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Of Monstrosity and Innocence:
The Child Predator in Clive Barker's Writings

by

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Abstract

This thesis considers Clive Barker’s child predator in terms of the greater cultural discourses that accompany its treatment and attempts to demonstrate how Barker's treatment of the predator is proportional to his adherence to the structural form of the narrative. Specifically, the intrusion fantasy form, which integrates fantasy and reality, incorporates the predator into society but as a disgusting version of humanity; the portal-quest form, which delineates fantasy and reality, exiles the predator as alien, excluding him from both humanity and society. When the form becomes pluralistic, ambiguous and ambivalent, these qualities equally manifest in the representation of the predator, notably casting doubt on the nature and perceived wrongfulness of his relationship with the child. My analysis questions, challenges and strives to unravel prevalent cultural conceptions of the child and the child predator in order to enhance understanding of the predator, his function, condition, and existence within Western society.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Forbidden Innocence and Monstrous Rhetoric in Clive Barker's Fantasy Writings 1

Chapter 1

The Predator Disgusts: Intrusion Fantasy and the Decay of Innocence 23

Chapter 2

Predatory Realms: To Admire and Desire the Child in Portal Fantasy 51

Chapter 3

Run-Away or Abduction?: Unclassifiable Fantasy and the Ambiguity of the Self 78

Conclusion

Be the Beast: Magic, Control, and the Homosexual Implications 107

Works Cited 117

Introduction

Forbidden Innocence and Monstrous Rhetoric in Clive Barker's Fantasy Writings

As a small child, Clive Barker attended an air show where he was confronted with the death of a high-flying daredevil, Léo Valentin. As the story goes, his family could not afford tickets, so they packed up the car with four-year-old Barker, his parents, his aunt and uncle, and his infant cousin and drove to a neighbouring field within view of the airplane acrobatics. The heat of the car was stifling, forcing the family out of the car and into the field to watch the death defying feats. After an impressive show, the grand finale went terribly wrong. Valentin—who had a plank of wood strapped to his feet and plastic wings attached to his arms—was supposed to jump from the wing of the plane, ride the airflow like a wind-surfing bird for a considerable amount of time, pull the rip cord at the last minute, and parachute safely to the ground, delighting the awe-struck audience. Sadly, he clipped his wing on the plane as he jumped, which caused him to spiral out of control and plummet to the ground, no cord pulled, a horror rather than awe-stricken audience witnessing the last act of the aerialist.

For the Barker family, this event was particularly horrific because of their positioning in the field adjacent to the event grounds. The aerialist's body landed only a few feet from their car. Barker recalls the panic of his aunt and mother who, upon realizing the trajectory of the plummeting body, scrambled into the car to shield the children from the sight of imminent horrors. His father and uncle stayed outside of the car and would later inspect the corpse of the would-be flying man. In his mother's arms, Barker fought to see, but she covered his eyes,

denying him view of the moment of impact (*Painter* 86-90).

In retelling this childhood incident, I do not mean to construe the event as more significant than it is. I make no claim that this was a defining moment for Barker nor that I have discovered the genesis of his predilection for the horror genre; such implications would require an intimacy with Barker's psyche to which I am not privy. I do, however, assert that this memory reveals three key aspects to his literary oeuvre: monstrosity, the protection of innocence, and the witnessing of that which is forbidden. These last two are contradictory statements. While one could argue that Barker has dedicated his artistic career to forcing his audience to witness the forbidden, showcasing it in his writings, his paintings, and his photography, one must also acknowledge his emphasis on the importance of protecting innocence in his narratives.

While reflecting on this memory in "Private Legends," found in *The Essential Clive Barker* (1999), Barker proclaims his allegiance to the forbidden:

> The image of a man falling out of the sky, his body and his ambitions dashed against the earth, is one that trails mythologies, of course. But it would be many years before I learned the story of Icarus, or read *Paradise Lost*. All I knew at that moment was the panic, and my hunger to see what the men out there were seeing; the thing I was forbidden. (*Painter* 87)

The panic of his mother, her emphatic desire to protect his innocence, surely exacerbated Barker's desire to witness, then and now. Moreover, it created a demarcation between that which is acceptable for the child and that which is

acceptable for the adult. Barker's mother of course did not invent this demarcation, but rather propagated the pre-existing attitudes toward the sanctity of childhood innocence in Western society. When the child-Barker's eyes are averted from the monstrous sight of the bird-man's demise, he is forbidden to witness in order to protect his childhood innocence.

Such fears are most prominently relevant to the protection of the child from abduction, abuse, and death—in other words, protection from the child predator. Given Barker's repeated preoccupation with the preservation of innocence in his novels, it is no surprise that whenever a child character appears, his or her predator also materializes. What is surprising, however, is his treatment of the child predator. In this thesis, I will analyse Barker's child predator in terms of the discourse that accompanies its treatment and attempt to demonstrate how his treatment of the predator varies with the form of the narrative. To this end, I will not limit my conception of the child predator to the paedophile, as many theorists have done, but will include those persons who abduct or are accused of abducting the child for whatever purpose. I aim to show that Barker's depiction of the predator is proportional to his adherence to narrative form and that, as formalistic classification becomes ambiguous, so too does the threat of the predator.

Using the categories of form in fantasy literature identified by Farah Mendlesohn in *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, I will investigate Barker's depiction of the child predator, moving from his most straightforward to his most ambiguous representations. This progression will reveal not only the impossibility of a non-

ambivalent discourse toward the predator and the child, but also the impossibility of the strict ordering of literary forms. While historical consensus places Barker's books in the Horror section of most bookstores and libraries, the presence of magic in his books resituates his work as fantasy. As such, the application of theories of the fantastic is both productive and appropriate.

Western notions of child innocence, the function of children in society, and socio-cultural attitudes toward adult predatory behaviour will all inform my reading of Barker's predator. Theories of monstrosity and the monstrous will also be critical in my analysis, as well as theories on the human preoccupation with mortality, magic, and ritual. All such discourses will combine to reveal an underlying desire to control one's environment, in both the predator, the child, and those invested in protecting the child, reflecting the modern obsession with orderliness. Such orderliness is compounded by the well-ordered treatment of the predator and narrative form in the selected texts. The primary texts for this project in their order of appearance are *The Damnation Game* (1984), the children's novel *The Thief of Always* (1992), *Imajica* (1991), and *Sacrament* (1996). These novels are particularly relevant to my study of the child predator not only because they each include a child predator of varying importance to the narrative, but also because each text was published during a period in which the abstract conception of the child predator was being re-defined in Western society as an unrelenting and unstoppable threat to childhood (Silverman and Wilson 40; Jenkins189).

Despite the obvious relevance of such an analysis, critical work on depictions of the child predator in literature is surprisingly minimal. Most

scholarship has focussed exclusively on the aesthetics of child abduction narratives in realist, adult literature, notably Nabokov's *Lolita* (for example, edited collections by Harold Bloom and Ellen Pifer). Primarily, scholarly work on child predators has been limited to the fields of cultural studies or discourse analysis. Paula Fass, Philip Jenkins, and James Kincaid have each contributed to the analysis of social issues and assumptions that surround childhood and child predatory behaviour. Similar discussions on conceptions of childhood can be found in literary theories of children's literature, recognizing the role of children's literature in constructing these very conceptions. My study will offer a unique combination of formal and discursive analysis applied to both adult and children's literary works.

Approaching texts in this way combines insightful interpretative methodologies. Genre theorist Anne Swinfen avows that fantasy, in that it is freed from "the constraints of primary realism," is a uniquely equipped "method of approaching and evaluating the real world" (233, 230). A discursive analysis of fantasy literature foregrounds the interdependency of fantasy and reality, allowing for a greater understanding of the mechanisms that inform the social conditions of society. In 1987, early in his career, Barker praised the horror genre's ability to "unveil the once upon a times behind apparent realities" ("Night Vision 4," *Painter* 71). These "once upon a times" are the mythologies that underpin our perceptions of reality. Appropriate to the horror genre, stories of the predator are saturated with fear and loathing, but more importantly, they are the driving force behind society's moral panic about this threat to the nation's children.

Anis Bawarshi and Mary Reiff consider genre as a mentally constructed space that "reproduce[s] social practices and realities" by way of a synchronized repression and revelation of ideological underpinnings (59). Within genre, the reader navigates a "social relationship," wherein he or she learns "to think and act and recognize situations" in a way that is harmonious with "particular goals, values, and assumptions" (61). Form is critical to orient the reader, according to Albert Levi, who clarifies that this social reality is "expressed less in material content than in narrative form" (20). The narrative is infused with a level of "determinism," wherein the form operates on the content, shaping and informing the message (38). As Barker was quoted to say in an article published 6 January 1990 in the *Daily Telegraph*, "genre is a most reliable noose" (*Painter* 380). Barker's engagement with the horror and fantasy genres—or, more specifically, his combination of the two—imparts a social reality that both demonizes and mythologizes the predator, locking him inside a predetermined set of ideals.

With literature functioning as a mirror as well as a conduit for cultural conceptions within society, fantasy literature has the unique ability to best approximate cultural conceptions precisely because it is not confined by the limits of realist fiction. Fantasy is able to represent real world issues in new and impossible ways, often exposing hidden assumptions, anxieties and contradictions that affect our tenuous perception of reality (Swinfen 231). Kathryn Hume confirms the adaptability of fantasy literature, asserting that

> Fantasy lets him [the author] focus on his preferred subject in a fashion that a more mimetic treatment of a similar theme would

> not. [...] A strictly mimetic piece is well adapted to the presentation of material values, or even humanitarian ones, but cannot readily get beyond these. Fantasy lets an author assert the importance of things which cannot be measured, seen, or numbered. (90)

Thus, if society views the predator as feeding off the vibrancy of youth, he can be depicted as a vampire; if he is instead perceived as an undetectable corruptor of innocence, he can be a dark shadow, whispering depravities into the ear of a child. Such imagery offers an interpretive richness that can simultaneously mask and reveal embedded anxieties. Fantasy arguably can illustrate societal ambivalences inherent in these anxieties to a greater extent than any realist literature could hope to achieve. Yet, outside of monster theory, such hermeneutical analyses of fantasy literature are negligible.

Similarly, little academic attention has been paid to Barker, despite his popularity, the high quality of his writing, his expressed desire to be analysed by critics, and the myriad topics available for exploration through his books. Most scholarship has been limited to selections from his collection of short stories, *The Books of Blood* (1984), which was his first foray into the literary world. Since their release, Barker's exercises in imagination—his fiction, his films, his illustrations, his paintings, plays, and photography—have branched beyond the boundaries of the horror genre, crossing into the realm of the fantastic as well as the perverse. Barker's fiction is a unique blend of speculation, magic, and horror that usually blurs the taxonomical boundary between horror and fantasy literature and, more often than not, commits his work to the fantasy genre.

Mirroring my own observation, Robbie Goh has remarked on "the relationship between the forms and structures of fantasies, on the one hand, and the various social anxieties and concerns that these texts represent (with varying degrees of displacement)" (21). His study of Barker is one of the few that focuses on his novels and attempts to situate them in the broader context of postmodern fantastic literature through his scrutiny of Barker's constructed alternative worlds. More representative of Barker-focussed critical work is a gender or queer studies approach to his short stories, evident in Craig Williams Burns's examination of Barker's treatment of the Goddess, or K. A. Laity's analysis of Barker's subversion of heteronormative tendencies of horror fiction. Other interests in his life and works include Douglas E. Winter's authorized biography *Clive Barker: The Dark Fantastic* and Christian Daumann's 2009 survey and summary of Barker's novels, ending with an analysis of the body in *Imajica*, in *Wonderlands in Flesh and Blood*. Linda Badley's *Writing Horror and the Body* may be the most comprehensive approach to Barker's work, incorporating both short stories and novels into her analysis. Badley's attention, however, is a bright thread in an otherwise muted tapestry of academic interest.

Perhaps a large contributing factor to this neglect is Barker's affiliation with the horror genre. Despite his obvious tendencies toward fantasy, his books continually find themselves on the Horror shelf. Lumped in with slasher-porn-gorefests, Barker's texts are easily dismissible by proximity. His association with fantasy does little to improve his situation. While fantastic literature has made gains in academic credibility in the past thirty years, many scholars still view

speculative fiction as escapist and trivial. Indeed, some of the aforementioned Barkerists refer to Barker's literature as high-fantasy, an apologetic justification for indulging his work in their academic pursuits. I will make no such apology. Barker's literary works are stylistically and culturally relevant, making a close-reading of discourses on childhood and child predators within these works both ambitious and worthwhile. The lack of attention paid to Barker's novels indicates a significant gap in the scholarship, as well as a narrowed approach to Barker as an artist.

Author's Life and Oeuvre

Barker was born in Liverpool, England, in 1952 to "decidedly working-class" father, Len, and highly educated and cultured mother, Joan (Winters 8). His mother read to him frequently and would remake his favourite stories as part of their nightly bedtime ritual. The older of two boys, as a child, Barker would write and illustrate original comic books for the entertainment of himself and brother Roy. Entertainment was limited in post Second World War Liverpool, but Barker was an artistic and creative child, admittedly inclined toward monsters and horror, with initiative to create his own fun; in addition to the comics, he also designed and fabricated puppets and put on local puppet shows to entertain the neighbourhood children, wrote short stories, and was endlessly drawing. Reflecting on his childhood activities in the introduction to *Incarnations: Three Plays* (1995), Barker imparts, "This was, please remember, at a time and place when only a few of the neighbors owned television sets (we didn't) and comics were rare treasures. It isn't so surprising then that I found an audience of local

kids for my entertainments" (*Painter* 223). At school, Barker struggled to fit in, as most artists do; bullied as well as disinterested, he often found school to be filled with "fear and boredom" (Winter 42).

It was at Quarry Bank, a premier boys' school, that Barker's literary talents were honed and where he was introduced to authors that would later influence his writing, notably William Blake, William Butler Yeats, and Christopher Marlowe, among others. While attending Quarry Bank, Barker found a group of kindred spirits and started a theatre troupe. This group of friends performed original plays for the school and would later evolve into a professional theatre company during his post-university years. Markedly, the group included Doug Bradley, who would later play the character of Pinhead in the Hellraiser movies, the very movies that would secure Barker's cult following. While Barker was not the sole playwright, each play being a collaborative effort, he was the leader and the most rebellious, often to the disdain of the school headmaster (Winter 51-56).

Barker suffered from abusive teachers and equally malicious classmates at Quarry Bank. He struggled with the lifestyle of such a rigid establishment and found refuge, more than anything, in his creative and imaginative endeavours. Reflecting on his bittersweet time at the school, Barker considers how the external social unrest of the 1960s, of which he was acutely aware, infiltrated his experience:

> I think I was given a very high level of education and I was then allowed to be an activist in the destruction of the system that I

> hated so much. And I was an activist in the sense that I was making plays, and the first and most obvious thing was my saying to the school: *I don't want to be in the school play anymore, I'm going to write my own plays. Anybody going to stop me?* And [headmaster] Pobjoy said, *No, you can do anything*. It was like a little revolution. (Qtd. in Winter 56)

This revolutionary attitude of radicalism and rebellion would carry through Barker's life, manifesting itself in many of his later writings and artwork.

Barker's parents urged him to attend university, even though he had been accepted to Liverpool College of Arts (Winter 64). He conceded, against his better judgement and personal wishes, and graduated from University of Liverpool in 1974 with a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in English literature, after switching from Philosophy. Educated and directionless, Barker and his theatre troupe—called the Theatre of the Imagination—experimented with film and theatre in Liverpool's artsy underground but with little success. In 1977, the same year that he wrote the first play of his newly renamed theatre troupe, the Dog Company, Barker came out to his family as a homosexual. Then living in London, he would continue to earn both a reputation and a living as a playwright and actor with the Dog Company, performing in Liverpool and London. Between 1977 and 1983, the Dog Company staged ten of Barker's original plays, including *The History of the Devil* (1980) and *The Secret Life of Cartoons* (1982).

As a reprieve from the strain of playwriting and inspired by the recent successes of horror fiction of the 1970s and 1980s, Barker submitted a manuscript

of eighteen short stories to Sphere Books in 1983. In 1984, the collection was simultaneously published in three books titled *Clive Barker's Books of Blood*, with an introduction by Ramsey Campbell, then England's most prominent horror author. Horror fiction was a profitable genre in the early 1980s, but it was also in its infancy, being defined by those publishing and those writing it. Barker was at the forefront of this literary movement, but as an unknown, his book saw few sales. Then, with one comment from Stephen King, Barker's literary career took off.

After being dubbed "the future of horror," a quote that has been repeated on the back cover of almost every one of his books, Barker became defined by the *Books of Blood* in the literary world. This label would become a blessing and a curse, earning him credibility in his early horror films and securing a sequel to the *Books of Blood* but later overshadowing and undermining his ventures into the fantasy genre. Barker complains in the foreword of the 2010 reprint of *Books of Blood*: "I'm uncomfortable being viewed as the 'Horror Guy,' invited out of seclusion at the season of pumpkins and campfire tales to talk about the Dark Side, while the passions that fuel my current work go undiscussed" (vii). In the early 1980s, however, such taxonomic classification was the catalyst needed to launch Barker's career from local theatre productions to global fame.

The mid-80s were a whirl-wind of literary and filmic success. As a newly acclaimed author, earning the British Fantasy Award and the World Fantasy Award for 'Best Collection,' Barker published the final three volumes for *Books of Blood* and his first novel *The Damnation Game* in 1985 (Winter 188).

Damnation was soon followed by *The Hellbound Heart* (1986), a short novella that would be later adapted into the famous movie *Hellraiser* (1987). Since then, *Hellraiser* has taken on a life of its own, spawning multiple sequels produced but not written by Barker. Another novella, *Cabal* (1988) became *Nightbreed* (1990), a film that Barker still regrets relinquishing creative control of. A plethora of films of varying degrees of success has been adapted from his short stories: "The Forbidden" was released as *Candyman* (1992), "The Last Illusion" as *Lord of Illusions* (1995), as well as film versions of *Rawhead Rex* (1986), *Book of Blood* (2008), *The Midnight Meat Train* (2008), and *Dread* (2009). Barker has also been involved in a number of projects either related or unrelated to his literary work, as a producer or director of film and television, and has inspired various comics, card games, and videogames.

Since their debut, the *Books of Blood* in their various editions of individual and collected volumes were republished a number of times, sometimes under new titles in the United States. But even as his horror stories were reaching their first American readers, Barker was already moving away from the horror genre, at least in his literary works. His next major publication was *Weaveworld* (1987), a fictionalized autobiography, written as an epic high-fantasy novel of over 800 pages. Yet, even in such a fantastic tale, as in his works overall, Barker seems incapable of annihilating all horror aspects from his literature, which is why he has embraced the term *dark fantastique* to describe his work.

A key element to Barker's work is a stylistic, descriptive quality that immerses the reader in his imaginative realms, necessary in his more imaginative

creations. Basing his narratives in reality and then merging or juxtaposing that reality with fantasy characterizes Barker's literary oeuvre. Most of his novels start out in settings familiar to Barker or his readers, the streets of London, a rural town in the prairies of the United States or a real city in Canada, which then becomes infiltrated by some fantastic occurrence or fantastic force. Some heterosexual or homosexual erotica or perversion nearly always surfaces in his usually 600 page long narratives, as well as philosophical or spiritual musing about the nature of existence or reality, questioning and probing rather than solving or determining.

After *Weaveworld*, Barker continued along a metaphysical vein, trying to determine the relationship between the world of dreams and reality in *The Great and Secret Show* (1989) and *Everville* (1994). He then delved into the complexities of human relationships in *Sacrament* (1996), *Galilee* (1998), and *Coldheart Canyon* (2001). In the wake of a significant move from London to Los Angeles in 1991, it would actually be 1992 that would mark another distinct moment in Barker's career path, with the publication of his first children's book, *The Thief of Always*. This was a risky publication both for his publisher, who feared that parents would not want their children reading a novel by Barker, and for the author himself because of the accompanying illustrations, also of his own creation.

Thief would be the first release of Barker's artwork into the public sphere and the potential for judgement caused him great anxiety. Both his and his publisher's fears were soon alleviated with the novel's positive reception. Barker has since had an ongoing exhibit of his paintings and illustrations at an art gallery

in Los Angeles, published a book of paintings, *Visions of Heaven and Hell* (2005), and initiated a five-book series of novels for young adults, based on and featuring his paintings. The *Abarat* series is currently being written, with the first three books already published, *Abarat* (2002), *Abarat: Days of Magic, Nights of War* (2004) and *Abarat: Absolute Midnight* (2011). In 2007, he returned to adult as well as horror fiction with the novella *Mister B. Gone*, a long narrative about the printing press from the perspective of a demon locked within the book. Not surprisingly, since that first publication of *Books of Blood*, Barker has received a considerable number of awards for both his fiction and films.

Accompanying the publication of *Sacrament* in 1996, Barker made an official public statement about his homosexuality. Barker had been featuring homosexual characters, and including scenes of homosexual erotica, in his fiction since the *Books of Blood*, but 1996 is still considered to be his official, public coming out. In his introduction to *Everville* (1999), he claims that since childhood, he has always used fiction as a means to understand his current reality, maintaining that "I've said elsewhere that however fantastical my fiction may appear superficially, it is always rooted in some urgent personal need—a desire, if you will, to explain something to myself" (*Painter* 154). In this spirit, Barker's novels frequently deal with social problems, confronting AIDS and HIV explicitly in *Sacrament* and *Imajica* and implicitly in *The Hellbound Heart*. For such efforts and for continually engaging homosexual characters in his novels, Barker has received the Lambda Literary Award for both *Sacrament* and *Galilee*. Surprisingly, the release of *Abarat* spawned some homophobic criticism that

accused Barker of deliberately including homosexual innuendos in the YA book, forcing him to publish a rebuttal titled "May You Live in Interesting Times" in the December 2004 issue of *Cinescape*, debunking such claims but also expressing his shock at the lack of tolerance among fantasy readers (*Painter* 118-120).

In recent years, Barker has become more interested in visually radical depictions of his sexuality. In 2003, he provided poetry to accompany the male-nude photography of his partner, David E. Armstrong. He also posed as a nude model in a number of the photos. Armstrong's photography was published under the title *Rare Flesh* and is a bestial and aggressive depiction of male sexuality and homosexuality, showcasing men with animalistic or non-human features and erections. In a later publication of male nude photography, David Leddick's *The Nude Male: 21st Century Visions*, Barker is featured as a photographer. His accompanying photo, meant to be a seminal representation of his work, is of a thin, boyish male in a boxing ring, splattered with blood and dirt, or perhaps feces. Few fans of Barker's would be familiar with this aspect of his career.

Barker has always adamantly expressed his disdain for those in positions of authority who prohibit access based on acceptable norms. This, of course, ties back to the childhood memory I related at the beginning of this introduction, the idea of adult authority determining and denying that which is forbidden from a child's eyes, but it also connects very obviously with the practices of organized religion. Barker confides, in the introduction to *Taboo* (1987),

> Taboo. Whisper the word and I come running, to peer long and

> hard at whatever I'm being forbidden. Why? Because if the powers that be go to all the trouble of telling you, 'Don't look!' it's likely to be something of significance they're warning you off; an image or idea that has the potential to subvert their delicately balanced status quo. (*Painter* 72)

At the time, Barker held very strong views opposing organized religion, but since then, his views have changed.

Overall, he expresses a desire to follow Christianity, yet his statements vacillate between condemning the church's abuses of power and praising the Bible and faith. His literary works reflect such contradictory feelings, with the religious hypocrisy scripted in *Crazyface* (1982), the false-promise of deluge in *Damnation*, and the discussion of Christ as magician in *Abarat: Days of Magic, Nights of War*. According to Winter, Barker "experienced a profound spiritual awakening" in his forties, close to the publication of *Imajica*, a novel whose protagonist is both a magician and the son of a god (18). His fondness for Christianity is readily apparent, even if one were to only consider the thematic interests of his novels published after 1990. These inclinations are not unproblematic, however, given Barker's sexuality and erotic interests, and may very well be his own forbidden taboo, a religion to which he longs to belong but from which he will always be denied entry.

Nevertheless, Barker's name can be found on lists of Christian authors, some of his books are available through Christian booksellers, and Christian singer Jaci Velasquez has a song that takes more than just its name from Barker's

The Thief of Always. His early writings were stories of demons and ruminations on hell, so it is only natural that he would gravitate toward the other end of that spectrum to include God as well as goddesses, angels, and heaven. Structurally, his books often take on a three-tiered modal system, similar to the Christian view of the universe, composed of reality (earth), a fantasy realm (heaven), and a dark, hidden realm (hell) which contains antagonists bent on destroying the other two. Most recently, the *Abarat* series adopts such a structure, and interestingly enough, after the homophobic backlash of the first book, references to Barker's male "partner" have been removed from his biography in the next two books of the series. One can only speculate as to the relationship between these two phenomena (but it likely stems from a misguided effort to appease fears that the child reader will be contaminated by homosexuality through the act of reading).

Like Gregory Woods, I situate Barker within the well-established male homosexual literary tradition. Influenced by other important members of this heritage, Barker embodies and presents its major themes of difference and desire. Woods acknowledges that an "advocacy of difference characterizes and enlivens Barker's fiction in ways which he relates to his own homosexuality" (246). Hugh Stevens contends that, like most literature, homosexual literature is preoccupied with social relationships. However, unlike most other literature, it seeks to challenge "central and privileged stories" of heterosexual desire by expanding its focus to include homosocial kinship, same-sex love, desire and marriage, and the problematic familial and social relationships that arise as a consequence of a non-heterosexual lifestyle ("Homosexuality" 2). The male homosexual literary

tradition, in particular, navigates these concerns via themes of sexual difference, secrecy, narratives of sexual awakening and identity formation, and problematically, through punishment for sexual extravagance, non-normative depictions of pleasure, and relations between young men—sometimes boys—and older men (see Woods and Stevens).

Given these thematic concerns, connections between the child predator, the genres of fantasy and horror, and the male homosexual tradition are more readily apparent. As Barker said in the introduction to *A-Z of Horror* (1996), he creates "fictions in which we may savor the very subjects that distress us in the real world, [...] discharging our anger by indulging our private monsters" (*Painter* 185). At home in monstrosity, Barker does not shy away from depictions of what he terms "outcasts that [...] live beyond the laws and limits of the 'ordinary' world," defying normativity and challenging the idea that deviance is destructive ("May You Live in Interesting Times," *Painter* 119). Considering Barker's fascination with the forbidden, it is no surprise, then, that in every representation of the child, Barker crosses the boundaries of taboo to engage the child predator. As Jon Silverman and David Wilson remind, the child predator is "the bogeyman of our age" (1).

Project Outline

My first chapter will address Barker's most obvious representation of the child predator as depicted in his first horror novel *The Damnation Game*. As an intrusion fantasy, according to Mendlesohn's classification system, *Damnation* presents the predator as a fantastic intrusion into the realm of reality. In this form,

the fantastic spills into literary reality, juxtaposing and conflating the two world views. The predator plays a subtle but significant role in this narrative. Unbeknownst to him, Anthony Breer is a reanimated corpse, a monsterization that inscribes moral and physical decay onto the body. Embedded within this representation are suppositions about the motivating factors that drive his literal appetite for schoolgirls, whom he abducts, murders, and displays in monstrously domestic scenes as part of his private and cannibalistic ritual. Breer creates a vacant child of the dead, which allows for the projection of his desires for acceptance and assimilation into normative society. Conspiring with the narrative form of intrusion, the predator integrates himself into the realm of the real only to be excluded once more as the narrative plays out.

The portal-quest fantasy is considered in the next chapter. Two novels, *The Thief of Always* and *Imajica,* present two similar depictions of the predator as foreign to reality. The portal-quest fantasy rigorously partitions the fantasy realm from the realm of reality. Mendlesohn affirms that the significance lies in its depiction of "entry, transition, and negotiation" (xix). Considering *Thief* first, I pay special attention to the portal in this anti-quest fantasy. In this novel, ten-year-old Harvey Swick visits a stranger's house in a fantasy realm, resulting in his imprisonment. The characterization of his entry and the environment within the fantasy realm, reveals assumptions about the innocence of the child as well as the capabilities of the predator. Negotiation takes precedence in my reading of *Imajica*. The predator is the Nullianac, member of an immortal and militant species of the Imajica, a collective breed who seeks the destruction of innocence.

Yet, their representation is complicated by the agency of the child victim and the ineptitude of her adult guardian. Overall, this narrative form demands segregation but not defeat of the predator and challenges the valorization of innocence.

My final chapter deals with Barker's most ambiguous text in terms of both its adherence to form and its depiction of the predator-child relationship. *Sacrament* is not easily categorized using Mendlesohn's classifications, so Kathryn Hume's discussion of mimesis in fantasy literature will also inform my structural reading. This narrative incorporates aspects from multiple narrative forms, a compilation that leads to an unavoidably ambiguous text and an equally ambiguous predator. Such ambiguity is particularly ironic, given the preoccupations of the novel's predator, Jacob Steep, with identifying, classifying and killing the last members of near extinct species, terminating the lineage of that species. Steep is heavily influential on protagonist Will Rabjohns as a child, acting as a teacher or mentor, sharing his worldview and introducing Rabjohns to the fragility of life and the power of controlling death. His lessons arguably corrupt Rabjohns's innocence with adult knowledge, coinciding temporally with the awakening of his homosexual identity. However, Barker's discourse does not clearly evaluate the consequences of such corruption, leaving the status of his predator as ambiguous as his novel's form. As such, *Sacrament* may serve as a counter-discourse to the other novels, or at the very least, reveal an underlying ambiguity present but denied in previously mentioned discourses.

To conclude, my discussion will revisit the use of magic as it relates to human desires to control nature and, subsequently, the child and the predator.

Both villains and saviours use magic in Barker's novels, removing any strict affiliation of magic as a positive or negative force. They all, however, use it as a means of asserting control over nature. In *Damnation* and *Thief* magic is used to defy the natural progression of human mortality, manipulating space in both texts and time in *Thief*, concealing or protecting the villain from the authorities of man and nature. In *Imajica*, magic is weaponized, used as a destructive force against the predator as a means of eliminating, stopping, or punishing him. In *Sacrament*, magic is more complex. It is a redeeming force as well as a source of anxiety, explaining the formation of Steep while allowing for his return to his original, non-human, non-gendered state.

In all cases, magic enacts some change on the environment that either creates or undoes human manipulation. This capacity for control is problematic in all the novels and, in fact, in Barker's oeuvre overall, wherein the depth of understanding necessary to successfully wield magic is not available to his characters. Indeed, Barker frequently includes characters with "powers that he [the character] doesn't understand or know how to properly use" ("Razorline," *Painter* 198). Such superficial understanding threatens to undo both villains and heroes in his novels and mirrors the reductive representation of the monster. In making the criminal monster a sexual deviant, Barker invites the comparison between the homosexual and the predator with uncomfortable and important consequences.

Chapter 1

The Predator Disgusts: Intrusion Fantasy and the Decay of Innocence

In this chapter, I undertake an analysis of Barker's first representation of the chid predator. In his 1985 novel *The Damnation Game*, not only does Barker offer the most voracious of all his child predators, he also makes him the most obviously monstrous, presenting him in the form of a cannibalistic, living-dead subsidiary agent of the main antagonist. Reinventing the zombie trope, Barker provides a unique appraisal of the threat of the child predator, as well as his motives. In so doing, the predator is dehumanized on several layers—rejected by society for his monstrosity and denied affiliation with humanity as a posthumous abomination. His decaying body incites a response of disgust while simultaneously serving as a visible proponent of his moral deviance. Likewise, the body of the child advertizes an inherent innocence, victimizing and eroticizing the child in concert. Through such a representation, Barker edicts the body as a social space, a site onto which the cultural discourse of the child and the child predator can be inscribed. Finally, the desire to expel the fantastic intrusion parallels historic reactions to the homosexual, another example of a labelled sexual deviant.

Barker's treatment of the child predator heeds the narrative form. Under Farah Mendlesohn's classification system, *Damnation* is the quintessential intrusion fantasy, wherein a reality-based frame world is infused by a fantastic invasion, either in the form of magical phenomena or an embodiment of the fantastic (i.e., a foreign intruder) invading reality. Mendlesohn explains the

trajectory of the intrusion fantasy: "the world is ruptured by the intrusion, which disrupts normality and has to be negotiated with or defeated, sent back whence it came, or controlled" (115). Such a disruption inserts the predator into normality while maintaining his independence from reality. This dualism ensures that the predator is an immediate yet unwanted presence, a "bringer of chaos" who targets children, reducing Mendlesohn's options to a single choice—defeat (xxi). While the child predator is not the primary fantastic intrusion, he serves and profits from the fantastic invasion as the villain's living-dead accomplice.

Set in contemporary London, *Damnation* is the story of Marty Strauss who, as a condition of his parole, is hired by Mr. Whitehead, an aging and eccentric millionaire, as his bodyguard. Whitehead has made a Faustian deal with the fantastic intrusion, Mamoulian, a man empowered by magic with the ability to manipulate and control the world, including life itself. Mamoulian seeks vengeance on Whitehead for squandering both their friendship and the gifts of his magic, using them to acquire wealth and fame. Nearing the end of his extended life, Mamoulian wants Whitehead to accompany him into the dark void of death. Strauss is hired to protect Whitehead from Mamoulian; however, he is unaware of the magical powers that he is up against, believing Whitehead to be merely a paranoid old man. Strauss and Carys, Whitehead's daughter and a heroine addict, fall in love and find themselves at the centre of this battle to defeat the fantastic intrusion. Of primary concern for this study is the secondary intrusion character of Alexander Breer.

Unbeknownst to him, Breer is dead. Believing himself to have been

unwillingly rescued by Mamoulian's intervention during his suicide attempt, Breer is compelled into his service. Breer remains ignorant of his living-dead status until Mamoulian informs him, near the end of the novel, "You are dead, Anthony. [...] You've been dead since the day I found you hanging from the ceiling. I think perhaps you knew I was coming, and you killed yourself to escape me. But I needed you. So I gave you a little of my life to keep you in my employ" (447). Breer is a "walking corpse" (447), more commonly referred to in horror fiction as a zombie. For Breer, this revelation releases the hold that Mamoulian has over him, revealing it to be fastened only through manipulation and coercion. Resentment builds in Breer, and he ultimately defeats Mamoulian in the final scene by decapitating him. However, while Breer shares many characteristics with the familiar zombie trope, Barker has appropriated and reinvented this monster to better illuminate the condition of the child predator.

In *Damnation*, Barker employs a predator-centered worldview rather than child-centered. The children in the novel are extremely minor characters, usually nameless and irrelevant to the plot, lacking agency, personality, and history. Conversely, Breer's inner thoughts and sentiments about himself, his relationship to the community and to Mamoulian, as well as his interests in children are intimated to the reader. Through such private disclosure, Barker infuses Breer's monstrous body with a certain complexity, granting him, unlike the traditional zombie, a sense of humanity—a thinking mind, feelings and a personality. This intimacy is predetermined by the intrusion fantasy form. The predator (the fantastic intrusion) seeks to be known, affirming that "the drive of intrusion

fantasy is to be investigated and made transparent" (Mendlesohn xxii). Indeed, during the reader's first encounter with the predator, Breer fantasizes about being dissected and understood as he prepares a confession (*Damnation* 106), indicating both a desires for external investigation as well as internal catharsis.

The reader is first introduced to "Anthony Breer, the Razor-Eater" some 100 pages into the novel, as he prepares a noose for his suicide (104). Introduced *in medias res* of Breer's suicide preparations, the reader is denied context. Aside from a few hints in his death-bed confession, the reader is told little of Breer history: "he wanted to say something about the children, just so they'd know, the people who found him and photographed him, that this wasn't a nobody they were staring at, but a man who'd done the worst things in the world for the best possible reasons" (105). Unable to articulate that "something" that "he wanted to say," Breer forgoes the suicide note, imagining that the discoveries from his body's future autopsy will articulation his plight.

As the last member of the Razor-Eater tribe, which is exactly what it sounds like, Breer believes that the collection of swallowed razors in his stomach will explain his very essence to the authorities (as well as the reader, replacing the confessionary note). Breer tells the reader, and assumes his coroner will agree, "You cut up a thing that's alive and beautiful to find out *how* it's alive and *why* it's beautiful" (106). Barker not only inscribes meaning on the body, but also inside the body. In this way, the predator must be destroyed in order to be understood, dismembered and dissected, as if answers could be found in bits of his flesh and samples of his blood. However, even Breer sees the false logic in

this statement, confessing that "before you know it, it's neither of those things [alive nor beautiful], and you're standing there with blood on your face and tears in your sight and only the terrible ache of guilt to show for it" (106), a cathartic reference to his own dissections of children.

Preoccupied with "the pretty ones" at "the schoolyard" and desirous of Carys "despite her body hair," Breer is obviously attracted to prepubescent girls (206, 438). Yet, the full extent of his crimes is not revealed until later in the novel. Barker unveils Breer's secret offence, using simple sentences as would be found in a child's reader, to slow the reader's progression, stressing the import of each revelation: "A yard or two from where he [Strauss] stood was a table. At it sat a young girl. She was staring at him" (374). Strauss (like the reader) takes only seconds to realize that the girl is staring through dead eyes, at which point the full effect of the scene is shared with the reader:

> There was more than the body to feast his eyes upon. There were the knives and the plate on the table in front of her, with a napkin lovingly shaken out and spread in her lap. The plate, he saw, had meat on it, sliced thinly as if by a master butcher. [...] The napkin had neatly covered a place on the girl's inner thigh from which the meat on her plate had been carved. (374)

Even before Breer's cannibalistic violation of the girl is made clear, Barker describes her body as a "feast" for the eyes. The wound to the girl's body is at first "neatly covered" up, "lovingly" denied by the meticulous "master butcher," a repression of the harm inflicted on the child. Indeed, Breer considers his victims

to be “my other friends” who are in a safe place “where nothing can hurt you” (444). Contradicting his earlier statement about understanding the beauty of the living child via the act of murder, Breer justifies his actions as protective rather than harmful.

These confused and contradictory justifications reflect both the rhetoric of the intrusion fantasy and the mythologies of the predator. Barker readily admits that “Motives are more complicated than one could ever express—so all you end up doing is telling part of the truth” (Qtd. in Winter 13). Yet, the drives of the novel’s form to fully investigate the fantastic intrusion contradict the popular notions that criminal monsters cannot be understood. In their study of criminal labelling in the media, Shilinka Smith and Shano Hill assert that “to call someone a monster is to deem them abhorrent and an embodiment of everything that is outside the norm of acceptable human behaviour, and hence unknowable” (4). Through such alienation, the child predator is dehumanized, segregated and made invisible. The predator becomes a ghost to public scrutiny: on a personal level, erasing his self in favour of a monstrous identity and, on a social level, slinking into the shadows of his community. Lawyer and legal scholar Michael Tonry states that real knowledge of the child predator is “obscured behind mists of emotion, oversimplification, political posturing and punitiveness” (x). Breer can be read as the “obscured” predator, alienated from the public through misinformation and demonized as a result.

Breer’s decaying body not only proclaims his moral taint to the neighbours, the children and society at large, it also symbolizes his physical and

social disintegration, which leads to his ultimate demise. Further, this body-marker also indicates the irreconcilability of two opposing views held about the child predator: that predatory behaviour is the manifestation of inner dysfunction; or that the predator is defined by the public, who deny him community, complexity and individual identity through dehumanizing discourse, leaving him no choice but to internalize this identity and submit to his predatory drives and fantasies. Jon Silverman and David Wilson argue the latter in their book *Innocence Betrayed: Paedophilia, the Media and Society*. In their research, they found that popular attitudes that child predators are "monsters" strip them of their humanity, promoting a "vilification which allows us to deny responsibility for them, rather than seeing them as a product of our own society" (176, 42). For Jonathan Allan, such fictional narratives construct "a monsterisation [...] by means of the dehumanising narrative strategy" (163). Silverman and Wilson confirm that "increasing stigmatization and exclusion of the paedophile [...] precipitates an offending cycle that results in more children being abused" (45). An inner landscape of dejection precipitates predatory actions, whereby "feelings of exclusion and rejection" are used as "permission" to maintain predatory behaviour (44).

Barker uses free indirect discourse to alert the reader that Breer has fully internalized the label of monster, an imposed identity. According to Gérard Genette, the "Internal focalization" of Breer's monstrosity is realized in "the narrative of 'interior monologue'" that Barker provides the reader (193). This monologue reveals how Breer's external worldview mirrors his inner one; looking

out the window, he notes that "the sky had looked as grubby as his sheets at dawn, and being a rational man he'd thought: why bother to wash the sheets when the world's so dirty, and I'm so dirty, and there's no chance of ever getting any of it clean? The best thing is to put an end to this squalid existence once and for all" (*Damnation* 104). Through such reverie, Breer highlights the frequently suppressed symbiotic relation between the child predator and society: his self-image ("I'm so dirty") and his actions ("his sheets") mimic the "grubby," "dirty" world. It is important to note that, at this point in the narrative, Breer is a member of reality; he only becomes fantastic when Mamoulian uses magic to reanimate his body and secure it into servitude *after* his suicide. Thus, Breer is a product of the same society that demands his removal and defeat.

While it cannot be denied that Breer is a disturbed man, plagued by guilt and unwholesome desires, the link between his external and internal worlds made in his monologue reveals neglected contributing factors to his behaviour. Breer acknowledges his relation to society, yet once he becomes fantastic, the greater community denies such affiliation, imposing the identity of monstrous Other. The mental exclusion and rejection from the community is made plain when the neighbours regard Breer "with suspicion as soon as he step[s] out the front door," to which Breer concludes that "the natives in this part of the city were inhospitable" (206). The mistrust of the neighbours erects a barrier between Breer and the community, which leads to and is exacerbated by Breer's own self-regard as a non-native social element, distancing him further. In *Perverts and Predators*, Laura and Lisa Zilney assert that "once an offence has been widely revealed and

is labeled by others as deviant or criminal, the individual may continue the behaviour because one has internalized the personality characteristics that other people expect" (51).

Further evidence that Breer is affected by external attitudes is revealed during a closer look at his so-called internal monologue, which reveals a rhetorical technique of the narrator to create the illusion that these are Breer's own sentiments. By merging narration with seemingly quoted thoughts from Breer's mind, the narrator takes Breer's thoughts and, according to Genette, "condenses them, integrates them into his own speech and thus *expresses* them in his own style," a style that may not reflect the same values as those of the character (172). Once this technique is exposed, Breer's status as a "rational man," perfectly capable of understanding his own actions, as well as the final conclusion come into question. These ideas may not belong to Breer, but may rather be imposed on him as part of larger cultural assumptions of the child predator as a rational being, aware of the consequences of his actions and thus culpable, wherein a final solution type approach to the problem of the predator would be "the best thing."

This conclusion is echoed by the predator's zombie representation, a figure who similarly lacks any hope of integration into the community. The fears that inform the zombie figure—the same ones that Barker uses in his characterization of Breer—are those of mortality, of cannibalism, and of the loss of identity and subjectivity. The zombie assimilates humanity into a mass of mindless, hunger-driven bodies, yet as Jilian Burcar notes in her reflection on the

zombie, the opposite is also true: "Not all monsters consume in the same manner, but every monster *assimilates*: either by passing in society [by incorporating themselves into a normative role] or by assimilating others into their monstrous culture, collective, or path of destruction" (105). The fear of the monster's assimilation into society forms the foundation of Breer's zombie-representation. It is the fear of the contamination of society, made most evident by the leaking of bodily fluids and odours during his decay, that is Breer's true threat. His body is the source and site of this fear.

Breer's decaying body, literally rotting from the inside out, parallels the predator's internalization of monstrosity, the contamination of his self by stigmatization. Philip Jenkins speaks to the conception of the predator as impossible to rehabilitate "because [his] acts arose not from any temporary or reversible weakness of character but from a deep-rooted sickness or moral taint" (189; Zilney and Zilney 41). The popular idea that there is something perverse and wrong at the core of the predator, generally referred to as an absent or black heart, are perpetuated in the dehumanizing representation of the predator. The zombie-Breer indicates the same demonizing inference. A corollary to Burcar's assertion that "zombies have no circulation" (103) is that they have no heart—or at least no functioning heart. Thus, Barker's representation of Breer as living-dead reflects cultural assumptions about the origins of the child predator, fantastic assumptions (since we know that real-life child predators, just like everyone else, do indeed have functioning hearts) that perpetuate the mythologization of the child predator. The projection of the 'heartless' metaphor onto the body of Breer

is testament to that mythology.

Most scholars agree that the monstrous body is interpreted as a physiological manifestation of moral deviance. This is a critical concept in monsterology, best described by Asma as "the recurrent way that inner monstrosity is supposed to manifest on the physical body of the creature; *evil* and *ugly* are enduring correlations" (283). Elaine Graham concurs that the repelling nature of the monster, seemingly stemming from his physical representation, is in fact a manifestation of his behaviour: the monstrous body is read as "the tangible, corporeal manifestation of sinful and disobedient acts"; "the phenomenon of monstrosity is not physical, but moral" (48, 50). Obviously incorrect in practice, the idea that moral qualities can be corporeally demonstrated satisfies the mutual desires for physical identification and for the continued adherence to such ideologies. Breer's physical representation as a monstrous living-dead zombie body implies that deviance can and should be identifiable by sight.

Common sense proves that one cannot identify the moral character of a person based on outer appearance, yet public stigmatization supports the representation of physical monstrosity so frequently equated with morally abhorrent qualities. Robert Wilson discusses the use of disgust in art, explaining that disgusting literary representations, like that of Breer's decaying body, are informed by their real-world, individual "contexts" and "local environments" (186). Indeed, Barker's depiction of the child predator as a disgusting and decaying body is a reflection of real-world sentiments. The physicality of Breer's monstrosity seems to echo current claims that making predators more visibly

identifiable through sex offender registries and community notification systems make neighbourhoods safer. On the contrary, Tonry, among others, contends that these legislations are ineffective and do little more than "stigmatize offenders and reassure a poorly informed but frightened and vindictive public" (ix; Wright, "Introduction" 7; Sample and Evans 235; Silverman and Wilson 2-3; Zilney and Zilney 88). In this light, Breer functions, as Margrit Shildrick's describes, to carry "the taint of all that must be excluded in order to secure the ideal of an untroubled social order" (3). The monsterization of the child predator as "all that must be excluded" distorts reality by localizing danger to a single criminal classification, denying the complexity and diversity of these criminals and their crimes, as well as minimizing or negating other potential threats to children, thereby making this "ideal" impossible to attain.

Such ideals become personified by the child, equating the predator's threat to the children with a threat to the entire community. In her article "Childhood and the Cultural Constitutions of Vulnerable Bodies," Pia Christensen writes that children are the personified vulnerability of the community, "symbolized in the fragility of the child's body," and as such, any threat to the child is metonymic of a threat to the entire community (42). Christensen explains that "Children are seen as archetypal victims" which, in turn, "confirm[s] adult power" (42). Thus, a threat to the child from a perceived outsider is a threat to the established adult power in that community, indicating a weakness in that protective adult power.

Furthering this argument, Martha Nussbaum reveals the influence of disgust on legal practice in her book *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and*

the Law. In it, she considers the extent to which human disgust responses have informed and supported laws that target non-normativity, ranging from homosexuality to paedophilia. Nussbaum explores both the physical and moral sides of the disgust response, both of which are also embodied by Breer. On a corporeal level, disgust plays an evolutionarily protective role, promoting a strong and powerful "awareness of death and decay" (Nussbaum 91). This aspect of disgust is described by Wilson as "visceral disgust, a strong gorge-cracking reaction to all physical transgression, all decay and slippage in the structure of appearance" (3). Barker capitalizes on this response through his emphasis on Breer's bodily decay and fecal matter—"His skin smelt, his hair was falling out, his bowels would scarcely move theses days" (*Damnation* 372). Barker's detailed descriptions of Breer's bodily decay throughout the novel invoke more than merely a repulsion to mortality.

It is no coincidence that the progression of his bodily decay is paralleled with increasing knowledge of his moral transgressions against children. The first indication of Breer's bodily decay, the exposure of his internal filth, is "a sickly, syrupy smell which made him almost ashamed to get close to the pretty ones along beside the schoolyard railing, for fear they put their fingers to their noses, making a 'poo-poo' sound, and ran off calling him names. When they did that, it made him want to die" (206). Breer's leaching body wards off the children like a disgust beacon, marking "difference and, hence, distance," identifying him as both a predator and a monster (Wilson 5). His physicality results in his exclusion from the realm of children who "poo-poo" him and run away. Breer's repulsive

form is mandated as disgusting by the moral taint that accompanies his attraction to children, problematically pairing repulsion and attraction.

Indeed, Breer's body appears to repel rather than attract; however, Wilson elucidates the "double-sidedness to disgust; from one perspective an object may cause nausea, or else an extreme moral revulsion; from another, it may seem attractive, exciting, and even desirable" (3). Breer's sexual desires are implied by his choice of perfume to cover the odour emanating from his decaying body. After washing "from head to foot three or four times a day, hoping to dislodge the smell" without success, Breer "[buys] perfumes—sandalwood in particular—and douse[s] his body with it after each ablution" (*Damnation* 206). The use of sandalwood is revealing given that "sandalwood essential oil is the oil that most closely aligns with scent of human sex hormones" and is recommended to enhance erotic activities (Gallagher n.pag.). Breer's attempt to counter the offensive odours that drive the children away from him with erotic oils meant to enhance sexual activity is clearly an effort to sexually attract the children.

In response to Breer's use of sandalwood, "the comments they [the neighbours] called after him weren't about excreta but about his sex-life" (206). The infusion of sexuality in Breer's monstrous body results from his decay, for without the offending odours of decay, he would have no need for the erotic oils. Moreover, given that this walking-corpse is the product of magic, the infusion of sex results from the fantastic intrusion. Here Barker follows the "conventional 'the intrusion is sex' structure of the horror novel," applied to Breer's secondary storyline (Mendlesohn 160). Working backwards from the odour of sandalwood

to the odour of decay, one could make the claim that Breer's excretion of bodily odours is akin to seminal fluid, concretizing the connection between the physical decay of his body and the moral decay of his actions.

The moral decay symbolized by Breer's body is equally represented in Barker's use of disgust. Through the physical repugnance of the zombie body, Barker presents Breer as an immoral and deviant monster, further stigmatized by the disgust response from the reader. Nussbaum argues that disgust is used primarily "to exclude and marginalize groups or people who come to embody the dominant group's fear and loathing" (14). It is interesting to note that the child predator is described in exactly these terms by Silverman and Wilson, who claim that the predator is "a conduit for fear and public loathing" (1). Wilson continues to explain the symbolism of disgust, which implies "judgement [...] that something or someone has fallen beneath human standards, is corrupted or otherwise unwholesome, and must be rejected" (13). This need for rejection coincides with the intrusion fantasy form that insists that the fantastic intrusion be defeated.

Fearing contamination, the community distances itself from the predator, paradoxically denying responsibility while contributing to the perpetuity of his behaviours (Silverman and Wilson 42). Through the motif of disgust, the community, as well as the reader, attributes to Breer "estrangement, or corrosive non-belonging" (Wilson 17). Nussbaum affirms that the marriage between disgust and villainy "hooks us on an unrealizable romantic fantasy of social purity and turns our thoughts away from the real measures we can take" (107). The rhetoric

of monsterology that defines the monster as the embodiment of all that must be rejected to ensure a safe and normal society, in conjunction with the dehumanizing effect of the disgust motif, fortifies the barriers between the child predator and the rest of humanity.

Likewise, Breer's decaying body ensures the demise of the child predator and the removal of his threat of contamination by being predetermined to self-destruct. Most notably, however, his zombie status validates his non-normative sexual desires, according to Jerome Cohen, who explains that the deviant "sexual practices" of the monster are those that "may be committed only through the body of the monster" (14). Burcar contends that, because the zombie body is "constantly suffering from a form of decay [...,] the zombie's body is not one of normative sexual fantasy" (103). Thus, if the zombie's body is one of non-normative sexual fantasy, he has no choice but to partake in deviant sexual practices—in this way, his fantasies are predetermined, mimicking the effects of the internalized monstrous identity and providing justification for monstrous deeds. In his historical study of the zombie trope, Kevan Feshami observes a shift in the drives of the zombie toward his "flesh-eating tendencies" when appropriated by American cinema (88). This shift elicits an explanation of the zombie behaviour as "an urge they have neither the capacity to understand nor the ability to control," which, when applied to the predator-zombie, simultaneously reduces the complexity of motivation and negates responsibility (Feshami 88). This is the same dehumanizing effect of communal stigmatization of the predator that Silverman and Wilson found in their research.

The consequences of zombification extend beyond the predator to his victim and resonate particularly with the child victim. Recall that Breer's violation of his captive was to butcher, prepare and serve the meat from her inner thigh. Heavy with sexual connotation, Breer literally penetrates the child (with his knife), consuming the meat from her erogenous inner thigh in the private intimacy of the cellar. Posthuman scholar Graham connects the zombie's "sexual as well as gastronomic desire" in the act of cannibalism (96). This link provides the first evidence of projected sexuality onto the child victim, who is "utterly defenceless against being consumed by this desire" because she is both eroticized and paralyzed by her innocence (96). In death, Breer's victim achieves alluring and permanent innocence; her body, frozen in its physical development, and her vacant face—that empty stare—are made permanently pure. This victimization through innocence is not merely a product of the zombie trope, as explained by James Kincaid in *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting*.

Kincaid argues that, when society valorizes innocence, it objectifies the child through the denial of subjectivity, which inevitably leads to a constructed notion of the child, imagined as an idealized, fictitious, empty child. He calls this construct "a vacant child," one who is innocent and pure and, thus, alluring (*Erotic* 17). For Kincaid, the child informs American standards of ideal beauty, where "desirable faces must be blank, [...] eyes big and round and expressionless, [...] waists, hips, feet, and minds small," making sexual objects of both children and adults youthful enough to pass as children ("Producing" 10). Thus, the child predator is but a symptom of this larger social practice of objectifying and

eroticizing children.

Using this line of thinking, Breer's actions, rather than being internally motivated, are complex manifestations of the social and cultural conditions within which he attempts to operate. When Strauss and Carys discover the demented domesticity of Breer's cellar (the dead girl sitting down to dine on her own flesh, presumably in Breer's company), Breer is "appalled" by the invasion, and shouts with "his voice at hysteria pitch. '*You can't come down here!*'" (*Damnation* 375). In response to what Breer perceives as a violation of this scene, "His concern was for the girl whose body was now toppling and falling into a rubber-jointed heap on the cellar floor. He rushed to her comfort, ignoring the desecrators in his anguish" (375-376). Breer's hysteric reaction and the urgency of his "anguish" trigger sympathy in the reader, diverting attention from the true victim—the girl. Robbed of subjectivity as well as the reader's attention, the girl is less than a "rubber-jointed" doll and little more than a "heap" of trash. The girl becomes Breer's desecrated object, his precious artifact of childhood innocence, because the narrator deems her as such. Yet, since she is most immediately victimized by Breer, the responsibility for her objectification can be traced to the child predator.

Similar to the moral implications of Breer's physically grotesque body, the child's outer appearance is the reflection of an inner state—vacant. The removal of the child's conscious identity creates a vacant shell upon which Breer is able to project his intentions, allowing him to conceive of the child as his equal, his domestic partner, his friend, and himself as her saviour. David Gurnham claims that, concerning the vacant child whose subjectivity has been removed, "it is

precisely the freedom accorded to the viewer to construct the children as they wish that causes the anxiety" (115). However, the freedom to impose also translates, through the removal of subjectivity (via the dead body), into a freedom from responsibility. Breer negates all accountability toward the care of the child, affirming contemporary attitudes toward "a vacant child who is both marginal and central to our lives: easily disposed of, abused, neglected, abandoned; and yet idealized, treasured, adored" (Kincaid, *Erotic* 17). In this easily disposable form, Breer can discard the child once her own decay has taken her body beyond the status of treasured beauty.

As if to reinforce the idea of the vacant child as eroticized, Barker provides a child whose subjectivity contrasts the objectified dead girl. Christensen describes "the contrast between the body as object and the body as *lived* subjectivity," affirming that the two conditions are distinct and that the objectified body is dead while the subjective body is alive (46; emphasis added). "Sharon" is the only child in the novel given a name, the first indicator of an identity, as well as the only child to interact with Breer and come out alive (*Damnation* 475). Sharon is a child of experience and complexity, with knowledgeable of—or at least curiosity about—the adult world. The reader is informed of her context: her promiscuous and abusive mother, her neighbours, and her predicament of being temporarily exiled to the sidewalk in front of her house. Unlike the nameless, dead girl who is frozen in her development, Sharon experiences and thinks about the world; she grows. Christensen notes "the assumption that through growing up the child develops a unified hardness of the body surface," which serves as a

"protective shield" against dangers (49). Sharon's growth negates suppositions about her innocence, removing the victimization that comes with the stigma of childhood by making her body into a "shield," impermeable to contamination.

Sharon displays a level of sexual curiosity critical to the trajectory of the child predator. She demonstrates interest in the house that Breer is in, where she "had seen peculiar comings and goings" followed by the appearance of "somebody at one of the middle floor windows, a big, shadowy figure, and he was beckoning to her" (*Damnation* 475). As the narrator informs us, "Sharon was ten. It would be a year before her first period, and though she has an inkling of the matter between men and women from her half-sister, she thought it a ridiculous palaver" (475-76). Here again we see Genette's narrator interjecting on behalf of the child, imposing an obviously adult interpretation. The narrator, able to foresee the future of Sharon's sexuality, speaks for her, evinced by his use of the word *palaver*, a word that many adults are not familiar with and one that would have been replaced by *fuss* in a child's vocabulary. The same condemning narrator, who earlier implied Breer's inherent culpability, is here reinforcing that idea and denying Sharon agency by insisting that, although Breer is currently tied to a bed in the upstairs bedroom, he is still able to seduce the child from the window. Given that the child's vulnerability is constructed by how she is perceived by others (Christensen 38), the narrator's interpretation of Sharon, which robs her of self-knowledge and imparts excess prowess to Breer, is quite problematic.

Revealingly, it is Sharon's sexual inquisitiveness that leads her to Breer in order to uncover "a mystery (or two maybe: death and man)" (*Damnation* 478).

From Sharon's perspective, Breer is a "male" and an "alluring figure," a figure that

> found something in Sharon; it turned over a rock. Beneath were the first stirrings of lives that weren't quite ready for the sun. They wriggled; they made her thin legs itch. It was to stop that itch that she disobeyed every prohibition on number eighty-two and slipped into the house when next the front door was opened, and up to where she knew the stranger to be. (476)

While Breer may have instigated this reaction in Sharon, turned over her rock so to speak, it is Sharon who initiates contact, Sharon who enters the house, mounts the stairs and meets Breer strapped to the bed. In her quest to solve the mystery of man, Sharon embarks on a journey toward adulthood and adult secrets. As Neil Postman notes, "By definition adulthood means mysteries solved and secrets uncovered" (88). This journey is concluded by contact.

Boundaries between childhood and adulthood are breached both physically and symbolically by Sharon's contact with Breer, foregrounding the rhetorical goal of the intrusion fantasy, which Mendlesohn states is "structured around a consensual suspicion of the world's boundaries" (119). At this point in the narrative, Breer's body has suffered significant decay: "His skin was blistering, and there were beads of something like black oil dotting his face" (*Damnation* 478); "something in his chest seemed to fail, a piece of internal machinery slipping into a lake around his bowels" (479). By touching Breer, Sharon risks contaminating her own body with his decay, a contamination that

Shildrick likens to heteronormative sexual intercourse. She would conceive of Breer as "an other whose anomalous body is leaky and noxious" where the possibility of contact threatens the "closed boundaries of the skin" (103). Here again, Breer's monstrous body invites sexual implication on the interactions between him and a child.

Yet, in keeping with the discussions of Nussbaum and Wilson, this threat of contamination may be more primitive. In its advanced state of decomposition, Breer's body symbolizes that "sense of [mortal] danger" that elicits the disgust response in humans (Nussbaum 95). Indeed, Sharon initially "didn't want to touch him," but out of sympathy, she obeys Breer's request to untie him, coming into contact with the "yolky fluid from his broken flesh" that seeps through the knots (478). She witnesses as "His flesh, which was now the consistency of softened soap, skidded off the bone of his wrists as he pulled his hands free" (479). Sharon is not contaminated by her contact with Breer, confirming that her body is as Christensen suggested: a hardened exterior shell. Sharon does not perceive Breer as a threat, neither in the sense of a moral or a physical contaminant. She expresses neither disgust nor loathing toward Breer's body, instead working systematically to untie the ropes.

Sharon's response to Breer's body at the height of its decay indicates a change in perception. As Nussbaum reminds us, disgust "is a powerful social force that turns attraction to aversion" (94). While this statement generally means that once one learns that something is disgusting, that thing will be avoided, it is not working in this predictable way here. Sharon's lack of disgust has little impact

on her own understanding of the world; rather, the fact that she is not repelled by his monstrous body—she "made no attempt to evade the contact"—functions to release Breer from the monstrous identity and the patterns it implies (*Damnation* 480). Breer had internalized this identity of monstrous (criminal) Other, an identity that negates any redeeming potential (Silverman and Wilson 33). Sharon's reaction—or, more precisely, her lack of reaction—creates room within that monstrous identity for Breer to be other than himself (i.e., to change).

Likewise, when Mamoulian tells him that he is the living-dead, Breer ruminates "Was this the miracle of redemption?" (*Damnation* 448). While the narrative is not clear on exactly what redemption is implied, one can speculate that it is the release from his obligatory desires for assimilation into the community, removing the stigma from rejection. Conversely, on a more physical level, the explanation that he is indeed a corpse externalizes his decay, which negates the possibility of an internal moral taint that infects his body. Either of these possibilities removes monstrosity from Breer's body, creating space for a more complex self-definition. Sharon offers the same liberation. Rather than affecting her attraction to him, her lack of disgust changes Breer's attraction to her. Indeed, at this point in the narrative, he turns away from his role as child predator and moves into a redemptive role.

Once freed from the bed, Breer considers harming Sharon: "In a matter of moments he could be across the room to where she stood. Even if she turned and ran he could catch her. No-one to see or hear; and even if there were what could they punish him with? He was a dead man" (479-80). This line of thinking

propagates commonly held fears that the child predator is undetectable, but more importantly, it reveals the change in Breer. He thinks about attacking Sharon but keeps his distance. His underlying desires and thoughts of perversion remain unspoken and are not acted upon. Despite Breer's zombie drive to "interact with humans as meat" (Burcar 105)—he reflects, "She was so perfect; what a blessing it would be to put a piece of her in him"—he is satiated by "her look" of acceptance and trust (480).

Accordingly, Shildrick associates a transition toward gaze as an indication of safety, opposing the fear "of touch, the very thing that signals potential danger in a specular economy that privileges separation" (103). She continues that such separation "makes possible the objectifying and disciplinary operation of the gaze" (103). Distance is a function of gaze, which creates a controlled adult of Breer and a sexual object of Sharon. Far from ideal, this positioning of adult and child is acceptable. As Kincaid observes, the sexually desirable child is a staple of contemporary American culture: "We *see* children as, among other things, sweet, innocent, vacant, smooth-skinned, spontaneous, and mischievous. We construct the desirable as, among other things, sweet, innocent, vacant, smooth-skinned, spontaneous, and mischievous" (*Erotic* 14; italics added). The desirable child, protected by the distance allotted via the objectifying gaze, is under no immediate threat. It is the presence of touch that mars the child predator, the absence of which initiates him into normative society.

For the reader, the finality of the intrusion fantasy, with its "trajectory of surprise/horror/anger followed by negotiation/repulsion/defeat," is particularly

satisfying when imposed on the child predator (Mendlesohn 173). This trajectory necessitates the defeat of the predator. The intrusion is always intended to be defeated, removed (xxii). Unfortunately, the real-world sexualisation of the child through objectification via the gaze remains problematic in *Damnation*. The distancing required for the gaze is not so easily maintained because of the intimacy encouraging nature of Breer's character, the appropriateness of the distance between adult and child, and the nature of intrusion fantasy. Mendlesohn describes intrusion fantasy as "an alternating current of latency and escalation, distance and intimacy" (145). Through the perverse act of touch, Barker creates this tension. But this idea of touch, while it affirms the immorality of the child-adult sexual relationship, brings to question other types of touch deemed inappropriate.

Of particular relevance to Barker's lifestyle and his literary tradition of homosexual writing, sexual touch between men is equally sullied within society. Recalling the domestic intimacy that Breer attempts to create with his victim, perhaps Breer views the corpse girl more as a kindred spirit, a potential corpse bride, able to share living-dead domesticity with him for eternity, behind the closed door of the cellar. If Breer's motives are to move toward normative hetero-relations, or at least as close to normative as his zombie state will allow, then such a depiction by Barker may also indicate a projection of monstrosity onto heteronormativity.

In *Damnation*, Barker's predator is a male seeking a female, albeit an adult male seeking a child female, but a normatively gendered union nonetheless.

This gendering creates what Mendlesohn describes as "tension over who or what is the 'intrusion,'" or in this case, who or what is the perversion (126). Breer represents the transgression between the adult and child, but also between male and female, the literal decay of the heterosexual relationship, or a nod to the non-normative reality of heterosexual desires, an understated comparison between the so-called deviant monstrosity of the homosexual and Breer's monstrous attraction to the opposite sex. Barker believes that "There is no solid status quo, only a series of relative realities, personal to each of the characters, any or all of which are frail and subject to eruptions from other states and conditions" ("The Sandman," *Painter* 291). If, as Barker claims, there is no such normalcy, then it would seem only right for him to utilize his monstrous character to problematize the normativity of the heterosexual union.

Returning now to Burcar's observation on the fear of assimilation. Breer's search for acceptance among the neighbours and the children, through his near-ritualistic self-grooming, indicates an overall desire to become socially integrated into reality. More broadly, Breer's actions bear similarity to the ritualistic patterns of a closeted homosexual, attempting to appear normative and therefore acceptable to society. Moreover, the zombie monstrosity of assimilation also relates to the homosexual, whereby normative society fears the spread of homosexuality. Nussbaum describes the justification: "semen and feces mixing together inside the body of a male is one of the most disgusting ideas imaginable—to males, for whom the idea of nonpenetrability is a sacred boundary against stickiness, ooze, and death" (113). Nussbaum elucidates that this fear of

contamination is "why the male homosexual is both regarded with disgust and viewed with fear as a predator" (113). Yet, given Breer's heterosexual tendencies, the fear in *Damnation* could easily be the spread of heterosexuality (which inherently oppresses homosexuality) just as easily as the spread of the predator.

Graham helps to make clear the connection between the child predator and the homosexual through monstrous representations. She says that "monsters are the evidence of the crime, the symptom of the disease" (53). As if homosexuality were akin to a disease (like paedophilia), medical professionals believed that it could be treated. Bertram Cohler explains that, during the 1930s, attitudes toward the homosexual were strikingly similar to those toward present-day child predators:

> defined as illegal and subject to criminal prosecution [...,] homosexuality was classified as a psychiatric disorder, and homosexual men were often remanded by family and community to psychiatrists [...]. Frequent police raids on bars where these men went to find sexual partners often resulted in criminal prosecution and publication of their names in the newspaper. (18)

It seems quite apt that Barker's child predator, his character who represents sexual deviance, should be treated with compassion. Particularly when, as Kincaid informs, in the contemporary state of media induced paranoia, "the accused are always guilty" (*Erotic* 12). Breer is given humanistic properties in order to problematize, not only his monstrous status, but also the idea that he is or should be ostracized from the community.

While the use of a monster certainly adds entertainment value to Barker's novel, it also reveals greater implications than perhaps noticed by the author. Without falling into the intentional fallacy, Graham hints at the purpose of monstrous representations. She contends that these authors "remind their audience of the fragility of the taboo's edicts upon which the moral order rests" because "they speak of liberation from convention. Monsters may serve as a warning of the folly of such transgression but may also herald new possibilities" (54). Barker has always been concerned with disrupting or at least challenging normality; it is a large part of why he chose to write in the horror genre. As recently as 2011, he has said "The act of creation has, for me, always been driven by a feeling deep in my gut that certain stories need to be told, that the status quo needs to be challenged" ("Foreword," *Painter* 17) .

The intrusion fantasy is a particularly suitable form to draw comparisons between normative and non-normative realities, and to extract hidden conflicts within a normative worldview. Mendlesohn explains that the intrusion fantasy "relies on a conflict between that which is known in a formal sense, and that which is believed, felt, or intuited. [...] Its trajectory moves from stability, through disruption, to a new mode of stability" (121). Disrupting social reality and illustrating alternatives are inherent to this form of fantasy and perhaps its most powerful rhetorical technique. When applied to the child predator, its unsettles the security of our understanding of the threats to children as well as the motivations of the predator.

Chapter 2

Predatory Realms: To Admire and Desire the Child in Portal Fantasy

My focus in this chapter is on two of Clive Barker's portal-quest fantasy novels, *The Thief of Always* and *Imajica*. Since the predator merely makes a cameo appearance in *Imajica*, I will concentrate primarily on *Thief*. The representation of the child predator in this fantasy form is particularly interesting since the portal-quest fantasy is predicated on the conception of separate realms, juxtaposing and coexisting with reality. Farah Mendlesohn explains that, in the portal-quest form, the protagonist embarks on a journey into an unfamiliar realm that he or she must "navigate" and master "enough to change it" (xix). In both *Thief* and *Imajica*, the reader journeys with Barker's reality-based protagonist into a foreign fantasy realm that he must learn to negotiate. Unlike the intrusion form where reality and fantasy intermingle, the realms of the portal-quest fantasy are separated in order to differentiate the space of fantasy from that of social reality, keeping "the fantastic [...] on the other side" (1). This binary-forming structure affects not only the physical realm of the predator but also the social conceptualization of the child as ignorant and the predator as villainous, simultaneously affirming and problematizing these dichotomies.

Granted, Barker does not strictly adhere to the portal-quest form in either novel, allowing more fantastic elements than is traditionally acceptable to move into the reality realm (particularly in *Imajica*), but for the most part, the narrative breach remains only one way: reality enters fantasy and not the other way around. The predator, represented by Barker as a fantastic monster, inhabits only the

fantasy realms, leaving him unknown to reality-restricted characters and able to maintain a lifestyle that violates the social norms and laws of the reality realm. In "The Erotics of Transgression," Tim Dean explains that "defying cultural prohibitions is always easier in fantasy than in reality" (69). This segregation ensures that the predator is sheltered from reality (and vice versa), undeterred by "the 'threat' of punishment for prohibited acts" (Zilney and Zilney 57). The demarcation between fantasy and reality (deviance and normality), created by the portal-quest, connects to the idea that fantasy grants as well as quarantines defiance.

Monstrous deviance, made separate from normative reality, is embraced by fantasy. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen affirms that the purpose of the monster is "to call horrid attention to the borders that cannot—must not—be crossed" (13). The monster amplifies these borders, strengthening the impervious binary distinction between monstrosity and normativity, and subsequently defining normality in contrast to monstrosity; his unfettered existence inside the fantasy realm secures the border from both sides. In this way, the fantasy realm serves as a monster zone, a region meant to encase and preserve monstrosity. Stephen Asma claims that the historical belief in such a defined space for monstrosity, "a monster zone, articulated in the legend of Alexander's gates, is alive and well today" (283). Housing the predator within a monster zone (the fantasy realm) normalizes monstrosity through its isolation from normative society (Zilney and Zilney 46), creating a situation wherein the actions of the predator are uninhibited and unrestricted, segregated and allowed to flourish, yet also made invisible to the

general public.

In Barker's children's novel, *The Thief of Always*, ten-year-old Harvey Swick embarks on a non-traditional portal-quest fantasy. Harvey journeys into the fantasy land not to explore new terrain on a quest to his predetermined destination, as would normally be expected, but rather to experience endless leisure, a subversive narrative structure that removes the quest from the portal-quest form. Harvey is bored with the mundane realm of reality and seeks relief from the tediousness of childhood at Mr. Hood's Holiday House, a fantastic dwelling of magic that exists in a separate realm, hidden behind a shroud of fog. Within the fantasy realm, the adult-child hierarchy is seemingly inverted, granting child residents the power to have their wishes fulfilled. This power is an illusion, however, since the realm is manipulated and controlled by Mr. Hood, a vampirous entity who seeks to consume the children's souls.

Barker's portal marks a boundary between safety and threat, between family/community and the predator. Crossing the boundary implies danger and the sharing of adult secrets with children that inevitably leads to the loss of innocence. Neil Postman observes that children experience childhood as if

> immersed in a world of secrets, surrounded by mystery and awe; a world that will be made intelligible to them by adults who will teach them, in stages, how shame is transformed into a set of moral directives. [...] For adults know, whereas children do not, what words are shameful to use, what subjects are shameful to discuss, what acts are deemed necessary to privatize. (86)

Mendlesohn confirms that the portal is commonly interpreted as "the transition between this world and another; from our time to another time; from youth to adulthood" (1). For Dean, the portal is a "fraught line [that] has something to do with sexuality" (65). Allowing the child to cross the predator-boundary imposes adult knowledge upon him that he is likely not prepared to interpret or manage. Indeed, as I will show, the portal carries, what Dean calls, an "erotic charge" (65) that complicates the reading of this text.

The portal is described as a wall of fog, uniquely reserved for children. When Harvey's parents attempt to find the house, even in Harvey's presence, the reader is informed that the house is "hiding" because "It wants children" (*Thief* 132). The portal-quest form dictates that "those travelling through a declared portal are expected to be ignorant" (Mendlesohn 13). Hence, the portal determines firstly that only children—who are "defined by ignorance" (Nodleman, *Hidden* 35)—are allowed entrance, and secondly, that the children who enter Hood's realm are less knowledgeable than he. Such ignorance is necessary to the mandate of the predator since it predicates that the child characters are innocent—and thus alluring—and that the reader (both adult and child) mimics this characterization. Such rhetoric not only demonstrates the furtive nature of the predator's realm but also constructs a chosen child, special and desirable.

Only a privileged few may enter to explore and know the predator's realm. Indeed, Harvey's recruitment is testament to this idea. Rictus, Hood's agent sent into reality to find children for his quasi-sex ring (Hall and Martin 165), knows Harvey and seeks him out specifically, marking him out by name: "You are

Harvey Swick, aren't you? [...] I thought for a moment I'd got the wrong house" (*Thief* 7). Harvey is praised as "a mir-a-cu-lous kid" (15), but when he starts to ask too many questions, he is revealed as disposable. Here we see the reality of the predator's seemingly refined selection process. As gay literature scholar Gregory Woods makes clear, "it is childhood itself that attracts, rather than the individual child" (333). Allison James explains that each child, whose continuously developing body charts the passage of time, embodies childhood (21), negating Harvey's uniqueness. Indeed, the plot confirms Woods's suspicion that "if boyhood [and not the boy] is so important, age will be a crucial theme. And wherever age is important, the theme of time is inescapable" (333). Harvey's age is repeatedly emphasized, and as the reader soon learns, the predator realm is one which controls and manipulates time, progressing through all the seasons in one day—for the children's enjoyment and continued compliance—while in reality, a year passes, robbing them of their childhood.

Taking a close look at the child's passage through the portal confirms Dean's erotic charge and the sexual nuance of the predator's desire for children. Harvey is welcomed into the fantasy realm by the open arms of the fog wall whose "misty stones seemed to reach for him in their turn, wrapping their soft, gray arms around his shoulders and ushering him through" (*Thief* 16). This romanticized depiction, when seen through an adult gaze, is a threatening image of a child willingly entering the realm of the predator. The fog acts as a passive receptor rather than an active abductor, evidenced by the accompanying illustration wherein no threatening arms grope or pull at Harvey; instead, the fog

yields to his body. The text corroborates the sensuality of this transition, accenting it with "a gust of balmy, flower-scented wind [that] *slipped between* the shimmering stones and *kissed his cheek*" (16; emphasis added). The use of "slipped between," most commonly followed by *the sheets*, amplifies the sexual suggestion of Harvey's kissed cheek. Accommodating yet violating, the fog embodies the child predator who baits rather than forces children into his company.

This eroticism, combined with the numerous references to death throughout the novel, connects sexuality and death. During his second night, following the death of one of the house cats, Harvey "dreamed that he was standing on the steps of his house, looking through the open door into its warm heart. Then the wind caught hold of him, turning him from the threshold, and carrying him away into a dreamless sleep" (64). Harvey is on "the threshold" of childhood (i.e., his life), peering in at the "warm heart" of his family only to be "caught hold of," trapped, by the same wind that kissed his cheek, which denies him his family as well as his childhood, and ushers him into a "dreamless sleep" of death. The later revealed consequences of entering the realm—that the children's souls are eventually consumed by Hood while their bodies are turned into fish who swim for eternity in his lake—affirms the connection with death and, according to Dean, "evokes a long tradition of imagining sex as potentially fatal. From sexually undifferentiated innocence to deadly excess, the line that demarcates transgression bears an unmistakably erotic charge" (65). Legal scholar David Gurnham elucidates that "eroticism is linked to death because both events

are a violent irruption of ordinary life that is special to human experience" (101). If the journey to the fantasy realm is indeed a journey toward the experience of adulthood, as Mendlesohn claimed, then it is also a journey away from youthful ignorance or denial of one's mortality.

Opposing this notion is Hood's realm, wherein eternal childhood is maintained. The child predator insists upon this forced existence of perpetual childhood, a desire which, according James Kincaid, originates from Western society that teaches adults "to adore and covet, to preserve and despoil" childhood innocence ("Producing" 10). As Perry Nodelman describes, "childhood, which inevitably passes, [is] agonizingly enticing to us [adults]—somehow better than, richer than, realer than the maturity we are stuck with. It forces us into a fruitless nostalgia—a lust for *something* we simply cannot have" (*Hidden* 81; emphasis added; Higonnet 28). Nodelman's "something" is innocence. As Gurnham notes,

> In our own society it is the sexualisation of the innocent child that incites the greatest fear and dread. It is this dread that means that the very implication that a child might be viewed as an object of sexual pleasure causes such huge anxiety and must be met with fierce condemnation, but also that which continues to ensure that innocence [...] is placed on such a high pedestal. (124)

The very innocence that is cherished in the child affirms his or her desirability and vulnerability. Yet, the desires of the child predator for "the boy who never grows up," Woods avows, rather than embodying adult-predatory deviance, represent his "only real chance of a lasting relationship" (335). In Woods's reading, the

predator attempts to secure a relationship that is both normative and impossible.

Further, this attempt at normativity reveals the disturbing psyche of the predator. Hood orchestrates "a regressive world of perfect childhood innocence" (Nodleman, "Progressive" 81), a child-gratifying realm to which he also belongs: "the man who chooses not to relate to adults, but seeks to return whether literally or not, to the playgrounds of boyhood and their pleasurable games" (Woods 335). Social care scholars Pam Foley and Stephen Leverett elucidate that children and adults use "places and spaces to explore and express their own and other's childhood and adulthood" ("Introduction" 3). Yet, as Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley remind us, "the utopian fantasy is property of adults" and, in this case, one adult, who seeks to explore and express only childhood ("Curioser" xiii). Hood's house is deliberately and diligently constructed, "built for games, chases and adventures," complete with an exterior replete with pastoral luxuries (*Thief* 22). As an architect of fantasy, Hood orchestrates his version of a childhood world, without education or adult authority, that capitalizes on the children's vulnerability (Christensen 41).

The fog barrier acts as a shield, protecting what lies beyond in the realm of the predator, from the gaze of society. This ensures privacy and secrecy for the predator, keeping him "safe behind the mists of his illusion," "safe from the awkward questions the outside world might provoke" (*Thief* 204; Mendlesohn 7-8). Such isolation grants increased control to the predator, via the enhanced dependence of the child, leaving him untouchable by reality. This positioning shifts the power for interpretation to the narrator who frequently contradicts

Harvey's interpretations, casting doubt on the overall depiction of events. The role of the narrator, as the only adult voice that transcends both realms of fantasy and reality, is troublesome. It seeks not to protect, nor to clarify, but only to contradict.

This deceit is a rhetorical aspect of the portal-quest fantasy, which "serves to divorce the protagonists from the world, and place them in a context in which they cannot question the primary narration" (Mendlesohn 7). The narrator repeatedly refers to the fantasy realm as "a place of illusions," trickery, and mirage (*Thief* 59). At times, magic is depicted as real and other times as imaginary, confusing reality with fantasy. This oscillation between artificiality and authenticity reinforces the magical powers within the realm and results in a surreal environment wherein consequences become irrelevant. This worldview reversal facilitates the false imprisonment of the children (Hall and Martin 82), by emphasizing the supposed playfulness of the realm. However, Harvey faces devastating consequences after escaping from the House, revealing the reality of both Hood's crimes and magic's ability to create true change and loss in the real world.

To further conflate reality and fantasy, Hood places the children in pseudo-positions of power, encouraging the taboo fusion of childhood with adulthood by creating mutual desires. Postman explains the transgression of such a merger, saying that it is socially "accepted that the child [does] not and could not share the language, the learning, the tastes, the appetites, the social life, of an adult" (50). Yet, within the predator realm, these shared values are achieved and

internalized by the children as a result of the imposition of Hood's realm of indulgence. In this way, Hood satisfies Mendlesohn's condition to enclose the fantasy realm, which "must be sealed from within, not without," by instilling the acceptance of taboo where "the threat of punishment comes from inside rather than outside the self" (32; Dean 70). The fog border demarcates a twofold realm wherein the threat of the predator can exist without contention and wherein Postman's adult-child, personified by Hood, flourishes.

The fantasy realm is a reflection of not only the predator's desires for childhood, but also his conceptualization of childhood, which makes *Thief* "a book not about children but about adult responses to them" (Woods 327). Hood imposes his unique vision of childhood on the children he imprisons, which simultaneously denies them "self-regulation and [...] agency" (Leverett 10), and problematizes Barker's representation of childhood. Consider the fulfillment of desire in this realm, which generally involves appetite, a veritable smorgasbord of excess: "hamburgers, hotdogs and fried chicken; mounds of buttered potatoes; apple, cherry and mud pies; ice cream and whipped cream; grapes, tangerines and a plate of fruits he couldn't even name" (*Thief* 22-23). Children's desires take the form of consumables, while the children themselves are equally consumable to Hood. This association can very easily be a projection of Hood's own desires—his own vampiric insatiability—and not necessarily an accurate representation of childhood desire. Hood's fantasy realm, his place of dwelling, is a matter of naturalized magic, leisure, and consumption.

The merger of adulthood and childhood, particularly when initiated by the

adult, naturally draws comparisons between the two categories. Postman affirms that when constructing a conception of childhood, one cannot avoid a subsequently constructed concept of adulthood (50). For Woods, "the lover of boys is necessarily involved in the process of constant comparison between himself and the boys he makes love with—a comparison in which he is always notably the loser" (334). In *Thief,* the reader experiences an interesting challenge to this idea since the adult-child comparison results in equivalence. Harvey comes to see Hood as a thief for having stolen thirty-one years from him, and Hood's immortality makes him the eponymous Thief of Always. However, upon his return to the fantasy realm to confront Hood and defeat two of his agents, Harvey is accused of being like him: "We're both thieves, Harvey Swick. I take time. You take lives. But in the end, we're the same: both Thieves of Always" (*Thief* 172). Hood expresses his admiration for and equivalence with Harvey. Yet, the portal-quest form dictates that the narrative be "concluded with restoration rather than *instauration* (the making over of the world)" (Mendlesohn 3), which requires Hood's defeat and Harvey's return to childhood (but not necessarily a return to innocence). Paradoxically, this trajectory also makes a "loser" of Harvey, but since his losses are not as great as Hood's (he is alive, after all), their distinction is maintained. Their difference reflects the modern ideal that children be "strangers in our midst," alien to adulthood (Nodelman, "Progressive" 81; Higonnet 27; Kincaid, *Erotic* 53; Stockton 296).

Barker claims that Harvey defeats Hood through his use of imagination; however, it is in fact Harvey's rejection of childhood innocence that makes him

impervious to the predator-Hood. For Barker, Harvey "uses every speck of imagination he possesses" to defeat Hood ("The Thief of Always," *Painter* 114). He epitomizes Barker's intellectual hero: "the magician as wit and wonder-maker, the man who wins his battles with imagination rather than brute force" ("Razorline," *Painter* 198). Yet, this claim cannot be entirely true, since Hood's villainy is facilitated by his own use of magic and not force. Thus, Harvey's power over Hood stems from a more complex source. Harvey defies the "disabling and disarming discourse of innocence" and takes ownership of his corruption, congratulating himself by saying, "I'm a good thief" (Gurnham 116; *Thief* 220). Harvey embraces his inner monster (Asma 183). He acquires Hood's vampire-like worldview: "*Maybe I don't need fangs to suck him dry [of magic],* Harvey thought, *maybe all I need is wishes*" (*Thief* 186). Enhanced by his earlier physical morphing into a vampire one Halloween night, Harvey's embrace of vampirism is a triumph, reflecting Asma's observation that "Everyone has the potential to become monstrous" (8). A child embraces monstrosity through the negation of innocence.

The rejection of childhood innocence is significant because it denies both the portal-quest fantasy and the commonly held conceptions of the child predator, both "narratives [that] are uninterruptable, unquestionable, and delivered absolutely" (Mendlesohn 13). Furthermore, given that the protagonist inevitably becomes the hero of the portal-quest fantasy, Harvey's childhood innocence is then always debatable. As Mendlesohn informs us, "portal-quest fantasies are structured around reward and the straight and narrow path," meaning, in this case,

that the path to be rewarded is a rejection of childlike innocence (5). Gurnham agrees that it is innocence rather than childhood that threatens the child:

> Innocence and the cultural baggage attached to it is not only an unreasonable ideal for judging children but, ironically enough, it also sexualizes the child since the greater the social anxiety about protecting childhood innocence, the greater the emphasis on that very quality believed to arouse the sexual interest of paedophiles. (93-94)

Harvey's inquisitive nature, consistent throughout the narrative, is the first clue to his rejection of such an absolute worldview.

Harvey's lack of knowledge is emphasized repeatedly, if not by his age and inability to give consent (Hall and Martin 41), then through his incessant questioning. Postman reveals this as a key characteristic of the transition from childhood to adulthood: "children must seek entry, though their questions, into the adult world" (90). Yet, the portal requires ignorance, which halts Harvey's attempt to access adulthood. When Rictus threatens to revoke the offer, saying that he is "too inquisitive for [his] own good," Harvey quickly recants, saying "I'm sorry. I won't ask anymore questions" (8). Harvey's entrance into the fantasy realm is contingent on the absence of questions. By denying Harvey the opportunity to metaphorically move into adulthood, in essence, to grow, which for Lisa Arai, entails "movement across social and geographical spaces" as well as "moving through time" (117), the predator imposes an impossible restriction. Indeed, Harvey is unable to quell his thirst for knowledge and continues to ask

questions while in the fantasy land, distinguishing himself from the other child victims within the realm and leading to his inevitable rise as the story's hero.

Another look at Harvey's passage through the portal reveals his ability to reject childhood innocence, present at the beginning of the narrative. Harvey is not strictly abducted in the most technical sense; he opts for the fantasy realm over mundane reality because of its promise of fun as well as its mystery. For Gurnham, this movement reveals Harvey's lack of innocence. He asserts that "Immobility is a key idea in the etymology of innocence," defining "The innocent, in contrast to the experienced, [as] one who stays at home and does not go adventuring" (95). Harvey's ownership of mobility is best exemplified by his unassisted passage through the portal: "Half out of hunger, half out of curiosity," Harvey walks through the fog of his own volition, claiming both desire ("hunger") and "curiosity" as fuel for his mobility (*Thief* 16). Naming the portal as a "hidden way" into the fantasy realm, the realm of the predator, further increases its allure and hints at the adult secrets contained within (11).

Problematically, the very sentiments that empower Harvey initiate his victimization. The novel begins with his rejection of childhood when he voices his affinity with adulthood, saying "it's not like I'm a kid" (*Thief* 6). However, Harvey's perceived kinship is more of a yearning for adulthood than an actual association with it. For Harvey, childhood is "dire and dreary," and he longs for adult freedom: "I am *ten*, [...] I don't have to tidy up because *she* [his mother] says so. It's boring" (5, 6). Undeniably, Harvey's boredom is the key to understanding his abduction. Barbara Pezze and Carlo Salzani illuminate Barker's

use of boredom to establish Harvey as a victim in their article "The Delicate Monster: Modernity and Boredom." Indeed, Rictus flies into Harvey's bedroom almost immediately after he expresses boredom, as if boredom were a siren's call to the child predator (*Thief* 6). Pezze and Salzani interpret boredom as a "crisis of experience and desire," one that inevitably leads to a "sense of victimization" (14). Pam Christensen iterates that "Children are seen as archetypal victims" (42). Moreover, boredom has three key effects relevant to Harvey's abduction and imprisonment: boredom "trivialises the world, disempowers the individual and empties time" (Pezze and Salzani, "Delicate Monsters" 10). Hood's realm, which appears to offer relief from boredom with its games and adventures, imposes these boredom-induced effects onto the children in order to maintain their victimization.

Harvey and the other children, Wendell and Lulu, spend (in the time of reality) years in childhood leisure. Yet, Hood's effect on time is only apparent outside the realm; while inside, the repetitive and unchanging days meld together, resulting in a compromised sense of time. Lulu remarks, "I've been here so long I don't even remember..."; trailing off, she is unable to recall any time before entering Hood's world (*Thief* 104). This effect is a result of the perpetual leisure of Hood's realm, which replaces all developmental markers with endless "sameness and repetition" (Pezze and Salzani, "Delicate Monster" 13). This strategy reveals boredom's intimate connection to the concept of leisure (13), an intimacy that is both exploited by and manifested in Hood. Joseph Boden links the experience of boredom, which is "frequently followed by sensation-seeking," to

"a wide range of impulsive and destructive behaviours" (204). Boredom, predicated on and determined by the fantasy realm, ensures that the children remain forever in a dangerous state of want. Indeed, the world of fantasy, in that it presents an idealized version of childhood, not to mention a gross oversimplification of child abduction, abuse and the child predator, is as Pezze and Salzani note: a trivialized version of reality, wherein the children are denied control and power, and in which the passage of time is made meaningless.

Harvey travels through two portals, the first being the entrance to the predator's fantasy realm, and the second taking him into his future adulthood. Harvey and Wendell escape through the fog into their futures. Since thirty-one years have passed, the world they enter is their own adult world—all the elements are there but the world is no longer familiar, "Several times he wondered if he'd gone astray, because the streets he passed through were unfamiliar" (*Thief* 119). Unable to navigate the streets of adulthood, Harvey becomes lost both literally and symbolically and, when reunited with his parents, finds that they have as much trouble identifying and believing in him as he has with them: "'It's not possible,' he [his father] said flatly. 'This can't be Harvey'" (120). Postman would define Harvey's experience as a child thrust into adulthood, which for him destroys childhood: "We are left with children who are given answers to questions they never asked. We are left, in short, without children" (90). This destruction of childhood—not childhood innocence—is a direct result of Harvey entering into the fantasy realm of the predator.

In both cases, Harvey remains a child; he does not "transition," as

Mendlesohn claims the portal-quest form dictates, into adulthood at any point in the narrative. Indeed, he remains confined by adult society—either by the child predator or by his parents. Because Harvey rejects both portals, his journey is instead "a rejection of the adult world that keeps [him] imprisoned in childhood" (Nodelman, *Hidden* 202). This rejection is not complete, however, since the reality he favours is the original reality in which he is a ten-year-old boy. Yet, even in this childhood reality, Harvey is granted the private space necessary for him to complete the intended transition into adulthood. Leverett concludes that children require "special places" that they learn to control "through resistance or negotiation," whereby they are able to "set boundaries to deny or allow others access" (20). It hardly needs mentioning that Harvey is denied such a space in Hood's fantasy realm, but this space is also denied in the future-adult realm, wherein his parents "had the decorators in" to remove the "rocket ships and parrots" from his room (*Thief* 127). The significance of Harvey's return to his original room, a room wherein he is able to maintain and define his own boundaries, is paramount to the portal-quest fantasy, which is contingent on the child's desire to cross boundaries. Compounded by his status "as a figure of cultural reproduction" as well as his "almost limitless potential" (Bruhm and Hurley, "Curiouser" xiii), Harvey is metaphorical of a future vision of reality wherein the child is not subject to the impossible fantasies of adult nostalgia (Higonnet 27, 38) but is instead (at least partially) granted the opportunity to define his own identity.

In *Imajica*, protagonist Gentle's journey into fantasy takes him through a

series of separate fantasy worlds known collectively as the Imajica. As he travels, Gentle slowly learns that he is, in fact, an ancient magician, a Maestro, who killed many people during a failed attempt to reconcile the Imajica with Earth. Of primary concern for my analysis is Gentle's encounters with this text's child predator, a non-human militant creature whose genderless body is weaponized, known simply as the Nullianac. The predator is once more depicted as alien to reality, existing only within the fantasy realm, but more importantly, living as another species. Through his segregation of the predator from both reality and humanity, Barker engages the rhetoric of monstrosity, defining the predator as a non-human entity, external to normative society. Confusingly, Barker uses the term *Nullianac* interchangeably to refer to both the species and its individual members. For the sake of clarity, I will adopt the term *Nulliani* for the collective species and only use *Nullianac* to refer to an individual member of the species.

The predator-Nullianac first appears when Gentle and his travel companion, a young girl and prophet named Huzzah, become lost in a chaotic and riot-filled urban centre. They find themselves in a threatening setting, where Gentle lacks (parental) control and authority: "Driven off course again and again, they were obliged to trust to instinct as to their direction, and inevitably instinct finally deserted them" (*Imajica*, I 472). This failure of protective instincts can easily relate back to Gentle's newly acquired role as false-father and guardian of Huzzah, as well as the inexperience of a first-time parent, or even a seasoned parent, in unfamiliar territory. Mendlesohn explains that "such defamiliarization is necessary" to the portal quest where "Immediately the world is new to both him

[the protagonist] and us [the reader], even though it is new only in terms of what he is accustomed to" (8). The form mirrors the experience of a parent's panic in response to child abduction, which can defamiliarize even the most well-known locales (Fass 4).

Alone in this threatening environment, Huzzah becomes separated from Gentle. Instigated by a raucous youth, her abduction further complicates the role of children in the predator discourse. While hiding among some rubble, Huzzah screams, attracting the attention of another child, a "trigger-happy youth [...] firing indiscriminately" in response to the sound (*Imajica*, I 473). A metaphorical reading of this encounter reveals a sexualized youth, indiscriminate in his promiscuity, whose sex, "firing" off at anything that moves, has become weaponized. This already sexualized child, "barely older than Huzzah," represents an idea commonly explored in gay literature: "not only that children can be corrupted, but that they can in turn corrupt other people" (473; Woods 327). The over-sexed youth's actions impose corruption onto Huzzah because they lead to her abduction by his older, stronger companion, the Nullianac.

Yet, even in this scenario, Huzzah is not entirely blameless. Huzzah alerts the predator to her whereabouts: "She let[s] out a shout" that draws the attention of the group led by the Nullianac (*Imajica*, I 473). Moreover, the mere fact that she had to go to the bathroom initially situates them in such peril. Huzzah seeks a private space to follow "a call of nature" and "relieve herself" (472, 473). In this innocent and natural act, Barker focuses the reader on Huzzah's sexuality, her genitals. This shift of attention exploits Huzzah's inherent innocence by

positioning her in what Gurnham informs is one of so many "postures that in their innocence they [children] could not have known would attract the lust of the paedophile" (126). In this way, Barker forces the reader "to regard the child's body as inherently erotic," making Huzzah's body "a cipher into which adult desires and anxieties are poured" (Gurnham 124; Bruhm and Hurley, "Curiouser" xiii). Foregrounding the inappropriateness of his adult proximity to Huzzah's childhood sexuality, Gentle, the noble adult, distances himself from her. While the Nullianac does not find Huzzah as she expels waste, it is this initial sexualizing act that instigates the abduction. Combined with her beckoning yelp, Huzzah's depiction can be interpreted as quasi-seductive, calling attention to both herself and her sexuality.

In pointing out this alternative interpretation, I do not intend to distort the narrative. Indeed, the Nullianac violently abducts and molests Huzzah. The Nullianac "snatche[s] her up [...] like a doll," reducing her to an objectified plaything, which, when combined with her earlier introduction as a "blessing," materializes into a body that "is caught up in the discourse of sexual perversion [...] through the prizing of innocence" (*Imajica*, I 474, 433; Gurnham 131). Gentle finds "his angel" in a "narrow and filthy" alley, "lying on the ground in front of her captor" (475, 476). The Nullianac "had stripped the lower half of her body, and its long pale hands were busy upon her" (476). Huzzah is the model of passivity in her angelically innocent and alluring pose, with the Nullianac active in his violation of her. As a "prophet" child, Huzzah is the metaphorical embodiment of "the fantasy of a preferred future" (*Imajica,* I 433; Bruhm and

Hurley, "Curiouser" xiii). Christensen claims that the child is construed as a symbolic figure "by which the survival of the whole community is secured" (42). Thus, any violation of Huzzah is extended to the sustainability of the community as a whole, a relation that is substantiated by the ruined city in which she is abducted. Like the city that yields to the violence imposed upon it, Huzzah's positioning reveals the ultimate state of vulnerability and submission.

Huzzah lies unconscious, a state interpreted by the narrator as pseudo-protection from the predator: "She was quite still, her body limp, *her eyes closed*, for which Gentle was *grateful*, given the Nullianac's present labours" (*Imajica*, I 476; emphasis added). This protection is a *façade*; the idea that she can deny the violation by refusing to witness hinges on "a rhetoric that posits insight in terms of visual perception" (Mendlesohn 12). Correctly, Gurnham suggests that Huzzah's refusal to look, rather than preserving her innocence, encourages paedophilic attraction: by refusing to "return the gaze," Huzzah becomes the ultimate object, "a prized jewel" of innocence (117). In her immobilized and doll-like state, Huzzah is stripped of both personality and subjectivity, making her a "pure object of desire" (124). Huzzah exemplifies Kincaid's vacant child.

This objectification is concretized by the inclusion of a voyeur. The Nullianac's young companion fills this role; "eyes fixed on the violation," he "Every now and then [...] aimed the gun at the child's head" (*Imajica*, I 476). Huzzah is no longer referred to by name, age or sex, but becomes "the violation," a non-human abstraction at which the youth holds no reserve against aiming his gun. The narrator's mention of "the child's head" incites further distress by

reminding the reader that not only is her body despoiled but her subjectivity as well. The narration of the voyeuristic youth reiterates the violation of Huzzah, victim of the exploiting and "objectifying gaze of a [...] paedophile viewer" (Gurnham 127).

Through such objectification, Barker creates a situation in which Huzzah has no protection against the predator. Should she open her eyes, her trauma increases through awareness; yet, keeping them closed further excites the predator and makes a sexual object of her unconscious (subjectively vacant) body. Gentle is in an equal predicament, for he can only rely on his magic to disarm the Nullianac and attempt to save Huzzah. Recalling that Gentle originates from reality, he cannot possess a practical weapon against the child predator and must rely on the tools of the fantastic, the tools authentic to a realm in which the predator must not be defeated but rather negotiated. In this case, Gentle's magic is what Asma calls "an imagined force with the power to meet the overwhelming monster force" (284).

Gentle fears the use of the fantastic weapon, which he has not mastered, and—like the Nullianac—could "do Huzzah some accidental harm" (*Imajica*, I 476). Gentle's hesitance to attack the Nullianac reinforces what Kincaid calls "a necessary part of the demonic story" of the child predator:

> If we construct a demon as the enemy, then we lock ourselves into a war story [...] We have no choice but to combat demons, and we can never get rid of them. That's the point. The pedophile is something more than a scapegoat for us [...] We need to torture

> pedophiles as if they were scapegoats, but we need always to make sure the torture isn't fatal—not to the breed, anyhow. (*Erotic* 94)

Barker's representation of the predator-Nullianac reflects Kincaid's critique of the contemporary treatment of the child predator, who is constructed as unstoppable by popular media: the individual may be arrested and imprisoned, but the child predator as a concept cannot be defeated. Similarly, within the portal fantasy rhetoric, the Nullianac must not only not be defeated, it must win.

The Nullianac distracts Gentle by revealing the hypocrisy of his attempt to save Huzzah as well as his own motivations as a predator: "We know how foul a savior you are. What's my crime besides yours? A small thing done because my appetite demands it" (*Imajica*, I 479). Still ignorant of his past, Gentle is confused by the Nullianac's accusations, "The eloquence startled Gentle, but its essence startled him more" (479). Mendlesohn claims that "hierarchy is frequently encoded in speech patterns" (6). The eloquent speech of the Nullianac raises it above the assumed depravity of the predator and, as if the accusation were not sufficient, its greater knowledge of Gentle's past secures its hierarchical positioning above him. In this depiction, the predator uses his position within the narrative hierarchy, his privileged knowledge as a member of the fantasy realm and his weaponized body to consume the child with fire, destroying Huzzah and her innocence. Moreover, the Nullianac is perceived as blameless. Like so many of Barker's monsters, "whose moral code is only appetite," it merely succumbs to the demands of its appetite ("A Thing Untrue," *Painter* 63). To be sure, the predator-Nullianac is depicted as inherently dangerous, a naturalness to his being

that cannot be suppressed or denied. The Nullianac, whose body is sexless yet weaponized—"its death-laden head" houses an electric charge that can be fired at will (*Imajica*, II 457)— is monstrous and dangerous by design.

The representation of the child predator as the Nullianac attributes a strange combination of qualities to the predator. Most notably, the Nulliani is a non-human and private species, shrouded in mystery, akin to a secret society. Kincaid describes this classification as a reality for the child predator: "Pedophiles have not really been, as we like to say, 'othered,' or marginalized: they have been removed from the species, rendered unknowable" (88; Zilney and Zilney 83). Likewise, information about the Nulliani is denied, making the species enigmatic and arcane, and what minimal knowledge is available comes primarily through rumour: "'They like innocence, *I've heard*. It's meat and drink to them" (*Imajica*, II 359; emphasis added). Because the portal-quest form positions the protagonist as an ignorant travelling into a defamiliarized world, information provided to the reader and the protagonist is not interpreted but, rather, accepted *ipse dixit* (Mendlesohn 17). As such, rumour becomes truth. Likewise, "The 'omniscient narrator' limits our vision while asserting that we have privileged insight," falsely convincing us of the impenetrability of the Nulliani (10). Indeed, the inclusion of the Nulliani is antagonistic to the portal-quest fantasy, where the protagonist and, subsequently, the reader are meant to discover the fantastic.

This (mis)representation has two consequences—disproportionate public fear and stigmatization of the predator—both of which actually increase harm to children. Leverett contends that moral panic reinforces "the general perception

that public space is unsafe" and leads to "reactive and frequently disproportionate action" (14; Elsley 105). Parents become overprotective and controlling, paranoid about "the myth of 'stranger danger' [...] despite the fact that most sexual predators are known to their victims" (Levenson 275). This response feeds into a media and political system that masks the uncomfortable reality that sexual predators are recognizable members of society (family members or friends, neighbours, coaches, etc). To alleviate this discomfort, concern is reoriented toward the unknown offender and strategies like residence restrictions are implemented to further remove him from the community, from humanity (Levensen 273; Wright "Introduction" 7, 9; Zinley and Zinley 130-31). Engrained in our society, such "dehumanizing [...] seems natural and inevitable" (Kincaid, *Erotic* 74). Like the villain of the portal-quest fantasy, we are "locked in the patterns" dictated by form and expectation (Mendlesohn 17). The community at large, predator included, become locked in social and cultural patterns formed on the basis of nothing more than rumour.

In *Imajica*, the Nulliani are a species of which little is known. The narrator offers no insight, and the only other knowledge source is from the lips of the predator-Nullianac himself. The Nulliani, who live for "'Many thousands of years, Maestro. Many, many thousands,'" have no individual identity, but are instead each a small part of the larger species (*Imajica,* II 460). As the Nullianac discloses to Gentle (and the reader), "I have no name [...] I am my brother and my brother is me" (461). According to Jean Cohen, this homogenization of the Nulliani, like the reductive stereotyping of the predator, trivializes "the problem

posed by the difference and potential conflict between individual and group identity, individual and group conceptions of the good, and minority and majority forms of intimate life" (49). This reductive definition of the child predator negates individuation and uniqueness, removing the potential for a gradient of seriousness of offence, as well as any room for interpretation, reducing all predators and all predatory action to a singular evil.

Moreover, the indifferentiability of the predator ("I am my brother and my brother is me") shelters. The Nulliani is a species that is abundant yet concealed, similar to contemporary ideas about the child predators who "have multiplied (and hidden themselves)," creating the illusion of a dangerously infinite, unknowable collection (Kincaid, *Erotic* 83). Opposing such fantasy, the Nulliani are in fact uncommon. As one imparts "We're rare and know each other's lives" (*Imajica*, I 478). Disconcertingly, the intimate connectedness of the Nulliani fraternizes the predator, giving the sense that not only is there a protective and immortalizing anonymity but also a perpetuating mechanism. Kincaid verbalizes this mythologized idea about the child predator: "the certainty that [this] lost cause will remain lost, that it (and we) may fight on in perpetuity, with no risk of winning" or ever stopping (*Erotic* 78).

The predator is an ever-present element that can be neither defeated by nor integrated into reality. Exalting innocence facilitates the targeting of child predators as "icons of evil," a focal point of "vilification that allows us to deny responsibility for them [predators], rather than seeing them as a product of our own society" (Silverman and Wilson 41-42). Both *Thief* and *Imajica* present a

landscape of exclusion. The predator, who does not himself enter reality, is shunned to the realm of fantasy. Kincaid would interpret this segregation as "the exiling of the unclean," and, in agreement with Silverman and Wilson, he concludes that "Such banishings [...] act to increase dramatically the isolation and fantasy-supporting loneliness that may exacerbate the sexual desire causing the problems" (*Erotic* 92). The significance of the portal fantasy structure is that it removes the predator from society, reinforcing the demonizing notion that the child predator is alien to normative reality, removing any hope of being integrated into society because of a seemingly fundamental difference that predicates his exclusion.

Yet, the predator is only metaphorically exiled as a scapegoat. To scapegoat the predator deflects social responsibility for the eroticization of the child by defining his appetites as anomalous and deviant. Richard Mohr articulates the resulting dangers of such a practice: "isolate this paedophilic mind from the rest of culture, label it perverted, derive the unacceptability of image and act from it, and, then, hey presto, sexy children are all right for viewing by everyone else" (22). Attempts to scapegoat the child predator "as the origins of society's evil" refute the more accurate idea that his desires are "at the heart of (rather than alien to) humanity" (Silverman and Wilson 41; Gurnham 124). The acceptable continuation of a voyeuristic society obsessed with the erotic child depends on the presence of the excluded and demonized child predator.

Chapter 3

Run-Away or Abduction?: Unclassifiable Fantasy and the Ambiguity of the Self

The books considered in chapter one and chapter two, *Damnation*, *Thief* and *Imajica*, all adhere fairly consistently to the form in which they are written, the intrusion fantasy and the portal-quest fantasy. Of course, there is some mild deviation from the parameters of these forms, yet overall, these texts remain rather prescriptive. Subsequently, the treatment of the child predator in these novels is equally regulated: in the intrusion fantasy form, which integrates fantasy and reality, the predator is incorporated into society but as a disgusting and debased version of humanity; in the portal-quest form, which delineates fantasy and reality, the predator is exiled as a non-human alien, excluded from both humanity and society. In both cases, the predator is visibly different and, as such, reflects a discourse that insists he be identifiable by sight, that his monstrosity be easily evinced rather than intuited. Yet, in Barker's *Sacrament*, a pseudo-realist novel which borrows from the narrative form of the intrusion fantasy, the portal-quest as well as those of immersion and liminal fantasy, the parameters are indefinite. The pluralism in *Sacrament* inevitably leads to a level of complexity and ambiguity unachievable in the singular form approach of Barker's other novels, attributes that extend to the representation of the child predator.

When considering the monsterization of the criminal, particularly the child predator, Stephen Asma aptly observes that "Usually complex factors lead to violent crimes, and though that complexity doesn't make the crimes less tragic, our understanding of these factors helps us to see the human being behind the

vitriol" (226). This same reductive imposition occurs in any kind of labelling, forcing a limited understanding of the child as well as the predator, which equally camouflages the human behind the label. In Barker's depiction of the child, the predator, the abduction experience, and the resulting adult, such complexities are made apparent, even if they remain contradictory, ambiguous or enigmatic.

So far in this thesis, the representations of the child predator appear to have been based on mythologies of popular discourse. In *Sacrament*, however, Barker moves away from such mythologization and presents a predator who is *human*, with all the emotional complexity and ambivalence of any modern self; in essence, this predator is a person whose identity defies reductionist labelling. In so doing, the predator is individuated, complicated and problematized, not only in his representation, but also in his role in the plot. His villainy depends on perspective, his purpose and identity are elusive, and his effect on the child, while enduring, is neither fully articulated nor defined. Like the form, the predator is complex and pluralistic, which leads to a profound uncertainty of his place in society. Consequently, he exists in an interstitial space, neither integrated in nor excluded from society, neither self nor other, while his relationship with the child protagonist remains ambiguous, at best.

As part of my reading of this novel, I conceive of its narrative as one loosely based on Barker's own experiences growing up. Certainly, there are many similarities to his early life, including the setting, the sexual orientation of the protagonist, and the events from his childhood, most notably a flu that ends with a sexual awakening and an identity-forming trip to the Hebrides Islands, among

other similarities (Winter 31-33). It is not my intention in this chapter to demonstrate the validity of such a claim, but rather to introduce this idea so that theories of biographical writing may be included as a meaningful interpretive lens for this complex narrative. Bertram Cohler's discussion of generational differences between homosexual life writers informs Barker's use of homosexual identity and the AIDS threat in a novel about the ambiguous child predator. Indeed, AIDS and the predator create a close connection between mortality and sexuality, similar to that discussed in chapter two, which again relates back to the desire for eternal youth and everlasting life, a conceivable motivation for the actions of the child predator.

My summary of *Sacrament* is more in-depth than that of the novels in any other chapter for the ease of analysis. In order to fully understand the use of the child predator in Barker's most complex and ambiguous work considered in this study, a thorough description of the events that transpire is required. Appropriate to this increased complexity, *Sacrament* depicts the child predator—if he can, in fact, be classified as such—in terms of the relationship he forms with the child. *Damnation* was concerned exclusively with the predator himself, while *Thief* and *Imajica* denied intimacy with the predator, propagating an unknowable entity, and instead focussed on the nature of the abducted child. Both approaches reduce the complexity of the child, the child predator, and the act of abduction. In contrast to Barker's other novels, *Sacrament* provides an intimacy with the predator that leads to a fuller and more elaborate representation.

As mentioned in the introduction, *Sacrament* was published in 1996 and is

Barker's official 'coming-out' novel to the gay community. This is not to say that Barker had previously denied or suppressed his homosexuality in interviews or in his writings, but rather that the publication of *Sacrament* was followed by a number of public appearances and interviews targeted at the gay community and that the novel deals explicitly with gay issues and the AIDS epidemic (Winter 422). Barker explains his motivation for creating a book wherein the homosexuality of its protagonist is integral to the plot:

> Gay men don't repeat their species. Gay men are born to extinction. They're not propagating, they're not increasing their tribe, by definition. [...] the book is about things that don't continue—and it seems doubly powerful and doubly moving, right now, that this tribe that doesn't propagate is being so catastrophically destroyed. (Qtd. in Winter 412)

Barker's protagonist, Will Rabjohns, is a prominent wildlife photographer, specializing in morbidly deprecating images of animals on the brink of extinction, who enters a coma as a result of a polar bear attack. The coma is a memory-portal that transports Rabjohns (and the reader) to his thirteenth year, to witness young Will growing up in England. In this chapter, I will use Will to distinguish between the child and adult versions of Rabjohns.

Inside the coma, the reader is immersed into the world of thirteen-year-old Will. Following the death of his older—and more loved—brother, Nathaniel, Will and his parents move to the rural town of Burnt Yarley. His father is a cold and distant professor of philosophy and his mother self-medicates to manage her grief.

Both parents make clear to Will that Nathaniel was the better son and that Will's death would have been far preferable to Nathaniel's. It is in this alienating family setting that Will meets Jacob Steep and Rosa McGee. Steep and McGee form a nomadic tribe of their own; unable to integrate themselves into normative society, they live in the margins, literally, taking up shelter in an abandoned courthouse on the outskirts of town. The courthouse, surrounded by a large hedge which physically separates it from the rest of the community, mimics the segregated fantasy realm of the portal-quest form that houses the fantastic elements (Steep and McGee). Will and two other local children, Frannie and her brother Sherwood, become entangled with the pair, leaving each affected by the experience well into adulthood. I will elaborate more on this part of the novel in my analysis. Rabjohns's coma ends with the dissolution of the relationship between Steep and Will. The events that transpire in the coma explain Rabjohns's strained relationship with his father as well as his continued connection to Steep.

Awakened from the coma and covered in bodily scars from the bear attack, Rabjohns returns to his normal life in San Francisco but finds that he is haunted by the spirit of Lord Fox, a residual effect of the coma. Lord Fox enhances the psychic connection between Rabjohns and Steep, resulting in hallucinatory visions and animalistic possession. As Rabjohns attempts to manage the presence of Lord Fox, the reader is oriented to the situation in San Francisco. The plague of AIDS has infiltrated a once utopian homosexual community and many of Rabjohns's friends and ex-lovers either have died or are dying. Amidst all this pain and confusion, Rabjohns is notified that his father has been beaten

close to death, later revealed to be Steep's bait, and is obliged to return to England. Steep senses the increased connection between them and, fearing Rabjohns's power over him, is determined to eliminate him. Realizing that his entire life's work as a photographer is driven by his encounter with Steep, Rabjohns is equally eager to be reunited to gain closure from the childhood experience that has had such an impact on his life.

The rest of the novel is set in England, returning Rabjohns to his childhood environment. He reunites with Frannie and Sherwood, and the three enter an intricate relationship with Steep and McGee. The events centre on understanding the origin and nature of Steep and McGee, who, despite thirty years having passed, are unchanged. During the coma, the mystical powers of Steep and McGee become evident to Will, but what he took as enchanting as a child needs explanation as an adult. Fantasy has intruded into reality, which, according to the drive of intrusion fantasy, needs "to be investigated and made transparent" (Mendlesohn xxii). Rabjohns learns that Steep and McGee have lived unchanged for hundreds of years, yet neither of them has any inclination as to who they are, where they came from or why they exist. Such existential concerns awaken a post-modern anxiety in the reader, particularly during an exchange between Steep and Rabjohns's philosopher father, who attempts to dismiss these mysteries, only to be confronted by the reality of his own anxieties.

We learn that Steep and McGee are the product of magic, wielded by a shaman of sorts named Rukenau. Rukenau found a non-human, divine, asexual creature, who "made temples from the altars of which a priest might see the

Creator's labours at a single glance," known only as the Nilotic, and brought it to England to build the Dormus Mundi, a sacred shrine with a passage to heaven (*Sacrament* 565). Once completed, he divided the Nilotic into male and female, forming Steep and McGee. Barker capitalizes on this splitting to create what Marina Warner describes as "a vehicle to express a new, psychological state of personal alienation, moral incoherence, and emptiness" (120). The novel culminates with their return to the Dormus Mundi to seek vengeance on Rukenau for this unholy division, wherein Steep and McGee are rejoined in their original form.

Already, in this plot summary, the mingling of narrative form is apparent. The narrative seems driven by the tension between these forms, using the portal of coma to enter the immersion fantasy of nostalgia, only to exit into a realist realm that is simultaneously intrusion (with the need for the fantastic to be removed), immersion (with the fantastic accepted and negotiated) and portal (with fantasy paradoxically exiled and excluded). That each realm within *Sacrament* is one that is familiar to Rabjohns indicates that the intrusion fantasy forms the foundation for this narrative. For Mendlesohn, the intrusion fantasy is a journey through familiar territory; "It takes us out of safety without taking us from our place" (xxii). However, with the normalizing of the fantastic in *Sacrament*, and its resolution as reconciliation rather than defeat or control, the rhetoric of the immersion fantasy is unmistakably paramount.

Moreover, the protagonist is neither ignorant, as the portal-quest demands, nor oppositional to the fantastic, as required by the intrusion fantasy form; he

merely seeks to grasp the meaning of the relationships in his life—be those relationships fantastic of otherwise—and, in so doing, seeks to understand himself. Rabjohns explores not another world, but his own world, the world of a homosexual male; Rabjohns does "not enter the immersion fantasy, [he is] assumed to be of it" (Mendlesohn xx). This is the core of the immersion fantasy trajectory. As Mendlesohn explains, "The innocence of the protagonists [...] is combined with their competence [...] because *their negotiation of their own world* is fundamentally interesting to the reader" (xxii; emphasis added). Barker's protagonist investigates the world of his adulthood and his childhood simultaneously, seeking answers and sometimes receiving them, with the pivotal intergenerational relationship between the child, Will, and the predator, Steep, at its heart.

The intergenerational relationship is blanketed as a harmful and negative experience for the child. Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley confront "the thesis of child-loving as exploitation, or intergenerational sex as trauma," claiming it as a construct that relies heavily on the idea of the child as purely innocent ("Curiouser" xxv). They avow that the threat of the intergenerational relationship is invoked by the discourse of innocence, wherein "the blank, innocent child [...] is free from the very desire he or she often seeks in the body of the adult other" (xxiv). This discourse stratifies the power in this relationship, demanding a hierarchy which positions the knowing adult above the ignorant and innocent child. The "perceived power imbalance" is defined as inherent to the relationship and "controversy inevitably surrounds the extent to which the boy member of the

intergenerational relationship can [give] consent" (xxiv). Yet an imbalance of power does not necessarily predicate harm, and Barker uses the relationship between Will and Steep to emphasize this point.

The presence of harm in an intergenerational relationship is difficult to establish given that it is most often a matter of perspective and individual experience. In *Perverts and Predators,* Laura and Lisa Zilney explain that "not all children who participate in intergenerational sex have a negative experience" (44). The contention held by Jon Silverman and David Wilson that "some of these childhood experiences could be 'good experiences'" can be difficult to accept (37). Nonetheless, Bruhm and Hurley confirm that some children are "initiated into sex by older figures who [are] not necessarily exploitative or harsh" ("Curiouser" xxix). Appropriate to the liminal fantasy, which "is shaped as much by doubts and questions as by assertions," these relationships are discouraged for fear of harm, yet the presence of any actual damage to the child can be uncertain (Mendlesohn xxiv).

Because of their potential for harm, these relations are categorized as wrong, yet "There is a separation between wrongfulness and harmfulness" (Zilney and Zilney 44). Similar to the distinction that Martha Nussbaum makes between disgust and indignation, where disgust is a fear-triggered revulsion to contamination while indignation "responds to the fact that we are vulnerable to damage," the idea that an intergenerational relationship is either wrongful or harmful is intricately connected and difficult to detangle (102). Barker provides the means, however, through the child-Will, who, at the age of thirteen, is on the

verge of both sexual maturity and the legal age of consent (Hall and Martinn 81), and who actively seeks the companionship and tutelage of an adult male. Still child enough to invoke the question of harm while also being the adult projection of Rabjohns, Will is able to inhabit both spaces, both roles, adding to the ambiguity of the text by calling into question his vulnerability and power simply through the simultaneous representation of child and adult in one body.

Vulnerability is a crucial theme in *Sacrament*. With Barker's overall premise of extinction, humans and animals are threatened, creating a kind of kinship between the two. For Nussbaum, this kinship appeals to a fundamental anxiety of humanity, "a type of vulnerability that we share with other animals, the propensity to decay and become waste products ourselves" (92). Mortality is the most obvious aspect of this anxiety, yet Barker explores another, more nuanced aspect: the vulnerability of existence. Both Steep and Will personify this vulnerability in different ways, Will as a child on the cusp of adulthood and homosexuality—as Barker described, representative of a life destined for extinction—and Steep desperately seeking identity, personal history and purpose. The vulnerability of both Will and Steep is enhanced by the animal imagery, which sets the tone for their relationship.

The complexity of Will's abduction is exacerbated not only by the intimacy granted the reader about his childhood homelife, but also by the characterization of the polar bear, whose attack opens the portal into the coma-memory. Rabjohns practically seeks out the attack, following the wounded bear after its attempted attack on one of his colleagues. Feeling a sort of kinship with

the bear—"She'd been shot for being true to her nature. No thinking queer could be happy with his complicity in that" (*Sacrament* 39)—Will follows her along the frozen landscape. His motives are not entirely clear, perhaps to locate the bear and share her last moments, perhaps in search of closure to their encounter, as he desires with Steep, but the transitionary potential of his pursuit is clear in his reverie: "He'd hung on this branch long enough, ripening there. It was time to fall and rot into something new" (39). Mendlesohn asserts that in the portal fantasy, "protagonists explore their land, but what they mainly explore is their own inner landscape, hence the use of reverie to indicate change and development in the plot" (40). The imagery of release from childhood, of ripening into adulthood, is indicative of the confinement of the adult-Rabjohns and the lingering hold of the childhood events that the reader is about to become intimately familiar with via the coma-portal. This marks the beginning of the decline of mortality, a powerful parallel to the future release from his childhood that will result from his confrontation with a similar beast: Steep.

The medium through which the reader accesses Rabjohns's childhood produces its own rhetoric, one that operates on the coma-memory space. Most obvious is the fantasization of childhood. This is, of course, enhanced by the depiction of memory as a seamless representation of the past. The aesthetics of the coma gives a sense of exhibition through an unattainable omniscience and a distancing explicit to the narrative, wherein the reader and Rabjohns alike are passive witnesses to the past. Hume calls such narratives perspectivist literature, where "the hero is relatively normal. His world, however, is twisted. When the

distortion is slight, we [the reader] cannot draw a line between fantasy and reality" (137). With the reader subject to Rabjohns's experience of events, immobilized and incapacitated, the possibility of interpretation is denied, in this case, conflating memory with actual events. Hume declares this rhetorical technique as an "attack [on] the reader's assurance [...] to persuade us that our judgment is inadequate to the challenge of interpreting reality" (137). Such an attack complicates the readers experience of both the events and the form.

Kincaid explains how this rhetoric serves to also fantasize the child predator. For him, this type of narrative is a falsehood inherent in the discourse of the child predator: "When we fish for truth, for reality, for a memory, for the child within [...] we haul up a story" (*Erotic* 3). Stories imply a coherence and cohesion impossible to memory, which Barker's narrative of Rabjohns's childhood confirms. Indeed, the telling of Rabjohns's childhood, while it does not entirely falsify the events, "dramatiz[es] the issue [of abduction], making it into a spectacle" (Kincaid, *Erotic* 13). Despite this rhetoric—or perhaps because of it—the memory-space exists only in Rabjohns's mind, but is formed from a real physical and social space of his past, an historical space in which he experimented as a child yet also one which, at present, muddies the distinctions between childhood and adulthood.

This distinction is further erased by its existence within the adult mind and the realization that Will is not thirteen-year-old Rabjohns, but rather a projection of the adult self onto an imagined child. Rabjohns fashions himself as a child, "the other that allows adults to understand their existence as adults," out of necessity,

for it is through this figure, a figure that is both estranged and strange to him, that Rabjohns is able to investigate himself (Nodelman, *Hidden* 197). As Cohler elucidates when describing the importance of self reflection in life writing, "The very act of remembering, however, is influenced by our shared understanding regarding the meaning of the past, including the importance of experiences taking place earlier in life for later-life outcomes" (5). Within this memory-space, Rabjohns re-enacts the events of his childhood, projecting significance through hindsight, achieving what Jean Cohen describes as "reinterpreting and reinventing meanings, norms, traditions, and narratives" through the act of memory, or at least the semblance of memory, for the completeness and linearity of the coma narrative is beyond the capacity of any real dream or memory (49-50).

The false certainty of memory relates to both monstrosity and childhood in significant ways. Barker explains the ambivalence that adults feel toward their childhood fears, concluding that "we all remember the monsters of childhood with shudders of affection" ("A Thing Untrue," *Painter* 64). Such monsters, which would surely have terrified the child, become nostalgic and familiar. The "glorification of nostalgia" is a key aspect of the rhetoric of the portal fantasy (Mendlesohn 3). Yet, as Susan Sontag reminds us, "Remembering *is* an ethical act, has ethical value in and of itself" (115). The intimacy provided and explored through this act of memory, both that between Barker and the reader and that between Will and Steep, echoes and affirms the ethics involve. For Cohen, engagement in intimate relationships also requires an "ethical choice" because of the high levels of "interdependency, vulnerability, and mutual responsibility"

involved (*Regulating Intimacy* 115). By situating the relationship between the child and the child predator in the space of memory, the ethics of such a relation are called into question in a new way.

Rather than labelling the child predator a monster, he is recalled "with shudders of affection," and the ethical space demands an investigation into the "interdependency" of the pair, the experienced "vulnerability," and the issue of "mutual responsibility." Such explorations are discomforting yet necessary to understand the nature of the impact on Rabjohns, particularly given the emphasis that his subconscious reliving of his childhood places on the significance of these particular events on the immediate circumstances of his adulthood. Likewise, Will does not encapsulate the ideal of absolute childhood innocence (Higonnet 10). Instead, Barker provides a child with adult qualities (Rabjohns's qualities), for the Will of the coma is not childhood Rabjohns, but rather a projection of his childhood self generated from the adult mind. Perry Nodelman contends that "'childhood' is always an imaginative construct," the remembrance of which blinds a person to his or her "actual past experiences" (*Hidden* 179). This blinding not only affects the individual, but also extends "outward to blind adults to their actual perceptions of contemporary children" as well, assisting in the deception of the reader to believe that the events of the coma are true to Rabjohns's life (179).

Another aspect of the portal-quest form is its impact on the development of identity. As Mendlesohn intimates, the protagonist of the portal fantasy explores both "a physical and internal landscape" (12). Instead of providing a window into Rabjohns's past, the coma-memory-portal serves as a private space,

which grants the "opportunity for self-development and experimental self-presentation" (Cohen, *Regulating Intimacy* 50). Not only does the memory portal allow Rabjohns to explore his childhood environment, it also allows him to explore himself, as the fantasized representation of Will. This type of exploration provides answers for Rabjohns about himself and his experiences, showing that "portal fantasies may reflect the need to create rational explanation of irrational actions" (Mendlesohn xix). The temporariness of the portal-fantasy further reveals that such explorations are insufficient to fully explain the complexity of the predator experience.

It has previously been established that place is important to the portal-quest fantasy, but it becomes doubly so when the journey through the portal is also a return to childhood. Social care scholar Stephen Leverett suggests that the importance of space to children is frequently underestimated and argues that "Space is not simply a physical entity in which children spend their time, it also has a social and discursive dimension" ("Introduction" 21). His attitude echoes that of Mendlesohn when speaking of the importance of space in fantasy. In the coma-space, Barker forges multiple layers of significance in his use of space, firstly by placing this environment within the mind of the adult, secondly by structuring it within the portal realm, and thirdly by envisioning it as the place of childhood. Leverett and fellow scholar Pam Foley avow that "Spaces and places [for children] are therefore constituted, physically, socially, historically and discursive" (1). Through such a complex formulation, space thus becomes a site

of agency for the child, in which the child is able to assert his autonomy, "making and remaking space" to suit his individual needs (Leverett 19).

However an analysis of the space of the child "reveals contradictions and tensions" between adult and child places, prompting the realization that the boundaries that separate these sites are not as secure or as distinct as they have been perceived to be (18). The space of the child, like so many spaces within *Sacrament*, is an interstitial one that moves "beyond the constructions of children as vulnerable and dangerous" (21). In this newly defined transformative social area, boundaries are challenged or problematized and relations can be redefined. The "remaking" culminates in the abduction of Will, leaving the reader believing in his agency, yet doubting the nobility of Steep's role as the adult because of the domineering Western discourse that projects danger onto their union.

The abduction in *Sacrament* differs from the previous abductions discussed in this thesis because it is denied by the child. When asked by police about "this man who abducted" him, "Will wanted to say: He didn't abduct me; I went because I wanted to go" (*Sacrament* 218). This denial is presented only to the reader, of course, since Will does not actually voice such opposition to the authorities. However, this statement is further made clear by the events that transpire between Will and Steep. Unlike in *Thief*, diegesis and mimesis reinforce each other, likely a result of the hindsight imposed on the "story" memory. Yet, the ambiguity around whether Will was abducted or ran away is repeatedly emphasized. When authorities are first called in, it is for "a thirteen-year-old boy missing from his home [...] and there was nothing to indicate an abduction, so it

had to be assumed he'd left of his own volition, with his wits about him" (153). These assumptions, in a way, reflect conflating statistics on child abduction with those of run-aways, used in the United States, primarily, to inflate the threat of the child predator (Kincaid, *Erotic* 78; Levenson 273-75; Wright, "Introduction" 7; Zilney and Zilney 99-100).

Will's case remains unresolved. Either reading—of abduction or run-away—can be supported by the text. Hume credits the multiplicity of acceptable readings as part of the contrastive literature rhetoric: "Besides encouraging affirmation of one interpretation, or the search for a new one, or rejection of both, contrastive literature can encourage reconciliation of the two polar views" (98). Will clearly receives from Steep the necessities of love and acceptance that he is denied at home, but it is equally clear that Steep manipulates and uses Will for his own purposes. Thus, the reader becomes accustomed to the notion that Will may have been both abducted and a run-away.

The contrast between the home environment of Will's parents and that of Steep and McGee gives the semblance that Will benefits from the latter. As an understatement, observed by the police authorities who came to investigate Will's disappearance, there is "Not a lot of happiness" in the Rabjohns home, with one officer remarking of his father, "Frankly if I had you for a father I'd be suicidal" and of the mother, "She's got enough pills in there to sedate the whole bloody village" (*Sacrament* 155). Steep and McGee both make Will feel more desired than his parents ever had. In their first encounter, Will is showered with praise: "You *are* a treasure" (70); "How could any self-respecting mother let you stray

out of sight? She should be ashamed, she should. *Ashamed*" (71). McGee functions to contrast her view with that of Will's mother, confirming his own feelings of neglect and maltreatment; as Will later reflects "This woman who had barely known his name had found in him qualities his own mother could not see. It made him sad and angry at the same time" (76). Postman attributes such "loss in the intimacy, dependence, and loyalty that traditionally characterise the parent-child relationship" to the dissolution of childhood (150). Of course, the contrast is complicated by the knowledge that this "story" is exclusively from Will's perspective, despite the inclusion of a narrator, in which the vilification of the parents may be a reflection of Rabjohns's lingering resentment. Nevertheless, as Will and Steep become more intimate, the distinction between child and adult does indeed dissolve.

Because he was constantly overshadowed by his older brother, even in death, Will is most poignantly emotionally affected by Steep's treatment of him as an equal. The first indication of this is Will's acceptance into Steep and McGee's world, which makes him special. Steep and McGee "lived in some secret place, he [Will] concluded, where they could not be troubled by the workaday world. Other than himself, he doubted anybody in the valley even knew they existed" (*Sacrament* 79). The privacy inherent to this abode is appealing and seductive to Will, since "Children, like adults, seek and have entitlements to privacy, belonging, autonomy and safety" (Leverett 21). Steep, and the private space he represents, offers to Will an environ in which he is not only desired, but

where he can experience belonging and through which he can become (self) enlightened.

Will desires to be with the pair, Steep in particular, and actively seeks them out. He is welcomed (*Sacrament* 99) into a realm of honesty, equality and happiness: "Will was embarrassed to admit the truth, but Jacob had been honest, he thought; so should he be" (101). Margrit Shildrick's contention that "openness towards the monstrous other [...] acknowledges both vulnerability to the other, and the vulnerability of the self" is particularly relevant to Will's and Steep's experience of each other (3). Through the suspension of any visible hierarchy, Will is ushered into an adult world that both accepts him as he is and desires to teach and mould him. He views Steep as a mentor, a keeper of secret knowledge through which Will enters a new (adult) existence, superior to his father's:

> *And you're the only one with the answers*, he might have added. That was the truth, after all. He was certain his father didn't have answers to questions like that, nor did his mother, nor any schoolteacher, nor anybody he'd heard pontificate on television. This was a secret knowledge, and he felt privileged to be in the company of somebody who possessed it. (104)

The potential to access the hidden knowledge of Steep—be it metaphysical, spiritual or sexual knowledge—instills in Will a desire to be the sole possessor of this "privilege"; "He [Will] was covetous of the knowledge" (86). When Frannie infiltrates this world, Will "didn't want Frannie watching. Jacob would never share what he knew—that knowledge that only the wisest of the wise

understood—while she was in the room" (106). A situation of isolation and secrecy is here instigated by the child's desire to obtain exclusive access to the predator. Such desire emanating from the child rather than the predator affirms the segregation of this experience to the fantastic realm of the portal fantasy.

Yet, through the gendering of the children, another reading arises. While a superficial reading reveals that Will is covetous of adult knowledge, he may in fact be covetous of male knowledge. This revelation is further reinforced by Will's sexual orientation, already becoming apparent during this childhood period, granting a sexual quality to the child, collapsing childhood innocence and adult sexual passion (Higgonet 10). Will takes on the role of voyeur, admiring the physicality of a youth, Craig, working as a mover:

> Craig stripped down to a threadbare vest, the sweat trickling down his neck and face from his low hairline, his neck and arms peeling where he'd caught too much sun. [...] Occasionally, Craig would do something that made Will feel as through he shouldn't be watching, though they weren't particularly odd things for anyone to do: passing his tongue over his frizzy mustache, stretching his arms above his head, splashing water on his face at the kitchen sink. (*Sacrament* 55)

That Will "shouldn't be watching" further enhances the forbidden sensuality of his experience. The slowed description and eroticization reveals not only the budding of Will's sexuality, but more importantly his homosexuality.

In Barker's other representations of the child predator, while some

children are victims of projected sexuality, none of them exhibit the same-sex desires of Will. Will's ownership of his sexual attraction to Craig evinces his transition into adulthood, particularly since it also demonstrates Will's adult-oriented desires. His adopted voyeurism concludes with his rejection of Craig after he is slapped by his mother for swearing: "Will chanced to witness the blow and saw how Craig's eyes teared up from the sting. He was, Will realized, just a boy, for all his sweat and muscle, and his interest in watching Craig's labors instantly evaporated" (56). The revelation that Craig is "just a boy," Will's undesired equal, contrasts with his truly desired unequal, Steep. Not only does Will reject youth, but also the passivity of sexuality.

As initiation into his realm, Steep sets Will to the task of killing two birds. This experience can be interpreted as sensual if not sexual in itself. The birds that Will kills are a pair of heterosexual mates, with obvious symbolism. He kills the birds "knowing Jacob was watching him" and seeking approval, "*Wasn't that beautiful?*" (164). The experience is quasi-sexual: "Will looked at its [the bird's] mate. In the time it had taken to kill the second bird, the first had also perished. Its blood, running down the blade was hot on his hand" (164). The penetrating knife seems to have desires and agency of its own, forcing Will into this act, leaving his hands hot with blood. Kathryn Stockton's discussion of growth is relevant to the interpretation of these little deaths. For her, metaphor conveys "some new meaning as it moves us across the distance between two different concepts" (280). Killing the birds, in that it mimics Steep's own self-proclaimed purpose in life to destroy the last of a species on the verge of extinction, solidifies the union

between Will and Steep. Yet, the birds are also "a vehicle to the child's strangeness" (Stockton 280). Following this experience of maturation, Will's "mind grew strange to itself, filling with thoughts it had never dared before" (*Sacrament* 165). Will experiences growth and change as a result of his exposure to Steep's adult values and practices. This experience precedes the physical intimacy between Will and Steep, which Steep interprets as a threat and subsequently rejects.

This identification with Steep is finalized through their intimate encounter. During a forced psychic connection, Will enters Steep's mind and body against his will, entering both adulthood and manhood. Steep informs the reader that Will is a "conduit" able to access Steep's mind through physical touch (167). Through this bodily intrusion, this breach of subjectivity and the adult-child barrier, Will experiences manhood, his own as well as Steep's:

> I'm in Steep's body. I'm looking through his eyes! The idea didn't frighten him; quite the reverse. He stretched a little, and it seemed to him he could feel the muscle of the man enveloping him, heavy and strong. He inhaled and smelled his own sweat. He raised his hand and fingered the silken curls of his beard. [...] Though he was the possessor here, he felt possessed, as through being in Steep had put Steep in his being. (182)

This union, the epitome of equality, has a foreignizing effect on Will, similar to the feeling of estrangement incited by his killing of the birds: "There were appetites in his hips and head he'd never felt before" (182). The predator-Steep

also enters Will, possessing him with desires that originate in Steep rather than in Will. In this way, it may be argued that Steep metaphorically contaminates the child, yet by physically entering the body of Steep, Will quite literally contaminates the predator.

It is this fear of contamination that inspires the rigidity of boundaries between adult and child. Pia Christensen orients us to "The cultural performance of (child) vulnerability and (adult) protection" that is enacted through the care and preservation of the surface of the child's body (57). She relies on the idea that the child is composed of two bodies "The first is a visible, exposed and specific outer nature of a child, and the second is the idea of a hidden, wild and vulnerable inner nature" (47). It is the vulnerability and potential for contamination of the inner body that makes a threat out of the child predator, for it is the inner body that houses the child's innocence, bound by the outer, physical body.

However, Will is a body without boundaries. He is an imagined construct of Rabjohns's coma, giving only the appearance of physicality. What is more, this imagined body has a fever (*Sacrament* 132). Will's fever is indicative of the "diffuseness of [his] inner body" as it spreads outward toward the surface of his skin, mingling the two bodies and making his vulnerability plain to anyone who sees him (Christensen 50). In so doing, Will fashions himself as an interstitial site, simultaneously inner and outer body, both and neither. Not only does Will violate the boundaries of his own body, he defies the physical bounds between his and Steep's body, as well as the cultural and social boundaries between childhood and adulthood. Through so many violations, Will makes himself susceptible to

contamination, "permeable to the world" (Christensen 45). This vulnerability explains the statement that, while Will is the possessor of Steep, "he felt possessed."

For Nussbaum, this vulnerability to physical and mental contamination, that of "crossing a boundary from the world into the self," is what elicits the disgust response; she explains that "disgust-relevant contamination may occur through the nose, the skin, the genitals`` (92). Outside the realms of fantasy, the body can only be contaminated via its orifices, implying a physical (and perhaps sexual) violation between Steep and Will. This violation and its implied sexual connotation are intensified by the little deaths that precede it. The birds serve as "reminders of our mortality and animal vulnerability," key triggers of the disgust response that "wards off both animality in general and the mortality that is so prominent in our loathing of our animality" (Nussbaum 93, 89). Yet, while all indications may point to the vulnerability of the child, the breach of their bodies draws tears from both Will and Steep: "Will sobbing that he did not know what was happening; Jacob, that he did" (*Sacrament* 168). That this encounter is perceived as dangerous weaves together the other threat of contamination outside the portal.

Beginning with Rabjohns's confrontation with the polar bear, an animalistic figure who cannot help but follow her natural instincts, Barker leads the reader through a landscape of death, sexuality and nature. The death of the birds—under Steep's tutelage—as well as the adult anxiety of the child-Will experiencing his own manhood along with that of another man, and the AIDS

epidemic that plagues Rabjohns's loved ones in San Francisco lock in the relation between danger and bodily contact between men, in childhood and in adulthood. Steep's fear of Will is symbolic of what Richard Canning describes as "mainstream society's fear of the epidemic 'leaking out' from the perceived risk group" with Will as a future member of a community of AIDS besieged homosexuals and Steep as a heterosexual killer of dying things (135).

Steep's fear stems from his assertion that "influence works both ways" (*Sacrament* 301). His influence on Rabjohns is evident in his photography, but the mental influence that Rabjohns has on Steep, stirring up unwanted memories, "prying" into his mind, troubles Steep to the extent that he decides to kill Rabjohns (302). Such reciprocity reveals the hold that an encounter between the child and child predator has on both parties. The question of corruption, of whether Steep was indeed a mentor or a predator, is reflected upon by adult Rabjohns. He ponders,

> Was it possible that the whole initiation had been stage-managed to make him into some semblance of the man he'd become? Or had Jacob been about the work of making a child into a murderer and simply been interrupted in the process, leaving the smeared, unfinished thing Will was to stumble off and puzzle out its purpose for itself? (316)

Such contemplation expands this discourse outside the text; as Mendlesohn explains, "reverie and self-contemplation, far from creating depth, break the sense of immersion" (10). In his discussion of homosexual literature, Woods echoes

Rabjohns's questions: "My aim is now to address the issue of the child's supposed innocence, and the adult child-lover's supposed guilt. Does the lover of boys molest victims or does he liberate his protégés into their dormant but already present sexualities?" (326). The question of the adult as victimizer or teacher is one that haunts the adult child relationship, particularly when there is such vulnerability for both parties.

It can hardly be coincidence that Will initially seeks out the company of Steep at a time when Steep is emotionally vulnerable. Indeed, Will is welcomed into Steep's presence, but only shortly after Steep had been abandoned by McGee, leaving him alone and feeling "melancholy" (*Sacrament* 99). When Will admits his ignorance of the term, Steep imparts his first lesson: "Melancholy is sad, but more than sad. It's what we feel when we think about the world and how little we understand; when we think of what we must come to" (99). Through this emotional openness, Steep makes his body vulnerable to Will, an apparatus explored by Barbara Pezze and Carlos Salzani, wherein the experience of melancholy shifts "emphasis from the soul to the body" (8). It is in this open environment that Steep decrees Will his equal, saying "We're equals here. Both a little melancholy" (*Sacrament* 101). Their affinity is secured in their mutual quest for self-discovery, with melancholy being "read as a modern identity crisis" (Pezze and Salzani 19). As the interconnectedness between Steep and Rabjohns demonstrates, denial of the monster translates into denial of the self.

At the heart of this novel is "The question that haunts the Western imagination—'Who am I?'—and its implicit companion—'Where do I come

from?'" (Shildrick 50). Rabjohns actively wonders if he is, in a metaphorical sense, a product of his encounter with Steep, if Steep is "the man who fathered Will Rabjohns" (*Sacrament* 354). Steep is continually preoccupied with his origin and his purpose. While the philosopher of the story may deny such musing as trite "sophistry," it is indeed this very existential indeterminate that "vexes every living thing" (421). Hume considers fantasy a response to such unknowables: "Man wants assurance of his nature, his role, and his significance" (141). Warner credits the division of Steep from McGee as the source of such quandaries: "The supernatural [...] is always in the process of being described, conjured, made and made up, without ascertainable outside referents" (159). Steep and McGee, while they may appear to be, are not members of reality. They are the fantastic. They are the intrusion that brings chaos to Will (and) Rabjohns's reality.

That Steep and McGee are unable to come to terms with their own incompleteness is another indication of the monstrosity that they represent and which has infected Rabjohns. As Woods explains, they are "classic cases of ambiguity. They are not good or bad, but both or either" (328). Shildrick agrees that "Monsters then, are deeply disturbing: neither good nor evil, inside nor outside, not self or other. On the contrary, they are always liminal, refusing to stay in place, transgressive and transformative. They disrupt both internal and external order, and overturn the distinctions that set out the limits of the human subject" (4). Barry Smart informs us that our inability to understand our personal reality is the very element that makes us human: "ambivalence is [...] a part of the modern human condition rather than a sign of its incompletion or distortion" (121).

However, if our contemporary understanding is as Christina Santos and Adriana Spahr describe that "that which escapes a fixed definition is imagined as the monstrous" holds true, then every modern self is already or has the capacity to be, at any moment, monstrous ("Introduction" ix).

Kincaid returns this notion to the child: "Strange, mysterious, and ungraspable, the truly modern child was and is both radiant and oddly repellant, the object of fawning and not-so-secret resentment" (*Erotic* 53). The child is monstrous in itself, attractive yet repulsive at the same time. Kincaid's assertion has interesting implications on the relationship between Will and Steep. Steep is labelled monstrous not only for his role as child predator and his origins as a non-human, divine creature, but also because he defies definition and embraces liminality and ambiguity. This characterization mirrors that of the form of the novel, but more importantly, it mirrors that of the child. Christensen describes the child as contradictory: "elusive and flexible, but capable of being modulated by the influence of adults" (48). This, combined with Kincaid's idea and Barker's representation of Will, forms a monstrous child that can and cannot be tamed by adulthood. Like the monstrous predator, the child is also excluded from society, a positioning that encourages affinity between these two outcasts in search of belonging, identity and self-definition, and that perhaps explains Steep's attraction to and fear of Will, having recognized his own monstrosity within him.

Such sentiments echo the reciprocating influence between Will and Steep, the child influencing the adult influencing the child, imposing onto each other the modernist conditions of ambivalence and ambiguity. Barker amplifies such

contradiction through his use of form: imbedding immersion fantasy under the guise of realism within his portals, opening portals within portals, and mirroring encounters in both realms of fantasy and reality. With such interchange, the uncertainty of the predator is naturalized within a novel infiltrated on every level by ambiguity. Such disguise acts as armour, protecting the discourse applied to the predator from critical scrutiny. Kincaid again explains the power of this story: "In any case, we protect the fundamental idea (and our fundamental need to believe) that child molesting is a clearly defined, discernible, marginal activity engaged in by others who can be (along with their acts) identified and punished, maybe even eliminated altogether" (*Erotic* 23).

The incongruity of this assertion is that this idea exists along the contradictory notion that the child predator is an unstoppable and insatiable breed and that, while the individual may be caught and imprisoned, the phenomenon will continue in others or in that same individual upon release. Kincaid's words echo similar sentiments that were once—and are still, in some circles—held toward the homosexual. Barker also recognizes and affirms this connection through his narration of the child predator: "Steep had never been comfortable in the company of queers, but he'd felt, almost against his will, a kind of empathy with their condition. Like him, they were obliged to be self-invented; like him, they looked in at the rest of the tribe from its perimeters" (*Sacrament* 453). The monstrous are always marginalized, but whether their lifestyle is considered criminal, deviant or acceptable is, ironically, a matter of perspective.

Conclusion

Be the Beast: Magic, Control, and the Homosexual Implications

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that the rhetoric of the form of Barker's choice of fantasy both reflects and shapes the representation of the child predator in his novels, *The Damnations Game*, *The Thief of Always*, *Imajica*, and *Sacrament*. In the intrusion fantasy, *Damnation*, the predator is conceived of as a foreign element embedded within society, whose deviance is plainly represented by the decay of his zombie body and whose presence is surely eradicated by the end of the novel. In the portal-quest fantasies of *Thief* and *Imajica*, the predator is a non-human, alien species that exists not in reality but only in an enclosed and self-sustaining realm, excluded from society. His nature is secretive and unknowable yet superior to his human opponents. In *Sacrament*, the form is an amalgamation of portal-quest, immersion, and liminal fantasy, combined with a perspectivist and contrastive approach to a fantasization of reality, which leaves it ambiguously unclassifiable. Indeed, such ambiguity is reflected in the unanswered questions of whether Will was abducted or ran-away, whether Steep was a predator or a mentor, and whether they are themselves or each other.

The application of Farah Mendlesohn's and Kathryn Hume's theoretical approaches to fantasy have yielded interesting and sometimes surprising results in my analysis of the predator. For Mendlesohn, the intrusion fantasy requires the predator to bring chaos, while the portal-quest fantasy demands that the character—be it child or adult—entering the portal is ignorant of what lies on the other side. In both forms, humanity is not prepared for the predator and must

determine how to deal with his presence *ex tempore*. It is no wonder, then, that the representations of the predator character within these forms are reductive: Breer, the appetite-driven zombie; Hood, a man without history or discernible intentions; and the Nullianac, an alien species that forms a furtive brotherhood without individuation. Each representation serves to remove the human from the monstrous representation and to deny the depth and layering of these characters, making them easily amalgamated into an equally singular and forgettable villain.

Only the ambiguous fantasy, which incorporates multiplicity, creating an uneven blend of villainy and humanity, breaks from this reductive tendency. Hume contends that "Juxtaposing several views when they represent a cross-section of society is especially effective for forcing us to realize that our view of reality is not privileged" (86). The sense of security that accompanies a discourse that claims to know the identity, motivations and actions of the predator is problematized by the depiction of Steep, a tortured and divided soul who finds in Will a companion and student with whom he can share his wisdom as well as the mysteries of his adulthood. That this encounter occurs on the brink of Will's own (homo)sexual awakening merely exacerbates the contract of worldviews that leads to a questioning of one's assumptions of what constitutes reality.

Viewing these texts and trying to unravel the depiction of the child predator through the lens of the male homosexual literary tradition is increasingly problematic. I have followed Gregory Woods's lead in positioning Barker within this tradition not only because "Barker is one of the bestselling gay writers in the world," but also because most of his major influences also fall within this

tradition: Christopher Marlowe, Jean Cocteau, J. M. Barrie, among others (245). But a discomfort arises in considering the representation of the predator through this filter because it inevitably leads to comparison.

The similarities between historical public opinion of the homosexual and those currently held toward the child predator can easily conflate the two, particularly when considered via the language of monsterology. As discussed earlier, during the 1930s, homosexuality was deemed "a psychiatric disorder" and "often resulted in criminal prosecution and publication of their names in the newspaper" (Cohler 18). The same can be said of the predator, with paedophilia classified as a mental disorder, laws against child abduction and sexual relations with a minor, and with national databases of sex offenders serving to notify the public. Such similarities do not imply that the sexual deviance of the predator should be excused or accepted by society, but it does create a kind of kinship between the two conditions.

Born in the early 1950s, Barker reached sexual maturity during a sexually liberated age. Cohler explains that gay "writers are influenced by the very manner in which their generation has understood the meaning of sex between men and the impact of social and historical change upon the manner in which they understand desire" (7). He also elucidates that many of Barker's generation fear that they

> may have contributed to the spread of a silent killer that began to take its toll a decade later. [...] these men at midlife often feel guilty that their youthful heady rush into newly accessible encounters led to the AIDS pandemic, a generational defining

> event that structured the personal accounts among men reaching young adulthood during the 1980s. (18)

Thus, it seems natural that Barker's representations frequently imply deadly consequences to forbidden desires, be they between adult and child or between adult males. Sexual deviance transitions to criminality through the monsterization of desires deserving punishment.

The AIDS discourse only amplifies the comparison between the homosexual and the predator with initial conceptions of the disease as a mark of shame, a punishment for so-called unnatural attraction and sexual union. Margrit Shildrick connects such guilt with the resulting vilification of homosexuals as "morally at fault" (53). In discussing the case of AIDS, Shildrick describes "the initial widespread public reception of the condition as figuring a gay plague, from which blameless heterosexuals were exempt, speaks to the notion that those affected were paying for sins in their past" (53). With the additional taboo of adult attraction toward the child found within the predator, Barker's depictions of bodily monstrosity—Breer's decaying body, the Nullianac's weaponized body—seem to echo the moralistic view of sexual transgression deserving to be made public spectacle.

In his discussion of the historical uses of monstrosity, Stephen Asma presents the longstanding, conservative or moralist reading of such representations. He explains that in this view, monstrous representations of sexual deviance

> remind us of our betrayal of morality and reinforce the timeless

> ethic [...] of sexual moderation: "If you violate sexual morals, you will be punished by death, and the city will be destroyed; tampering with sexual morals is a threat to civilization." [... H]orror gives us a virtual tour of the consequences of 'leftists' sexual liberation. (196)

Through such rhetoric, deeply imbedded contradictions and resentment are revealed in Barker's narratives. As if in defiance of his generation, Barker presents sexual liberation as fantasy that more often than not is defeated or at least removed as part of the conclusion to his novel. Yet, almost contrarily, characters who represent sexual deviance—Breer, Steep, McGee—are sympathetic and identifiable to the reader.

The postmodern implications of these oppositions and contradictions are obvious. While we may presume to accept heterogeneity in the self and society, reconciliation is not so easily managed. Barry Smart excuses such weakness in the modern self, saying that "Under conditions of modernity conflicting emotions and attitudes abound: ambiguity and uncertainty proliferate" (6). In response to these conditions, we turn to "ambivalence," which it seems is "destined not to go away, for it is a product of the modern preoccupation with the pursuit of order" (6). This need for order is evident in all the texts considered within this thesis. Humanity struggles to make sense of that which cannot be reconciled, that which defies definition and refuses to remain in a singular category, in other words, that which is monstrous. The resulting ambivalence reveals our own fragility; "the theme of vulnerability begins to take shape as the somewhat unanticipated yet irreducible

companion of the monstrous" (Shildrick 6). For Barker, the remedy for such vulnerability in the face of fantastical monsters is equally fantastic magic.

Indeed, another commonality to the representation of the predator is the presence of magic. According to Sir James George Frazer's circa 1890 anthropological study, the practice of magic is predicated on the assumption of a natural order, "a system of natural law, that is, a statement of the rules which determine the sequence of events throughout the world" (26). The ordering of nature allows for a sense of security, a reassurance that events are not subject to random occurrence but rather follow a pattern, which if understood can be controlled. In magic, "man depends on his own strength to meet the difficulties and dangers beset him on every side. He believes in a certain established order of nature on which he can surely count, and which he can manipulate for his own ends" (804). Through the use and practice of magic, "man essayed to bend nature to his wishes by the sheer force of spells and enchantments" (52). These efforts empower the magician to affect change and exert his own will on his environment, in effect attaining "a sovereignty over nature" (45).

Such an ordered system of nature implies that, through the mastery of magic, one is able to maintain control over one's environment. In Barker's fantasy, magic is wielded by both villainous and noble characters. In *Damnation* and *Thief*, magic is exclusively in the hands of evil figures and is used to manipulate reality in order to alter the environment to facilitate the plans of the predator (Hood) or his creator (Mamoulian). In *Imajica*, Gentle uses magic to fight the predator, but in keeping with the portal-quest fantasy, without mastery of

the fantastic environment, he is unable to achieve the level of precision necessary to effectively destroy the predator. In the cases of Gentle and Hood, it is their inability to maintain control over the environment that thwarts their efforts; like Frazer's failed magicians, "both the order of nature which he assumed and the control which he had believed himself to exercise over it were purely imaginary" (804). Good or evil intention has little to do with success.

The greatest desire to know and control nature is essential to the character of Steep in *Sacrament,* and it is through his interconnectedness with Will that the influence of traditional magic becomes apparent. Steep's purpose in life is to maintain a record of extinction, through the seeking out, documentation and then finalizing murder of the last of any given species. Yet, his knowledge of nature is superficial. Like the modern understanding of the child predator or any other criminal monster, wherein "We are still very much in the *description* phase of the science of the criminal mind, not yet at the underlying causation phase," Steep's investigation of nature is merely descriptive (Asma 228; Silverman and Wilson 43). The danger of his encounter with Will arises from the same superficial understanding.

The exertion of control that magic implies proliferates throughout every character and reader. Modernity dictates that citizens control their desires, behaviours, and reactions. A society that fears the child predator seeks control over both the adult and the child. Associations of the child with nature are longstanding and create a connection between depictions of magic and the child. Steep begins a magical engagement with Will without fully understanding the

system governing their interaction. Magic assumes "that things act on each other at a distance through a secret sympathy, the impulse being transmitted from one to the other by means of what we may conceive as a kind of invisible ether" (Frazer 27). Via this fantastic substance, the mutual influence between the child and the predator manifests as a result of magic. Thus, the very magic, intended to control this interaction, brings about its interconnectedness and chaos because of a lack of understanding and a rigid encasement of assumptions.

Through my analysis, these assumptions—sometimes about the child and sometimes about the predator, often contradictory—have been foregrounded. Ambiguity, contradiction and ambivalence infiltrate every interaction between the child and the predator, with extended consequences on conceptions of the self and the monstrous. Engagement with the predator and theories of monstrosity lead into a treacherous territory that opens debates about normativity. On the one hand, "In our age of postmodernism (a radical form of social constructionism), it is a good time to be a monster. The monster is but another subspecies of the other, and like all marginalized, subordinated groups, the monster can finally let its hair down and glory in its difference" (Asma 252). Such a celebration of multiplicity applies without question to the homosexual, but what of the predator's sexual difference? This question is complex and not readily answerable, particularly given the arguments by James Kincaid and David Gurnham that the culture that opposes the child predator is the very culture that created it.

For Laura Davis and Christina Santos, the monster is of interest because it is able to bring to the fore problems that would otherwise remain hidden under a

guise of normative society. They claim that

> The monster can threaten the very foundations upon which our values rest [...]. Because we understand our own existence and identity in relation to such structures and established values, the monster has the potential to disintegrate the Self, our very core. Monsters challenge the homogeneity of society and Self by revealing inconsistencies, gaps, and the unknown. ("Introduction" x)

Indeed, as I have argued throughout this thesis, Barker's depiction of the predator has continually challenged commonly held conceptions of the self and society, but it has also affirmed the very same conceptions. Many of the complexities of representing the predator in literature have been uncovered and, at the very least, acknowledged by my analysis, yet it remains clear that this topic is far from exhausted.

Because my aim was to consider Barker's works and his representation of the predator within the context of the male homosexual literary tradition, wherever possible I focused exclusively on male interest in boys. The gendering of the predator and his victims is an interesting and fruitful avenue to explore, within these texts and likely others, particularly given the heightened sexuality of Rosa McGee's victimization of young Sherwood in *Sacrament* and the melancholy depiction of Mr. Hood's female victim, Lulu, in *Thief*. Both of these texts open opportunities for further analysis in terms of the gendering of the predator, since in my discussion and in many commonly held beliefs, the threat

of the predator has been exclusively discussed as masculine. Moreover, the gendering of fantastical, monstrous transformations illuminates differing sentimentalities toward the child, since in *Thief* the monstrous transformation of Harvey into a vampire is temporary, while the metamorphosis of Lulu into a fish is permanent. Kincaid would certainly agree that this depiction reflects a privileging that arises from "the way we have idealized 'the child' that makes us indifferent to most children, even those whose misery and devastation strike our eyes" (*Erotic* 54; Jenkins 10-11). Given a broader scope and greater breadth for analysis, unpacking the issue of gender would surely add to the neglected scholarship of the child predator.

While discourses of the innocent trap children within an idealization that makes them appealing, it also makes them vulnerable to the predator. The predator is similarly trapped in a mythology that affirms its threat and negates its humanity, transforming it into a monster. This transformation removes responsibility from society as well as the individual, child or adult. It perpetuates a cycle, or as Kincaid has called it, a story that seems doomed to repeat itself in an endless loop of victim and victimizer. Through analyses such as mine, which seek to question, challenge, and weaken the tightness of this story, the full complexity of the predator, his function, his condition, and his existence within a society that seeks to exile but not annihilate him can begin to be explored.

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