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## Neil Gaiman's Ghost Children

People populate the darkness; with ghosts, with gods, with electrons, with tales.  
(Neil Gaiman, *American Gods*, 418)

**Abstract:** The article examines Gaiman's use of the ghost child motif in *The Sandman* (1989–1996), *Coraline* (2002) and *The Graveyard Book* (2008). It outlines the special symbolic tensions that result from the conflicting images of “ghost” and “child” and shows that Gaiman focusses on a liminal space between the two, in the shape of half-ghosts, or “dead boy detectives”. The paper suggests three emotional movements for the ghost plotlines of the analysed stories: from terror to hope, from pity to salvation and from desolation to connectedness. From this it concludes that Gaiman's stories represent the ghost child motif as symbol for a positive relation with Death.

Ghosts and ghost stories are essential to the storytelling of Neil Gaiman. He tells their tales with rhetoric emphasis, savouring the scary moments, evoking an emotional intensity that forcefully underlines the suspension of disbelief. If we are scared of ghosts, how can they not have at least some kind of reality? To give the conclusion at the beginning: one of the hallmarks of Gaiman's use of the ghost child motif is a playful uncertainty, a fanciful desire that there really *should* be ghosts, but (un-)fortunately they exist only in fiction. This leads to the creation of a new type of “half-ghost” in his writing. We can sense this positive sentiment towards ghosts for example when listening to Gaiman's reading performance of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, which is, above all, a joyful performance. Especially significant is the initial encounter between Scrooge and Marley's ghost, in which supernatural fear disrupts and overcomes the banality of the mundane and cold hearted Scrooge. Fear of ghosts is here the first step to redemption:

‘You don't believe in me,’ observed the Ghost.

‘I don't,’ said Scrooge. (Dickens 18)

[...]

Scrooge fell upon his knees, and clasped his hands before his face.

‘Mercy!’ he said. ‘Dreadful apparition, why do you trouble me?’

‘Man of the worldly mind!’ replied the Ghost, ‘do you believe in me or not?’

‘I do,’ said Scrooge. ‘I must. [...]’ (Dickens 19)<sup>1</sup>

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1 Neil Gaiman's reading from December 2013 in the New York Public Library is available as podcast.

Neil Gaiman gleefully emphasises the supernatural horror in his performance. Generally, he adapts the joyful telling of dark stories to contemporary tastes. He works to reinvent the horror genre, and not only for young readers. To exemplify this, the following article will throw light on how Gaiman uses ghost motives, with special attention to the ghosts of children, in *The Sandman* (1989–1996), *Coraline* (2002) and *The Graveyard Book* (2008).<sup>2</sup> To understand Gaiman’s use of ghost children, the paper presents possible affective reactions of the implied reader and outlines emotional swings or oscillating pairs of emotions as characteristic of Gaiman’s approach.

The profoundly “oscillating” character of fear is obvious: “chill”, “shiver”, “tremble”, “rattle”, “heart-pounding” and so on; many fright related expressions, as well as the corresponding bodily manifestations of fear, imply oscillating movements. Likewise, frightening fiction, and especially ghost stories, embrace different narrative rhythms of tension and relaxation. Typically, the genre’s dramaturgy oscillates between poles such as the known and the unknown, safety and danger, natural and supernatural, past and present, life and death – each associated with a variety of intense emotions. In the second part of the paper, this emotional pendulum is described in three stories: from terror to hope (*The Sandman*), from pity to salvation (*Coraline*) and from desolation to connectedness (*The Graveyard Book*).

First, however, it is necessary to outline the wider significance of ghosts and scary fiction for children, as well as the special emotional contradictions that are implied by the idea of ghost children. Contemporary children’s literature criticism acknowledges that ghost stories, and in the wider sense scary fictions, play elementary roles in growing (up). Bettelheim’s *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976) has argued that especially the dark symbolism of fairy tales – and this includes ghosts – has psychologically positive and necessary functions for the mental development of children. Bettelheim’s work has defended and reinforced a view on the “healthy Gothic” that accompanies the contemporarily widespread acceptance of the elements of horror in fiction for children. Consequently, psychological criticism of children’s horror fiction is a common mode of analysis. For example Karen Coats concludes an analysis of Gaiman’s *Coraline* with the beneficial effects of the Gothic from a developmental perspective:

This may be yet another function of the Gothic for outwardly stable, well-loved children. Their worlds do not provide them with circumstances that adequately represent for them

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2 The original presentation of this paper was done with the focus on the graphic novels to these stories, some references to these texts and illustrations remain.

the violent, bleeding cut that is psychically necessary for them to learn to be alone in the presence of their parents. Their outer lives give them no actual contexts for the fear that accompanies the inner dramas and psychic losses that are an inevitable legacy of growing up. Well-made Gothic can fill in those gaps, giving concrete expression to abstract psychic processes, keeping dark fascinations and haunting fears where children can see them, and mingling the horror with healthy doses of humour and hope. (Coats 91)

Here we see the Gothic as providing a safe simulacrum of otherwise possibly traumatic negative experiences, which modern middle class life seems to be “lacking”. We also see from the above passage that a central affective oscillation of Gothic narrative is fear and humour. Especially in texts for younger children, comic relief is an obvious strategy to contain the negative emotions evoked by the Gothic. Going beyond a simple division of negative and positive feelings, the frequent pairing of the conflicting emotions horror and humour in contemporary children’s fiction has been seen as an expression of “how contemporary life is becoming more uncertain, full of anxieties and complexity” (Cross 65). Coats too reads Gaiman’s emphasis on the coupling of fear and humour as a response to the ambiguities of contemporary life: “Gaiman often combines humour and horror, which has been the legacy of the Gothic since its inception, and indicates the close relation between fear and humour as two affective responses to incongruent stimuli” (Coats 78). Incongruent stimuli relate also to the disruption of reality in the ironic and the affirmative, the realist and the fantastic modes, which often clash in ghost stories. For Richard Gooding, Gaiman’s *Coraline* is technical innovative, which has much to do with the fact that “Gaiman begins to blur these boundaries [between real and fantasy] almost immediately” (393). For Coats on the other hand, Gaiman’s stories are traditional, he does Gothic “old school”, especially from an ethical and gender perspective (*ibid.*), but also with clear cut boundaries between the real and the fantastic levels of his narratives.

Gaiman admits to this playful conventionality, as I would describe it, for example in his insistence on the scariness of evil, the containment of fear and the closed story with a happy end that ultimately overcomes fear. In Gaiman’s own words: “In order for stories to work — for kids *and* for adults — they should scare. And you should triumph. There’s no point in triumphing over evil if the evil isn’t scary” (Popova 2014). This attitude toward children’s scary fiction echoes in the emotional movements that will be outlined, which oscillate from the negative, darker emotions toward positive states mind; from fear to humour, from terror to hope, from desolation to connectedness, and so on.

More often than not, Neil Gaiman stops the swing of his ghost narratives’ emotional pendulum on the “soft” and contained, the familiar side of safety

and comfort. This attitude plays an important part in the cathartic and healing qualities of his writing. Just like Scrooge in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, the emotional exercise, which Gaiman proposes to his readers, leaves them moved and therefore ultimately "softened" and "receptive", but not disoriented and traumatised. Young readers are frequently considered to naturally be "sponges", permanently absorbing all impressions. For Gaiman, scary stories at the right age or in the right conditions are the medium of choice to make an unequalled impact:

Stories you read when you're the right age never quite leave you. You may forget who wrote them or what the story was called. Sometimes you'll forget precisely what happened, but if a story touches you it will stay with you, haunting the places in your mind that you rarely ever visit.

Horror stays with you hardest. If it brings a real chill to the back of your neck, if once the story is done you find yourself closing the book slowly, for fear of disturbing something, and creeping away, then it's there for the rest of time. There was a story I read when I was nine that ended with a room covered with snails. I think they were probably man-eating snails, and they were crawling slowly toward someone to eat him. I get the same creeps remembering it now that I did when I read it. (*M is for Magic*, ixf)

For Gaiman, the emotional impact of stories may leave "ghostly" impressions on the reader, "haunting" her. On the one hand, memory, body and emotion are intertwined: a deeply felt experience will be remembered for a long time, strong feelings create importance, they structure memory and thus frame the future. On the other hand, ghost tales seem to provide something of an archetypical model of storytelling for Gaiman, which connect us with the past.

Gaiman's quote from *American Gods*, which opens this essay, may be read as a commentary on ghost stories and their relation to storytelling in more general, almost anthropological terms. "People populate the darkness; with ghosts, with gods, with electrons, with tales" (*American Gods* 418), Gaiman writes and begins his list with ghosts, as if they belong to the first imaginative inventions of mankind. The telling of ghost tales rooted in human culture is that omnipresent (cf. Briggs 177; "Ghost Story" in Clute 403). Moreover, can we imagine a better, more stereotypical setting to tell a ghost story than that of a small group of people huddled closely together around a campfire, while the wild beasts of the woods howl close by, in the deep dark night? With this picture in mind, Gaiman's phrase can be seen as a history of culture *in nuce*. In the "dark" prehistoric beginning of mankind this same darkness was cause for much fear and thus contributed to the need to tell stories. Ghost stories go beyond the pragmatic invention of language to serve everyday communication. They are

part of those artful tales which create meaning and construct the comfortable zone of the familiar in the world. The illumination of darkness, not only with fire, but also with tales, may be seen as an important factor in the emergence of civilisation, a first step toward enlightenment. Ghost tales, probably in the first place those about ancestors and the deceased, may figure among the oldest, the primordial tales. Gaiman opens a panorama from the magical world view of prehistoric times, which is the basis for the religious world view (gods) to the scientific (electrons) view of enlightened modernity. Most importantly, in the eyes of the storyteller, these three different world-views are not merely seen as a historical sequence of conflicting paradigms of progress; for the storyteller, magic, religion and science essentially fulfil the same narrative function, which is to make us feel at home in the world. The telling of ghost stories itself connects to that primordial tradition and is therefore a “magical” technique. Moreover, it is a technique which we relate especially to children:

The ghost story's 'explanations' do not operate to rationalize or demystify the supernatural events, but rather to set them inside a kind of imaginative logic in which the normal laws of cause and effect are suspended in favor of what Freud termed “animistic” ways of thinking, in which thought itself is a mode of power, in which wishes or fears can actually benefit or do harm – ways of thinking that are characteristic of very small children who haven't yet defined their own limits, but which Western educational traditions have taught us to reject or leave behind. The ghost story reverts to a world in which imagination can produce physical effects, a world that is potentially within our power to change by the energy of our thoughts, yet practically alarming. And of course the ghost story itself lends some degree of credence to the powers of the imagination, since the mere words on the page can, in their limited way, reproduce the effects they describe: once we are in the grip of the narrative, the heartbeat speeds up, the skin sweats, or prickles, and any unexpected noise will cause the reader to jump. (Briggs 178)

This magical intensity and the emotional truth of ghost stories, as has been shown with the help of the initial example by Dickens, may be read as an initiation to deeper, perhaps religious, but certainly ultimate questions. The paradox of the ghost motive (return from the dead) may be seen as an affirmation of the idea of an afterlife, or at least evokes the discussion of the issue. Children have a two-fold relation to these questions. On the one hand, they are innocent and have to learn about death, on the other hand, they are themselves symbols of life and thus oppose death. Kimberly Reynolds writes in the introduction to *Frightening Fiction*:

Flirting with the idea of death can be understood as the beginning of accepting that death is inevitable, an idea which is beyond most young children. At the same time, adolescents frequently believe (or act as if they believe) that they are immortal. Texts which provide vicarious encounters with ghosts, the undead, and others who exist outside the conventional definitions of life may be read as confirming this belief: seeing a ghost is frightening, but it can also be taken as evidence that death is not the end of the self, and even that interaction with the known world remains possible after death. (Reynolds, 7)

To sum up these complexities we may assume that ghost tales for children are a traditional and sensitive topic (nowadays mostly evoking protective instincts by adults in the question of what level of scariness is appropriate for children). Children are supposed to be especially impressionable, and ghost stories can have a deep and therefore lasting emotional impact. Humour is a “natural” emotional reaction to fear caused by ghost stories for children. Ghost stories provide access to the darker elements of the psyche, as well as existential questions and religious imagination. The magical suspension of disbelief, characteristic for fiction and particularly fantastic fiction, is especially easy for children. Ghost stories are primordial tales. The naïve child is oblivious to death, yet ghost stories raise the issue. The child as a symbol is an antithesis to death. Narratives of child death are therefore especially tragic.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the motif of child-ghosts manifests at least a double paradox: it represents the communication with the world of the dead on the one hand and on the other hand the premature death of innocents, who are the symbol of eternal life. Traditional ghosts often return as a consequence of “unfinished business” in life and therefore represent a continuity of the past. Child ghosts represent the denial of life and opportunity itself – their paradox is that of eternal discontinuity.

Neil Gaiman’s mode of choice to deal with the contradictions of child ghosts is, as has been outlined above, comic relief and a happy ending. However, it becomes obvious in stories such as, “Click Clack the Rattle Bag”, with its meta-fictional play on telling scary stories and its inversion of traditional roles, that he is consciously choosing between the many narrative options to represent the motif<sup>4</sup> – here the seemingly innocent child is the monster, and all the scarier

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3 The death of “Little Nell” in Charles Dickens *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841) is such an iconic Victorian child death, whose tragic is reinforced through the image of her loving grandfather waiting until his own last breath for her return on her grave; an option that is denied through the realistic mode of Dicken’s narrative, thus underlining the terminal sadness of the old man.

4 A video of Neil Gaiman reading “Click Clack the Rattlebag” on 21.12.2014 in the New York Public Library is available online; see work cited list.

for it. Whatever the role which Gaiman chooses for his child ghost, he tells its story passionately and with empathy, and in the fictional encounter with his ghost children the reader can enjoy an imaginary, impossible communication which bridges the gap between life and death.

### **Ghost Children in *The Sandman*. From Terror to Hope**

The first example of ghost children is *The Sandman*, issue #25, (first published in April 1991) "Seasons of Mist: Chapter 4". The episode carries the subtitle: "In which the dead return and Charles Rowland concludes his education". In the larger plot arc, the issue serves as an illustration of the consequences after Lucifer has emptied and closed down hell and the spirits of the damned return to haunt the places of their past lives. Within this back story, the series' main protagonists and supernatural powers are almost completely absent in issue 25. Instead it focusses on 13 year old Charles Rowland who has to stay as the only pupil at the British boarding school St. Hilarions during the winter break. At the beginning of the story, the protagonist Charles Rowland dies in the school's attic, while his ghostly friend Edwin Paine is holding his hand. The story then retells the last six days of Charles's life. In these days he has been tortured by the spirits which returned from hell to the boarding school, chief amongst them the headmaster Parkinson:

[...] Despite any tribulations we might have experienced, we are all now back at school. At the *old school* [...] You all died here [...] I will teach you what I learned. In hell I learned so many things. [...] You are schoolboys. You are at school. You come to school to study. Therefore you will study'. (*The Sandman* 14 f.)

What really haunts the boy, apart from the demonic headmaster, is the return of a cruel school system, which includes corporal punishment (15), unquestioning obedience (*ibid.*), silent study (*ibid.*), nonsensical rote learning (23), ice-bathing (16) and a group of brutal bullies (13, 18). This "old school" appears as hell on earth and the mortal boy succumbs to the extremely harsh treatment within days, while he is forced to participate in the grotesque re-enactment of a past educational system. His only friend is the ghost of Edwin Paine, another victim of the bullies and their attempts at black magic (12). However, the care of a ghost friend is not enough to save his life and Charles Rowland dies.

*Evil Ghost Child*

In Gaiman's representation, death is the turning point when terror stops. Charles's afterlife begins when he opens his eyes to beautiful Death (20), who is one of the main protagonists of *The Sandman* series, sister to the Sandman, who, in turn, is an allegory of dream. Death appears as a fashionable, caring, 1980s style Goth, who acts slightly exasperated and hasty due to the chaotic state of the afterworld at that point in the story. She permits the two ghost boys to do what they want – until the metaphysical disorder has been resolved (21). The boys' suffering and oppression stops and thus their youthful optimism can emerge: they recognise that "[...] we've learned all we're going to at school. Now: let's see what life's got to offer us..." (24), and hand in hand the two ghostly friends set out to make the most of their remaining time on earth. In the last panel they leave school and step off the asphalted road into untrodden grassland, away from their bleak education, toward an open future. Their future adventures have been detailed in a variety of spin-off series to *The Sandman* in a genre crossover that may be called "boarding school teenage ghost detective stories": *The Children's Crusade* (1993–1994) and *Sandman Presents: Dead Boy Detectives* (Ed Brubaker, 2001). They also have further various short appearances in *The Sandman* universe.

*Dead Boy Detective*

We can discern two types of ghost children in this story: the traditional ghost, which returns and repeats its crime: the bullies, who haunt the school boys. This type suffers a repetitive punishment for mortal sins, which goes so far that they inflict their own tortures on themselves in the absence of victims (23). Furthermore, this type shows no significant difference to conventional adult evil spirits, apart from a heightened sense of the macabre, when the image of an “innocent child” is perverted and serves to represent demonic entities. The second type is perhaps Gaiman’s own invention: the “dead boy detective”. It is a ghost protagonist, which subverts the classical ghost image by occupying the liminal space between life and death, thus examining the border between the two. Just like mortals the dead boy detectives have a limited time remaining on earth. This special condition comes with the possibility to negotiate between the worlds of the dead and the living – a theme that we will see repeated in *The Graveyard Book*. As death liberates the boys, their agency and their child-like qualities it returns, which is here primarily an optimistic, hopeful outlook toward the future. Thus ghost children may even enjoy their undead state – for as long as it lasts.

### Ghost Children in *Coraline*. From Pity to Salvation

The child ghosts in *Coraline* are a counter example to the care-free dead boy detectives in *The Sandman*. They are minor characters in Gaiman’s *Coraline*. As the representation of minor characters tends to be more stereotypical, which is the case with the child ghosts in *Coraline*, we see here the conventional, one dimensional

image of child ghosts. Dramaturgically they serve as a warning; as victims, who have to be freed from the clutches of the villain. Afterwards, they serve as helpers.

*Ghost Child Victim*



*Coraline* is a story about a bored young girl, who does not get sufficient attention from her parents and escapes into an otherworld, which is the lair of the story's villain, the "Other Mother". The child ghosts that are locked away in this otherworld are former victims of this demon, also called the beldam, who have been sucked dry of their love. They are described and illustrated as translucent, "pale figures, [...] nothing more than afterimages, like the glow left by a bright light in your eyes, after the lights go out" (101). All that is left to them is the feeling of emptiness: "'Hollow,' whispered the third voice. 'Hollow, hollow, hollow, hollow, hollow'" (ibid.). The child ghosts are represented as Victorian children, playing on the image of the angelic child and its pitiful death. This is exactly the reaction which they invoke in *Coraline* (and the reader). First they warn Coraline of her fate, if she succumbs to the seduction of the beldam:

'She will take your life and all you are and all you care'st for, and she will leave you with nothing but mist and fog. She'll take your joy. And one day you'll awake and your heart and your soul will have gone. A husk you'll be, a wisp you'll be, and a thing no more than a dream on waking, or a memory of something forgotten.' (ibid.)

Later they offer valuable help in the defeat of the insidious beldam (102 f., 116, 128). After Coraline has freed the souls of the ghost children, they are able to interact one last time with the heroine, giving her the strength to leave the demon's realm:

They moved through her, then: ghost-hands lent her strength that she no longer possessed. There was a final moment of resistance, as if something were caught in the door, and then, with a crash, the wooden door banged closed. (160)

Coraline returns to the world of the living, pursued by the animated red right hand of the Other Mother, which she finally buries in a deep well. Thus, the story acknowledges the possibility that Evil may return and that the emotional pendulum may swing back from safety to danger and fear at any time. The ghost children, however, have been positively redeemed and can pass on, probably to a better kind of afterlife. Coraline has a chance to see them on their way in a dream:

And in her dream Coraline saw that the sun had set and the stars were twinkling in the darkening sky. Coraline stood in the meadow, and she watched as the three children (two of them walking, one flying) went away from her, across the grass, silver in the light of the huge moon. The three of them came to a small wooden bridge over a stream. They stopped there, and turned and waved, and Coraline waved back. And what came after was darkness. (174)

This classic representation of a child ghost carries the heroic, triumphant emotions of *Coraline's* plot and its happy ending. The child ghosts represent here the possibility to set right past wrongs and to connect positively with the dead.

### **The Ghost Child in *The Graveyard Book*. From Desolation to Connectedness**

The positive connection to the dead is a central point of the use of the child ghost motif in *The Graveyard Book*. The story begins with the shocking, cold blooded murder of a family. The toddler is the only survivor, who, by sheer luck, crawls away to the nearby graveyard. There he is adopted and raised by the ghosts who inhabit the graveyard.

Motherly empathy is represented as carrying on beyond death – the ghost of the recently killed mother begs the other ghosts to protect her baby (14 f.) and the ghostly foster parents Mr. and Mrs. Owens, who could not have children when they were alive, decide to take care of the boy. From the side of the dead, love and

care for the living is a prerequisite for the survival of the child, called Bod Owens, short for Nobody Owens. From the side of the living, the child's innocence and vitality is a second prerequisite to overcome the initial tragedy: Bod grows up among the ghosts of the dead, as brightly spirited, as if his surroundings were the most natural thing in the world. He is not allowed to leave the graveyard, which becomes his home, his "cozy tomb" (150) even. Humour contains the tragic beginning of the story and creates an ironic narrative voice, which is light-hearted enough to suit all audiences: "You might think—and if you did, you would be right—that Mr. Owens should not have taken on so at seeing a ghost, given that Mr. and Mrs. Owens were themselves dead [...]" (14). The book is full of puns on death and being undead, such as young Bod asking: "Who lives in there?" (37), inquiring about the ghostly inhabitants of the grave next door.

Bod is a playful take on the ghost character, he is alive, but his upbringing gives him ghostly powers: he is given the "Freedom of the Graveyard" (22), a state which protects him from harm and makes him ghostly – he is almost invisible and normal visitors of the graveyard ignore him. Later he learns to consciously fade away from sight and he even masters the power to haunt the dreams of mortals, such as the school bullies Nick Farthing and Maureen Quilling (183 ff., 194–196). Therefore, he is a half-ghost entity.<sup>5</sup> This eccentric state in both the worlds of the death and the living, allows him to examine and negotiate the border between the two, like no other.

The best example for this function is, to my mind, the central fifth chapter of the story, which carries the title "Danse Macabre" and which takes up the medieval tradition of the death dance. It is set on a special day, when winter flowers blossom. On this day the two worlds meet in a folklore carnival: the townspeople and the dead join in a midnight dance: "Rich man, poor man, come away, come to dance the Macabray" (144), goes the tune. The townsfolk do not believe in this event as having any metaphysical significance – to the Mayoress it is a perfectly ridiculous tradition (151). Consequently the living never remember the event (159), but the dead do, and so does Bod. His privileged place between both worlds earns him the honour of the last dance, which is with Death herself, who appears as a sublime lady in grey, clothed in cobwebs, and who rides a white horse. In this dancing union everybody joins in, smiling (160). It is a happy and sublime moment, as the brief dialogue between Death and Bod during their dance illustrates:

'I love your horse. He's so big! I never knew horses could be that big.'

'He is gentle enough to bear the mightiest of you away on his broad back, and strong enough for the smallest of you as well.'

5 Compare to the half-ghost boy Hemi in China Miéville's *UnLunDun* (2007). Both writers are interested in the in-betweenness of the fantastic grotesque.

'Can I ride him?' asked Bod.

'One day,' she told him, and her cobweb skirts shimmered. 'One day. Everybody does.'

'Promise?'

'I promise.' (161 f.)

This positive approach toward death subverts the horror genre, in which for the most part the greatest source of fear are death and terrible armies of undead. In *The Graveyard Book* there is comfort in the certainty of a sublime and beautiful death – an observation that all too often goes unnoticed in our modern society, which most of the time embraces a lifestyle and adolescent attitude toward death, pretending that we are all immortal.

Neil Gaiman's narratives of ghost children give fictional space to a healthy relation with death, which he examines especially with the liminal, half-ghostly characters that introduce a subtle shade of differentiation between not the living and the dead, but the living and the ghosts. In combination with the positive child-like qualities, these child "half-ghosts" carry closed narratives which we can clearly see in the traditional fairy tale motif after the dance macabre: "When the dance was done the townsquare looked like after a wedding" (162). *The Graveyard Book* is until now the primary example for this new kind of in-betweenness, which centres on the co-existence and connectedness of the living and the (un)dead. As childhood is the most formative phase in life, the protagonist Bod is deeply affected by his positive relation with the ghosts. Although he himself loses his ghostliness in the process of growing up and at the end of the story he walks into adulthood to "leave no path untaken" (306), he will always fondly remember the graveyard as a "cozy", homely place to finally return to (307).

In conclusion, ghost children, as we have seen them in Neil Gaiman's narratives, are ultimately likeable characters, who redeem their frightening undead state in a variety of ways. First, they offer a humorous and therefore humane variety of the ghost motif. Secondly, they serve as mediators between the world of the living and the world of spirits, between past and future. Most importantly, they represent a positive relationship with Death, portraying a child-like perspective on it that is not ignorant of its darker aspects. Rather it is a perspective that results from the conscious choice to stop the stories' emotional pendulum at the right moment and with an optimistic outlook. At least to me, these seem sufficient reasons to wish that there really were ghosts, Gaiman's kind of ghosts.

Half Ghost. Bod Dances with Death



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