Imagining the Impossible: International Journal for the Fantastic in Contemporary Media, Volume 4, Issue 1 (2025)

"'Veni, vidi, voro: I came, I saw, I consumed': Age, immortality and intergenerational conflict in 21st century British children's fantasy dramas"

https://doi.org/10.7146/imaginingtheimpossible.163164

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Abstract

This article will analyse the representations and politics of ageing and longevity in two case studies from British children's television drama, *Young Dracula* (CBBC 2006-2014) and *Shoebox Zoo* (CBBC 2004-2005). British public service broadcasting for children has been constructed as a service protective of the child audience's development, which may account for its 'lack of recognition [...] as part of the great TV drama tradition' (Messenger Davies 2001, 57). Despite this, this article suggests that these case studies use immortality to investigate the same fears and anxieties about ageing and death identified in art and culture more broadly. Drawing from television studies and gerontological studies, and using textual analysis, this article argues that these immortal figures also signify a corresponding anxiety about the loss of children's identity and destabilization of ontological and epistemological boundaries within intergenerational relationships, defeated only by child protagonists' use of PSB values against them.

Keywords: "Children's television"; Fantasy; Immortality; Ageing; Childhood; "Public service broadcasting"; Monstrosity

Victoria Byard

'Veni, vidi, voro: I came, I saw, I consumed'

Age, immortality and intergenerational conflict in 21st century British children's fantasy dramas

In season 4 of the Children's BBC horror-comedy drama, *Young Dracula*, the protagonist's immortal father, Count Dracula, faces a challenge from a much younger vampire. The upstart graffities Dracula's territory with a symbol from 'the old country' – three Vs in a shield formation – but, when questioned by Dracula, is unsure what the V might stand for other than vampire. Dracula hisses, 'Veni, vidi, voro – *I* came, *I* saw, *I* consumed' (S4 E1). Actor Keith-Lee Castle's performance as Dracula leans as heavily into the first-person pronoun as he does his opponent and, in so doing, reveals several major anxieties and concerns about ageing and immortality within the text which, I will argue, perpetuate 'the tradition of connecting youth and senescence' (Joosen 2018, 5) in broader discourses and histories of art and politics. However, I will also argue that, by incorporating the persistent theme that 'the aged might be perceived as preying on, exploiting, or projecting their own weaknesses onto children' (Nelson cited in Joosen 2018, 4) into children's television, child protagonists and viewers are empowered to explore their place within intergenerational relationships, and to align themselves with values of citizenship and morality.

This article examines two British children's fantasy television dramas in the 21st century and discusses the representation of ageing and immortality in relation to childhood and children's television as a specialised form of public service broadcasting (PSB). Both case studies use superannuated ageing as a metaphor for imagined threats to the natural and sociopolitical order, especially threats to a particular Western idea of childhood that is central to the history and production

culture of BBC Children's TV. In *Young Dracula* (CBBC 2006-2014) and *Shoebox Zoo* (CBBC 2004-2005), the arcane knowledges and solipsistic demands of immortality are put into conflict with models of child development and learning, as well as more community-centred values of liberal democracy that BBC Children's has historically foregrounded as the necessary building blocks of child development and British civic society (Buckingham et al 1999; Oswell 2002). These texts are important cultural spaces for producers and child audiences to worry at recurring anxieties around age, death and intergenerational relationships. Consequently, these dramas function as part of broader political, social and aesthetic histories whilst also re-centring children and attributing them with their own sense of agency.

Using an interdisciplinary framework that draws from television studies, genre studies, and gerontological studies, this article identifies the decline and threat narratives that are often associated with old age in Western media. This anxiety about what old age might demand of society and younger individuals is frequently intensified by positioning old age against youth in a competition for resources, and the old are thereby frequently represented as monstrous and parasitical. Whelehan and Gwynne suggest, perhaps in relation to the 'silver tsunami' they predict in the opening pages of *Ageing, Popular Culture and Feminism*, that public discourse in Western countries

> shows a preponderance of dire warnings about the "burden" of an ageing population who present a horrifying drain on resources, as if they are in essence vampirically drawing the lifeblood from the young. (2014,1)

This conflation of age with rapacious monstrosity is made literal in *Young Dracula* and *Shoebox Zoo*. In both texts, the central antagonists are supernatural agents that overpower the child protagonists, specifically as parental and quasi-parental figures. In *Young Dracula*, Vlad and his sister, Ingrid, contend with their father Count Dracula as a threat to their anonymity and security as they seek refuge in a new country. In *Shoebox Zoo*, the immortal Michael Scot is based on the legend of the Scottish medieval magician of the same name. Initially, Scot seems to be a powerful but benevolent figure, offering advice and support to child protagonist, Marnie McBride, but as the series unfolds it becomes apparent that he is the architect of the dangers Marnie

faces. These immortal antagonists repeatedly put the child characters in physical and psychological danger and attempt to subjugate them to further their own longevity. These fantasies reproduce and reify the sociological and symbolic narrative of the old preying upon the young and destabilise the concept of childhood as protected. Their immortality affords them authority and power without a framework of self-knowledge and empathy. Dracula and Scot are presented as superannuated adults, selfish parents, *and* 'bad' children. This forces child protagonists to identify and model their own prosocial learning in opposition to the immortals' values and demands, and consequently to advocate for PSB values associated with 'good', responsible and maturing child citizens.

Children's television and public service broadcasting

In combatting the threat of immortality, the child protagonists' weaponry is a repertoire of values that both index the maturation of children into self-actualised and empathetic citizens and the maintenance of PSB values. While children's media narratives have regularly focused on the enculturation of characters and audiences to the dominant values of the culture that produced them, even in commercial media, the BBC's public service values as a national broadcaster have been more rigorously inscribed, managed and monitored for the 'public good' of the child audience. An ideological framework intended to foster the child audience's psychological and civic maturation has always been part of BBC Children's conception of the needs of the child audience and its public service mission. Oswell states that children's television from the 1950s attempted to 'construct a normative ethos for the child and to connect the child to external world in an active form of citizenship and public participation' (2002, 49); in short, a mixed service of programming that foregrounded pro-social messaging, thinking, and enculturation into contemporary childhood and society.

Throughout the 20th century and into the 21st, the nature, quality, and production volume of British children's television were repeatedly scrutinised, regulated and rearticulated through successive pieces of broadcasting legislation, BBC Charter negotiations, regulatory

initiatives such as the ITA/IBA Consultations on ITV Children's Television in 1965, 1973, and 1981 (Byard 2016), and institutional directives such as the CBBC Service Licences. More specific requirements that a 'sufficient amount of time [be] given [to] programmes intended for children' was legislated in 1990 (Broadcasting Act 1990), influenced by the lobbying of British Action for Children's Television (Davies 2021). Subsequent guidelines from the Independent Television Commission advised that ITV companies were 'required to transmit 10 hours a week of children's programmes' including '75 hours of drama' (Steemers 2018, 8) 'with a range of entertainment, drama and information programmes' (ITC 2003), or risk their franchises. Children's television was seen as the leading edge of the public service mission: it had 'always been viewed as a socially important aspect of provision, vital to public service broadcasting' (Steemers 2010, 214). Despite significant industrial, cultural, and social changes across the late 20th century, children's programming across the regulated duopoly of the BBC and ITV was staunchly upheld as a necessity for the life of the nation and a child audience that required specialised media spaces, genres, and address to develop as media audience and British citizens.

The Communications Act 2003, however, fatally undercut these requirements. In the wake of the Act, and the subsequent ban on 'high fat, salt and sugar foods' advertising in children's TV schedules from 2007 (OFCOM 2007), the economies and production cultures of children's television began to collapse as ITV companies rapidly and drastically cut their children's provision. This reduced programming hours as well as the quality of available programming and the pluralism of voices and knowledge that OFCOM saw as central to public broadcasting for children (Livingstone 2008, 173–175). The BBC has consequently become the only significant producer of home-grown children's media and it has become axiomatic for academics and industry professionals to suggest that the early 2000s was a 'state of "crisis"' for children's television (Whitaker 2009, 1) or even a decade which had observed the 'practical disassembly of public service production for children' (Steemers 2017, 311).

Despite this fundamental breakdown of the 'Great Tradition of children's broadcasting' (Buckingham et al 1999a, 67), Maire Messenger Davies argues that cultural and textual continuities that spoke directly to both Reithian values and contemporary childhood continued to operate across early 2000s' British children's television. Davies suggests

that 'children's media can be defined as 'a Crazyspace" (2005a, 126) that functions as a refuge and a space of resistance for children to 'seek political knowledge and to challenge the status quo' (ibid) and identifies this as 'a space that has been cultivated by public service broadcasting' (2011, 136). Davies suggests that one of the most defining and 'recurrent features of children's screen drama' (2005b, 393) and children's public service media is not only its ideological messaging about contemporary civic values but the continual re-situating of the child audience and its need for a carnivalesque space within broadcasting, consistently engaged with the concerns of contemporaneous childhood viewed through a specialised, circumscribed service or space.

In 2006, the first CBBC Service Licence was issued by the BBC Trust to delineate the public service remit of Children's BBC. The Licence outlined several identificatory values for the output with a particular focus on distinctive, high-quality media, innovation and creativity, and production of home-grown media that would constitute a mixed service produced explicitly for children within their own culture/s. However, it also suggests that integrative values for the audience should be recognisable across the children's service. The Trust mandated at that time that 'CBBC should provide a stimulating, creative and enjoyable environment that is also safe and trusted' and that it should have a 'particular focus on informal learning, with an emphasis on encouraging participation' (BBC 2006). This was in part predicated on the interactivity enabled by the consolidation of online platforms which could encourage 'children to participate or to deepen their experience of a programme or topic' (ibid). However, as this wording suggests, participation should not simply be digital but should empower children to extend their informal learning beyond their engagement with children's television. Part of this informal learning is to do with the child's place in their community and nation; the Service Licence states that CBBC's programming should reflect 'social engagement, citizenship and life skills' and encourage 'exploration of life skills within drama,' (BBC 2006) of which 650 hours were required each year. However, the more pressing concern of the CBBC Service Licence, generated by the BBC Trust until 2016 when responsibility was passed to OFCOM, was that Children's BBC should be maintained as a specialised space of production and public service for children and its programming should be calibrated as a service and space in

which the meanings of childhood could be worried at. It is therefore clear that, despite radical changes in television platforms, distribution and viewing behaviour, children's TV drama maintains PSB values as a touchstone and therefore these discursive 'crazyspaces' of civic, moral, and emotional development into the 21st century.

Ageing and death in children's media

Other cultural, political and historical discourses also inform these fantasies about immortality. By unpicking how longstanding conceptualisations about ageing and death affect children's television, we can situate them as part of a broad and potent didactic and gerontological framework. Joosen states that 'media narratives in popular culture often ascribe interchangeable characteristics to childhood and old age – the nature of these characteristics is extensive, ranging from physical weakness and the need for care and education, to wisdom and moral superiority' (2018, 5). In so doing, these media narratives frequently reinscribe a model of decline associated with the aged for centuries: while the child is seen as vulnerable because they are developing, the elder is seen as vulnerable because of a supposed loss of physical, psychological, economic and mental power that returns them to a theorised second childhood. While the decline narrative dominates discussion of ageing, Blaikie, drawing on the work of Saul, suggests that it is part of a binary produced within culture: 'the negative inevitability myth regards older people as being in a state of irremediable physical, mental and social decline whereas the positive tranquillity myth sees them as resigned, gracious and passive' (1999, 181). This suggests a representation of ageing more grounded in concepts of maturity and ongoing development in wisdom. However, while the decline of old people's physical and mental powers might not be as strongly foregrounded within the tranquillity myth, the focus on resignation and passivity suggests a disempowerment similar to that of children within cultures where childhood is structured, directed, and monitored by adults.

Joosen suggests that these palimpsestic representations of childhood as similar to senescence are often defined by 'three basic patterns [which] emerge in the ways that childhood and adulthood are linked: affinity, conflict, and complementarity' (2018, 15). While research on ageing in children's television is lacking, I argue that this genealogy

of ageing fantasies within children's television engages explicitly and repeatedly with these patterns. Inthorn's work on several BBC children's television programmes argues that the CBBC case studies link childhood and senescence, through PSB values, to the complementarity model. Inthorn's article on grandparent-grandchild relationships in *Mr Alzheimer's and Me*, *Katie Morag* and *Topsy and Tim* finds that the programmes under analysis 'show narrative moments which map onto Tronto's (1998, 2003) concept of good care, including attentiveness, responsibility, competence, responsiveness, solidarity and trust' (2016, 2). While the adult-child relationship has been historically conceptualised as top-down with all the care and authority with the adult, creating a strictly hierarchical structure, Inthorn suggests that the grandparent-child relationship represented here is reciprocal, with grandparents providing care and children demonstrating learning about care, as well as providing a social and emotional role for the elderly. The case studies therefore reinforce some of the traditional liberal values of Children's BBC: positioning the child as an agent in their own civic and emotional learning.

Other analyses of British children's television suggest the relationship between childhood and senescence as one of both complementarity and affinity rather than conflict, and position old age within the tranquillity myth. Holdsworth and Lury argue that through the 'textual experiences of time and space and the operations of care' in CBBC texts, one can 'recognise [...] the reciprocity and interdependence between generations' (2016, 185). They identity this 'reciprocity and interdependence' in children's media texts beyond Children's BBC as well, but specifically identify the CBBC case studies as:

> television's 'duty of care' (within both public service and commercial systems) is arguably heightened in its recognition of, and (anxious) responsibility for, the child audience. Within this regulation and control of the child for their own good is an understanding of care as a paternalistic and civic concern. (2016, 185–186)

This production concern is traced through 'the textual experiences of time and space and the operations of care' through Katie Morag's relationships with her grandmothers, Grannie Island and Granma Mainland; Old Jack's relationship with the child viewers he addresses

directly through the screen in songs, stories, and interactions with his village community; and the real-life caretaking relationships of children with grandparents with Alzheimer's.

While representations of, and relationships with, ageing might be seen as part of children's media, death is a much more contentious topic. As Anna Home notes in her history of Children's BBC,

> Death, like magic, is an emotive area in children's programming. Many adults feel that it is not a proper subject for tea-time television. (1993, 101)

This major aspect of the decline narrative is therefore frequently omitted from children's television. Discussing children's conceptions of death, Clark states 'Adults in Western countries often regard death as unmentionable when it comes to children as if death comprises a topic uncomfortably at odds with the perceived innocence of childhood' (2020, 595). Despite this squeamishness, Home subsequently stated in relation to BBC Children's programming that 'children have to experience death at some time, and it is not a subject which should be ignored' (1993, 101). Nevertheless, realistic representations, or even sustained discussions, of death remain rare on British children's television. Current BBC guidelines state 'Our audiences, particularly children, can be frightened or distressed by the portrayal of both real and fictional violence. [...] There are very few circumstances which justify broadcasting the moment of death.' (BBC 2019)

Ageing, death and immortality in fantasy

Despite this avoidance of violence and dying in British children's television, death or at least the imaginary spaces around death haunt children's television fantasy. Whether manifesting as ghosts (*The Clifton House Mystery, The Ghost Hunter*), timeslips (*The Georgian House, Archer's Goon*), reincarnations (*The Owl Service, The Chestnut Soldier*) or immortality, British children's television has persistently thought about ways around death and the troubling concepts and processes it might signify for the viewer. In her broader discussion of the relationship between television and death, Wheatley identifies three key themes in 'the contemporary UK ghost serial – grief and mourning, trauma, and the search for truth and reconciliation' and suggests that

these texts are 'often about learning to grieve 'successfully" (2024, 88–89). Arguably, these children's dramas offer interventions in which children can recognise mortality at a remove and use the fantastic text as a space of working through or worrying at similar anxieties. It is no coincidence that in *Shoebox Zoo* the immortal Michael Scot recruits Marnie in the immediate wake of her mother's death and that the antagonists of both seasons attempt to lure Marnie over to the side of evil by promising to give her 'the power to return your mother to the world of the living' (S2 E6). In the programme's finale, Bill Paterson's off-screen, omniscient narration celebrates Marnie's ultimate decision to act in accordance with public service values of citizenship, community and a protected childhood to defend the world of the living against evil. He declares that while 'Marnie had lost her mother [...], now she had her back and she knew she'd always, always have her in her heart,' (S2 E13) suggesting that, despite the allure of immortality, power and magic, the purpose of *Shoebox Zoo* is to teach Marnie and by corollary child viewers the importance of 'learning to grieve "successfully"' (Wheatley 2024, 88–89) and defend the rules of natural order and social morality against adult, even immortal, antagonists.

Fantasy may therefore be the most productive frame within which death can be discussed within British children's television, as a non-mimetic mode which allows discussion of difficult or worrying topics necessary to child development and maturation. Bettelheim argues that fairy-tales correspond to the unpredictable, animistic way in which children experience the world and operate as a mode that allows children to externalise and narrativize conscious and unconscious psychological, social and moral knowledges and processes to learn about the world and themselves (1978; 1991, 45–47). Through the mode of the fantastic, Bettelheim argues that 'the child fits unconscious content into conscious fantasies, which then enable him to deal with that content' (1976; 1991, 7). Davies draws on Bettelheim to argue that 'fantasy stories serve necessary psychological and developmental functions' for child audiences (1997, 23). However, fantasy can be used not only to caulk gaps in children's symbolic and cognitive understanding but to project anxieties outwards, particularly when the concept or feeling is overwhelming: Catherine Lester argues that 'fantasy is often used as a way of mitigating horrific elements' (2021, 34), such as the betrayal of childhood and parental abuse represented throughout *Young Dracula* and *Shoebox Zoo*.

Fantasy also facilitates different relationships between power and ageing than those commonly represented in gerontological studies or more realist genres of media. Hartung and Falcus argue that 'the fantastic mode provides an entry point for analyses of age representation which may open up new conceptualisations on the one hand, and, on the other, serve to critique existing social and cultural stereotypes of youth and old age' (2023, 14). Thus, children's television fantasy drama creates spaces of speculation, reflection, and critique for children through 'unbelievable' genres and narratives to address psychological, biological, ethical and social anxieties about ageing and death that are rarely acknowledged elsewhere.

Perhaps the most pertinent contribution of fantasy to this article's focus is the genre's ability to destabilise normative trajectories of human development, even to the point of defeating mortality, whether through vampiric undeath (*Young Dracula*) or by extending the human life span through science or magic (*Shoebox Zoo*); in short, to interrogate 'the inevitability of death [and] the desirability of immortality' (Guimarães 2023,13). The act and process of dying as well as myths of ageing may be defeated though immortality: one need not inevitably weaken physically, mentally or socially or encounter the 'projective disgust' (2010, n.p.) towards our selves or others that Martha Nussbaum identifies as an inevitable part of the decline narrative, nor need one surrender the self and body to resignation and passivity, no matter the grace or wisdom achieved in the tranquillity myth. The concept of immortality may preserve not only the individual life but the values and achievements of the past and present: Stephen Cave, for example, argues that immortality is the foundation of civilisation, and that institutions from states to museums to families are built upon the desire to achieve symbolic immortality (2012). Lineage and heritage can therefore be not only articulated but embodied into the present day, as we see in the case study texts.

However, arguments persist within gerontological and immortological studies over the value and ethics of immortality. Jacobsen (2017) identifies widespread resistance to the pursuit of immortality and draws from cultural, social, and scientific fields to suggest, contra Cave, that immortality vitiates civilisation, evolution, and the psychological drives that keep human beings, societies, and cultures dynamic. Mortality is therefore a necessary engine for human endeavour and human relationships. In a world where immortality exists, suggests

Jacobsen (2017, 3), competition for extended life and consequently for resources to make that life pleasant would be intensified, reinforcing conflict between individuals, social groups, and age groups, and decentring ethics of care, connection, and empathy from intergenerational relationships. Immortality thus potentially becomes a state of inertia in which human connection stalls, and immortals become detached from their own humanity. Consequently, immortals risk producing and reproducing *ad nauseam* unethical and inhuman values, processes, and identities.

Young Dracula (CBBC 2006–2014)

Adapted from the children's book by Michael Lawrence, *Young Dracula* opens when Vlad, Ingrid, and their immortal father, Count Dracula, arrive in Wales, having fled Transylvania after their castle was stormed by an angry peasant mob. From the outset, Count Dracula's immortality sets him in conflict with the world around him but also, more importantly, with his own children. Child protagonist Vlad's opening voiceover states that he 'always wanted to be normal, to fit in' but acknowledges that his inherited vampirism prevents this (S1 E1). Vlad's vampirism was inherited in part from his father, the legendary Count Dracula, so immediately Vlad and his aspirations are set in opposition to his father. *Young Dracula* is a loose adaptation of Lawrence's book and the TV drama creates a much denser palimpsest of Dracula adaptations: the hearse in which the Dracula family arrive is called Demeter after the ship that brought Dracula to England in Stoker's novel, and is driven by their servant, Renfield; Dracula's daughter is called Ingrid, presumably in reference to horror film actress, Ingrid Pitt; and Vlad's pet wolf, Zoltan, is named after the film *Dracula's Dog* (Albert Band 1977). Consequently, despite his paternal status, Dracula is grounded in established narratives of monstrosity and consumption, as well as a metatextual and long-lived adaptive history of an undying myth.

The metatextual figure of Dracula moved from cinema to television in the 20th century and into the 21st (2017). Stacey Abbott identifies a persistent palimpsest of aesthetics and iconography from previous adaptations or a 'conglomeration of Draculas' (2017, 2). When the legendary Dracula appears in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, for example, his 'accent evokes Bela Lugosi while the long black cape with the

scarlet red inner lining suggests Hammer Studio's Christopher Lee' (ibid), and *mise en scene* and music from previous Draculas is also resurrected. Abbott traces this intertextual iconography on television beyond *Buffy*, from 1950s' late night TV horror hosts like Vampira, through the supernatural sitcoms and soap operas of 1960s and 1970s, and into children's television with a particular focus on the Count from *Sesame Street*. Despite the rearticulation of Dracula into a Muppet, Abbott suggests he 'offered an avenue into the iconography, aesthetics and conventions of horror for children' (2017, 9).

Young Dracula inherits this complex palimpsest of aesthetic and allusion when the Gothic irrupts into the small Welsh town of Stokely. Upon the arrival of the Dracula family by hearse, the camera pans, then zooms, from the orderly suburban streets to a ruined castle on a mountain looming over the town enshrouded by thunder and lightning. Once established in Stokely, much of the action and aesthetics become oriented around domestic or educational spaces rather than the local landscape or town. This reinforces the constraint felt by Vlad and Ingrid across their doubled existence of immortal Gothic and mortal everyday but also expedites what might be described as 'budget Gothic', a style and *mise en scene* necessary to the genre but appropriate to the limited funding for children's television. While production design for the castle set, and later for Garside Grange, draws on Gothic conventions and style, such as heraldic devices, candelabras, and heavy drapery in red and black as well as low-key lighting, the town of Stokely and the normality for which Vlad yearns is represented through chintzy domestic and functional educational spaces, both shot under high-key lighting and using a more muted colour palette. The camerawork also varies between the two worlds, with camera angles and movements within the castle and Grange more vertiginous than horizontal. This once again keeps the Gothic contained and budget-friendly and reinforces the Count's oppressive demands that his children serve the needs of his immortality rather than their own developmental and civic needs while, at the same time, suggesting the potential spatial and agentic freedoms beyond the castle.

Young Dracula also situates the isolation and stasis of immortality against more positive values of childhood through costume, rhetoric, and performance. The Count is distinguished from his neighbours by his disdain for them as 'peasants' and by his costume and language

which draws from the established iconography of Dracula adaptations. While Keith-Lee Castle's long hair and pale make-up is reminiscent of Gary Oldman's *Dracula*, his costuming draws on more classical representations in its limited palette of red and black, high-collared capes, and silhouettes which suggest historical formalwear, similar to Christopher Lee's Dracula. By contrast, Vlad's wardrobe is deliberately more mundane, aligned to the mortal 'breathers' that his father and sister despise. In earlier seasons, Vlad's costume is usually school uniform, brightly-coloured casual clothes, or a rugby kit in the episode 'Blood Sport' (S1 E10). In later seasons, Vlad's costume becomes more aligned to Dracula's Gothic style in colour and texture but still maintains a youth-oriented twist by incorporating leather jackets and layered shirts, indicating a shift in the relationship between youth and immortality from one of conflict to one of affinity and complementarity.

Count Dracula is also in conflict with his firstborn daughter, Ingrid, though she is far more committed to achieving the immortality, evil, and consumption of the vampiric lifestyle than her brother. Dracula's immortality means that he re-enacts the values derived from his long historical context and class identity, declaring to Vlad that he is his father's favourite because he is 'the son and heir of the Dracula family.' By contrast, Ingrid is rejected because she is a girl and therefore unfit to assume power. Her father suggests that her birthright might be 'cleaning [his] capes; housework; something like that' (S1 E1). In the first season, he attempts to marry her off at the age of fifteen, despite her objections. In season 3, he is still reiterating this disdain; when the headmistress of Ingrid's school approaches him with concerns about Ingrid who 'feels her life is meaningless,' her father responds, 'Of course it is; she's a girl' (S3 E9). The defining relationship between youth and senescence of *Young Dracula* is not one of affinity or complementarity but of immediate and sustained conflict at a biological and emotional level. Vlad rejects his own paternal, monstrous inheritance as he wants to remain a human child. His humanity is defined through the PSB values associated with CBBC and Davies' 'crazyspace': a necessary and protected space where children can learn and model values of citizenship, empathy, and moral choice. Dracula rejects Ingrid from a perspective shaped by the values of immortality, both intertextual and metatextual: male primogeniture and the misogyny that has often been a central tension in vampiric

narrative. Dracula's attitude towards both children is one of coercion and threat, even as he professes his affection for Vlad.

Dracula's monstrosity is also predicated on the threat of both class-based and physically violent consumption. Throughout the first season, the Draculas' neighbours, the Branaghs, are patronised and menaced by the Count whose castle overlooks their modest semi-detached; at several points, he attempts to eat them and refers to them as 'ugly peasants' (S1 E11). In the season finale (S1 E14), the Count invites the Branagh family to a Hunt Ball so they can be fed to visiting vampire nobility, despite several of the children being Vlad's friends. This makes little difference to the Count, who declares to his son that 'a friend is just someone we haven't bitten yet' (S1 E5). However, this relationship of conflict extends to destabilise the boundaries between child and adult, not just within the Dracula family but across the entire text. The glamour and consumption associated with immortality cause the Branagh parents to attend the Hunt Ball and stay to enjoy the pageantry and excess even when their children beg to leave. The school's woodwork teacher, Eric Van Helsing, also neglects his relationship with his wife and his son, Jonno, in favour of half-baked plans to follow his own family's legacy as vampire slayers. Jonno, like Vlad and the Branagh children, is repeatedly forced to be the voice of reason within the parent-child relationship as their parents engage in violence, risk-taking, and self-indulgence. Van Helsing even takes Jonno to the Hunt Ball to slay vampires, exulting, 'I've always dreamed of this moment, Jonno: me and you, outnumbered, fighting shoulder to shoulder against a bloodthirsty horde of vampires!' (S1 E14). Because of the allure of immortality and the way it affects the local society within *Young Dracula*, parents cannot be trusted to protect their children and become reproductions of the selfish immortal, forcing their children to assume the parental role.

In several respects, therefore, the adults and particularly the immortal adults become a specific threat to the values that CBBC has consistently foregrounded. Count Dracula explicitly endorses the values of selfish consumption, insularity and inertia, violence and desire in his pursuit of blood, beautiful women, and absolute power, even over his own children. As part of a binary model of values, he explicitly rejects the prosocial values of education, friendship, fairness, and citizenship. From the first episode, Dracula identifies Vlad's adherence to PSB values as antithetical to being a Dracula

and an immortal, reprimanding him: 'I'm disappointed in you, son. I mean, where's this bad attitude coming from: the cheeriness; the optimism; the love of the outdoors?' Positive values, often associated with innocent and healthful childhoods, are rejected in favour of inculcating his child into the violence, excess, and iconography of vampirism and immortality. When Vlad wants to join the school rugby team, his father shouts, 'I didn't impale half of Wallachia so you could be "a good sport!"' (S1 E10). When he later agrees that Vlad can play rugby, he advises, 'Make me proud, son, and whatever you do, don't forget to cheat.' Dracula also rejects Vlad's desire to go to school and instead cheers when Vlad gets suspended from school, stating, 'Vladdy, tomorrow you'll stay home [from school] and entertain me. Invite your friends; we can play Murder in the Dark!' (S1 E4). The dangers of immortality – boredom, alienation, insularity, a near-vampiric consumption of resources – are reinscribed here as a direct threat to childhood as defined by the tradition of children's PSB and reinforced by a childish father figure whose immortality constructs him both as authoritative and volatile.

Though the show becomes a denser and more Gothic, teen-oriented text in later seasons, this binary of values remains in place. However, it begins to move from conflict to complementarity and affinity. In the final episode (S5 E13), Dracula again berates his son for his failings but this time it is intended to provoke Vlad into attacking him which would allow Dracula to save his son. The ultimate evil of the fifth season, the Blood Seed, a carnivorous plant that 'feeds on greed, on hatred' and which will consume vampires and humans alike, can only be defeated by cooperation between immortals and mortals, and by Vlad as the half-human, half-vampire Chosen One. When one vampire hesitates, Vlad states, 'We can't do this if you still hate us. I'm sorry about your father, but we're the new generation. We can start again.' Co-operation, forgiveness, and the citizenship of children and young people saves the world in *Young Dracula* and reconciles Count Dracula to his son. The programme's final words indicate the values of PSB triumphing over the values of immortality, and the transition from the model of intergenerational relationships as conflict to models of affinity and complementarity. In saying goodbye to his son who intends to travel the world, Dracula confides to Vlad, 'I used to be embarrassed to call you my son. But now I'm ashamed I ever doubted you. Vladimir Dracula, you have made a very, very old vampire very, very proud.'

Though PSB values were at risk from immortals acting as bad parents, 'bad' children, and bad neighbours throughout, here they are restored and act as the foundation for safeguarding the world and the father–son relationship.

Shoebox Zoo (CBBC 2004–2005)

Shoebox Zoo, co-produced by BBC Scotland and several Canadian production companies, also situates the relationship between immortal Michael Scot and the child protagonist, Marnie McBride, as one of intergenerational conflict. Michael Scot, based on the historical alchemist and scholar of the same name, is established immediately as a man of arcane knowledge and power: in S1 E1, Scot is seen on the battlements of a ruined Scottish castle, conjuring lightning from a cloudless sky. In voiceover, the Storyteller (Bill Paterson) prophesies a day in which past, present and future will meet: 'a day to which the fickle sands of time and tide have run, a day when Fate and Prophecy reveal the Chosen One'. As the prophecy suggests, time, temporal resonance and destiny are at the heart of this text: Marnie McBride becomes the Chosen One when a broken clock strikes eleven on her eleventh birthday. The antagonist, Toledo, takes up residence in the Clock Tower of Edinburgh's Balmoral Hotel, the clock of which famously runs three minutes fast to help travellers make their trains on time. Michael Scot is revealed to be eleven centuries old and looking for the lost book which is the source of his power and a child who can act as an agent to find and return the book to him. In the opening episode, a disguised Scot gifts four toy creatures, the Shoebox Zoo, to Marnie for her birthday, to surveil and assist her in this quest.

Within this intergenerational relationship between an immortal and a child, the values of childhood and PSB are at risk, just as much as they were in *Young Dracula*, but the emphasis is different. Both Dracula and Scot identify the protagonists as the Chosen One, a child destined to fulfil some purpose that the adults cannot achieve themselves but, where Vlad is expected to fulfil his vampiric nature and family role, Scot identifies Marnie as an agent that can restore his own power and identity. Nevertheless, both immortal adults expect children to meet their demands at risk of erasure of their own childhood and identities. Where Dracula abhors education in favour of excitement and instinct, Michael Scot's raison d'être is learning. Both the historical and textual

Scot position themselves as scientist-magicians, and the voiceover reinforces this egocentric commitment to learning:

> There's nothing strange about magic; it's only science by another name [...]. But whether you call it magic or science, it's a mighty powerful thing that can be used for good, or in the wrong hands... well, let's just wait and see. (S1 E2)

Part of the danger within *Shoebox Zoo* is the pursuit of esoteric knowledge and the hubris to think it might be controlled by man. Scot became an immortal magician through his studies into alchemy and his eventual authorship of the 'Codex Arcana Nefasta, the list of unholy mysteries, the book of forbidden knowledge' (S1 E5). Early in his immortality, it was stolen by his students and then lost, and he identifies Marnie as the Chosen One who can find and return the book to him. He acknowledges the danger, stating, 'The book contains deep and dangerous magic. [...] You may find it but on no account can you open it.' The risk of too much learning becomes manifest and directly dangerous: through 'deep and dangerous magic,' Scot discovered the ability to generate life through science/magic and brought to life the antagonist, Toledo, who is also pursuing the power of the Book. Despite the potential risk to Marnie's physical and psychological wellbeing, Scot pressures her to find the book, often threatening her and the Shoebox Zoo creatures to maintain his power and immortality.

The damaging effect of immortality on Scot's own morals and relationships becomes clear through his creation and treatment of the Shoebox Zoo. The wooden figures of an eagle, a bear, a snake and a wolf all come to life in front of Marnie and reveal that they were once students of Scot's. In punishment for their theft of the book, Scot turned them into toys and 'imprisoned [them] lifeless across the centuries. [...] Like some horrible nightmare you can never wake up from' (S1 E2). It later emerges that the wolf, Wolfgang, was not only one of Scot's students but his own son, 'the wretch that shares my blood' (S1 E9). This paternal betrayal, the result of Scot's egocentric pursuit of immortality and power, makes Wolfgang even more hostile to Scot and he conspires with Toledo to defeat his father. After Wolfgang changes his mind, father and son reconcile but Toledo kills Wolfgang shortly afterwards by throwing him onto a fire in front

of Marnie and Scot. Though grief-stricken, Scot is still unable to accept his role in his son's cursed life and death.

Other effects of Scot's immortality are that he has, unintentionally, kept Toledo alive for centuries as his evil double and, more intentionally, kept his own servant McTaggart in his service just as long. Resentful of this, McTaggart points out to his master that he has weaponised immortality as an unjust punishment:

> I took the book so it wouldn't corrupt you the way it corrupted your students. Or fall into the hands of that evil monster that your precious knowledge created. And what thanks did I get? Tortured in your dungeons for eleven years. And doomed to walk this earth until this blasted book is found. (S1 E13)

Here, as in *Young Dracula*, immortality traps children and adults into the sterility of dynastic expectations, class division, and egocentricity. Scot's studies were made possible by his noble birth and generational wealth centuries before, and his alchemical knowledge is therefore as much a signifier of class and wealth as his castle, robes, and servant. Ali Mitchell, costume designer for *Shoebox Zoo*, stated the 'red/teal robes for 11th-century Alchemist Michael Scot and his colour scheme informs the school uniforms' (2011) as well as the livery McTaggart wears, suggesting connection, influence, and power over others through heritage. When season 2 moves from Edinburgh to Colorado, returning Marnie to her home in the States, the location for Scot's residence is the Fairmont Banff Spring Hotel. As with Tantallon Castle, he is the only occupant, attended once again by McTaggart. Heritage sites such as the Edinburgh locations of St Giles, the Balmoral Hotel and Central Library, even the residential neighbourhood of Marchmont with its characteristically Scots Baronial tenement buildings, later echoed in the similar style of the Banff hotel, are used to reinscribe the problematics of immortality in relation to ownership and control and clearly distinguish the identity of *Shoebox Zoo* as part of a particularly Scottish-Canadian lineage.

Scotland is itself presented as a kind of immortal discourse, separate from more traditional tartanry or kailyard representations, but nevertheless a pastiche of Scottish myth, dynasticism, and cultural identity that functions as the fuel for immortality within the text. This works on both a textual and extratextual level. Whitaker argues that *Shoebox*

Zoo, along with other texts produced by BBC Scotland like *Raven* and *Balamory*, 'foreground their Scottish origination' (2011, 75). In *Shoebox Zoo*, this operates through mise en scene but also through the star-studded cast including several well-known Scottish actors. Most notably, Michael Scot is played by Peter Mullan, only a few years after the release of the critically acclaimed *My Name is Joe* (Ken Loach 1998), and the rest of the cast are also established 'internationally known names' (BBC 2004, 5). The imbrication of history, identity, landscape, and cast establishes the drama as distinctively Scottish, which was one of Claire Rundell's intentions as Executive Producer for CBBC Scotland and co-creator of *Shoebox Zoo*: 'I was keen to raise CBBC Scotland's game [...] and get a more ambitious, international show with high production values commissioned' (BBC 2004). Consequently, *Shoebox Zoo* signals CBBC Scotland's ability to be competitive while maintaining PSB values of quality and citizenship but also, per Jacobsen, suggests an immortality immobilised in the ideas and knowledges of antiquity through its use of Scottish architecture, monuments, and accents.

By contrast, characters in season 2 are mobilised within the natural landscape and within social and cultural communities. Magical and spiritual power is embedded within nature and indigenous traditions. First Nations actor, Gordon Tootoosis, stars as Nathaniel, grandfather to one of Marnie's friends and a medicine man, who passes his knowledge along to his grandson, Kyle: 'That horse medicine wears you out. I'm getting too old, grandson. Too old to ride a horse anymore. I figure you're ready to take over the reins.' When Kyle questions if that means he must be like his grandfather, Nathaniel responds, 'No, I want you to be yourself, do things your way' (S2 E6), in contrast to Scot's own jealous guarding of knowledge and power.

As with Dracula, Scot becomes the figure of the *puer senex* or eternal child, a classical archetype in which aspects of childhood and maturity are conflated. However, as I have argued in regard to *Young Dracula*, these figures in children's drama are cautionary tales. Dracula and Scot are both immortal adults and 'bad' children: petulant, selfish and impulsive. This childishness in Scot is signalled through his relationship with McTaggart and Marnie. McTaggart must repeatedly remind Scot of their actual history rather than the self-exculpatory narrative Scot has constructed, and his care is more akin to parenting than service: in S2 E10, he tucks an ailing Scot into bed, tries to

persuade him to eat, and when Scot petulantly rejects this advice, McTaggart responds,

> Feeling sorry for yourself, eh? Go on, have a wee greet [cry], go on. No, you're not getting off with this. Your ambition and your arrogance created that Book and you're going to have to be here to clear up this mess when that book's finally found. Now eat your greens!

Again, an immortal father becomes a *puer senex*, abnegating his parental, social, and ethical responsibilities. McTaggart and the child characters are forced to model parenting and PSB values as an expected baseline, and in so doing save the world and themselves, reinforcing the redemptive power of citizenship, care, and responsible learning.

Conclusion

As I have argued in this article, British children's television has sustained an interrogation of the relationship between senescence and childhood, not only through realist programmes but through fantasy dramas about immortality. These dramas reflect persistent anxieties about ageing and death, following similar narrative patterns to adult-oriented discourses about old age and its relationship with youth. *Young Dracula* and *Shoebox Zoo* deploy what Joosen identifies as 'three basic patterns [linking old age and childhood]: affinity, conflict, and complementarity' (2018, 15), frequently seen in broader discourses of art and culture. They also draw on the *puer senex* archetype, in circulation since antiquity, but adapt it to the PSB values of children's television to interrogate the bounds of childhood and maturity, and the values that contribute to this transition. This article extends these cultural discourses to analyse representations of immortality and argues that the concept is used to question what it means to be a 'good' child within children's television. The case studies deliberately foreground longstanding PSB values of cooperation, care, forgiveness, and children's civic responsibility in CBBC, and as textual markers for maturation, redemption, and the reclamation of the relationship between childhood and senescence from conflict to affinity and complementarity.

Within these two case studies, immortality is positioned as anti-childhood and anti-citizenship, two discourses which are conflated

within the tradition and proposed 'crazyspace' of British public service broadcasting for children. Maturity and citizenship are thereby located as the responsibility of an individual within a civic community, and a responsibility which must be defended by children for children, even against adults and parents and the fantasy of immortality.

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