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Child's Play in Contemporary Gothic Narratives

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the significance of child's play in a number of contemporary Gothic literary and visual narratives. Two short stories, "Subsoil" (1994) by Baker Nicholson and "Word Doll" (2015) by Jeffery Ford, are more closely studied, while some other relevant texts are also discussed. In these works foregrounding old-fashioned games, child's play is associated with the ancient past, awakening rural and primordial cultural memory. They express an uncanny sentiment, mixing familiarity and estrangement, that is aroused by the return of the repressed past. In addition to the introductory and the concluding sections, the main body of this article is divided into three parts that deal respectively with how these texts evoke latent anxiety and fear about so-called "savage" cultures, the "primitive child" myth and rural childhood. Gothicized child's play, however, also acts as a conduit—an intermediary agency—for communication with alienated entities. In the final part, I argue that the connection with Others initially brings horror and repulsion, but also enables understanding, empathy and reconciliation, which fulfills the critical function of collective play of building relations and fortifying social bonds, as in primeval societies. These Gothic narratives of child's play provide a renewed view of play and childhood in our time. Play is not only an inconsequential pastime, but offers opportunities for re-immersion in, rethinking of and constructive appropriation of past legacies. The liminal nature of childhood is also positively acknowledged through emphasizing the qualities of inclusiveness, flexibility and responsiveness in the infantile psyche so as to empower children's subjectivity and agency.

KEYWORDS: play, Gothic literature, childhood, Rural Gothic

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I. The Gothicization of Child's Play

The eighteenth century marked a meaningful milestone in thinking about play seriously with certain philosophical and aesthetic treatises such as Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790). A number of influential nineteenth-century writers continued to deliberate on the concept of play, including Paul Valéry, Stéphane Mallarmé and Lewis Carroll, but, as Joyce Goggin indicates, it is Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* (1938) that has most considerably inspired works on literature and ludicity (5). Pioneering the systematic study of the play-element explicit or latent in various cultural activities ranging from sports and poetry to laws and warfare, this work boosted a long-lasting academic interest in diverse ludic activities among multiple disciplines. In the words of Huizinga, play can be defined as "a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is 'different' from 'ordinary life'" (28). In summary, the essential characteristics of play according to Huizinga include voluntariness, seclusion and limitation, tension between regulation and violation, physical excitement and psychological gratification, separation from and frequently transcendence over normal life. Individuals engaging in play are often believed to benefit from plentiful rewarding effects such as fortification of body and mind, acquisition of knowledge and life skills, absorption of social values and conventions, mastering of emotional management, and so forth (Hall; Erikson).

Play is especially considered pivotal for pre-adulthood experience. Held to be greatly advantageous to children's mental as well as corporal development, various sorts of games and toys have been widely adopted in modern pedagogy. A closer look into child's play and its development over cultural history reveals the ever-changing conception of childhood. Enlightenment philosophers, for example, with their reflections upon human nature and groundbreaking works exploring infantile psychology, such as *Emile, or On Education* (1762) by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, encouraged soulful immersion in nature and outdoors activities instead of sedative reading. The Romantic admiration of spontaneity, imagination and childhood innocence further endorsed physical exercise and play that were believed to cultivate or preserve these qualities. Friedrich Fröbel, founder of the first kindergarten in

the Western world, along with other nineteenth-century German forerunners in juvenile education, put into practice such celebration of enlightening play. Fröbel designed a set of six educational toys in simple spherical, cubic and cylindrical forms which aimed to stimulate children's intuitive acts of touch and grasp. Following Fröbel's example, modern juvenile-educationists Maria Tecla Artemisia Montessori for example, have mostly affirmed the value of play in child pedagogy, recommending hand-on activities, somatic situational experiences and instructive toys.

Contemporary horror films, however, have cast dubious shadows on child's play since the latter half of the twentieth century, most abundantly in post-1970s American productions, but similar phenomena can also be observed in non-English cinematic works. The backdrop of the bloody serial killings in the blockbuster *Halloween* (1978), for example, is the Halloween child's game of "treat or trick." The classic Italian cult film *Deep Red* (*Profondo Rosso*, 1975) first featured a psychopath killer who sang a creepy lullaby before committing homicides; later, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) famously adapted the nursery rhyme "One, Two, Buckle My Shoe," originally probably a jump-rope song, to the demonic Freddy Krueger's haunting jingle: "One, two, Freddy's coming for you. . . . Three, four, better lock your door. . . ." In addition to these are the frequent appearances of talisman-like doodles and dismembered toys that possibly symbolize children's unspeakable fear and infantile cruelty in films like *Deep Red*, *Dark Water* (2002) and *Winchester* (2018)—not to mention the numerous possessed or manipulated wicked dolls in films such as the *Child's Play* series (beginning in 1988), *Dead Silence* (2007), and the *Annabelle* series (beginning in 2014). The plot of the remarkable Spanish-language film *El Orfanato* (2007), produced by iconic Gothic author Guillermo del Toro, is structured almost entirely upon child's play: the mother, heartbroken for her lost son, plays hide-and-seek with the child's ghost in the hope of finding his missing corpse; later she plays "red light, green light" to lure the intimidated hidden specters of murdered children in order to disclose their covered misery. The profusion of such dismal depictions of child's play made Dominic Lennard devote one whole chapter, "All Fun and Games till Someone Gets Hurt: Hating Children's Culture," in his book *Bad Seed and Holy Terrors: The Child Villains of Horror Films* (2015), to investigating the implied fear and hatred of childhood culture.

In the literary domain, Ray Bradbury was one of the most outspoken writers who earliest verbalized a comparable uneasiness about child's play. Bradbury's sinister imagination unrolls in ordinary scenes of children's everyday life. In "Let's Play 'Poison,'" the paranoid school teacher Howard suspects his students, a bunch of game aficionados, of being guileful and subversive by nature, which is evidenced by their instinctive preference for secretive and prohibited playgrounds: "excavations, hiding-places, pipes, and conduits and trenches" (95). Through Howard's suspicious lens, children's games are infernal witchcraft below innocent disguises: the geometric figures drawn for hopscotch are pentagrams for a devilish cult, and the merry rhymes accompanying rope skipping are "incantations" with tabooed magic power (94). Howard eventually drops dead due to the children's malicious scheme and is secretly buried under the pavement upon which they kept on hopping cheerfully, playing their favorite game of faking death called "Poison." In "Zero Hour," evilness hidden behind child's play is magnified to a cosmic scale. The children's seemingly silly little game, dubbed "Invasion," is rapidly expanded, thanks to adults' gullible neglect, to a nationwide network of conspiracy, whose goal turns out to be a real invasion from outer space. In "The Veldt," the futuristic immersive holographic virtual-reality game room is transformed by the telepsychic children into a savage African veldt, where the materialized lions finally devour their parents. Bradbury's gloomy imagination about child's play probably inspired Stephen King, who openly acknowledged his debt, to create the haunting clown figure Pennywise in the popular horror fiction *It*. The colorful and smiley dancing clown is ironically a multivalent projection of repressed childhood traumas as it transmutes into various symbols of the child protagonists' deepest fear.

Researchers of Gothic fiction and horror film have demonstrated an increasing interest in this Gothicization of child's play. Commenting on the psychological significance of the doll in *Child's Play*, Lennard regards it as evoking "the nervous difference between adults and children and the violent usurping of adult power." The doll became a motif "for negotiating the anxious idea of an unknowable and uncontrollable child," hence making childish fun "synonymous with adult fear." Fear of children's culture betrays "a paranoid demonization of children's perspectives" and "a striking challenge to the adult-child hierarchy" (133-34). Catherine Spooner, in *Contemporary Gothic,* also dedicates the chapter "Teen Demons" to contemporary teen Goth subculture,

where she highlights its followers' distinct and often provocative lifestyle centered on various sorts of eccentric play (87). Lucie Armitt, in *Twentieth-Century Gothic,* acknowledges that "one of the key ways in which twentieth-century Gothic literature differentiates itself from its predecessors is in its treatment of the theme of the haunted child" (15); later, when commenting on M. R. James's story "The Haunted Dolls' House," she argues, "Toys can encourage extremes of possessiveness and self-centeredness in all children, and perhaps the most internalising emotion of all . . . is avarice, in which a miserly condition of self-fulfillment ensues" (44).

The representation of play frequently reveals what kind of image adults have of children. As previous scholarship has also remarked, certain contemporary Gothic texts have been suggesting a significantly altered view of play as well as childhood. They manifest a transformation of child's play—from educational activity availing physical and spiritual development to embodiment of juvenile belligerence and aberration. Although a popular-cultural subgenre cannot (and does not need to) stand for all sides of opinion about the issue, such transformation, to a considerable degree, indeed betrays an increasingly agonizing relationship between adults and children. As play potentially materializes the relationship between these two primary categories of human beings—a relationship that has been confronted with mounting contestation since the 1960s anti-cultural youth revolts—the Gothicized child's play reflects a more acutely perceived difficulty of mutual understanding between generations. With regard to play's cultural significances in contemporary society, this article hopes to offer some alternative and supplementary views that may differ from the findings of other related disciplines such as child education, adolescent psychology and so on. To illustrate the main argument, this article sets out to investigate the representation of child's play in certain post-1970s, primarily Anglophone Gothic writings, with a special focus on "Word Doll" by Jeffrey Ford and "Subsoil" by Nicholson Baker.

These two works have been so far unduly little studied, and the dimension of child's play in them has never been fully explored. I choose to pay them more attention because, first, play/game studies and so-called "ludology" emerged in the early 1990s as relatively new theories and disciplines, but they have taken much more interest in technology-powered or social-media-based games such as computer and cellphone games (Goggin 6). Such a technology-turn has been

conspicuous in recent Gothic studies, too. Armitt reminds us "how closely science fiction and the Gothic have come to exist in relation to each other: where once superstition lay at the root of the *unheimlich*, now, arguably it is the machine age" (149). A technological focus on the Gothic equally characterizes Fred Botting's *Limits of Horror: Technology, Bodies, Gothic* (2008), where he renews the meaning of the uncanny as "in many ways, a technological phenomenon whose effects are accentuated by the shifts and disturbances of technical innovations" (108).

Secondly, most previous Gothic studies about play and games focus on highly commodified modern play culture, primarily situated in urban or suburban locales and frequently white middle-class families. Lennard, for example, states that the central concern of *Dolly Dearest* is "the child's attachment to its material possessions, the idea that children might become 'possessed' by their toys," conveying the message that "the forces of commodity capitalism are the real demon, exploiting children's desires for friendship and emotional engagement" (142). When interpreting *Child's Play*, Lennard also highlights the boy's "advertising-oriented imagination" and claims the film to be "certainly the most aggressive expression of anxiety toward children's consumerism in mainstream cinema" (141, 142). Spooner also indicates that Goth subculture embodies an image of "self of late capitalism," one pursuing self-improvement through consumption (102); she then elaborates this argument in a separate chapter entitled "Gothic Shopping."

Compared with the above-mentioned relatively mainstream views from recent social-sciences and Gothic scholarship, "Word Doll" and "Subsoil" offer rare renditions of a traditional gaming culture that is greatly dependent on bodily and oral interactions and handmade objects. Hence these stories present an alternative taste for and view of play as well as of the child's psyche and invite different analytical approaches other than those of technology and consumption. The children's games featured in them are characterized by conspicuous obsoleteness, being a legacy of bygone eras with distinct social and cultural conditions such as close-knit rural communities or closeness with organic materials—conditions which are vanishing and being replaced by more modern paradigms. Far from striking a nostalgic vein by idealizing old-time gaming culture, these texts attest to the Gothicization of child's play: by insinuating the traditional games' connection with earlier cultures and rural ideology, these texts end in not only exposing the chasm between adults and

children, but also *between the past and the present, urbanity and rurality*. "Word Doll" and "Subsoil" thus serve as peculiar textual examples which address child's play from unique points of view. In the following, this article is divided into three sections dealing respectively with how these texts evoke uncanny sentiments by awakening latent anxiety and fear about so-called "savage cultures," the "primitive child" myth and rural childhood.

II. Resurrection of Pre-modern Play/Culture

"Word Doll" centers on a fictive child's game, the so-called "word doll," and the local tradition and folklore around it. During a visit to the obscure Museum of Word Doll, the narrator learns of an unusual old-time custom: in the mid-nineteenth century, within a small area in Ohio, the peasant families used to summon a "doll maker" to give little children a "word doll" when they participated in farming for the first time. A word doll is literally made purely of words: an incantation-like chant was whispered to the child, who afterwards fancied having a "field friend" whose aspect and personality was freely imagined based on its given name and occupation, such as Captain Moss or Hunter Brot (Ford 337). Insubstantial as it was, a word doll grew as the child did, often maintaining a life-long intimacy with her. The child's attachment to the doll helped her to escape from drudgery, but sometimes such psychological dependence could become dangerous. Excessively identifying with his doll "Mower Manc," Evron Simms began to emulate his own mental image of it, ending up as a child workaholic—industrious, silent, stiff and emotionless, not unlike an inanimate doll. Once during his recovery from injury, villagers began to see a wandering stranger whose appearance resembled eerily the imaginary Mower Manc; several atrocious murders then happened and were suspected to involve Evron's phantom friend. Even into the twenty-first century, the now legendary figure "The Mower" is occasionally claimed to stray in the fields of Ohio, "weeping for want of work" (342).

"Subsoil" is another dark fantasy around an old-time toy—"Mr. Potato Head"—in which different pieces of facial features are inserted onto a potato to make a human figure. Nyle T. Milner, an agricultural historian, finds one such toy in the closet at a country guesthouse. The toy arouses nostalgia for his rural childhood; however, under closer scrutiny, the potato doll appears spooky: "mummified, it had seemed, but conscious, in a state of sentient misery. The

really disturbing thing was that . . . it had, Nyle felt, looked at him with a fixed intent to do him harm" (Nicholson 536). Creepier things happen later that night: more mummified potatoes extend their sprouts from the basement with a somehow conscious volition all the way up to Nyle's chamber. Finally, the potato dolls pierce into Nyle's body with unstoppable growing sprouts and shrivel him into another hybrid doll. What was once Nyle, too, is mummified and waits in the same state of sentient misery for the next prey: "he readied his pale tentacles for the final gleaning, waiting for nightfall" (544).

What characterizes "Word Doll" and "Subsoil" is, first, their relatively uncommon interest in old-time play and, secondly, their distinct attitude toward it. Surveying the evolution of childhood culture, numerous historians and sociologists have voiced deep worry over certain transformations in modern play since the twentieth century, especially in Western urban settings and white middle-class households: village games and street games have greatly faded out of childhood due to security concerns and alienated community relationships, and have been replaced by indoor, often solo and online types of games. Children are surrounded by much more sophisticated and commercialized play embodied by mass-produced toys and computer games manufactured by globalized brands (Driscoll 199; Cross 5; Tiffany 81-82). The presentiment that traditional childhood is on the verge of vanishing has aroused intense reactions, predominantly in a nostalgic and elegiac vein. Folklorists Iona and Peter Opie embarked on field studies on the streets and at school playgrounds in the mid-twentieth century to record children's games, rhymes and lore before they completely faded out of sight.[1] In "Toys," Roland Barthes lamented that the "aura" of wooden toys is lost in the plastic toy, which, "made of a graceless material" with "an appearance at once gross and hygienic, destroys all the pleasure, the sweetness, the humanity of touch" (54). More recently, Franco La Cecla also accused the excessive materiality of modern play of depriving children's spontaneous creativity: today's popular characters are made as streamlined 3D models shelved for sale, "whose stories and personalities had already been defined in advance" (70).

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[1] Iona and Peter Opie's efforts were collected in *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*, *Children's Games in Street and Playground*, *Children's Games with Things*, *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*, etc.

"Word Doll" and "Subsoil" were produced at a time when Western urban childhood is widely believed to be compromised by commercialization and technology and when modern children have lost their magical "small worlds" created through the traditional play that Walter Benjamin once extolled (13).[2] However, "Word Doll" and "Subsoil" do not join the loud symphony of nostalgia and grievance, but rather suggest a disillusionment with the mythicized earlier childhood culture. Obviously play serves as a means of reconnecting with the past in both works. The word doll custom is maintained to be "something brought over from Europe," which "originated with a woman named Mary Elder, back in the eighteen thirties" (Ford 335). The ritualistic mask worn by the doll-maker is an aged Iroquois False Face Mask with archaic pagan features—"deep-set eyes, a crooked nose, and a large oval mouth opening bordered by sharp teeth"—which had been buried "a hundred years before it was plowed up" (335-36). Comparably, the potato doll in "Subsoil" is found among a pile of "old children's games. There was a game called Mr. Ree and period Monopoly and Parcheesi boxes" (Nicholson 535). Mr. Potato Head, considered the treasure of the collection, brings delight to Nyle for its rustic simplicity and authentic naturalness. He reminisces about *bona fide* Mr. Potato Head, admiring its joining "man and nature in concert; 'the encrustation of the mechanical upon the organic.'" He laments on the modern distortion of the real thing, accusing the ready-made artifice of spoiling the natural flavor: "a mistake—now you merely joined bought plastic to bought plastic in various fixed permutations. Why continue the affectation of a potato at all?" (536) The theme of reconnection with the past is reinforced by their narrative context, which in both cases is a trip to a museum specialized in preserving endangered cultures. Jeff learns of the word doll in the word "doll museum" run by anthropologist Beverly Gearing, whereas Nyle re-encounters Mr. Potato Head during a research trip to a museum of agricultural machinery for his monograph on the early harrow, during which he finds insights about "the evolution of rotary-hoe blades and diggers" (534).

Such rekindled fascination with old-fashioned games finds echoes in numerous contemporary Gothic narratives: hopscotch and other street games in "Let's Play 'Poison,'" the primeval circle dancing in *Beware! Children at Play*

[2] "They use these things, not so much to reproduce the works of adults, as to put the most disparate materials in new and discontinuous relationships, by turning them into something through play. In this manner, children build for themselves, all on their own, the world of objects, a small world within the big one" (Benjamin 13).

(1989), hide-and-seek and green light in *El Orfanato*, the nineteenth-century Dresden china doll in *The Boy* (2016), the swing in *The Conjuring* (2013) and so on. What is noteworthy is that these works also manifest a penchant towards the Gothicization of child's play. This peculiar phenomenon invites a deliberation on what discourses of childhood, play and cultural memory these gloomy tales have been constructing. In the following, this article is going to explore these issues in light of classic and also recent childhood studies, play/game theories and certain relevant Gothic tropes.

First, in accordance with the association between play and the past in "Word Doll" and "Subsoil," the cultural-anthropological approaches to childhood studies have offered abundant evidence about the connection between child's play and historical legacy. For example, some researchers find in nursery rhymes, which have frequently been an indispensable component of child's play, residues of collective memory, especially about darker histories (Roberts; Rollin). It is held that many nursery rhymes which have been passed down for centuries carry with them traumatic remembrances and even unrevealed secrets. A well-known song, "Ring-a-ring o' roses / A pocket full of posies / A-tishoo! A-tishoo! / We all fall down," impressively featured in the horror film *The Evil Dead* (1981), is widely believed to be associated with pandemics and rites of purgation. Some others are suspected to secretly preserve stifled memories about natural catastrophes, wars, high infantile mortality, infanticide, human sacrifice, and so on (Roberts; Rollin). Researchers also find in nursery rhymes, despite their soothing melodies, unspoken tensions between parents and children, especially during historical periods of hardship and grief. Roni Natov, for example, indicates that "despite the many attempts on the part of folklorists to explain away this disparity between the dark messages and the pleasant sounds of the nursery rhymes, they suggested a hidden hostility and secret fear about childhood, not just about the protection of children from the world, but about our denial of the inner darkness of which we suspect them" (133). A song like "The King of Mice," Natov maintains, "suggests the darkest of nursery rhymes, a ritualized invocation of the appetitive, insatiable animal nature at the base of our fears about children and about the 'childish' parts of ourselves" (134).

Studies like this encourage the interpretation that child's play could be not only a token of personal childhood but also, by means of synecdoche, that of "*collective childhood*," that is, earlier phases of cultural history. This view is

supported by sociological studies that have increasingly affirmed a close, even concomitant relation between recreational practices and societal/cultural evolution. It is maintained that the essential characteristics of major phases of civilization have been reflected in their taste about and invention of play culture. George Walter Fiske, for example, tries to connect Dr. Woods Hutchinson's investigation of five developing stages of "food getting" with the adolescent mentality of each epoch and their mainstream game types: children of the Hunting and Capturing epoch preferred "games of stealth, including Hide and Seek, Black Man, and Prisoner's Base," while in later phases characterized by more complex social relationships and production modes veered towards cultivation and manufacture, children's games correspondingly co-evolved, prizing more cooperation and coordination (qtd. in Kidd 76).

Regarding this assumption, Thomas S. Henricks provides a more comprehensive delineation of the co-evolution of play and general cultural transformation. He divides the history of play into four chief periods: the pre-modern period (in Europe, roughly before the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries), the early modern period (from that time through the eighteenth century), the late modern period (the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries), and the postmodern period (beginning in the latter half of the twentieth century; 19). Among these, Henricks's elucidation of pre-modern play is most relevant to our following discussion of Gothic texts. In pre-modern societies, Henricks indicates, people mostly living in village communities were relatively isolated, with limited knowledge of different others, and thus forced into social patterns that reinforced their "commonality." Closely bound people were drawn into the rhythms of the agricultural year and the necessities of the local community. These explain the regular alternation between labor and festivity and the dominance of collective games. Moreover, such communities were dominated by a fundamentally oral tradition; information was mostly passed in face-to-face settings. With scarce verbal records of past occurrences, people habitually and periodically re-enacted events to remind themselves of crucial knowledge and skills for survival. Henricks maintains, "Culture in that sense was often 'performed,' and skills in dramaturgy and narration were admired. To that degree, 'common sense' was forged as an act of collective memory-making" (20). In line with this performative culture, many pre-modern chase games, like Chick and Hawk, symbolically re-enacted the collective effort of warding off

predators, invaders or evil forces, thus passing down folk memory about dangers and survival wisdom.

The affinity between pre-modern culture and play is also evidenced by the concept of the "sacred realm" that is crucial to both. In the pre-modern world with scarce information sources, traditional knowledge was revered, much of which derived from religious understanding. This brought about the widespread cult of distinct sacred spaces that stood beyond and coordinated the world of everyday affairs (Henricks 20). Huizinga similarly affirms the central importance of the "sacred realm" in archaic play, which is still retained in the simplest child's play of the present day. Huizinga argues that rudimentary play originated from the same consciousness or unconsciousness of cosmic order that also motivated germinative religious aspirations: "In the form and function of play, itself an independent entity which is senseless and irrational, man's consciousness that he is embedded in a sacred order of things finds its first, highest, and holiest expression. Gradually the significance of a sacred act permeates the playing. Ritual grafts itself upon it; but the primary thing is and remains play" (17-18). According to Huizinga, this isogenesis explains similar features between primitive play and ancient ritual acts, especially their inclination to set up a distinct and often closed space out of everyday life, an autonomous space whose special regulations are consecrated:

> We found that one of the most important characteristics of play was its spatial separation from ordinary life. A closed space is marked out for it, either materially or ideally, hedged off from the everyday surroundings. Inside this space the play proceeds, inside it the rules obtain. Now, the marking out of some sacred spot is also the primary characteristic of every sacred act. (19)

III. Uncanny Return of the "Primitive Child"

The abovementioned play studies inspire this article to give weight to the uncommon focus on and rendering of traditional games in the cluster of Gothic texts previously mentioned. The affinity between premodern play and pre-technological cultures, I argue, is intentionally or unconsciously played up in "Word Doll" and "Subsoil" as well as certain other Gothic-child narratives that manifest a rekindled fascination with old-time play. One of its most disturbing

consequences, I argue, is that the "primitive child" hypothesis, that is, the conception of child as savage and bestial which has been generally rejected in modern child psychology and educational theories, appears to be resurrected.[3]

In *Transformations: The Anthropology of Children's Play*, Helen B. Schwartzman indicates the influence of evolutionary theories and cultural imperialism on burgeoning childhood studies and consequentially on the epoch's conception of the child:

> Studies of children began in the late 19th century at a time when it was fashionable to collect and compile examples of the customs of various "primitive" peoples. Western children at this time were often equated with primitives (e.g., Appleton, 1910), and so their customs, often their games and rhymes, were likewise considered appropriate for collection and preservation. Evolutionary theories of biological and cultural development were in vogue during this era, and so when investigators chose to analyze material on children, they naturally relied on the evolutionary practices. G. Stanley Hall's recapitulation theory of children's play is typical and is probably the most well-known of these studies. (21)

Huizinga's interpretation of play evinces a similar conception of the infantile psyche informed by evolution and recapitulation theories. Affirming that "archaic society . . . plays as the child or animal plays" and "the world of the savage, the child and the poet [is] the world of play" (26), Huizinga bluntly equates primordial mentality to the child's inner self, which is embodied in the essential play form (17, 26). Such assessment leads to his emphasis on the implied religious dimension in child's play. He proclaims that archaic ritual is in itself a kind of "sacred play," which is "indispensable for the well-being of the community, fecund of cosmic insight and social development." One of underlying similarities between such ritualistic play and child's play is a

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[3] Since the mid-twentieth century, scholars of childhood studies have mostly discarded the simplistic equation of the infantile psyche to primitive/animalistic thinking. John M. Roberts, Malcolm J. Arth and Robert R. Bush, for example, in their "Games in Culture" (1959), attempted to develop a theoretical framework for the study of child's games that would accentuate their meaningful sociocultural significance. It is suggested that games are expressive "cultural activities" similar to music and folktales. Games are also said to be "models" of various sophisticated cultural activities and hence should be viewed as "exercises in cultural mastery": games of chance are related to "mastery of the supernatural," for instance (qtd. in Schwartzman 196-97).

peculiar consciousness, however latent, of "only pretending," but in an ultimate degree of "seriousness." In this sphere of sacred/earnest play, "the distinction between belief and make-belief breaks down" and "the child and the poet are at home with the savage" (25-26).

It is surprising to find that, even though the nineteenth-century's biology- and anthropology-informed view of child development and Huizinga's play theory have practically disappeared from current childhood studies, "the primitive child" image they helped to invent remains robust and enchanting to the contemporary Gothic imagination. Despite the acknowledgement that this mystified image cannot stand for real children living in diverse circumstances, and although the conception of the child it represents is academically judged outdated, profuse contemporary Gothic portrayals of "savage" children engaged in primordial play still deliver meaningful and unignorable messages.

When making a historical investigation of American childhood, Steven Mintz claims: "For the past three decades [1980s-2000s], the overarching narrative of childhood has consisted of a discourse of crisis: a story of unstable families, neglectful parents, juvenile oversophistication, and teenage immorality" (370). As victimized or deviant childhood is represented as an emblem of familial and social failures, individual children often serve as potent symbols of collective fear and anxiety. The return of the "primitive child" in post-1970s Gothic narratives, I would argue, is part of this crisis discourse. As Mintz also mentions, adults' hostility toward youth is frequently rooted in "fear of disorder, and loss of control"; the "primitive child" figures with their anachronistic play suggest emancipation of wild nature and a threat to civilization and adult authority, turning the belief in progress and order on its head (370).

The "primitive child" myth is frequently reinstated in these texts by highlighting the association of child's play with primordial mentality. Under the cover of lighthearted games are often, explicitly or suggestively, ritualistic re-enactments. This casts child's play with mysticism, sometimes even unreason and morbidity, projecting a dread-laden prejudicial perception of so-called "primitive" cultures. The fringe film *Beware! Children at Play* serves as an impressive example. When Karen J. Renner studied the "evil child" phenomenon in contemporary popular culture, she singled this film out for its vivid visualization of a unique species of corrupt child—the savage offspring of an isolated community or primitive society (13). In the film a gang of

runaway children form a quasi-tribal community, taking delight in primitive games like singing and dancing in circles while reciting alliterative medieval ballads, which apparently reiterate ancient bonfire festivities and shamanistic incantations. Moreover, the children take what civilization left behind or prohibited—nudity, raw diet and even cannibalism, incestuous inbreeding, public sexual intercourse, rape and slaughter. Play is also a crucial element in Thomas Tryon's novel *Harvest Home*, which centers on an archaic fecundity rite that is faithfully observed in a modern New England village. In this annual festival, the villagers play rural games, like husking bees and burning scarecrows, and stage the "Corn Play" that re-enact the cycle of vegetal life and death. Their corn-doll custom exemplifies homogeneity between child's play and primitive rituals. Locals call the corn doll "gaga," in Indian for "fun" or "funny," just "a child's plaything" (Tryon 76); however, it also serves as religious effigy: despite the childish facial features, it has a pair of "all-seeing eyes, all-knowing. Omnipotent," which creepily resemble a "witch doll or voodoo object" (164).

In terms of the cultural transformation of toys, Gary Cross indicates, "It is difficult to distinguish ancient children's toys and dolls from objects intended to accompany the dead to the afterlife or icons designed to represent and embody the power of gods . . . . But clearly a mark of modernity is the historical point when adults turn religious icons and amusements into children's play figures and recognize play as a special right of childhood" (13). Interestingly, we find exactly a reversal of this historical course in the abovementioned Gothic texts where child's play deliberately resumes its ancient ritualistic functions and suggests a reactivation of an ancestral past that children inherit along with the play instinct. Child's play is arguably made a site of contestation between pre-modern "savagery" and the modern paradigm as Cross indicated.

The above discourses cast new light on the reading of "Subsoil" and "Word Doll." Both of them purposely designate the narrator as city-based intellectuals; their chance encounter with the old games brought them to re-experience the culture of childhood as well as the *childhood of culture*. The word doll custom introduced to Jeff a disappearing rural community with its folk tradition and European cultural origin. The museum's curator boasted of their cultural preservation: "What's in those nine drawers over there is all that remains of the history of Word Dolls. This is the largest repository of material evidence of the existence of the tradition. When I'm gone, knowledge of it will

have been pretty much erased from history" (Ford 334). As the plot unfolds, the child's play unveils a deeper connection with pre-modern ritual and mythology. The Doll Maker's mask, for example, is believed to incarnate the consecrated power with which the adults are able to create word dolls that could exercise profound spiritual influence. It is practically a ritualistic article that could "[carry] us back to the world of the savage," the world of "sacred play" as Huizinga affirms (26). Furthermore, Evron's word doll, Mower Manc, when turning from fantasy to fleshly presence, eerily resembles the ancient fairy figure Elegast—"an entity from the folklore of the Dutch Low Countries. A supernatural figure, like the field and forest in human form" (Ford 340). These details attest to a popular belief not uncommon in the fantasy and Gothic genres that the child in the state of play is likely to exercise unique potency which, in this case, stands for the power to reconnect with primordial spirituality and hence to awaken the "primitive child" within.

Hall, as a pioneering adolescence scholar, maintained that play, instead of training children for the future, rather reiterates "the motor tendencies and the psychic motives bequeathed to us from the past" (43). No matter whether this assumption is still academically approved nowadays, this reiteration thesis, in my opinion, is voluntarily adopted in "Subsoil" and "Word Doll" and some other Gothic narratives featuring traditional play. Rehearsal of the past through play, however, is not rendered in these works as valuable means of transmission of crucial cultural memory and survival knowledge; on the contrary, it is used for excavation of darker history. Negative (mis)conceptions of premodern play and pre-technological cultures are aggrandized, such as the alleged penchant for unreason and anti-intellectualism, outdated beliefs and practices, normalization of violence and misogyny, and so on. Earlier phases of man's development used to be condemned by Progressivism as intellectually "premature," as that which should be outgrown, in the way an adult outgrows his adolescence. These Gothic texts feed their power of terror exactly on such cultural prejudice, portraying suspended growth and collective regression to cultural immaturity; what was once disenchanted by the Enlightenment privileging of scientific rationality now threatens to resurge through the child's innocent play.

The power of terror that these texts emanate also illustrates certain essential traits of Gothic aesthetics. Rebecca Munford indicates that "Gothic signifies the shadowy underside of Enlightenment values by blurring the

boundaries demarcating reason and emotion, reality and fantasy, the natural and the supernatural, past and present" (10). The subversive and destabilizing character of the Gothic is embodied in these works in the way they expose the vulnerability of the modern paradigm and myth of childhood, by unveiling unconquered barbarity lurking in the child's nursery. Furthermore, the uneasiness they provoke is not unlike that theorized by Sigmund Freud in his momentous essay "The Uncanny." The concept of "the uncanny" is proposed primarily to describe the psychological phenomenon that once desired and familiar things, after a long time of prohibition, negation and repression, come back as something dimly recognizable, bewildering and repulsive. Uncanniness is provoked by the confrontation with what is at once familiar and alien, known and unknown, alluring and revolting. The Gothicized child's play depicted in these works is all about the uncanny return of repressed memory about personal cultural and childhood. Remembrance of infantile unreason and pre-modern "savagery" is portrayed as resilient and somewhat menacing, waiting in darkness for reemergence.

In "Word Doll," the haunting figure of The Mower is exactly portrayed as an emblem of the uncanny return of the repressed past. At the end of the story, it is implied that Evron's word doll keeps hanging around Jeffrey, who was then the last keeper of knowledge about the vanishing game:

> The very night I was finally satisfied that the piece was ready to send out, the coldest night of the year. I had a dream of Mower Manc. In it I got out of bed and went to the window. It was night, and the light in the room was off. There was a full moon, though, and I saw, out in the barren field past the orchard and the garden, a figure moving through the snow, curved blade glinting as it swung like the pendulum of an old clock. Across the distance, I heard the weeping clear as a bell, and its anguish woke me. (Ford 343)

Incarnated as the immortal wanderer "The Mower," the word doll game turned into an obstinate existence lingering in a world that has forgotten about its history. Its undead presence implies that memories about exploited childhood and the rural primitive past are never safely exiled into oblivion or silently

shelved as museum artifacts. They are upsettingly alive, with undying resolve to return again and again.

IV. Rethinking Rural Childhood

The other aspect of child's play revealed in "Subsoil" and "Word Doll" that this article intends to examine concerns the way they interrogate the prevalent idealization of rural childhood, in which traditional rustic games also play a pivotal role. In both works, a visit to the countryside introduces the city-based protagonists to local traditions and eventually summons ghosts of the grim rural past through the mediation of old games. In "Subsoil," following the initial excitement, Nyle quickly senses in the potato doll "apparent animosity." Trying to discount it as a trick of decomposition, uneasiness is nonetheless hovering for "he had never been hated by a potato before" (Nicholson 536). Comparison with some other contemporary Gothic representations of rural childhood and a brief review of conflicting rurality discourses prove inspirational for our subsequent interpretation of such vegetal enmity emitted from rustic games.

In the distinct Gothic subgenre dubbed "Rural Gothic," from Stephen King's "Children of the Corn" (1977) to the recent film *Midsommar* (2019) for instance, we have repetitively observed country children portrayed as fervent custodians of traditional values, frequently alongside archaic cults.[4] In King's story, the children of Gatlin, Nebraska, center their lives on the pagan worship of the corn deity—"He Who Walks Behind the Rows"—guarding scriptural doctrines and extreme moral codes by vindictive regulations, not hesitating to slaughter all adults and spare only the uncorrupted souls of children under nineteen. In comparably outrageous manner, in the insular Swedish village in Ari Aster's film *Midsommar*, the ancient Scandinavian ritual of Midsommar was faithfully observed, even by the youngest generation who received a modern education. They revived eccentric pagan practices including collective sexual intercourse, ritualistic rape, consecrated suicide and human sacrifice. These rural-horror tales suggest the tenacity of primordial impulses and the

[4] Rural Gothic narratives mostly stage disastrous encounters between naive urban travelers and aggrieved locals which usually end with assaults, deaths or horrifying discoveries of communally covered atrocities. Earlier, better-known works of the genre, such as *Deliverance* (1972) and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), expressed the resentment and aggressiveness of frustrated "white masculinity" and of the rural working class (Murphy 150).

persistent impact of ancient beliefs on young adherents. In the typical Rural Gothic imagination, a darker version of country childhood looms large: the devolved offspring of backwoods communities are depicted as manifesting not only physical degradation, but also cultural regression characterized by barbaric conduct and obsolete beliefs. This view frequently overshadows their representation of childhood culture, symbolized, for example, by the green doll made of corn stalk and sheath representing a vegetation deity in "Children of the Corn," and the midsummer fireside circle dancing and chanting in *Midsommar*. Rustic games are represented in such a way that the infantile penchant towards fantasy and intuition is connected with the predominance of supernatural modes of cultural expression—such as myth, religion and magic—in pre-modern societies.

The Rural Gothic thus associates country children and rustic games with outdated values and transgressive practices. Such upsetting representation of rural childhood is nevertheless drastically opposed to the long-lasting cultural tradition since Romanticism which has celebrated children in their "natural" state, a state which was believed to be best preserved and nurtured in idyllic nature. Owain Jones, a scholar of childhood geography, indicates a widely circulated discourse regarding the problematic relationship between childhood and urban space, which has resulted from the conflict between the "romantic inheritances that see childhood as a state of naturalness and innocence, and the urban as a cultural (often corrupted) edifice which has moved away from nature" (17). Indeed, Rousseau's pivotal work *Emile* represented a boy raised in "rural seclusion" where his naturalness flourished. Children's literature, which burgeoned along with the romantic conception of childhood, has also been dominated by rural and natural themes (Jones 21). This explains the abundance of romanticized and nostalgic accounts of rural childhood in the mainstream culture. Rural naturalness has been assumed to facilitate a "prolonged innocence" of childhood (20), one reason for which is exactly that "the countryside is a boundless treasure-house of opportunities for creative *play*" (19; emphasis added).

Social historian Colin Ward, nevertheless, offers demythologizing investigations of the realities facing contemporary children in rural areas. As documented in *The Child in the Country*, Ward exposes the darker side of rural childhood. He acutely observes the plight of teenagers trapped in villages, which has been eclipsed by the illusory ideal of country childhood. Discrediting

the popular literature that kept feeding the mythology of rural childhood, Ward finds in working-class autobiographies and oral accounts more truthful reminiscences about "incredible hardship, squalor and exploitation," among other adversities (32). In a chapter ironically entitled "A Place to Play?" Ward continues to scrutinize the familiar fantasy that "[s]pace in the country, everyone agrees, provides opportunity for the vital kind of play" (99). In reality, certain late-twentieth-century social geographical surveys about village children's play behavior demonstrated a rapid dwindling of vacant lots and an increasingly restricted access to natural landscapes and even to outdoor spaces in general. "Unofficial play spaces are lost to children every day" to such a worrying point that some investigators even proposed to work vigorously "to create an awareness of the importance of play" in contemporary rural communities (104).

Ward's unflattering demonstration of the predicaments confronting contemporary rural childhood prepares us for a more critical rethinking of the Romantic bucolic ideal as well as of the Rural Gothic. Huizinga's concept of "Puerilism," which he deemed "the most appropriate appellation for that blend of adolescence and barbarity which has been rampant all over the world for the last two or three decades," incites further reflection on these issues (205). Although the background of this concept is a set of ideas and practices employed by the Nazi movement for the sake of solidifying national identity and reinforcing pro-Aryan cultural myths, "Puerilism" can be fittingly interpreted as a leaning towards socially contrived regression, a collective re-enactment of earlier phases of cultural history, and thus inspiringly relates to our present discussion. As Henricks elucidates, "Puerilism" was often embodied by ideologically homogeneous people gathering together in "*adolescent confraternity*," singing drinking songs and "[thinking] with the blood" (37; emphasis added). The concept of "Puerilism" points out the risk of excessive indulgence in symbolic child's play, that is, sticking to an imagined simpler past. When an adult has been clinging to stages he should have outgrown and emboldens other people to do so collectively, such an act is not child-like, but *childish*. Both "Children of the Corn" and *Midsommar* demonstrate a similar obsession with "adolescent confraternity," that is embodied by children's thirst for bloody fighting/hunting games and collective ritualistic play. Perverted rustic games being adopted as impressive symbols, an emblematic *childishness* plagues the rural communities represented in these

backwoods-horror tales. It expresses a predominantly urban anxiety over backwardness and cultural regression that rural areas are often believed to stand for.

Projected to the vegetal enmity emitted from rustic games, this essentially urban fear of rural primitivism is also manifested in "Subsoil." Opposed to the Romantic celebration of the sublime in wild nature, "Subsoil" insinuates a suppressed dread of pristine nature expressed, for example, by the unspoken tension between humans and vegetation. As an agricultural historian, Nyle is long devoted to studying how culture has dominated nature, how technology has grasped the reins on elemental forces. In the climax scene, the potato sprouts' penetration into human flesh is metaphorically an ironic reversal of the human exploitation of natural resources with consumptive machineries: "Whitish-purple growth enveloped him. He waved his arms and plucked at himself hectically, but the soil-starved delvers were persistent. . . . They found the routes his blood took, and they followed these deeper; by dawn they had grown the fresh lumpy tuber that burst his heart" (Nicholson 543). Before the assault, Nyle forebodingly reminisces about the dramatic deaths of two fellows that were strangely associated with natural products: an expert of early silos was "suffocated by three tons of raw soy" (535), whereas an engineer who had developed a groundbreaking turf flail and trencher was killed by "the unfortunate inhalation of a cotton ball" (540). The "villains" in this story are not brutal rednecks or village freaks as in typical Rural Gothic tales, but vegetation which stands for untamed nature defiant of human domination.

Here the Gothic trope of the uncanny return of the repressed finds a creative variation in the vengeance of suppressed rurality and primordial nature. The theme is reinforced by the trope of the *rural leftover*, that is, what has been forsaken by the procedures of urbanization, industrialization or other kinds of "progress" necessitated by modernity. The rural leftover is embodied by abandoned fields, crumbling farmhouses, ghost towns, but also by damaged individuals with their eccentric ways of living. In rural horror narratives, a commonplace means of vengeance taken by resentful hillbillies is exactly those solid material embodiments of "rural leftover," such as outdated rural apparatus—sickles in "Children of the Corn," chainsaws from shut-down slaughterhouses in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, shovels from exhausted mines in *The Hills Have Eyes* (2006) and so on. Picked up from historical debris, they serve as weapons for the powerless in spoiled places. "Subsoil"

showcases the oddest kind of assault from the rural leftover: a deserted rustic toy and a withered potato, which commit desperate vegetal violence to retaliate for wounded Nature.

V. Play for Mediation and Redemption

The last part of this article intends to propose a critical reappraisal of the argument developed so far, especially with regards to play's claimed function of reiterating the past. It is true that play often recycles tried-and-true forms and connotes a connection with the past; however, a creative player knows how to play an old game in alternative and innovative ways. Repeatedly in history, children have proven gifted in reinventing the way of playing, familiarizing themselves with established rules while complicating and redefining them. Through playful exploration of and experimentation with cultural legacies, they learn to create and grow up, and society moves forward with them.

Most of the texts I have discussed indeed stimulate uncanny sentiments through the trope of returning to the repressed past, but their true purpose may be more than simply to shock, but rather resides in enlightening through terror. Though the past is recurrently rendered as haunting and menacing forces, the aim is not to alienate the present altogether from its heritage, but to help to recognize overlooked histories, to rethink them and eventually to reconnect with them. The ghastly games do not connote merely the vengeful will of the past, but more subtly a cry for being remembered and reintegrated into the present.

All these invite a different reading of the ending of "Word Doll." The story appears to conclude with the burning down of the Museum of Word Doll and symbolically the annihilation of the childhood culture it had preserved, but actually after the accident, Jeff, as fiction writer, finds new inspiration and produced his latest work: "I got an idea for a story about a religious painter who's sent out by a prelate on a journey to find and paint a true portrait of the Devil" (Ford 343). This ending could be read as paying tribute to the word doll game itself, celebrating children's powerful imagination in the state of play that is capable of bringing fantasy to life. As if making internal thematic parallels, the writer's creativity is rejuvenated after his encounter with childhood culture, just like the painter in his fiction also departs in pursuit of the blessed gift of seeing the invisible—the unique insight often attributed to children with

privileged sensitivity. This alternative reading suggests that even after children grow up, the body-and-spirit union in the *flow* (optimal experience), unbounded imagination and curiosity about the unknown that they first learned in play are everlasting legacies of childhood.

Likewise, from an inimical urban and anthropocentric point of view, "Subsoil" could be easily interpreted as a typical Rural Gothic text with Mr. Potato Head being yet another demonic doll; however, numerous tribal cultures and non-Christian beliefs have assumed that human beings and all other earthly creatures derive from one and the same divine origin, so that accounts of metamorphosis and ontological mutability are considered awe-inspiring and enlightening. In "Subsoil's" surrealistic hostel, aging potatoes are made into nourishing soup to treat the guests, who are afterwards turned into vegetables that are to nurture future patrons. Such a reciprocal relationship of giving and taking between humans and vegetation epitomizes the wondrous cycle of nature as long as beliefs in human-exceptionalism and ontological fixity can be put aside. Only by discarding habitual taxonomic division and hierarchy could Nyle-Potato finally relish cross-species fellowship and vegetal nirvana: "What once was Nyle woke in a very dark place. Many Krebs cycles had passed; many more would pass. He felt himself being slowly turned, his fellows were dozing by the dozens near him" (Nicholson 543). Thus, the one-time doll player becomes a doll himself, the former being no longer a manipulator and the latter no longer a passive object. The subject and the object are inverted and merged into an inseparable, symbiotic entity, co-creating inter-subjectivity between human and non-human: "He exhausted himself doing the only thing he can do, which was trying to send out underground shoots to form more potatoes like himself' (543). This spooky tale of a rustic game could be alternatively read as conveying a yearning for exchange and fusion, for reformation following deformation, which have been fundamental game patterns since antiquity.

It is in such a context that the representation of child's play in these works, I argue, makes a meaningful echo of the increasingly prominent Gothic trope of ghost-seeing children.[5] Sage Leslie-McCarthy indicates that in earlier narratives, these children were inclined to be passive victims, who suffered

[5] In addition to Leslie-McCarthy, Christian Stewen also points out the prominence of ghost-seeing children as a trope in contemporary horror cinema. He indicates that ghost-seeing implies "a breaking up of traditional borders," especially the borders between life and death; through communicating with the specters, "these liminal spaces are constantly opened up by children," which grants more agency to these othered children compared to their previous cinematic representation as passive victims (265).

from their unsolicited facility to see paranormal phenomena. In more recent works, nevertheless, seeing ghosts has been more frequently regarded as a true "gift," a capability to perceive alternatively. In contrast to the previous helpless victims of demonic forces, they are now often active seekers, willing to interact and even ally with unseen and neglected entities. Leslie-McCarthy points out these children's unique ability "to reach, empathize with, and restore others, facilitating both personal and social resolution and justice." Although their unusual gift often makes them odd and isolated, these "othered" children play a valuable role in "bringing 'others' in from the periphery, giving voices to the marginalized, the abused, and the forgotten who are often also children." Therefore, these children act not only as "mediums" but "mediators"—they restore "a dialogue between the past and the present, between family members and within communities where communication has broken down" (Leslie-McCarthy 2).

Child's play in contemporary Gothic narratives, I argue, frequently plays a similar role as mediator, a cross-border interface establishing access to "othered" entities. These unusual games encourage alternative ways of perceiving and cognizing, bringing to light overlooked realms and individuals. Numerous works have employed the trope of child's play to create otherwise impossible relations: the little girl Regan, living in the predominantly white middle-class American suburbs, plays a Ouija board before getting possessed by the ancient Mesopotamian deity Pazuzu in *The Exorcist* (1973); the ghosts of murdered twin girls in *The Shining* (1980) lure the lonely and abused psychic boy Danny to "play with us"; the good guy doll Chucky, embodying angelic innocence, turns out to be haunted by a transgressor and Voodoo cultist in *Child's Play*. In *El Orfanato*, it dawns on the mother that she could only reach the intimidated hidden specters by playing their games. Only by treading into the children's play world was she able to cross the chasm between the living and the dead, adults and children, in order to recover the lost ones and redeem their trauma. Child's play thus breaks up rigid boundaries, relating the past to the present, and delivers unheeded messages. The liminal space opened up by child's play is abundant with affect and ethical agency, and it is reachable only by those who dare to reach out and who still retain a child's spirit of play.

The old-fashioned games that I have hereto discussed, such as word doll, Mr. Potato Head and other street games and village games serve alike as a key to unlock lost worlds. Just as in "Subsoil," the potato doll epitomizes the rural

and primeval past, helping to extend their yearning shoots until they penetrate into the awareness of modern mentality. In this manner, play indeed sets up a distinct space, a "sacred realm" as in the primitive rituals indicated by Huizinga, which aim to reinforce cyclically the cosmic and social relations that are indispensable for the community's survival. These Gothicized old-time games inspire us, through simultaneous fear and awe, to reconsider our relation with the pre-technological and rural pasts that have been estranged with the advent of modernity. Through reworking our relationship with these "othered" entities, revisiting the past could potentially lead to a new vision and prospective future. The trope of child's play, then, stands no longer for indulgence and fixation, but for exploration, communication, and transformation. From this perspective, childhood would not be merely a temporary period of immaturity that should be eagerly outgrown and surpassed, but an inexhaustible fountainhead of inspiration.

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