Evil and Innocence: Children in Ghost Stories by Elizabeth Gaskell, M.R. James, and Susan Hill
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Introduction

As teachers of the English Language, one of the most important aspects that we have to convey to our students is the culture and literary history of the English-speaking world. One aspect of that culture is the Gothic. The definition of this literary movement has varied greatly, but David Punter notes that certain recurring elements can be seen as distinguishing Gothic fiction. Many of these stories “used castles, ruins, convents, as settings”, usually to invoke a sense of the medieval, barbaric and primal as a contrast to the contemporary world (7). The presence of the supernatural was also common, and it was used to create a similar contrast, as ghosts and spectres had been absent from most fiction until the revival of the Gothic (10). The supernatural presences could sometimes have a perfectly reasonable explanation, but the important factor is that they are there and provide something unexplained and frightening. Punter stresses that “Gothic fiction has, above all, to do with terror”, and as such it strives to build terror and suspense in its readers (13).

With such characteristic markers and historical relevance, it makes sense to teach Gothic horror in school, especially as it already happens to be a popular genre among the young readers we are supposed to educate. The supernatural horror genre has skyrocketed in popularity as of late with its presence in novels, movies and even music videos. Yet while the genre has adapted to the times, it still retains much of what distinguishes the Gothic from other forms of literature. This is why a closer look into this genre may be warranted.

Given that our profession demands that we educate young people, it is important to analyse the role of young people in ghost stories. Children have a rather complicated
relationship with horror as they are traditionally considered harmless and adorable. However, this can be deceptive. As Henry James pointed out, children add an extra “turn of the screw” to the tension that readers feel when they are involved in ghost stories (3). They are innocent enough to be sympathetic victims, but they are also capable of great acts of malice. This sometimes makes it difficult to tell if children are evil or innocent. Child characters are therefore in a unique position when it comes to fulfilling the roles of both victim and spectre in ghost stories. The very same innocence that makes children wholly sympathetic as victims makes them seem even more evil as ghosts. Thus the present study may help our pupils understand the traditional roles of young people in fiction and how these roles can be used in different ways.

In order to analyse how threat and innocence blend together in Gothic horror through child characters, this essay will explore three different English works by different authors spread out over various time periods. “The Old Nurse’s Story” (1852), by Elizabeth Gaskell revolves around a nurse named Hester trying to protect a little girl in a house haunted by a ghost girl and her mother, and is a good example of Victorian ghost stories. “Lost Hearts” (1904), by M. R. James tells the story of a young boy who is adopted by a mysterious cousin with a house haunted by the ghosts of two children. This story represents the ghost story around the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, although it is set in the previous century. The Small Hand (2010) by Susan Hill is a contemporary novel about a man who is haunted by the ghost of a small child whose intentions he does not understand. All three stories concern children and share strong similarities despite the differences in the gender, background and time period of their authors.

The argument that this essay aims to prove is twofold. Firstly, it is meant to show that all of the above stories follow the conventions of the gothic horror story and that they are traditional examples of the genre. The conventions of the ghost story which
will be discussed in this essay are the setting, the environment in which the story takes place, the narrator, the person who tells the story, and the structure of the time-frame. It will also explore the observer, who is the character who sees the ghost, the ghost itself, including its motives and history, and the visitation, the way in which the ghost appears to the observer. The second part of the argument is that all three of these stories diverge from the traditions of the genre by including the role of the child, where the evil characteristics of ghosts are blended with the innocent characteristics of children.

The essay will be structured so that each chapter covers one story and will systematically address each of the aforementioned conventions. The final chapter will be dedicated to the pedagogical merits of these stories and how they can be studied in the classroom. By comparing how the three stories use the conventions, this essay will prove which of these conventions are affected by the inclusion of a child role and which remain traditional, based on trends and movements in literary history that have been typical of the genre.

There have been studies made both on the subject of the traditions of the ghost story and on the traditional portrayal of children both in literary history at large and in ghost stories. There have also been studies that attempt to explore how ghost stories in particular make use of the inherently innocent characteristics of children and blend them with “evil” or threatening aspects, mostly in reference to *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James. The most important secondary sources have been Neil Wilson’s history of the genre and its most important authors, and Ellen Pifer’s study of the image of the child and its development over the years, especially in regard to the ghost story. However, there has not been much research done on the subject in recent years, particularly in regard to contemporary authors like Susan Hill. This means that a new study is justified. There are also no comparative studies on these three stories.
Chapter 1: “The Old Nurse’s Story” by Elizabeth Gaskell

Elizabeth Gaskell became noticed as a writer in the middle of the 19th century among writers such as Charles Dickens and Charlotte Brontë. While she wrote primarily in other genres, she is considered among the most influential writers of supernatural fiction in the Victorian period, which Neil Wilson attributes to her mastery of atmosphere and narrative (226). “The Old Nurse’s Story” was the first of her supernatural short stories to be published and a good example of these strengths. This chapter is structured into two broad sections. The first deals with generic conventions such as the setting, the function of the narrator, time-frame and the build-up of suspense and fear through mystery. The second section looks at the role of the child as both the observer of the ghost and the ghost itself. The chapter closes with a summary of the resolution and closure of the story.

The setting contains many elements that are typical of the genre, particularly for its time. The house in which the story takes place is an old manor in a park so isolated that when the characters approach it, Hester claims that they have “left all signs of a town, or even a village” (Gaskell 6). The building itself sets up a ghostly atmosphere as it is made clear that parts of it have fallen into ruin because of neglect. This works as foreshadowing for the history of the ghost, what we might call the “backstory”, as it tells the reader that something has happened to the owner of the house to make her lose interest in maintaining her home. This image of “crumbling castles and monastic ruins of old” is a staple of Gothic stories according to Clive Bloom (2). Thus the setting can be said to be traditional in Gothic horror stories at an architectural level.
While the house is falling into ruin, so are its inhabitants. The only people who have not yet abandoned it are two old servants, Dorothy and James, the lady of the house Grace Furnivall and her companion Mrs. Stark. The presence of nothing but old people adds to the atmosphere of decay and fallen glory that Bloom speaks of. It is to this cast that Hester, a young nurse with a strong motherly instinct, arrives together with Rosamund, a little girl recently orphaned and in Hester’s care.

Inside the building there are two important pieces of the setting. The first one is the east wing which is completely closed off and further foreshadows the past of Miss Furnivall. That the wing is now closed off can be seen as a sign of a secret past contributing to the atmosphere of mystery and suspense typical of the Gothic story. Bloom points out that “Gothic atmospheres – gloomy and mysterious – have repeatedly signalled the disturbing return of pasts upon presents and evoked emotions of terror” (13). This is indeed what happens with the events that Miss Furnivall is trying to hide in “The Old Nurse’s Story”. The second important feature of the setting inside the house is the big organ in the great hall. As we will see later, it carries great importance for the story which is immediately signalled by its central placement in the house. Hester’s reaction to the size of it also contributes to showing its importance as it is said to be “so large that it filled up the best part of that end” (Gaskell 6).

The organ is connected to the natural scenery which is described as isolated from civilization during Hester’s first arrival (6). The setting is closely connected with the surrounding forest and a typical feature of the setting of a Gothic tale is the presence of nature and how it reflects the events of the story. In “The Old Nurse’s Story” nature and the weather are closely connected to the appearance of the ghosts and to their history. Throughout the story we repeatedly see that the ghosts tend to act or show themselves either on or right before nights that are particularly cold or windy. The sound of organ
music is a prime example of this.

The narrator is Hester, the titular “old nurse”, who is recounting events from her youth. This works as the framing narrative for the story and the first layer of the time frame. Hester’s participation in the events of the story means that the reader becomes privy to the information and revelations of the story as the younger Hester becomes aware of them. Following the narrator like this and sharing her scepticism of the supernatural can be said to be one of the traditional elements of the story. Julia Briggs argues that: “a background of general scepticism or disbelief is one of the factors that distinguishes the ghost story of the last two centuries from earlier examples” (17). Briggs connects this to the realistic tendencies of the times as the religious movements and genuine belief in the supernatural began losing their hold over people. Carol Martin further reinforces this view of the narrator’s scepticism as vital to the persuasion of the reader. According to her, when the sceptical narrator “is convinced of the supernatural powers, the reader too must be convinced” (36).

Scepticism such as this can most prominently be seen in “The Old Nurse’s Story” when Hester hears about Rosamund’s first encounter with the ghost. She accuses the child of outright lying to her: “Now you are a naughty little girl, and telling stories” (Gaskell 14). It should be mentioned that Hester is not always disbelieving. Her reaction when she sees that the organ is broken is a great deal of discomfort and fear as it means her initial reasonable guess that one of the residents is playing it at night is wrong. However, Hester fits in nicely with these “sceptical” narrators as she is only disturbed by her first confrontations with the mildly supernatural but never convinced until she is faced with what is clearly a ghost in the second visitation.

Hester’s role as narrator also serves the purpose of inspiring fear in the reader which is helped along by her own participation in the events. Her reactions to events are
delivered directly to us as they happen and thus we share her feelings of terror. This sense of terror is mostly conveyed through her sense of powerlessness as she has no way of defending Rosamund from the ghosts, apart from simply keeping her away from them, and even in this she is limited. It is pointed out to her by Dorothy that Rosamund is not really Hester’s ward and so she cannot take her away from Miss Furnivall (17). This view of Hester’s helplessness is supported by Martin who argues that Hester has “no power to save Rosamund except though her love for the child” (34).

There are three different time periods in the story, as the Hester of the present (old Hester) takes the reader back in time to the past where young Hester and Rosamund are living the events at the manor. From there it goes even further back in time when the narrative temporarily changes from Hester to Dorothy, who reveals the events of the past. If we assume that the “present” of the story is the 1850s when the story was written and since Hester is now telling her story to Rosamund’s children it is reasonable to assume that the main story goes back twenty to thirty years. Dorothy’s story goes back to Miss Furnivall’s youth, yet another 40-50 years, as we are told that the old Lord Furnivall’s son “was with the army in America” presumably in the 1770’s (Gaskell 19).

From the beginning of the story the plot also builds up the mystery in various ways. The first mysterious event is when Hester begins to hear the old organ in the middle of the night. That the organ also proves to be broken inside increases the mystery as Hester now has her reasonable theory behind the music shattered. The reaction of the servants further deepens the mystery, as they first try to blame the sound on the wind and then refuse to tell the whole story behind the ghost playing. Hester even voices several questions for the reader as she says “but who the old lord was, or why he played, and why he played on stormy winter evenings in particular, she [Dorothy] either could not or would not tell me” (10).
More mystery is raised after the first visitation when Rosamund sees the ghost girl and is led outside where she meets the ghostly mother, is lulled to sleep and almost freezes to death. When Hester tells Miss Furnivall about what Rosamund told her, the old lady has a very strong reaction that not only reveals that she believes Rosamund’s story but also that she has a connection with it: “Oh! have mercy! Wilt Thou never forgive! It was many a long year ago” (16). The second visitation is when Hester finally believes in the ghosts after seeing the ghost child and confirming that she never made any sound no matter how much she cried or slammed against the windows. This incident is what finally prompts her to press Dorothy for the whole story and this is where many of the questions are answered.

We learn that the two Furnivall sisters, Grace and Maude, competed for the love of a foreign musician who their father had hired out of his love for music and it turned into a bitter rivalry. Maude ended up marrying the man in secret but being a shady fellow he ended up leaving her and their young daughter. Grace and Maude grew more and more hostile, and when their father finally found out about Maude’s marriage and daughter, he promptly disowned them both and threw them out into the cold winter night to die. When the story of Maude’s banishment is revealed, it still leaves out a crucial part, namely what happened when Maude and her daughter were thrown out of the house and what part Grace Furnivall played in the events of that night. This final piece is not told to the reader until the resolution of the story.

So the story follows the traditional patterns in setting, narrator, time frame, and build-up of suspense in order to inspire fear in the reader. We will now turn to the role of the child, as both the observer and the ghost are children.

The first person to see the ghost is the little girl Rosamund who immediately takes a liking to this new playmate and trusts her completely. This reaction continues
even in the more extreme circumstances of the second visitation when she feels a strong
sense of pity for the ghost who is out in the cold. At this point she turns against Hester
who has been a good friend until now. “‘She won’t let me open the door for my little
girl to come in’ … ‘Cruel, naughty Hester,’ she said, slapping me” (Gaskell 17).

On both occasions Rosamund repeatedly uses positive or possessive words like
“sweet”, “pretty” or “my” to describe the ghost girl, showing that she is unable to find
any faults in her despite the grave danger that the child has already placed her in.
According to Richard Flynn, this is consistent with how children have traditionally been
depicted in art and literature over the ages: “The idea of the child and the ideal of the
child have, since their simultaneous invention, been inseparable” (105). Rosamund can
thus be said to be a representation of this ideal, a wholly naïve and innocent child who
sees nothing but good in others and who would never harm another being.

Rosamund is not the only seer in the story and Hester’s reaction is quite the
opposite from hers. Unlike Rosamund, Hester notices the abnormal aspects of the child
which makes it otherworldly, such as the lack of sound or footprints in the snow. She is
also acutely aware of the danger the ghost child poses to Rosamund as she has seen how
it nearly killed her once, and during the second visitation she sees the strong influence
the ghost has over her. What we see in Hester can be described as the opposite of a
child’s view. She is more worldly and aware of her surrounding as well as more
perceptive of the danger. Hester’s reaction therefore highlights the childish qualities we
see in Rosamund.

The ghost itself is also a child and so we see these childish qualities in her as
well. She is an innocent child who fell victim to the cruelty of the old Lord Furnivall
and was left to die, along with her mother. The girl’s appearance also does much to
show the innocent characteristics of a child. She is described by Hester as quite small
and poorly dressed for the weather outside and whenever she is seen she is crying and wailing, desperately trying to get in, which as we have seen sends Rosamund into a protective frenzy out of pity. Jennifer Bann describes this action by the ghost as an act “embodying the ferocity of a living, unresolved past” (671).

The way in which the ghosts appear may imply a more innocent intention as neither the ghost girl nor her mother seems threatening at first. During the first visitation the ghost girl simply asks Rosamund to come out and play and they go hand in hand to meet with Maude, who gently sings Rosamund to sleep under a tree. The second visitation has the girl go back to the house and cry outside the window, begging to be let in, once again rousing sympathy from Rosamund. Innocent activities like those from the first visitation can be seen as indicative that the child ghost is seeking “emotional and physical warmth” rather than vengeance according to Bann (678). Even during the third and by far the most violent visitation the ghosts do not attack anyone physically. Instead, they re-enact the scene which led to their deaths in front of those that are affected by it. This act of bringing the truth to light further supports the idea that the ghosts are seeking justice for what was done to them.

However, the ghost girl has threatening qualities to her as well. Rebecca Styler claims that Gaskell “held no Romantic notion of children’s innate innocence” (35). In this light the nicer qualities seem like a façade meant to conceal the menace of the ghosts. While the ghosts were victims of a villainous man, they now haunt the manor and specifically target another child, Rosamund, who has nothing to do with their tragic fate. Thus they become evil themselves. The reason why Rosamund becomes a target is never clearly stated, but it can be guessed from the fact that old Miss Furnivall is fond of her. It seems like the motivation for going after Rosamund is an indirect revenge against Miss Furnivall. This would be consistent with most ghostly motivations,
according to Kathryn Edwards, as revenge has historically been the most frequent motive for hauntings in ghost stories (356). The ghosts can thus be considered evil for wanting to kill a little girl for the sake of revenge. The ghosts also possess a strange supernatural power that draws Rosamund to them. Hester claims that she is “convulsed” in her arms as she tries to hold her back (Gaskell 23). This kind of ghostly grip suggests a power beyond just the pity they inspire in other characters and makes the ghosts seem more dangerous and threatening. It also adds to Hester’s fear as she claims that the power that is pulling her darling Rosamund is stronger than hers, which contributes to her helplessness and by extension to that of the reader.

The scene of the third visitation also acts as the resolution of the story, as the ghosts reveal the final piece of mystery that was missing from Dorothy’s second-hand account of that night by re-enacting the climax of the past. We see the young Miss Furnivall and how she played a part in revealing Maude’s secret to their father. Her spectral representation is said to have a look of “relentless hate and triumphant scorn”, indicating that she is enjoying the scene (23). Meanwhile, the old, still-living Miss Furnivall is desperately pleading with the ghost of her father to spare the child, revealing that she deeply regrets her role in the tragedy. As the ghostly image of Lord Furnivall once again strikes the child, regardless of Grace’s pleas, the scene disappears, and she dies, despite never having been touched by the ghosts.

Thus the story ends with every character’s history and motivation made clear and the perpetrator of the original crime made to pay for her deed. Justice is served and the mystery is solved. To summarize this chapter, we can conclude that the story stays very close to the conventions of the gothic genre in terms of setting, narrator, and the build-up of suspense. It also mixes evil and innocence as the ghost girl uses her childlike charms to commit evil acts while Rosamund is the pinnacle of childhood
innocence. However, they are both passive in their approaches, as neither takes direct action to achieve goals of their own.
Of the three authors this essay aims to explore, M.R. James might be the best known. Being a highly respected and successful scholar made him recognized within the literary community before he ever began writing supernatural fiction, and it is believed that his extensive knowledge of old cultures is what attached him to the genre. This background is clearly visible in his works as many of his characters and settings reflect James’ own interests, with characters who are academics or settings that centre on intellectual places such as libraries or universities. This particular trait of using ghosts and settings with a long-standing history has become one of the hallmarks that James left on the ghost story. Wilson claims that: “Over the years an identifiable ‘Jamesian’ school of writers emerged … who continued to write in the antiquarian tradition” (287). “Lost Hearts” was among the very first ghost stories that James ever published, and exemplifies the traits and quirks that made him an influential writer within the genre. The analysis of this story follows the same structure as the previous chapter, with a look at how James uses the traditional tools of the genre followed by an exploration of the children in the story.

In the setting we immediately see a great similarity to Gaskell’s story as the main location of all the events is a large, old manor with no discernible surroundings attached to it, which gives it a feeling of great isolation. The narrative informs us that the building is Aswarby Hall and that it is located “in the heart of Lincolnshire”, which is a rather large and non-specific location (James 5). However, that is where the similarities between the two houses end, as the manor in Gaskell’s story was described
as ruined and of an unspecified age. Aswarby Hall on the other hand, is described as “a tall, square, red-brick house, built in the reign of Anne; a stone-pillared porch had been added in the purer classical style of 1790…” (5). The great detail in the description of the setting is a staple of the traditions that M. R. James introduced to the ghost story as it immediately establishes much of the house’s history. Wilson also argues this point: “The gothic ghost was regularly used to introduce colorful historical background material, and helped cement the traditional association of ghosts with events in the distant past” (12). The setting can thus be said to once again follow the traditions of the gothic horror-story, though in a different way.

The characters that play a role on this stage are our main character Stephen Elliot, a young boy recently orphaned, who is taken in by his cousin Mr. Abney, the master of the house. Mr. Abney is a scholar with a particular interest in history and pagan religions. He lives alone in the manor with the exception of two servants, Mrs. Bunch and Mr. Parkes. That the master of the house is a scholar with a long career of studying old and forgotten cultures, together with the rich description of the house itself, work to create the typical Jamesian setting that Wilson speaks of. There are also the two ghosts, appearing as a young boy and girl, who haunt the manor.

One rather large difference in the two settings is how they treat the outside setting or nature. Whereas the surrounding forest and the weather played a large part in “The Old Nurse’s Story”, they are never mentioned in “Lost Hearts”. The house is described in great detail but aside from pointing out its general location, the narrative does not refer to the surrounding area. Likewise, all of the important events of the story occur inside the house, never outside. The most important locations are a closed-off bathroom and an old wine-cellar, both of which serve to build up a mysterious and gloomy atmosphere such as we have seen in Gaskell’s story with the closed-off wing. In
this story too, the atmosphere serves as a way of signalling the return of the past, and in this case it also works to build up a setting that is strongly connected with the past, as is James’ trademark. A third location of equal importance is Mr. Abney’s study where the climax of the story takes place.

The narrator is an interesting part of the analysis in this case because he is different from the narrator in the other two stories. The narrator of “Lost Hearts” is neither the protagonist nor is he a character that appears in the story at all. Despite this, he is clearly a person as he frequently refers to himself or provides his own insights into events with comments like: “It was, as far as I can ascertain” or “It was altogether a pleasant impression…” (James 5-6). Much like “The Old Nurse’s Story”, the story is told in the past tense and the reader is only provided with information as the main character, Stephen, becomes privy to it. Unlike Hester, the narrator remains distanced from the events and only relays the feelings of fear or suspense through a second-hand account. This goes against the norm of the genre which is that the narrator stands in for the reader with his scepticism and fear as Briggs previously established (17). While James himself is said to never have believed in ghosts, his narrator seemingly accepts everything supernatural without question. Briggs acknowledges this as a particular trait of James himself that strayed from the conventions of his time: “His [James’] stories assert a total acceptance of the supernatural that his scepticism apparently denies” (124).

While there is no framing narrative for the story, the timeline does stretch over several time periods. As previously mentioned, the narrator tells the story in the past tense which means that one layer of the time-frame is the narrator’s “present”, while the story proper is set mainly between the September of 1811 and the March of 1812. We may note that this is a good fifty years before M.R. James was even born. This could mean that the “present” is the time when the story was written and that the narrator is
James himself. The story also makes two shifts in time. The first is when Mrs. Bunch tells Stephen that he is not the first child that Mr. Abney has taken in and that the ones that came before him disappeared suddenly with no trace left behind. The second shift comes late in the story and goes forward in time to tell of how the adult Stephen discovers some notes that explain everything he has seen at Aswarby Hall.

The build-up of mystery occurs in the very first conversation as Mr. Abney immediately begins asking Stephen about his age in a manner that quickly registers as “odd” in his mind (James 7). The supernatural occurrences begin soon after when Stephen sees a ghost girl in the abandoned bathroom. This is made more mysterious because the narrative makes it unclear if Stephen is really seeing this ghost or if he is having a dream: “The terror of the sight forced Stephen backwards and he awoke to the fact that he was indeed standing on the cold boarded floor of the passage in the full light of the moon” (11). Mr. Abney displays further strange behaviour upon hearing this as he is very interested in the event and asks Stephen for detailed descriptions that he may note them down.

More suspense and fear is created when Stephen later wakes up from his sleep to find that something has left “destructive and apparently wanton” claw marks both on his bedroom door and on his nightdress (12). This mystery continues when the butler, Mr. Parkes, reveals that voices can be heard in the abandoned wine-cellar. Each of these incidents builds up the mystery by establishing that there are otherworldly things afoot in Aswarby Hall and the master of the house has an agenda we do not know about.

Stephen sees the ghosts one more time before the resolution, on the night Mr. Abney has asked to meet him in the study. The ghosts appear to him as horribly disfigured children with holes in their chests, which scare him greatly. On the night of the climax he goes to Mr. Abney’s study only hear muffled words and screams behind
the door. When he finally opens the door, the narrative jumps forward in time to explain how Stephen would later discover the notes that answer all of his questions. These notes reveal that Mr. Abney was performing dark rituals meant to give him superhuman abilities and immortality. For this purpose he was taking in young children and sacrificing them by ripping out their hearts and grinding them into dust that he puts in wine for him to drink, with Stephen as his final victim. Only after these secrets have been revealed does the narrative shift back to Stephen and the scene he discovers after entering Mr. Abney’s office, which gives the story its resolution.

So far we have seen that “Lost Hearts” differs from “The Old Nurse’s Story” in some of the conventions but overall it follows the same traditions of a gothic ghost story with the setting, the time-frame and the build-up of suspense. From here on we will study how James incorporates the role of the child in his story and how it differs from Gaskell’s story.

This time around the protagonist is a child, and Stephen Elliot is just as innocent as Rosamund. He is completely in the dark about Mr. Abney’s malicious intentions towards him and he lives his life at the manor with as much virtue as one can expect from a child of his age. He is described by the narrator as being of “an adventurous and inquiring turn” and possessing “a courage which I do not think can be common among boys of his age” (8, 11). He displays childish sensibilities such as relishing an “opportunity of sitting up till eleven o’clock” (16). However, unlike Rosamund who is an embodiment of the traditional naiveté of childhood as described by Flynn (105), Stephen’s reaction to being confronted with the supernatural is anything but naïve. He is immediately terrified by the sight of the ghost girl’s decayed corpse in the bathroom and then again when he sees both ghosts together before meeting with Mr. Abney, he becomes “Inexpressibly frightened” by their terrifying appearance (17). We can thus see
that while Stephen possesses the typical innocent qualities of a child, he is much more active and sensible than Rosamund. This development is discussed by Ellen Pifer as she claims that most writers during the 19th century “paid tribute to the idyll of childhood innocence”. However, towards the end of the century they began to move away from this in response to Sigmund Freud’s theories on childhood sexuality (21). On the forefront of this development Pifer places Henry James, whose child characters did not “wait patiently for rescue” or “continue for long to play the passive role of little victim” (29). Stephen can thus be seen as part of this same movement to give children a measure of agency. This is reinforced by the fact that it is only Stephen’s reaction that we see in the story; there are no adults around trying to protect him, as with Rosamund.

This particular function falls to the ghosts themselves who in the end save Stephen from sharing their fate of being sacrificed for the sake of Mr. Abney’s mad ambition. Like Stephen, they were innocent victims of Mr. Abney’s cruelty and did nothing to deserve their fate. Mrs. Bunch emphasizes the pitifulness of the ghost girl Phoebe: “the pore child hadn’t no one belonging to her – she telled me so her own self” (James 9). It is also questionable if they ever have any ill intent as they never once cause Stephen harm even though they scare him a great deal. From this it can be said that, just like the ghost girl in Gaskell’s story, the ghosts have innocent qualities, but unlike that story where the innocent qualities served to hide a more sinister function, these ghosts serve an innocent or helpful function hidden by threatening aspects.

The appearance they take as ghosts is one such threatening aspect. They are quite clearly inhuman to Stephen from the first moment he lays eyes on the girl Phoebe. She is described as “a figure inexpressibly thin and pathetic, of a dusty leaden colour” (11), and the boy Giovanni looks outright monstrous:

The moon shone upon his almost transparent hands, and Stephen saw that the
nails were fearfully long and that the light shone through them. […] On the left side of his chest there opened a black and gaping rent; and there fell upon Stephen’s brain, […] the impression of one of those hungry and desolate cries that he had heard resounding over the woods of Aswardby Hall that evening.

(17)

The description of the ghosts gives us the reason for the title of the story. The ghosts’ hearts have been removed, and the long nails give the reader a hint of how the tears and scratches on Stephen’s nightdress and door came to be. Bann argues that the appearance of the child ghost signifies not what it can do but rather what it must do (678). In this light the description above is fitting since the “hungry and desolate cries” are indicative of the mission that the ghosts have returned for, which will be shown in the resolution of the story.

Furthermore, the ghosts seem very threatening because, regardless of whether or not they mean any harm, they do end up tormenting Stephen with their haunting, even though he is an innocent child in the same situation as they were and had nothing to do with what happened to them. The way in which they appear to him also works to make them seem even more dangerous, as their contact with the living is of the physical kind. The ghosts leave ominous marks on Stephen’s door and clothes which are easy to interpret as ill intent. They also end up taking revenge on Mr. Abney in a most brutal fashion which connects to their own fate. According to Michael Mason, this physical type of ghost was a preference of James’, as he often makes his spectres far past forgiving the crimes done to them (256). However, unlike the ghosts in Gaskell’s story, these ghosts do not get their revenge by harming an innocent child, but by protecting one.

The story ends with Stephen opening up Mr. Abney’s office only to find him
dead in his chair with his chest crudely torn open just as his victims’ had been with “an expression of rage, fright and mortal pain” (James 20). Thanks to the notes we are told that Stephen discovered later, every blank in the mystery has been filled and the man responsible for the hauntings has been made to pay for his crime. Once again the story wraps up neatly with a sense of closure.

Finally, we can conclude that this story once again follows the conventions of the ghost story but that it also differs from “The Old Nurse’s Story”. The setting is Gothic in that we have an old manor as our stage, but it also follows James’ antiquarian traditions and it leaves nature completely out of it. The stories both use a mixture of evil and innocence in their child characters, but James’s ghosts look and behave threateningly while acting to save an innocent from sharing their fate. Gaskell’s ghosts looked and behaved like innocents in order to cause someone harm. Meanwhile, the observer Stephen has the typical innocence of youth while also being more active than Rosamund.
Chapter 3: The Small Hand by Susan Hill

The only contemporary author in the group, Susan Hill has only been active in writing ghost stories since the 1980’s when The Woman in Black was first published. She has acquired a reputation for writing her stories with a predominantly Gothic tone and setting, inspired by other writers including M.R James. According to Rosemary Jackson, her writing also tends to “vindicate a feminist approach” despite not always using female characters for her novels (81). Her characters, male or female, tend to have feminine traits, professions or sensibilities about them that diverge from the male norm. The following analysis will continue to explore what makes her story traditional in terms of setting, narrator, time-frame, and build-up of suspense as well as how the role of the child comes into play. This will affect the role of the observer, the ghost, and the scene of the visitation.

Over the course of the story the setting moves between several locations but there are two in particular where the most significant events occur. The first is the old, run-down manor where the ghost first appears and sets the whole story in motion. The house lies abandoned at the end of a road so dark and overgrown that the main character scarcely even believes it to be a road. The gate has also gone unopened for so long that “rust flaked away at the hinges” when they are finally put to use again (Hill 13). This is once again reminiscent of the ruined old houses and castles that Bloom spoke of as typical of the Gothic ghost story as it shows the fallen glory from days past (2). The manor can therefore be compared to the old building that has seen better days in “The Old Nurse’s Story” as opposed to the still old but historical and well-kept building in...
“Lost Hearts”. Nature is once again very prominent in this setting. The narrator notes that “whatever the garden, now ‘closed’, had been, nature had taken it back” (Hill 13). Moreover, the appearance of the ghost is connected to water which is another indicator of the importance of nature.

The second location is an old monastery where our main character eventually finds a brief refuge from the spectre that haunts him. This location once again draws inspiration from classic Gothic architecture as it is old and built on hallowed ground. Hill also draws inspiration from the settings used by M.R. James in this instance, as the main location within the monastery is a large library, and the reason our main character has come to this place originally is to appraise one of Shakespeare’s First Folios. This gives the setting and the protagonist the same distinct air of education and academics that Wilson spoke of as an element turned into a tradition of the genre by James (287). In this setting as well, the presence of nature is very important as the monastery is just as isolated as the manor but the tranquillity of the surroundings reflects the safety that the main character feels within.

The main character of the story is Adam Snow, an antiquarian and dealer in rare books and manuscripts for museums and collectors. The only other important character is Adam’s brother Hugo, who has a history of mental breakdowns and becomes a confidant for Adam. It is the first time that the cast is predominantly made up of adults with no child characters barring the ghost itself.

The narrator of the story is the protagonist Adam who tells the story after the event. This has more in common with Gaskell than James as the narrator is a character taking part in the story, which adds a personal element to the narration. This is particularly evident whenever Adam the narrator comments on the actions of Adam the character with observations like: “I ought to have turned back then” (Hill 11).
Expressing regret over the actions he has taken in the story works as a way of conveying the character’s growing sense of fear to the reader and also emphasizes how he begins to believe in ghosts. The character Adam still expresses the scepticism of a man who has only just begun to experience the supernatural, with only a fleeting interest in the strange occurrence he has been through. Thus the narration given to us by the future Adam serves the purpose of convincing the audience in the way that Briggs stresses is a major part of the ghost genre (17).

That the narrator tells the story in the past tense also helps to set the time-frame as one layer of the story is the “present” of Adam the narrator recounting the events that happened to him in the past. Events are told to us chronologically and there are no distinguishable shifts in time, although Adam occasionally alludes to the “present” or later developments. This usually happens when he is expressing regret or nostalgia about something in the story and it is my impression that it further reinforces the sense of looming horror as it tells the reader this is only the beginning.

The build-up of suspense begins early as Adam arrives at the derelict manor and out of curiosity begins to explore it. He feels a small hand grab hold of his own “as the hand of a father and his child” (Hill 15). The strangeness of the incident spurs him to find out more about the manor and the small hand, and he begins to inquire about the house from his acquaintances. What little he manages to find does not hold his interest and when he is faced with a promising business deal he quickly “forgot about the whole thing” (36).

The next stage of suspense comes when he has been occupying himself with his work for some time. During a visit to the Botanic Garden in Oxford he has a sudden panic attack and a strong urge to throw himself into a nearby pond. Believing that he is about to go mad, he seeks advice from his brother Hugo, who has had a similar
experience with depression and who tells Adam not to worry. This puts Adam at ease and he assures himself that he had simply had “a strange encounter and been touched by some shadow,” which he was still “able to forget” (74). Adam’s sense of security lasts until he has two encounters in close succession where the child ghost makes much more forceful attempts at his life by actively trying to pull him off a cliff and into another pool of water. It is after this that Adam is given sanctuary from the monks at the monastery and he begins to truly believe that he is dealing with a ghost that haunts him. This forces him to ask “Why does this thing want to do me harm?” and once again begin his search for answers (Hill 117). The great gap in time and pages between the supernatural incidents makes the build-up of suspense far more gradual than in either of the two previous stories. This is something that Wilson feels is “crucial to the effective suspension of disbelief in the reader and the eventual success of the work” (16).

When visiting the manor once more the ghost pulls him again and this time it feels “as if someone was in danger of falling over the edge of a cliff and clutching at me for dear life, but at the same time it was trying to pull me over with it” (Hill 134). He also finds the manor inhabited by an old woman who identifies herself as the former owner of the house. This raises the suspense of the situation even further, as it is unclear if the old woman is a ghost herself. Adam notices that “it was impossible to guess her age” and his earlier research revealed that the woman was already quite old thirty years ago (144). However, she behaves like a living person until she suddenly disappears. This happens after she takes Adam to a part of the garden that has been mysteriously restored to its former perfection. However, Adam’s biggest discovery is an old photo of himself and his brother as boys together with another small boy, proving that he has been at the manor before but has forgotten it.

Shortly after this event Adam experiences sudden relief as he feels the child
ghost leave him “like the mist that clears within seconds”, and in his relief he calls up his brother once more and tells him about the photo which makes Hugo very uncomfortable (175). When confronted with it, Hugo reveals that he knew some of the manor’s history and that he and Adam had been to the garden on a few occasions. He also knows that a two-year old boy drowned there once but he insists that there was no third boy when the photo was taken. This leads Adam to believe that it is the ghost that can be seen in the picture. Not long after, Hugo is found drowned in the nearby river and Adam realizes that the ghost child did not leave but simply went after another victim, as he finds that Hugo’s dead hand is folded “as if it had been holding something tightly” (199). The last pieces of the puzzle come a few days later when Adam receives a letter that Hugo sent him before he died, which explains the circumstances around his death.

The observer of the ghost this time around is an adult, and as such, Adam’s reaction to the supernatural is quite different from the two previous seers. He displays neither the instinctive protectiveness we see in Rosamund nor the gut-fear reaction we see in Stephen. Instead, he is initially puzzled by his first encounter with the ghost, and later, when it begins to present a danger to his person, he seeks out a logical explanation by recalling his brother’s period of mental illness rather than assuming that he is dealing with a ghost. His solutions when facing the unknown are essentially a healthy dose of scepticism and drawing on past experiences of hardships, which can be seen as the opposite of the typical childlike traits of innocence and unconditional trust that had been the prevailing idea of child for most of the 19th century, according to Pifer (21). It seems natural that Adam, being an adult, would exhibit traits that are the polar opposite of those typically seen in children in literature.

So far we have seen that Susan Hill uses various traits that have been traditional
in the ghost genre and that her story has elements that we have seen in both Gaskell’s and James’s works. We have also noticed that she strongly differs from them in having an adult as the only seer of the ghost. We will now look at how the role of the child comes into play as the ghost itself.

The ghost child’s name is James Harrow and it is clear that the child did nothing to deserve being “drowned in what was simply described as ‘a tragic accident’”, which makes him an innocent victim (Hill 35). When Adam sees the child ghost reflected in the surface of a pool, he is described as being about three or four years old with “a solemn and very beautiful face” which certainly gives him the appearance of an innocent child (103). This immediately raises the readers’ sympathy, as a tragic fate that befalls a child is often considered more “gruesome and startling” than the same incident applied to an adult, according to Pifer, referring to the preface to Henry James’s *Turn of the Screw* (44). When the ghost makes his visitations, it starts out harmlessly enough, as all the child does is take Adam’s hand and hold on to it for a while during the first visitation, an act that Adam finds oddly friendly to the point that he is even a little bit disappointed by the fact that the hand does not come back at a later point. Even after the ghost has left him, he reminisces about how he found the small hand to be “strangely comforting, as if I had been singled out for a particular gentle gesture of affection from the unseen” (Hill 176). This shows the power of the child ghost over Adam that goes beyond the physical. The child’s face makes Adam feel that the child is asking him to do something and that he is “unable to refuse what he wanted” (103).

These innocent qualities soon disappear as the child once again haunts another innocent victim with no knowledge or involvement in what happened to the ghost child. We also see that the child repeatedly attempts to drag Adam to certain death and when it fails to do so it gives a “howl of pain and rage and anguish combined” (81).
Furthermore, it ends up murdering his brother Hugo instead. This is consistent with the motivation of revenge which Edwards lists as one of the most common type of ghosts throughout the genre (356). The fact that the child’s murderer also turns out to be a young boy adds an additional twist to the typical idyllic vision of childhood innocence as even a non-supernatural child is capable of evil acts such as murder. We never find out young Hugo’s reason for killing which makes the whole thing seem random and pointless. According to Dani Cavallaro, it is this connection “with a primordial and inchoate world that does not respect rigid codes and fixed patterns of meaning” that makes the evil in children seem particularly frightening from an adult perspective (135).

The ghost always manifests itself as a small hand that takes Adam’s, and while it initially only holds him, it eventually becomes a vice-like grip pulling him towards certain doom. The force that Adam feels in the child’s grip is clearly supernatural: “The strength was that of a grown man although the hand was still that of a child and at the same time as I was pulled I felt myself in some strange way being urged, coaxed, guided to the edge”, and this adds to the sense of fear that Adam feels, as he cannot resist the child ghost physically or mentally (Hill 80). Symbolically, the ghostly hand in the ghost story represents “not only a potential threat, but the agency which makes it possible” according to Bann (674). This gives the ghost an additional air of malice, as it is the agent in control of the violence done to the victim.

In the end, the ghost abandons his haunting of Adam only to go after Hugo instead to drown him in the river. The resolution of the story consists of a letter where Hugo explains that it was he who pushed the two-year-old James Harrow into the pond to drown when he was a boy and that the guilt later caused his mental breakdown. He also explains that he willingly goes with the child to pay for his crime and that they are both at peace. This ends the story in a similar manner as the previous two, with the
perpetrator of the original crime punished and the ghost at peace. However, many questions remain unanswered and it does not give the reader the same sense of closure as the previous stories. We never find out if the old woman at the manor was a ghost or not, why the ghost child began haunting Adam instead of Hugo who was the one responsible, why the child who died at two appears as a five-year-old in the old photo and to Adam himself when it was over thirty years since he died, or why Hugo decided to do something so horrible to the child in the first place. As such, we are left much like Adam himself at the end of the novel, unable to do anything with the knowledge we have been given.

Looking over this chapter we can see that this story is very much like a traditional Gothic ghost story with a setting that has two ancient buildings that are central to the story, and a strong presence of nature. The other conventions are equally adhered to and the child ghost displays perhaps the most complex blend of evil and innocence of all three stories. Young James Harrow appears more like a developed character, with goals and desires of his own to fulfil as well as a strong sense of control over the fate of his victims.
Chapter 4: The Ghosts in the Classroom

We have now discussed how these three stories use the conventions of the genre to establish a traditional spooky atmosphere and also how they each include children in various roles to add an additional twist to the story. So how do we as teachers apply these stories and what we have learned about them in the classroom? How do we teach students about these stories and the elements they include? And what kind of students can learn the most from these stories? This chapter will look at what the Swedish course curriculum says about teaching English literature at an upper-secondary level and how these stories and their authors can be used. It will also provide suggestions for lesson plans that utilize these stories while teaching English in the classroom.

The first thing to note is that the subject of studying literature fits in well with what the national curriculum for English in Swedish upper-secondary schools says:

Students should be given the opportunity to develop knowledge of living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used. Teaching should encourage students' curiosity about language and culture, and give them the opportunity to develop plurilingualism where skills in different languages interact and support each other. (SNCC)

Since the curriculum stipulates that students should be given knowledge about cultural phenomena in English-speaking countries, it seems appropriate to dedicate a portion of the literary history lessons to the Gothic and its conventions. All three stories have exhibited traits that are traditionally considered Gothic, and Anna Powell and Andrew
Smith see more than enough academic reasons why the Gothic genre should be studied as preparation for advanced studies in literature at university level:

There are significant reasons why we teach and study Gothic and why the field should attract increasing numbers of enthusiastic converts among lecturers and students. From its former marginality to the literary canon as prescribed by English Studies, Gothic has become a fully-fledged and popular topic with its own undergraduate units and postgraduate degree courses, scholarly associations and journals. (1-2)

The Gothic is therefore appropriate to study in class as it is both a popular subject among young people and a respectable one among scholars. Powell and Smith then go on to explain how the Gothic as a genre has been one of the more influential movements in English literary history. We can see this in Susan Hill’s novel as she uses many Gothic elements in her setting and characters which are an excellent example of how these traits have been passed on and are still being used by authors of fiction today. Gothic horror is a good starting point for introducing these concepts to young people as it has become a popular topic in literature among younger readers according to Clive Bloom (2). Powell and Smith further support this as they believe students would “welcome an opportunity to study in college a popular cultural form they might already enjoy outside” (2). Thus studying Gothic horror is in line with the part of the curriculum that says that the teacher should stimulate the students’ curiosity about matters of language and culture.

The curriculum also dictates that pupils be given the opportunity to develop their ability to talk about cultural phenomena in the English-speaking world. Since the three works in this essay represent different eras and genders of the Gothic horror genre, they offer the pupils some diversity in terms of culture. All three of these stories are
appropriate for students reading at an upper-secondary level. “The Old Nurse’s Story” and “Lost Hearts” may both be old tales with some outdated language present in them, but neither is too complicated for the students of the intended ages to understand. They are also both quite short and can easily be given to students as homework or even finished during a two-hour lesson. *The Small Hand*, however, is a contemporary novel written in informal language, and while it is too long to be finished during a lesson, it is well suited for reading at home.

So how do we form a lesson plan around these ghosts? A task-based teaching session puts greater focus on meaning rather than spelling and grammar and is the most effective approach to take. The students should be able to understand what the literary text is about and communicate their thoughts about it effectively, even if they cannot phrase their thoughts in perfectly correct English.

In keeping with the task-based approach to teaching, it is appropriate to start off with a stage of preparation which Dave Willis and Jane Willis argue will “prepare learners for the topic and to make available the vocabulary” (115). In this case it might take the form of a lecture or a teacher-student discussion about what students enjoy about ghost stories in order to bring them into the topic and explain important words like “setting” or “suspense”. This part is also suitable for explaining the historical background on the subject like the emergence of the Gothic as a genre and to stimulate the pupils’ curiosity about the subject by bringing in the persevering presence of the Gothic in popular culture. One way of explaining the conventions to the students would be to ask them what they expect a typical setting in a ghost story to be like, or what they think a ghost should be like. Expectations are something everyone already has so they make for a good framework when explaining a topic, and the teacher can note down the students’ answers on the board to get the students thinking.
Following this, the students will be given one of the three stories to read for homework or to read during the remainder of the lesson, depending on the available time. Because Susan Hill’s novel is significantly longer than “The Old Nurse’s Story” and “Lost Hearts”, the pupils who are assigned that story will be given extracts of the novel rather than read it in its entirety. These extracts should cover Adam’s first encounter with the ghost and manor, the attack during the storm, the importance of the monastery and the second attack, Adam’s meeting with the old lady and finding the photograph, and finally the resolution of the story through Hugo’s letter. Certain gaps in the plot can be filled in with a provided summary.

In order to make the pupils begin to learn about the Gothic conventions they will be asked to consider them while they read. What is the setting like? Who is the narrator? When does it take place? Does it build on the mystery? Who sees the ghost first? Who is the ghost? These are all questions they will be expected to find an answer to during their reading. They will also be asked to consider what they think about the child characters in their respective stories since this subject will be what helps them contextualize the stories and give them a purpose outside the classroom.

The main task begins in the next class where the students are divided into groups of three so those who have read Gaskell can begin by giving a synopsis of their story to those who have read James and Hill. This will allow them to prove that they have understood the story well enough on a factual level. From there they will explain the conventions and their interpretations of the child’s role. Did they think about the child in their story? Did they think it was innocent or evil? Having certain interim goals and parameters for their discussion will help to give them guidance and make the task clear to them. Not having these interim goals “leads to difficulties in Task-Based Teaching” according to Willis and Willis (157).
As a follow-up task to this, the teacher can initiate a class discussion about what the students thought made the stories frightening. This is also an opportunity to once again bring up the role of the child. Teacher-led discussions with questions like these will allow the students to think more deeply about the themes of the story and appreciate the subject more.

To conclude the task, the pupils will be asked to put together an outline for a ghost story of their own with the only parameters being that they must make use of elements that they have encountered in the previous parts of the task for their setting, narrator and characters. They should also include a child character in some role. Since this part should ideally be finished within one lesson or as homework for next time the outline should not be more than one page or 400 words long. This part of the task has been placed at the very end, because it will allow the pupils to put into practice what they have encountered while reading and discussing the stories, and thus understand better why they have studied as they have up until now. These are some of the motivations that Willis and Willis provide for putting focus on form in a task-based approach at the end of the process (25). In total, the plan should require about three or four scheduled lessons of about one hour each to complete.

To summarize, the themes prevalent in these three stories are suitable for teaching in the classroom, based on what the national curriculum says that pupils should learn during their time in class. They are also practical for use as study material based on their length and level of language and it is possible to construct a working lesson plan with several stages and focus on both meaning and language.
Conclusion

The purpose of this essay was to analyse how the three authors Elizabeth Gaskell, M. R. James, and Susan Hill both conform to the traditions of ghost stories and differentiate themselves from them by having children fill the role of ghosts in their stories. The original hypothesis was that children, possessing certain inherent characteristics such as innocence and purity in the minds of most adults, add a deeper level of fear when those innocent characteristics blend with the threatening aspects inherent in ghosts.

The first important finding is that all three settings have classic Gothic elements with large derelict manors and ruins. However, James’ manor is not ruined and he has his own antiquarian spin on the setting with a scholar seeking knowledge as the driving force behind the supernatural events. He also makes no use of the natural surroundings which is a typical Gothic trait that both Gaskell and Hill put great emphasis on. Hill also makes use of multiple settings from both the traditionally gothic and the antiquarian traditions. The second finding was that all three of them use a first-person narrator. However, James deviates from the norm by having a non-participant narrator that does not display any scepticism the way those of Gaskell and Hill do. All three stories use a divided timeframe by either making shifts in time to explore events of the past or make allusions future developments. This primarily serves the purpose of building suspense throughout the story as events occur and the mystery is gradually revealed. We can thus conclude that all three authors follow the conventions of the gothic horror story, but with a few differences between them.

It was found that all three authors use the traditional characteristics of innocence
and vulnerability for their child characters. This was especially noticeable in the observers as Rosamund and Stephen have no ill intentions whatsoever. Rosamund in particular cannot see any of the dangers around her because of her innocence and naiveté. Susan Hill has an adult in the role of observer so the childlike qualities are shown mostly in the ghost. This is something all three stories have in common as in every case the child ghost has been an innocent victim of abuse or cruelty which results in their deaths. They also display childlike characteristics in their actions. The child ghost in Gaskell’s story tries to lead her victim away by asking her to come out and play, whereas the ghosts in “Lost Hearts” serve as protectors of Stephen in the end by attacking the man who means to kill him. The ghost boy in Susan Hill’s story initially seems sweet and comforting to the main character, holding his hand like a trusting child.

However, we also saw that all of the ghost children have threatening qualities to them as well. They all haunt people who in turn are innocent victims who have done nothing wrong and so they come across as wrongdoers themselves. They are also threatening because of their otherworldly nature. In both Hill’s and Gaskell’s stories the ghosts have the supernatural ability to pull their intended victims to their doom with some invisible force. The ghosts in James’s story are absolutely monstrous in their appearance, which leaves no doubt that they are not alive and this frightens Stephen immediately. All three ghosts are justice seekers who are out to harm their wrongdoers in some way.

A final interesting finding was that Gaskell and James end their stories with all of the major questions of the mystery answered, such as how and why the ghost died, why they appear the way they do, their motivations, and the motivations of those responsible for the ghosts in the first place. Hill, on the other hand, does not answer any of these questions and other plot elements remain unsolved as well. Hence the story
lacks a sense of closure.

By going through the national curriculum for English we found that there are good reasons for students to learn about the Gothic as it is a part of the cultural history of the English-speaking world. It is also a topic that is both popular among young people and has been the focus of academic studies. The topic also lends itself well to lessons in the classroom. The students can read the stories or passages from them at home and discuss the conventions and their importance in groups afterward. The students may also produce their own texts and an outline for their own ghost story will allow them to put to use what they have learned about the conventions and about child characters in horror.

Over the course of these three stories we can see a distinct development in the child characters. The ghost girl in Gaskell’s story was limited to using her childlike traits to lure her victim out in the cold. She is mostly passive in the story and the same can be said for Rosamund. This could be a reflection of the times and author, as the story has almost no male characters in it and was written at a time when neither women nor children were expected to be very active or in control. Stephen, the child protagonist of “Lost Hearts”, has far more control and is more aware of the danger around him than Rosamund. The ghosts follow the same pattern as they take a much more active role in protecting Stephen and attacking Mr. Abney. This development could be a reflection of the changing image of the child at the time it was written, or it could be because the story is distinctly male. The only female character of any note is one of the ghosts and the two of them can be seen more as a pair entity rather than as individuals. Finally, The Small Hand is a story with predominantly male characters and written in contemporary times. The child ghost in this story is far more active than either of the other two and much more developed with an agenda and needs of its own. The story also adds an
additional twist by having a child be responsible for the death of young James. This is a stark contrast to the older stories, where only the supernatural children, male or female, are allowed to commit evil acts, and only when they also have justification to do so. Because of this, it is unlikely that the behaviour of James and young Hugo is a result of their gender roles. We can therefore conclude that it is a change in the way writers treat the child that has caused this development.

This leads to our final conclusion. Both of the older stories end with every thread of the plot solved and every question answered, while Hill leaves many questions still unsolved and several character motivations remain a mystery. The fact that we are never given a reason for young Hugo’s drowning of an innocent child is especially important to this essay because it illustrates the mix of innocence and threat and how the child has changed in modern ghost stories. The lack of closure in this matter makes young Hugo’s murder seem like the pointless and random act of a child, perhaps even a prank of sorts. The reader is never sure if young Hugo was simply evil or not, and the same can be said for young James as he clearly attempts to murder the innocent Adam but it is unclear what his exact motivations are. It is never clear if these two children are exceptionally malicious or if what we see is simply the human capacity for evil.

The final conclusion of this essay is that the nature of children is indeed a dual one. They arouse sympathy with their vulnerability because it is difficult to see them as anything but innocent creatures. On the other hand, they also inspire fear by subverting those expectations. An innocent request to come out and play can bring deadly danger and a hand that at first seems comforting can become a violent, vice-like grip. This gives them a unique role to fill in the genre of horror fiction as they are both the ideal victim and monster. When added to the conventions of the Gothic horror story they do indeed add the proverbial “turn of the screw” to a field of literature that already makes
our hair stand on end. Their role is an interesting and often overlooked element that has persevered through one hundred and fifty years of Gothic literature, and will likely endure for many years to come.
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