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"Hansel and Gretel" Films: Crimes, Harms, and Children[1]

Abstract:

A brutal narrative of child abandonment, murder, and cannibalism may not seem the conventional stuff of fairy tales to those trained for a Disney-eyed view. Yet that is exactly what "Hansel and Gretel" offers. Film versions across genres, including drama, noir, horror, slasher, thriller, comedy, and adventure, deal seriously with crimes against and harms to children. Many practices and behaviours that endanger and damage people of various ages in all kinds of contexts, including environmental degradation, economic exploitation, and many forms of discrimination, are not proscribed in the formal criminal justice system, and/or are beyond the jurisdiction of public institutions. Many actions and inactions that affect and/or pertain to children's wellbeing are found as recurring themes and ideas in "Hansel and Gretel" films. In this paper, the authors focus on non-supernatural, live-action films available in English for adult viewers that include child main characters, that is, those whose Hansels and Gretels are clearly below the age of puberty. These films, the authors contend, offer distinctive perspectives on harms to children as individuals and as groups, especially with relation to institutions implicating justice.

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Key words:
Charles Laughton, Christoph Hochhäusler, crimes, cultural criminology, Curtis Harrington, Danishka Esterhazy, fairy tale films, *H & G*, *Hansel and Gretel*, harms, Karel Kachyňa, *This Very Moment*, *Treeless Mountain*, *The Last Butterfly*, So Yong Kim, *The Night of the Hunter*, *Whoever Slew Auntie Roo?*

Filmy o Jasiu i Małgosi. Zbrodnie, krzywdy i dzieci

Abstrakt:
Brutalna narracja o opuszczeniu dzieci, morderstwie i kanibalizmie nie wydaje się konwencjonalnie baśniowa dla osób przyzwyczajonych do disnejowskiej perspektywy odbioru. Jednakże to właśnie tematyka *Jasia i Małgosi*. Filmowe wersje tej opowieści, reprezentujące różne gatunki – w tym dramat, film *noir*, horror, thriller, komedię i film przygodowy, poważnie traktują kwestię zbrodni i krzywd wyrządzanych dzieciom. Wiele praktyk i zachowań, które zagrażają i szkodzą ludziom w różnym wieku we wszelkiego rodzaju kontekstach, włączając degradację środowiska, wykorzystywanie ekonomiczne i rozmaite formy dyskryminacji, nie jest zabronionych przez formalny wymiar sprawiedliwości i/lub są one poza jurysdykcją instytucji publicznych. Wiele działań i zaniechań, które mają wpływ na dobrobyt dzieci i/lub się do nich odnoszą, to tematy i idee powtarzające się w filmach o Jasiu i Małgosi. Autorka i autor artykułu skupiają się na dostępnych w języku angielskim, niewykraczających poza poetykę realistyczną aktorskich filmach dla dorosłej publiczności, w których głównymi postaciami są dzieci, tzn. na tych, w których Jasiowie i Małgosie są wyraźnie poniżej wieku dojrzewania. Dochodzą do wniosku, że te filmy oferują wyróżniające się perspektywy postrzegania krzywd wyrządzanych dzieciom jako jednostkom i grupom, szczególnie w odniesieniu do instytucji związanych z wymiarem sprawiedliwości.

Słowa kluczowe:
Charles Laughton, Christoph Hochhäusler, zbrodnie, kryminologia kulturowa, Curtis Harrington, Danishka Esterhazy, baśniowe filmy, *H & G*, *Jaś i Małgosia*, krzywdy, Karel Kachyňa, *Zaginieni*, *Góra bez drzew*, *Ostatni motyl*, So Yong Kim, *Noc myśliwego*, *Whoever Slew Auntie Roo?* [Kto zabił cioteczkę Roo?]

A brutal narrative of child abandonment, murder, and cannibalism may not seem the conventional stuff of fairy tales to those trained for a Disney-eyed view. Yet that is exactly what "Hansel and Gretel" (ATU 327A) offers.[2] Like another exception to the feature film Disneyfication of fairy tales, "Little Red Riding Hood" (ATU 333; see e.g. Greenhill & Kohm, 2010), it has

[2] A[arne] T[hompson] U[ther] numbers refer to the folktale type index developed by Antti Aarne, expanded by Stith Thompson, and updated by Hans-Jörg Uther (2004).

nevertheless been the subject of many film versions, many aimed at adults not children. The story has been cinematically adapted for theatrical, television, and video/DVD release, including American, Australian, British, Canadian, Czech, Dutch, French, German, Israeli, Japanese, Korean, Polish, Soviet, and Spanish productions (see *International Fairy-Tale Filmography*; Greenhill, Magnus-Johnston, & Zipes, n.d.). Jack Zipes's (2011) *The Enchanted Screen* lists 41 "Hansel and Gretel" films produced between 1909 and 2007, not including the American *The Night of the Hunter* (Gregory & Laughton, 1955; hereafter referred to as *Night*) and the Czech/French/British *Poslední motýl* [The Last Butterfly] (North & Kachyňa, 1991; hereafter referred to as *Butterfly*). And more have appeared since, including at least five English-language live-action features in 2013, from the campy fantasy horror *Hansel & Gretel: Witch Hunters* (Ferrell, Flynn, McKay, Messick, & Wirkola, 2013) to the campy comedy horror *Hansel & Gretel Get Baked* (Cotton, Pollack, Sobel, Morgan, Hudson, Thompson, & Journey, 2013).

Across genres – drama, noir, horror, slasher, thriller, comedy, and adventure – many of these works deal seriously with crimes and harms to children and adults. We use the term 'harms' because many practices and behaviours that endanger and damage people of various ages in all kinds of contexts, including environmental degradation, economic exploitation, emotional abuse/neglect, and many forms of discrimination, are not proscribed in the formal criminal justice system; they are not codified as 'crimes.' Nor are they included in the purview of public institutions tasked with protecting young people. Many such actions that affect and/or pertain to children are found as recurring themes and ideas in "Hansel and Gretel" films relevant to cultural criminology.[3] Here, we focus on all non-supernatural, live-action films in English for adult viewers that include child main characters, that is, those whose Hansels and Gretels are clearly below the age of puberty. These films, we contend, offer perspectives on harms to and crimes against children as individuals and as groups that are distinct from the issues discussed in films about teenagers and adults.[4] In addition to *Night* and *Butterfly* (above), we look at the British *Whoever Slew Auntie Roo?* (Arkoff, Nicholson, & Harrington, 1971; hereafter

[3] Cultural criminology seeks to understand crime in its sociocultural context and explores how ideas of crime and criminality are shaped by cultural discourses including film, along with "the many ways in which cultural forces interweave with the practice of crime and crime control" (Ferrell, Hayward, & Young, 2008, p. 2).

[4] See the *International Fairy-Tale Filmography* for more "Hansel and Gretel" themed films (Greenhill, Magnus-Johnston, & Zipes, n.d.).

referred to as *Whoever*), the German/Polish *Milchwald* [This Very Moment] (Grollmann & Hochhäusler, 2003; hereafter referred to as *Moment*), the Korean/US *Na-moo-eobs-neun san* [Treeless Mountain] (Gray, Howe, Hoy, Knudsen, & Kim, 2008; hereafter referred to as *Treeless*), and the Canadian *H & G* (Gibson, Hirt, Sandulak, & Esterhazy, 2013).

Across language, culture, nationality (indicated above), time period (1950s–2010s), and genre, all these films show ambivalence toward formal institutional structures and the justice system, in particular for their inability to protect children. The continuities persist notwithstanding the distinctions.[5] Sometimes (as in *Night*, *Whoever*, and *Butterfly*), legal structures directly or indirectly damage children. The system also fails in *Moment*, *Treeless*, and *H & G* but it does so specifically because it cannot identify circumstances as harmful, nor mitigate them. We note that the earlier works reflect the first pattern, and the later the second, but a conclusion as to whether or not that reflects a trend would require a larger sample.[6]

The ambiguity of crimes and harms in these films shuts down any possibility for a traditional crime film wherein justice is at first absent but is ultimately re-established. Instead, these films explore crimes and harms without satisfying their viewer that everything will be fine in the end. The children may seem safe at the close of *Night*, *Whoever*, *Treeless*, and *H & G*, but what has preceded the conclusion suggests the solution may be temporary. In *Butterfly* and *Moment*, the children are clearly still directly in danger – on their way to a concentration camp and half naked on a deserted road, respectively.

Contemplation of what happens after seems built into these films' structures. Their ambivalence and ambiguity – avoiding simplistic fairy-tale conclusions in which evil is punished and virtue rewarded by living 'happily ever after' – render them critical films. They suggest the need for other solutions to difficult problems that address harms beyond the reach of conventional criminal justice interventions. Accordingly, these films question simple retribution

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[5] While cultural criminology focuses on the interplay between crime, culture, and society, the perspective is admittedly dominated by scholars working in Anglo-American contexts. The originators and key exponents of the movement work predominantly in the US and the UK (e.g. Ferrell, Hayward, & Young, 2008) and like all criminology there, lack significant engagement in other linguistic or cultural contexts. While the films we analyse originate within and reflect diverse Western and non-Western cultural, linguistic, and historical contexts, we cannot address those distinctions in the space available here; our analysis remains rooted in the Western and Anglo contexts that underpin cultural criminology itself.

[6] See, however, our discussion of patterns in paedophile crime films (Kohm & Greenhill, 2011).

and offer in its place an alternative conception that emphasises restoration, forgiveness, and reconciliation, key pillars of restorative justice. We, therefore, argue that these films constitute a critical popular criminology that troubles conventional models by placing harm at the centre of its conception of justice.

Crime Films and Fairy Tales

In crime films, symbolic representations of transgression and control render feelings and emotions central. Conventional crime films give audiences representations of criminal transgression in which perpetrators are located, condemned, and punished. But "in contrast to conventional narratives characterized by easy resolutions, critical films are dominated by open endings and characters who are neither good nor bad but inscrutable. In these contexts, the world, the self, and truth are volatile, unpredictable, and never fully knowable" (Rafter & Brown, 2011, pp. 6–7). The "Hansel and Gretel" films we discuss are critical in Nicole Rafter and Michelle Brown's sense, but in their own ways these movies are also postmodern because "viewers are […] left […] with no clear way of making sense of the criminal[/harms]; such films challenge the very idea of criminological explanation" (p. 6). While Majid Yar (2010) criticises a traditional/critical crime film dichotomy, arguing that films are multifaceted and contain "a complex coexistence of meanings that give voice to *both* socially conservative *and* critical viewpoints [emphases in original]" (p. 74), the duality assists us in exploring the ideological fairy-tale content of these films' popular representations of harm, crime, and justice.

With Rafter and Brown (2011), "we are not claiming merely that movies create cultural focal points and reproduce the emotional textures of crime[/harms] in ways that formal criminology cannot. Rather, we are claiming that images organize our worlds and that representations are central to our lives. Representations shape how we think about crime[/harms]" (p. 5). Thus, crime films are "a contested terrain in which conservative, liberal and radical voices propose different viewpoints on issues of morality, justice, order, fairness, violence and retribution" (Yar, 2010, p. 72). Taking "Hansel and Gretel" films seriously as a type of criminological discourse follows the movement to make "popular criminology" central in the discipline (Rafter, 2007; Rafter & Brown, 2011; Kohm, 2017). But it is also politically and culturally valuable to sort out just how ideological representations like "Hansel and Gretel" films affect the ways audiences might understand crimes and harms, as well as the ways they might understand fairy tales. Fictional films like these versions of

"Hansel and Gretel" may confront issues unacceptable or too complex for simple binaries of good and evil, innocent and guilty, perpetrator and victim. We focus, as most useful for cultural criminological analysis, on films that are: live action;[7] present-day or recent setting; realistic; aimed primarily at adult audiences; not based on the late-19th-century Humperdinck opera; and feature-length.[8] We discuss here all such films we could locate that were available in English as of 2018. We begin with a consideration of variation in the story.

"Hansel and Gretel" – Cannibals and Other Horrors

The best-known traditional version of "Hansel and Gretel" concerns a father persuaded by his wife, the children's stepmother, to abandon his daughter and son in the woods. Twice the kids find their way home, but eventually they become lost and encounter a gingerbread house, wherein a cannibal witch lives. She cages Hansel, and forces Gretel to do housework. The boy deceives the witch by proffering a stick or bone instead of his finger when she wants to test whether he is sufficiently fattened up for cooking. When she decides to cook him anyway, Gretel tricks the witch and pushes her into the oven. The children take the witch's treasure and, sometimes with supernatural help, bring it home to their now (again) widowed father. The tale can incorporate striking images evoking appropriate and inappropriate food, many of which have become cultural commonplaces, like the trail of breadcrumbs, the gingerbread house, the imprisoned Hansel's bony 'finger,' and the witch shoved into the oven. Many films for adults use these images which are sometimes the primary, or even the sole, link to the narrative.

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[7] Animated films, though conventionally associated with escapist family entertainment, admit many exceptions to that tendency, including *Jin-Roh: The Wolf Brigade* (Sugita, Terakawa, & Okiura, 1999), referencing "Little Red Riding Hood" (see Greenhill & Kohm, 2013).

[8] Distantly historicised or science fiction chronotopes may displace issues to another time and place; supernatural creatures and happenings may explain away crimes, harms, and their effects; child and/or family fare often censors or mitigates harm; shorter works allow less extended exposition of issues. Media scholars enjoin recognition of the vast differences between feature film and television production (e.g. Bignell, 2013). Rafter's (2006) groundbreaking study of crime films excluded TV productions because they are "shaped by different considerations of audience, artistic aspiration, duration and financing" (p. 7).

Within Europe, traditional versions of ATU 327A vary extensively. Zipes (2011) comments that in the manuscript on which the Grimms based their story:

> […] the children are not given lovely names; their mother is their biological mother; the children do not need the help of God to save themselves; they automatically return home with money that will guarantee a warm welcome. Indeed, the Grimms changed this oral tale that they had recorded, and in the process they demonized a stepmother, transformed the children into two pious innocents with cute names who trust in God, and added a silly duck that helps them across a pond to soothe a sobbing father, who does not show any grief about his dead wife, nor does he apologize for abandoning them (p. 194).

Cannibalistic figures in "Hansel and Gretel" can include not only witches, but also "ogres, giants, […] demons, and magicians" (Zipes, 2013, p. 121). There may be one child protagonist, or three; male and/or female; who may simply be lost, not abandoned. The house in the woods may have quite conventional construction materials. In an Italian version, the boy Peppe drinks from a magical brook that turns him into a sheep and his sister Maria "more beautiful than the sun" (p. 136). Maria grows up and marries a king. Her stepmother, jealous that Maria's success has exceeded her own daughter's, plots against the young queen. Both stepmother and stepsister are explicitly evil and receive gruesome punishments in the end, but their powers are not supernatural, and they are not cannibals. The stepmother (not a supernatural creature in the woods) as evil cannibal is also found in a Romanian version in which (like in the Italian story) the boy transforms, this time into a cuckoo (pp. 121–153). These extreme variations in tradition are not unlike those in the films which stray far from the familiar Grimm variant. The cinematic re-imagination of the tale to fit within new temporal and cultural contexts is a continuation of a much longer pattern of adaptation and transformation of oral tellings. Deviation from the well-known Grimm "Hansel and Gretel" does not invalidate creators' works as versions of the tale.

Zipes (2011) sees the story as dealing with "abandonment and the search for home" (p. 200) and links "Hansel and Gretel" with "Tom Thumb" (ATU 700), "The Pied Piper" legend, "Donkey Skin" (ATU 510B), and "The Juniper Tree" (ATU 720; see e.g. Greenhill & Brydon, 2010). He says that cinematic adaptations of these works "comment metaphorically on modern attitudes toward the maltreatment of children, the causes of physical abuse and violence suffered by young people, and the trauma of incest" (Zipes 2011, p. 193). Child disappearance, especially as motivated by stranger-danger/paedophilia fears

is remarkably absent, despite being a common trope in crime films generally since the 1980s (Kohm & Greenhill, 2011), though child sexual abuse often appears as an explanation for ambivalent or evil Hansel and Gretel adult characters' actions. Live-action films exploit their medium to enact and highlight the abuse theme, also present in some traditional versions.

Given the tale's aforementioned ghastly content, it is not surprising that "Hansel and Gretel" themed films aimed at adult audiences often invoke drama and/or horror. Zipes (2011) argues that most such works "tell the story of child abuse and abandonment from an adult perspective that diminishes or excuses the consequences of adult actions harmful to children. Even if the tale may point to the parents as culpable, there is a certain amount of rationalization of guilt and responsibility that shapes the telling of the tale" (p. 195). However, parents may be entirely absent or their (ir)responsibility and blame may be quite obvious, as in the first film.

Legal/Political Damage to Children by Institutions: Implicating Crimes

The Night of the Hunter *(directed by Charles Laughton, 1955)*

In the first three films, legal institutions directly and indirectly harm children, and kids are affected by and/or play parts in criminalised actions and responses to them. In *Night*, the law executes a father, stealing to provide for his family. His incarceration with another prisoner leads to that individual perpetrating harms and crimes upon the remaining family members. This moody American "lyrical horror film," "expressionist period piece," and "realistic fairy tale" (Couchman, 2009, p. 134), alludes to "Bluebeard" (ATU 312) and "Little Red Riding Hood" as well as to "Hansel and Gretel."[9] The Christianity of psychotic serial femicidal preacher Harry Powell (Robert Mitchum) tolerates murder but not sexuality. He marries Willa Harper (Shelley Winters), the widow of his hanged cellmate, Ben (Peter Graves), whose two children, John (Billy Chapin) and Pearl (Sally Jane Bruce), have hidden the money from their father's bank robbery. John has suspicions about his stepfather, confirmed when Powell threatens the children. Powell murders Willa, and claims she abandoned him

[9] Davis Grubb, on whose book the film is based, "identified Hans Christian Andersen as one of his masters" though *Night* "seems more strongly connected to the darker stories of the brothers Grimm" including "Hansel and Gretel" (Couchman, 2009, p. 43; see also pp. 41–44).

and the kids. When he withholds food and threatens to slit John's throat, Pearl reveals that the money is in her doll. The siblings escape with the doll, floating a boat down the river, watched by various animals. Powell follows.

Kindly widow Rachel Cooper (Lillian Gish) takes them into her home. Her Christianity, as fervent as Powell's, directs – unlike his – to forgiveness and to caring for orphaned and abandoned children. The preacher shows up, asserting he is the children's father, but Cooper defends them with her shotgun, eventually shooting him. When the police come to arrest Powell, John recalls his father's arrest and protests, revealing the money doll and refusing to identify Powell as his mother's murderer. A vigilante mob gathers, brandishing ropes and farm implements, but the police take Powell away. The concluding Christmas scenes with Cooper and the children suggest a happy-ever-after.

This "eccentric and weird" chiller (Bauer, 1999, p. 614), an "oddball classic" (Vineberg, 1991, p. 27), explores in (perhaps surprisingly for its time) often critical, postmodern modes, ideas around harm, criminality, and psychosis, beginning with parental figures – a mother, father, and step*father* – who, like Hansel and Gretel's father and step*mother*, fail rather spectacularly to care for John and Pearl. The boy's empathy for Powell during his arrest and trial underlines the link John traces between the preacher and his biological father, and their intertwined fates. This connection emphasises their common criminality, but also their ambivalence. Biofather Ben robs a bank for a benevolent reason – caring for his family – but kills two men in the process and is executed by the state for his crime. Evil stepfather Powell is also a thief and killer, and Bluebeard-like, a serial wife-murderer, who takes their money; but that does not prevent young John's forgiveness – an echo of the New Testament Christianity that pervades the film that hints at a restorative rather than retributive approach to justice. And while biofather Ben unwillingly leaves his wife and family too soon, stepfather Powell relentlessly follows John and Pearl when they run away, refusing to relinquish his hold over them. But as in the best-known version of "Hansel and Gretel," John forgives both father and, perhaps more inexplicably, stepfather – a further disavowal of justice as retribution.

Willa's death literalises her seeming numbness and absence. She differs from the vibrant, warm, and caring stepmother Cooper, no "Hansel and Gretel" witch, whose house is a refuge filled with good food. However, though arguably Powell is the stepfather/witch figure, he and Cooper both seem equally obsessed with Christianity. Cooper repeatedly tells her charges Bible stories, and when Powell threatens her houseful of children, he sings his constant refrain, the hymn "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms," and she sings along. Perhaps director Laughton chose this song to allude to the American right to bear arms:

the film's good characters – father Harper and stepmother Cooper – both use firearms to defend their families, while evil preacher Powell's weapon of choice is a switchblade.

Night's film noir visuals obscure its very non-noir emphasis on Christianity, clear judgements of good and evil in polarising Powell and Cooper (if not the other characters), and apparently happy conclusion. It fits the conventional idea of fairy tales (see e.g. Bauer, 1999), "with all the elements in place – a wicked step-parent, a pair of innocent, besieged orphans, a perilous journey, and even a fairy godmother" (Vineberg, 1991, p. 27). It superficially resembles a conventional crime film in concluding with Powell's arrest. But more disturbingly ambivalent characters nevertheless surface. For example, the community did nothing to take care of young John and Pearl, yet they are eager to enact vigilante justice.

Night's American dustbowl Southern Gothic setting shows that poverty and hunger are *socially* rooted, extreme wealth co-existing with extreme poverty. Etiologically, crime is explicable as a rational response to intolerable conditions. No amount of labour can save the Harpers' farm; Ben is driven to criminal acts by a lack of legal options to feed and support his family, but perhaps the community could have offered an alternative to crime rather than vigilante action after the fact. Specific to "Hansel and Gretel" films is this very notion that family may be insufficient to the task of raising children. Ideally, as in *Night*, unrelated community members become caregivers to orphaned and/or abandoned children. However, as the next film demonstrates, many endangered children must rely on themselves, sometimes with dire consequences.

Whoever Slew Auntie Roo? *(directed by Curtis Harrington, 1971)*

Institutional child welfare dismally fails its charges in this film. Here "comedy and horror collapse into one another, exchanging places in syncopation with sudden, inexplicable shifts among expressions of love, hostility, and aggression between generations" (Morrison, 2010, p. 134). In this British horror-thriller, set before World War I, the kindly orphanage nurse describes the two child protagonists as "abandoned." Every Christmas, Mrs. Forrest, called Aunt Roo (Shelley Winters), invites ten orphans to a feast at her "Gingerbread House" (with architectural gingerbread). Christopher (Mark Lester), an inveterate storyteller, and his sister Katy (Chloe Franks) sneak in and Aunt Roo accepts them. Katy overhears a phony séance conducted by Mr. Benton (Ralph Richardson) and servants Albie (Michael Gothard) and Clarine (Judy Cornwell), thinking that calls to "Katherine" (Aunt Roo's dead daughter, whose mummified corpse

she keeps in the attic nursery) are addressed to her. Aunt Roo locks Katy in the nursery when the other children return to the orphanage. Christopher returns to find her; he describes seeing Aunt Roo with the corpse, but the adults disbelieve him. Convinced that Aunt Roo is a witch fattening him and his sister for slaughter, as in the "Hansel and Gretel" tale, Christopher tells Katy and the two try to escape. Aunt Roo becomes more and more delusional. Christopher locks her in the pantry and burns her house down, having taken her jewellery and hidden it in Katherine's teddy bear, appropriated by Katy.

The narrative is remarkably ambivalent, as are the characters. Christopher's role echoes Gretel's more than Hansel's, when Aunt Roo forces him to do domestic chores and he ultimately becomes the instrument of her demise. Yet he is wrong in thinking that Aunt Roo wants to kill and eat him and Katy. The woman wants to adopt Katy, though she is indifferent to Christopher, but lacks confidence that the system will allow her. The film suggests she may have been careless in allowing her daughter to slide down the banister, so that Katherine falls to her death. But Aunt Roo is hyper-vigilant in caring for Katy, though her references to fattening the children up, and her food preparation methods using large knives and cleavers, signify cannibalistic witchery to Christopher.

The boy's imagination along with his knowledge of fairy tales leads to Aunt Roo's death. The story does not pit good, forgiving children against an evil adult, as in *Night*. Instead, a series of misunderstandings and miscues lead amoral children and a mentally unstable woman to make poor choices thus suggesting the causes of crime are anything but straightforward or subject to rational explanation. Yet the film does not invite viewers to mourn Aunt Roo; Winters plays her as a psycho-biddy, too shrill, whiny, and crazed to elicit much sympathy. The self-interested children in the end have not only Katy's beloved teddy bear – as in *Night*, a children's toy secreting treasure – but also Aunt Roo's jewels. The film concludes with Christopher's voiceover: "Hansel and Gretel knew that the wicked witch could not harm anyone else and they were happy. They also knew that with the wicked witch's treasure they would not be hungry again. So they lived happily ever after" (Arkoff, Nicholson, & Harrington, 1971).

To an extent, this film debunks childhood innocence, but is far from explaining away adult actions; it blames them for setting up the circumstances that foster evil. Those in charge of the orphanage wherein Christopher and Katy are incarcerated (as they see it) are inflexible, punitive, and unsympathetic to their charges' plights. Further, James Morrison (2010) argues:

> *Whoever Slew Auntie Roo?* virtually remakes *The Night of the Hunter* with Winters, in an eerie, campy displacement, in the Robert Mitchum role. In the film's

> last third, Winters shuttles between enacting avuncular tenderness and shrewish malevolence, both in registers of muffled hilarity, with no framing perspective to explain these startling alternations or to ground the shifting attitudes. The ending refuses to establish whether Auntie Roo's death is a form of justice or an unspeakable cruelty, the murderous outcome of the children's malicious delusions (p. 135).

Winters's Aunt Roo is considerably more complex than Mitchum's purely evil Powell; further, *Night*'s children are angelic and *Whoever*'s ambivalent. Yet the links are telling. As a crime film, etiological ambiguity and allusions to a "twisted psyche" (Rafter, 2006, p. 30) make *Whoever* less straightforward and conventional in its popular criminological content, without direct critique of the origins of violence, abuse, or neglect of children. Comparable (potentially) evil children (and sometimes teens or adults) appear in many "Hansel and Gretel" films, but in the following, they are obviously victimised.

The Last Butterfly *(directed by Karel Kachyňa, 1991)*

The legal political system is itself criminal in this Holocaust drama focusing on French mime artist Antoine Moreau (Tom Courtenay), who mocks the Nazi salute during a performance in occupied Paris. The non-Jewish Moreau is sent to Terezín. The Nazis contract him to stage a performance to demonstrate to an International Red Cross delegation that this model concentration camp is benign (see American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, n.d.). When he realises that children are sent on the transports to death camps, Moreau decides to stage "Hansel and Gretel" "with a few small changes" (North & Kachyňa, 1991). The show begins innocuously with a colourful gingerbread wall, but it falls away to reveal caged children. They try to escape the witch but she sends them screaming into the oven. Moreau rescues them, and the children, wearing yellow stars of David, rejoice. After the show, the Red Cross delegates ask to speak with Moreau, but the Nazis claim he has returned to Paris; in fact, they have dispatched him with all the performers to the gas chambers. The film closes with black-and-white scenes of the (now dead) characters reuniting with their (also deceased) loved ones.

The witch is played alternately by Moreau and the children's caretaker Vera (Brigitte Fossey). Their adult status marks their difference from the rest of the actors, who are children. *Butterfly* metonymically references the Holocaust in a context that implies that harms to children are worse than the same harms to adults. Moreau is spurred to artistic action only by knowledge that the young as well as the old go to their deaths. The film apparently shares his ageist presumption.

We note that the murders of Jews and their supporters, as well as the violent suppression of dissent, are legal in the historical context. Consequently, genocide studies scholars have not typically approached the subject from a criminological standpoint. Many acts of genocide were legally authorised – often with considerable public support – and are, therefore, not amenable to conventional criminological theory or criminal justice interventions. For example, Christiane Wilke (2010) argues that German law remains haunted by the actions of judges who were complicit in upholding the morally corrupt laws of the Nazi regime – pointing to the need for justice beyond what can be found in the formal judicial system. The example of Terezín shows that formal justice can be no more than a smoke screen which obscures the true purpose of the Holocaust – genocide.

Moreau's mock salute, as well as his sombre fairy-tale staging, are seen by the diegetic Nazi audience as both insult and provocation. Yet the latter's content is insufficiently obvious for successful decoding. The rehearsal's summary dispatching of Hansel and Gretel by the witch gives way to multiple children (not only Hansel and Gretel) sent to the ovens wearing stars of David. Yet it is the children in the oven, not the witch, who pull and persuade their cohort to their deaths, and Moreau who saves them. This rescue takes power from the hands of the expected child liberator, Gretel, though the play's children collectively push the witch into the oven. The film declines to confirm if Moreau and his troupe would have been headed to the gas chambers regardless of the play's content. Yet their presentation remains a gesture of defiance.

While criminologists have addressed a range of harms beyond conventional street crimes, a fulsome criminology of genocide – the crime of all crimes – is in its infancy (Rafter, 2016). Nevertheless, an analysis of genocide films like *Butterfly* offers important insights into "questions about witnessing, remembering and the possibility of closure" (Brown & Rafter, 2013, p. 1018). Interweaving the well-known fairy tale into a Holocaust film allows an accessible entry point for viewers and "a space from which to work through the meanings that will enter collective memory and historical consciousness" (p. 1019). While not conventionally thought of as a *crime* film, *Butterfly* provides a popular criminological exploration of harms to children on an enormous scale that demand responses beyond what the conventional criminal justice system can deliver: recognition and reconciliation. The film fails to develop a cogent etiology of crime. It shows the innocent children of Terezín stealing out of hunger and other needs. Their 'criminal' behaviour's punishment is the same as all others in the model camp – deportation by train to a concentration camp and death. Conversely, the historical, cultural, and political roots of genocide remain unexplained in the film.

The System and Families Both Fail: Implicating Harms

This Very Moment *(directed by Christoph Hochhäusler, 2003)*

The children in *Moment* have all their material needs met. Arguably their unmet need for love and attention from their father leads to them hounding their stepmother. Their class and economic privilege make these kids unlikely candidates for institutional concern. Neither the patriarchal system nor the family patriarch can recognise the danger or the stepmother's desperate need for support and help; they simply presume her gender and privilege are sufficient.[10] Silvia (Judith Engel), infuriated with her stepchildren's behaviour, leaves Lea (Sophie Charlotte Conrad) and Konstantin (Leo Bruckmann) on a roadside during a shopping trip in Poland but quickly returns to find them gone. She goes back home, pretending all is well. When it becomes clear the kids are missing, she and father Josef (Horst-Günter Marx) and the police search for the children. The boy and the girl wander, sometimes seeking help, and encounter the underclass, trailer-dwelling Kuba (Mirosław Baka) who treats them kindly but sees an opportunity to make money. He intends to return them, but when the suspicious Lea tries to poison him, he too abandons the children. The film concludes with the kids on the road, the parents searching, and Silvia still unable to tell Josef what she has done (see also Zipes, 2011, pp. 202–204; Polak-Springer, 2011).

As Allison Norris (2013) points out, in this film (and *H & G*, discussed below), "the children's survival is, and likely will always be, entirely reliant on their own capacity" (n.p.). As in *Whoever*, they are no angels; they reject all their stepmother's efforts to get along with them and Lea actively antagonises her. Silvia is more childish than wicked; though the stepmother's character and motivations differ from the equally ambivalent witch/ogre Kuba, they abandon the children in similar circumstances. Direct abuse is absent, and indeed the film viewer may understand and sympathise with Silvia's and Kuba's reactions. When children (as they do!) torment their caregivers, society expects those adults to avoid responding in kind. Indeed, unlike Moreau in *Butterfly*, *Moment* (and, below, *Treeless* and *H & G*) allows for recognition of the difficulties and needs of adults, not only of children.

As a popular criminological interrogation of child neglect/abuse, *Moment* avoids binary good and bad characters and the simple resolution of justice restored characteristic of conventional crime films. Instead, it invites identification with a neglectful parent and invests the children with a capacity for

[10] See Greenhill (2014) on the institutionalised contradictions of motherhood, regardless of class, and its potentially fatal consequences.

evil. Yvonne Jewkes (2015, p. 126–127) points out that cultural depictions of children can embody deep seated ambivalence and tend to vacillate between the child as innocent victim or evil perpetrator (as in *Whoever*). However, by combining elements of both polarities, a film like *Moment* provides a popular criminological space for critical reflection about societal ambivalence toward children and motherhood more generally. The film’s lack of clear resolution marks it as alternative, as does its ambivalence toward parental neglect. Like many other examples using fairy tales like “The Juniper Tree,” this film and the next allow for the difficulties of parenting, though they also clearly demonstrate the dire implications for children of failures therein.

Treeless Mountain *(directed by So Yong Kim, 2008)*

If *Moment*’s Silvia had access to emotional support from her husband, from other women, or from institutions its outcome might be different. But in *Treeless*, the issues are economic as well as interactional. A single mother struggles in the absence of family and community, and the practice of locating her problems in the private sphere (her ex-husband does not provide) means she lacks options. This film returns the consideration to the innocent, blameless child protagonists of *Night* and *Butterfly*. Jin (Hee-yeon Kim) and her younger sister Bin (Song-hee Kim) live with their mother (Soo-ah Lee) who struggles personally and financially, and takes them to stay with their paternal ‘Big Aunt’ (Mi-hyang Kim) outside the city, promising to return when their piggy bank is full. Big Aunt’s care is lax; sometimes there is no food in the house and she fails to send Jin to school. The kids roast and sell grasshoppers to make money and fill their piggy bank, but a letter arrives telling Big Aunt to take them to their maternal grandparents’ farm. Their grandmother (Park Boon Tak) immediately welcomes and feeds them. Though they continue to work hard, they also play with each other, smiling and laughing. They give their piggy bank to their grandmother to buy new shoes.

Though Jin and Bin end the film walking through a field, the situation differs somewhat from the obvious uncertain liminality of *Moment*. An adult has finally taken loving responsibility for the children; though an apparent candidate for the old evil witch, living on a farm, and thus arguably in a house within nature (if not in the woods per se), the grandmother is her opposite. No longer does young Jin need to provide care to even younger Bin, as in the film’s opening. The transformation, as in *Night*, is that they can again be children.

As a popular criminology of child neglect, *Treeless* offers a realistic and straightforward depiction of the issue, situating the resolution to neglect within

the biological family. While more than one blood relative fails the children, ultimately grandparents provide the necessary care. However, given the prior failures of the mother and maternal aunt, the film hints that the present happy circumstances for the children may be only provisional. Like most domestic harms, the neglect of the children is presented as a family matter and not subject to state intervention. As such, the film aligns with reality for most abused and neglected children in that their suffering is often not conceived as criminal but rather merely a private domestic matter.

Analysing this film using "Hansel and Gretel" brings attention to the needs of children, rejected by their biological parents and then by a stepmother/witch figure (Big Aunt), to fend for themselves. Yet they eventually find their gingerbread house of plentiful food and a caring witch, reversing the conventional story. But their happiness could be as short as their grandparents' lives; soon enough they may be back on the road like Lea and Konsti. The next film offers another story of neglected children of a single parent, and an older child who must take care of a younger – though its ending is again ambivalent.

H & G *(directed by Danishka Esterhazy, 2013)*

As in *Treeless*, poverty and lack of institutional support both endanger innocent children. This neorealist retelling sets the story in present-day Winnipeg, Canada; stepparent and witch figures are male. The film deals with "the cyclical nature of abuse and neglect" (Norris, 2013, n.p.) and centrally concerns children who are at best victims of an overburdened single mother, or at worst in grave danger of physical harm at the hands of several adult strangers they encounter on a rural pig farm. Loving but sometimes negligent mother Krysstal (Ashley Rebecca Moore) focuses more on her new romantic relationship with Garry (Erik Athavale) than on the care of her children Harley, six (Annika Elyse Irving), and Gemma, eight (Breazy Diduck-Wilson).

After a night of drinking and partying, the couple argues while the children sleep in the backseat of Garry's car. Garry angrily ejects Krysstal beside a rural highway and speeds away, forgetting that the two kids are still in the car. He abandons them further down the road, leaving Gemma to care for her little brother alone in the woods. The children are taken in by a young pig farmer, Brenden (Tony Porteous), who provides food, shelter, and more attention than their mother. Unable to reach Krysstal on her phone (which she left in Garry's car), the two children settle into life on the farm. However, their respite is disrupted when Brenden's brother Willy (Dan Baker-Moor) shows up and a loud drinking party ensues. The children become fearful of a drunk and potentially

violent Brenden and his friends and flee to the highway where a kindly Indigenous woman (Sherry Kaluyahawi Starr) offers assistance.

Like the other films, *H & G* inverts expectations by using character and role reversals to highlight important themes. In the earliest scenes, Gemma looks after her younger brother (recalling *Treeless*). Even before the primary caretaker role is thrust upon her in the woods, she wakes up well before her mother and ensures Harley receives breakfast. Later at the farm, the girl becomes upset when Brenden bathes her brother, stating: "That's my job!" (Gibson, Hirt, Sandulak, & Esterhazy, 2013). Gemma, the most responsible member of the young family, acts as a voice of maturity and reason, and rescues her mother from sticky situations, and Harley and herself during the chaos on the pig farm.

H & G uses the plot and imagery of "Hansel and Gretel" to drive the story of neglected and imperiled children. Director Esterhazy deliberately diverged from the best-known versions of this tale in that she sought to create more sympathetic female characters to counter its evil stepmother and witch. The script describes Krysstal as "early 20s, pretty, an exhausted young mother" (Norris, 2013, n.p.). The film complicates the sympathetic father and evil stepmother, instead constructing the neglectful but loving single mother and initially playful boyfriend. Gone is the concerted plan to abandon the children. Also gone is the old witch, replaced by farmer Brenden, who provides the kids with food and shelter.

Harley appears preoccupied with food and eating. The first morning in the woods, he is delighted to learn that berries can be had in abundance for free. Gemma, on the other hand, seems more concerned that Harley be fed than with her own needs. She prepares his breakfast in the first scenes. She tells Brenden that Harley is hungry the second day on the farm, urges her brother to eat his bread crusts, and discourages further eating when he complains of hunger in the evening. Gemma is the one who discovers clues that lead the audience to believe Brenden's (or perhaps brother Willy's) appetite might be paedophilic.

Canadian audiences read the pig farm and the brothers' abuse of a young woman, possibly a sex worker, as reference to notorious serial killer Robert (Willie) Pickton's kidnapping and murder of street-involved women from Vancouver (see Jiwani & Young, 2006). But the film leaves open many questions. Could human remains be stored in the freezer for consumption? What sort of bones does Harley discover in a bucket near the freezer? Why is there a pile of expended shotgun shell casings near the shed? Consequently, the film lies toward the alternative end of the crime film dichotomy though it offers little in way of explanation or resolution to the plight of endangered children. While

many aspects of the film are shrouded in ambiguity, the theme of hunger ties the adaptation firmly to the traditional tale, including the children's longing for love, protection, and understanding.

Family Dramas: (For) Good or Ill

Families, as in conventional versions of "Hansel and Gretel," are both a sanctuary and a problem. To avoid harm, the children in these films, whose parents are absent or problematic, need something more than their nuclear families. "Hansel and Gretel" appears in these films sometimes by direct presentation or reference (as in *Butterfly*'s play or *H & G*'s title and character paralleling), but each one has lost, abandoned, and/or neglected primary characters. Those children, like Hansel and Gretel, may go in search of food and/or shelter, a quest which always leads to more difficulties, however initially attractive sustenance and/or refuge may appear (particularly in *Whoever*, *Treeless*, and *H & G*). Direct violence and abuse, particularly sexual abuse, is usually more implied than explicitly presented in these films, unlike so many "Little Red Riding Hood" films which address those issues head-on (see e.g. Kohm and Greenhill, 2014). Instead, children in these films are placed into danger as a result of neglect and/or criminal actions.

In all these films, the search for shelter from, but also in, the world can echo "Hansel and Gretel" in which "[t]he witch's house is a parallel of the parents' house: it is dominated by a woman (who hides her cruel intentions behind a friendly appearance)" (Holbek, 1987, pp. 393–394). The women in the films' original homes are more ambivalent than cruel per se; they focus on their own needs over those of the children in their care. Often the movies decline to judge them, implicitly recognising the difficulties of their positions as single mothers (*Night*, *Treeless*, and *H & G*) or otherwise lacking support (*Moment*). And in *Whoever*'s orphanage and *Butterfly*'s Terezín, one woman's caring is insufficient to protect children from difficult, even murderous, contexts.

But as in tale versions, in films the houses can also offer "contrasts: the house of the parents is *outside* the forest; that of the witch is *in* it; the former has no food, the latter has food in abundance [emphasis added]" (Holbek, 1987, p. 394). A true refuge may be discoverable, as in *Night* or *Treeless*, but much more often the children end up on the road again, travelling to an explicitly dangerous/murderous place (as in *Butterfly*), or an uncertain one as in *Whoever*, *Moment*, and *H & G*. In their liminal locations, more harms, including criminal, are possible, even likely. The films fail to resolve as the conventional

"Hansel and Gretel" does, with the children safely home with a father who now, thanks to them, has the means to take care of them. For the most part, the films also do not directly address the roots of crime, abuse, and neglect. Rather, ambiguity or silence on etiological matters diverge from traditional crime films and might potentially invite audiences to view the issue of child abuse, neglect, or even the crime of genocide, in critical ways.

Food also figures in these films. In *Night*, the need for sustenance motivates the desperate father's bank robbery, and the withdrawal of food confirms the stepfather's evil. In *Whoever*, the Christmas feast draws children to Aunt Roo, and her later food preparation makes Christopher suspicious and leads to him murdering her. In *Butterfly*, the lack of (adequate) food in Terezín leads to the child who will play Gretel stealing. When Moreau defends her, she is replaced on the train to the concentration camp with another child. The public display of food is also offered to the Red Cross to indicate that all is well in Terezín; but like the witch's gingerbread house, it is a trap and a sham. Initially in *Moment*, Kuba's signal to the children that he is their friend is through offering them food – it also, of course, likens him to the witch. *Treeless*'s Big Aunt fails to provide adequate food for the two children, but also their source of money to fill their piggy bank is a foodstuff, grasshoppers, which they roast and sell. And as in *Moment*, in *H & G* the witch/stepfather Brenden provides abundant food for the children, signalling (at least to Harley) that he is their friend.

Like some traditional versions, but also like realist live action "Hansel and Gretel" films which make the main characters older teens or adults, often the two primary characters are misbehaving or even vengeful rather than innocent, reflecting what Jewkes (2015, p. 126–127) describes as a broader societal ambivalence toward children and youth more generally. *Whoever*'s Christopher murders the stepmother/witch, burning her to death in a pantry, perhaps echoing the conventional Grimm oven – but the Gretel figure, Katy, unlike her Grimm counterpart, remains innocent. The gender reversal of the clever/active character who kills the witch – making it Hansel, not Gretel – echoes sexist notions that females need to be saved by males. In *Night*, too, it is John not Pearl who takes charge. *Moment*'s bratty Lea, in contrast, is clearly the ringleader and main instigator. *H & G* has Gemma in control, as would be expected of its feminist writer/director Esterhazy.

The filmic practice of creating an identity/homology between the stepmother and the witch is less clear in these realist films about children than it is in realist films about adults or in children's films (see e.g. Greenhill, 2020). Perhaps only in *Whoever* are the characters truly merged. In *Treeless*, the grandmother, who by her age and somewhat ragged appearance might be

mistaken for a witch character, turns out to be the kindest and best of all the children's caregivers. But very crucially, *Night*, *Moment*, and *H & G* explicitly reverse their evil characters' gender. *Night* has an evil stepfather and a good witch; *Moment* a harried, overwhelmed, and herself childish stepmother and a male witch; *H & G* has a biomother similar to stepmother Silvia in *Moment*, and a male witch.

Much of this reversal from convention in the fairy tale reflects the films' striking shared interest in complex relationships between male characters: in *Night* between John and his preacher stepfather, in *Moment* between Kuba and Konstantin, and in *H & G* between Harley and Brenden. Despite the witch/stepfathers' shortcomings – including murder and perhaps even cannibalism – their stepsons clearly love and forgive them. In each of these films, the children's fear of harm is overshadowed by their need for a relationship with their stepfather/witch.

These films very clearly invoke crime's emotive qualities – hurt, rage, harm, terror, yet also the grinding on of everyday life that continues in its wake. None seeks an objective, empirical view. They bring what Mike Presdee (2000) felicitously termed the carnival of crime – "the performance of excitement and transgression [which includes] ecstatic, marginal, chaotic acts [wherein] damage is done, people are hurt and some 'pleasurable' performances reflect on or articulate pain" (p. 32). Unlike some fairy-tale films which actively seek to revise popular notions of criminals and crime – think, for example, of *The Woodsman*'s (Daniels & Kassell, 2004) implicit call for sympathy/empathy for a paedophile (Kohm & Greenhill, 2014) – these films play with social relations of order and disorder.

Yet by avoiding neat resolutions and failing to clearly demonstrate the triumph of good over evil, these films form part of a growing oeuvre of works that open up popular cultural spaces for examining questions of justice by engaging sensitive topics (Kohm & Greenhill, 2011). Given Hollywood's longstanding interest in films interrogating murdered, missing, and abused children, it is noteworthy that films incorporating elements of ATU 327A diverge from mainstream filmic treatments of the subject. Cultural criminologists have only just begun to open their lines of inquiry to works that explore areas on the margins of mainstream criminality including child neglect. The ambivalence shown to that subject in the films discussed above should be of particular interest to cultural criminology – but also to analysts of child culture.

Though these are all realist, live action films, each includes crucial moments that perhaps go beyond simplistic notions of realism. *Night*'s Pearl

and John’s dreamy floating down the river, watched by a series of implicitly friendly animals, may invoke for current audiences a Disney animated feature fairy tale, but at the time it was made, only *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Disney, Cottrell, Hand, Jackson, Morey, Pearce, & Sharpsteen, 1937), and *Cinderella* (Disney, Geronimi, Jackson, & Luske, 1950) were available, so Disney traction would have been less firm. Instead, this scene demonstrates the children’s sense of harm, but also their hope for rescue. *Whoever*’s over-the-top Aunt Roo plays with *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960) when its title character “keeps her little daughter’s decaying corpse entombed secretly in an attic nursery” (Morrison, 2010, p. 134); a female – not male – character preserves her daughter – not mother – in the attic – not basement. *Butterfly* juxtaposes the real with the imagined when it presents, in black and white, the reunions between primary characters, victims of concentration camp gas chambers and ovens, and their loved ones. Even the more social realist *Moment*, *Treeless*, and *H & G* offer their Hansels and Gretels respite from their difficult lives – at a carnival, gathering grasshoppers, or playing in a field. These films enact, sometimes transgressively, multiple concepts of harm and crime, but also a sense of how the absence of harm and crime might be possible, in ways that beg multiple viewer responses.

Rather than directing viewers toward the simple pleasure of a binary “double movement” (Rafter, 2006, p. 3) of justice denied – justice restored, these films offer a more complex cultural space in which to contemplate issues of neglect and harms to children that allow for conceptions of justice that recognise non-criminalised harms beyond the formal criminal justice system or conventional acts of retribution, as well as sometimes hinting at alternatives and critical solutions.

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