The Translation of Horror Splatter for Children in Italy
Darren Shan and his *Demonata Saga* in Translation

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Abstract

Shavit (1986) pioneered in treating children's literature as texts received in the context of target literature, highlighting the specific constraints this genre faces and how these constraints lead to deviations from the source text. Taboo topics, such as sex and violence, are often excluded from children's literature within a given society. Central to Shavit's historical argument is the assertion that modifications to source texts align with prevailing notions of what is deemed educationally 'beneficial for the child' in the cultural context of the time. In recent decades, translators have tended to place greater trust in children's ability to engage with differences; however, the adaptation of cultural details remains apparent, particularly in the translation of cultural references (e.g., food). What remains crucial is the role of the intended child reader in the translation process (O'Sullivan 2005) and its impact on the final product. In contemporary contexts, deviations from the source text have diminished, as exemplified by the *Demonata Saga* by Irish author Darren Shan, translated into Italian between 2007 and 2010. Unlike the Goosebumps series by American author R. L. Stine, Shan's novels draw inspiration from splatter horror, and their success suggests that Gothic elements which gained popularity in adult culture are beginning to influence children's literature as well (Buckley 2017). Shan utilizes tropes and imagery from splatter supernatural narratives, including demons that torment humans, themes of madness, and unsettling visions. This paper examines the translation of the first book, *Lord Loss* (2005), noting that it underwent no adaptations, which likely contributed to the series not being fully published; only six of the ten books in the series were translated. This assertion is supported by an interview with the author and the fact that the books are now out of print.

1. Introduction

Stories for children have traditionally been linked to fear and dark feelings, with the basic idea and principle to instruct children about the existence of dangerous situations and people. In his seminal work about fairytales and their role in children's psychological development, Bruno Bettelheim (2010 [1976]) stressed the importance of representing evil and the need for children to experience fear through the stories to grow up and face reality. However, despite this

important function played by gothic and horror elements in fairytales, there has always been the tendency to soften images and topics that adults consider too strong for a children's audience. Notorious passages in Grimm's or Perrault's fairytales, even though they were conceived both for adults and children, have been deleted or somehow censored in translation to the point that those references are not known to the general public.

Furthermore, norms in translation play a crucial role in the translation process, as Toury (1995) and Even-Zohar (2005) affirmed in their studies. Thus, norms have shaped, and still do today, children's literature in translation, as Shavit (1986) discussed in her analysis of the translation of children's literature. Moreover, childhood is also a social construct and its definition changes both diachronically and culturally, so, topics and themes suitable for children change accordingly. As a result, adaptation is the key term that characterises the translation of texts aimed at children, on the ground that children lack a wide background and encyclopedic knowledge and, because of this, they need to be protected. For this reason, some topics have been for a long time considered taboo in children's literature: the representation of sex, death, or physical pain has always been avoided in children's literature, and even when they rarely appeared, they have been manipulated and changed in the target texts.

Darren Shan is an Irish author for children whose main works deal with mystery, gothic, fear and, as will be discussed later in this essay, horror splatter. In Shan's books, a series called the *Demonata Saga*, demons are horrible and slaughter human beings mercilessly, depicting gruesome scenes and episodes. Interestingly, in the Italian translation, those tropes and scenes were fully translated, but their publication in Italy stopped at the sixth of the ten books of the saga.

Thus, this paper intends to throw some light on the translation of horror splatter and on the possible reasons why the saga was not as successful as in other European countries, having missed the opportunity to develop an Italian horror genre for children.

2. Horror and children's literature

2.1 The horror genre

The modern horror genre in Western literature can be traced back to the English Gothic novel of the eighteenth century and the German "shudder books" (Tawnshed 2016). Specifically, Gothic fiction began as a branch of Romantic literature, directly opposing the Enlightenment and its emphasis on scientific causes. In this context, with the exaltation of feelings and how Nature could reflect the human inner self, the Gothic genre started to exalt feelings such as fear and anxiety by depicting unreasonable events set in dark and ruined places.

Horror comes from the Latin verb *horrere*, which means to quiver or shudder (or, in the case of hair, to stand on end), and is commonly used in fiction to refer to texts or storylines that aim

to induce terror, shock, or disgust (or a combination of these), as well as associated emotional states such as dread or suspense (Reyes 2016). Moreover, although this is not strictly necessary, horror is often associated with supernatural happenings or fantastical situations. Whereas the latter emphasises the speculative features of supernatural events, horror employs them to elicit a reaction. Unlike other genres like Western or science fiction, but similar to Erotic fiction, horror is defined by its emotive themes rather than specific historical or geographical contexts.

Horror is a genre that spans across various media and historical contexts, making it highly marketable, with themes and characters that resonate widely within popular culture. The Gothic/Horror genre is often linked to specific characters or creatures, such as vampires, zombies, demons, and werewolves, as well as certain settings like haunted houses or manors. Nevertheless, these elements alone do not define the genre's boundaries. For example, for some, horror needs to be "disgusting" (Cavarero 2009, 8), while for others, simply shocking the audience is just one of the many ways in which horror can impact readers (King 1991, 40).

As a literary genre, horror creates suspense through a series of plot devices as identified by Noel Carroll (1990). Typically, a horror plot begins with an onset – the moment when the readers are first introduced to the monster, marking the beginning of the horror. The monster's arrival may be immediate or gradual, helping to build an atmosphere of uncertainty. Subsequently, the next stage involves the discovery of the monster, which can occur through investigations or be revealed as a surprise to the characters in the story. Following this, there is the confirmation stage, where characters attempt to convince others of the monster's existence and the mortal threat it poses. Finally, the plot culminates in a confrontation, which can take the form of a problem/solution scenario. Interestingly, these four stages can occur in any order, allowing for an uncountable variety of potential plots.

2.2 Horror in children's literature

The horror genre has its roots in graphic and repetitive folklore, myths, and legends from cultures around the world. Examples are Greek stories of Kronos and the Cyclops, and Russian tales of Baba Yaga, many of which originate from indigenous cultural traditions that depict child-eating ogres, witches, and demons. Despite this long history, children's horror fiction, as a distinct genre, is relatively recent, particularly since fairy tales are not categorised as horror.

Although horror literature for children can be a medium for conveying moral lessons – referred to by Maria Tatar as the "pedagogy of fear" (Tatar 1992, 22) – censorship of a genre designed to frighten children is perhaps inevitable. Nevertheless, children have always had a fascination with what we now refer to as Gothic themes – ghosts, goblins, hauntings, and horrors, as well as the concept of fear and the act of pretending to be afraid. As pointed out by Dale Townshend (2008), this interest was encouraged by their nursemaids, partly because fear

effectively ensures compliant behaviour and partly because the nursemaids themselves enjoyed the excitement of a good horror story. A significant development in the eighteenth century was the transformation of the Gothic narrative into an adult genre, even though it had originally belonged to children's literature.

However, this transformation did occur, and as a result, the Gothic genre was largely suppressed in children's literature in favour of morally uplifting texts that aligned with adults' desires to mould children into rational beings with Enlightenment values. One possible explanation for the persistence of Gothic elements in children's literature over the centuries may be how easily the typical Gothic setting can be seen as an allegory for the mind. Interestingly, although often distorted from a historical perspective, Gothic tales frequently present a free-floating setting.

The Gothic chronotope often takes place in a house haunted by a past that remains relevant (Jackson, Coats and McGillis 2008). As children grow, they accumulate more experiences – both good and bad – displacing these memories and creating complex pathways where fragments of their past can get lost, only to resurface at unexpected moments. Consequently, the child's mind becomes a crowded and sometimes frustratingly inaccessible place, while their body undergoes uncomfortable changes.

Furthermore, as Anna Jackson (2008) and Anna Smith (2008) argue, Gothic motifs of the uncanny are especially suitable for metaphorically exploring the tumultuous nature of adolescent identity. In this way, the uncanny aspects in the adolescent novels that these two scholars examine serve to both highlight and trigger change, acting as a complex metaphor for the transitions these characters experience in relation to their families and personal histories.

Children's literature is significantly influenced by adult horror and real-life horrors. Notably, horror fiction for children and teenagers began to emerge in the 1960s and 1970s. At this time, these works did not fit into a specific subgenre, as there was no concerted effort by publishers to promote horror fiction aimed at younger readers (Nevins 2020, 169-176). Instead, the authors often produced their work in isolation, influenced more by personal interests than by a broader young adult fiction movement. However, the publication of R. L. Stine's first *Goosebumps* novel, *Welcome to Dead House,* in 1992 altered this landscape. Specifically, the success of the adult horror market in the 1990s prompted a trend among children's book publishers to explore horror themes. As a result, this genre is a hybrid form that intersects with the genres of ghost stories, vampire tales, suspense, the supernatural, thrillers, and science fiction.

Victoria De Rjike (2004) examines horror fiction for children from the perspectives of different sub-genres and styles of writing, as well as the kinds of dread or fear they inspire. Using a psychoanalytic framework, she identifies five sub-categories as a way to analyse this slippery genre, though she advises not to take them too seriously. These sub-categories include BOO!-

horror, schlock-horror, camp-horror, gothic horror, and The Horror. Moreover, the types of dread explored in relation to these categories include the fear of being eaten, fear of being watched or witnessing death/dead/undead beings, fear of suburban life, fear of the inner self or double, fear of being stolen, and fear of the real.

Importantly, it essentially established young adult horror as a recognised category in publishing and marketing. This proves that Horror has become accessible to people of all ages (Reyes 2016, 195) and the genre is no longer exclusive to adults, as parents are increasingly accepting their children's interest in it.

By immersing themselves in gothic tales, children can learn how to navigate family and social issues that affect them in their everyday lives. Through these narratives, as fictional characters take steps to mend their fractured relationships, child readers can also develop a deeper sense of self-confidence. Finally, they can realise that they possess the strength and ability to restore order after experiencing chaos or trauma in their own lives (Howarth 2014, 14).

3. Translating horror for children

The field of translation studies lacks literature that focuses on a methodology for approaching horror literature. In a broader view, one of the main features of children's literature in translation is the adaptation of the original texts. Klingberg (1986) referred to this process as "cultural context adaptation", which involves modifying local features to make the text easier for children to understand.

Clotilde Landais (2016) proposes several strategies for analysing the translation of fear in horror literature, emphasising the significance of the reality effect and suspense in evoking fear in readers. To convey the emotions intended by the author accurately, translators must ensure that their choices reflect these feelings. Consequently, a translation that fails to evoke the intended sense of fear is considered unsuccessful from the perspective of individual reader reception.

Moreover, translators must find a balance between preserving the reality effect – often crucial at the beginning of horror narratives – and building suspense as the story progresses. The reality effect helps establish a credible fictional universe, while suspense is what keeps the reader fully engaged. Thus, careful reading and understanding of the narrative are extremely important, as translators must grasp the mechanisms of fear and how they are constructed in the original text. This comprehension is vital for reproducing the intended emotional impact in the target text.

Regarding cultural references, translators have the option to retain the original references with footnotes, which can help maintain the author's universe but may disrupt the narrative flow. Alternatively, they might adapt or replace these references to better suit the target

audience, although this approach could risk losing some cultural nuances. Additionally, to preserve the narrative rhythm that elicits fear, translators should strive to remain as close as possible to the original text's grammatical and vocabulary choices, as well as its sentence organisation, thereby helping to replicate the intended pacing and tension.

By employing these strategies, translators can enhance the reception of horror fiction in the target language, ensuring that the emotional impact of fear is effectively conveyed to the reader.

What seems to be a guideline in the study of the translation of horror is the concept of norms. According to Gideon Toury's target-oriented approach (1995), we can identify three types of translational norms: initial, preliminary, and operational. Specifically, initial norms dictate whether to follow source or target culture norms, resulting in acceptable or inadequate translations. Meanwhile, preliminary norms govern translation policy and the acceptability of indirect translations. Finally, operational norms govern the act of translation, influencing text structure and language choices. Notably, Toury acknowledged the sociocultural boundedness, instability, and extraction difficulty of norms, which are inherently unstable and change over time. Childhood is not determined only by psychological and biological factors, as its meaning changes according to cultural and social contexts and periods in history. As a result, different societies may present contrasting ideas about children's vulnerabilities and capacities. Thus, ideas about what is admissible or not when talking about taboo topics such as sexuality or death vary with time and society, and therefore, norms always change accordingly. Within the translational process of horror works, a crucial role is also played by other various factors, including linguistic, ideological, poetics, and discourse aspects (Lefevere 1992,14), highlighting the interplay between the source text and its adaptation to the target audience's cultural and ideological norms.

In a broader context, all translations can be seen as a form of rewriting, and they reflect certain ideologies (Lefevere 2017). Shavit (1986) was the first to examine children's literature as texts that are received in a target culture, highlighting the specific constraints faced by this genre and how texts translated for children have been subject to censorship and manipulation by adapting them to the idea of what adults deem suitable for children.

Furthermore, ideological control, particularly in the form of censorship, is most apparent when totalitarian regimes attempt to indoctrinate the youth, subjecting children's literature – including translations – to various degrees of manipulation (Fernández López 2005).

In recent decades, translators have shown more confidence in children's ability to understand differences; however, cultural adaptations are still present, such as in the translation of cultural references like food.

What remains central to this process is the presence of an intended child reader throughout the entire translation process (O'Sullivan 2005) and the impact this has on the final product.

Still today, adults, whether parents or educators, select books for their children and decide what is more acceptable for them.

4. Darren Shan and the *Demonata* Saga: *Lord Loss.*

4.1. The author and his work

Darren Shan (1972) is an Irish author famous primarily for his dark, gothic, and horror-infused young adult literature books. Although he started his writing career at a young age, Shan gained international acclaim through his series, *Cirque du Freak* (2000-2004), which seamlessly merges elements of Gothic fiction, horror, and fantasy. His narrative style, marked by a relentless pace and gruesome horror, captures the imaginations of young readers, particularly in Europe, where his works have achieved great popularity. Shan's early works were predominantly rooted in fantasy; however, he quickly gained a reputation for looking into darker, more macabre narratives, exemplified in his *Demonata* saga (2005/2009). This series, comprising ten books, presents an eerie exploration of a world in which demons and humans bump in violent and horrific encounters.

Moreover, Shan has consistently expanded his creativity within the horror genre, notably with his *Zom-B* (2012/2016) series and various stand-alone novels, thereby becoming a leading figure in contemporary teen horror fiction. The first book of the *Demonata* saga, *Lord Loss* (2005), immerses readers in a world of darkness and terror. The plot focuses on Grubbs Grady, a teenage boy who, alongside his uncle, confronts a nightmare reality after the brutal murder of his family by mysterious and supernatural creatures. These entities, referred to as demons, enter the human world through rifts that open between dimensions. As Grubbs seeks help in his uncle's mansion, it becomes a battleground where they must face the demon lord, Lord Loss.

Shan's prose in *Lord Loss* is characterised by intense horror elements that draw heavily on Gothic themes of isolation, darkness, and the supernatural. Furthermore, the fast-paced narrative is filled with grotesque imagery and terrifying encounters that underscore the brutality and unpredictability of the demons. The atmosphere is imbued with dread, blending psychological and physical horror, offering readers an upsetting glimpse into a world where humanity's survival is precarious. In particular, the Gothic atmosphere is accentuated by the mansion's haunting setting, which plays with themes of isolation and claustrophobia prevalent in classic horror literature. Throughout *Lord Loss*, Shan creates an intricate plot that examines the fragility of life, the terror of the unknown, and the struggle for survival amidst overwhelming malice.

The book achieved significant success in Europe, contributing to Shan's rising fame within the horror genre. From a thematic perspective, the *Demonata* saga frequently introduces disturbing and unresolvable questions, designed to instill fear within the reader's rational self.

For example, themes such as the fear of bewitching figures, exemplified by the Boogeyman, alongside the unsettling realization that home may not be a sanctuary, further amplify its chilling atmosphere.

The *Demonata Saga* was translated into Italian between 2007 and 2010, and according to Shan, it primarily targets children in the age range of approximately 11 to 13 years. However, recommendations on specialized e-book stores regarding the intended audience occasionally extend to children as young as eight. This saga is notably distinct from the *Goosebumps* series (1992 to present) by American author R. L. Stine, as Shan's works draw inspiration from splatter horror. The success of the *Demonata* series indicates that elements of Gothic literature, which have gained popularity in adult culture, are increasingly permeating children's literature (Buckley 2017).

4.2. Translation Analysis: Lord Loss – Il Signore dei Demoni

A book cover is often regarded as the initial means of communication between the book and the reader, as it serves as a threshold that invites engagement. Moreover, it functions as a commercial tool for publishers, designed to capture the attention of potential readers and encourage them to explore the book. At the same time, it embodies a collaboration between the author's words and the designer's vision, thus serving as a fusion of form and meaning that represents literary heritage, cultural identities, and artistic expression.

In this regard, a book cover is examined as an example of intersemiotic translation within Translation Studies, since it represents a partial reflection of the text. Notably, Marco Sonzogni (2011) explored various covers of Umberto Eco's novel *The Name of the Rose* in the context of text-to-cover translation. Building upon this perspective, Jian (2021) suggests that a book cover can also function as an exotic cultural translation driven primarily by marketing considerations.

When comparing the source and the target covers for *Lord Loss*, they do not show significant changes or adaptations. Specifically, both covers depict a sort of (were)wolf face with a gnarling open mouth and glow-in-the-dark evil eyes while it seems to jump out against the observer during a chess game, as the scattered pieces around suggest. However, we can notice some differences. On the source cover, the author's name is at the top while the title is at the bottom. In contrast, on the target cover, at the top, we read the word *Demonata* and, at the bottom, the title and the author's name. Despite these layout variations, fonts are not changed, nor are the colors; therefore, in both cultures, the genre and main topic of the book are clear from its cover. Furthermore, *Lord Loss* is the source title of the book, and it is also the name of the demon that slaughters the protagonist's family. Yet, in the target title, the reference to the demon's name, probably the most fearful of them, is not mentioned. Instead, the title is translated as *Il Signore*

dei Demoni (*The Lord of the Demons*), employing an explicitation strategy. This is likely due to the difficulty of a literal translation of the original name, which also presents alliteration.

As for the translation analysis, it will be focused mainly on those scenes of the plot where Gothic and horror-splatter tropes are present, to highlight the way they were translated.

(1) [...] When a parent turns up at school, unexpected, it means one of two things. Either somebody close to you has been seriously injured or died, or you're in trouble.

My immediate reaction – please don't let anybody be dead! I think of Dad, Gret, uncles, aunts, cousins. It could be any of them. Alive and kicking this morning. Now <u>stiff and cold, tongue sticking out, a slab of dead meat just waiting to be buried</u>. [...] (Page 9: *Rat Guts*)

(2) [...] Quando un genitore si presenta a scuola all'improvviso, può significare solo due cose: qualcuno in famiglia è gravemente ferito o persino morto… oppure sei nei guai.

La mia reazione è immediata: ti prego fa' che non sia morto nessuno! Penso a papà, Gret, zii, zie e cugini vari. Potrebbe essere chiunque. Vivi e vegeti questa mattina, ora <u>rigidi e freddi, con la lingua penzoloni, un mucchio di carne morta che aspetta di essere sepolto.</u> [...] (Page 7: *Viscere di Ratto)*

The first sample is taken from one of the first chapters of the book. It effectively sets the atmosphere and the tone, introducing the reader to the life of a teenager who cares for his family. At the same time, the idea of death creeps in with the images of his family and relatives dead, giving the reader a first hint of splatter by the phrase "slab of death meat", which is translated straightforwardly. When comparing the source and the target texts, it is clear that no adaptation at the content level has been made. However, the only adaptation occurs at the cultural level as the idiom "alive and kicking" is straightforwardly translated with its Italian equivalent.

(3) [...] Mum and Dad are by the sink, discussing the day ahead. They got stiff when they hear the screams, then dash towards the stairs, which I can see from where I'm sitting. Gret appears before they reach the stairs. Crashes out of her room, <u>screaming, slapping bloody shreds from her arms, tearing them from her hair</u>. She's covered in red. [...] "What did you put on my towel?" she asks quietly.

<u>"Rat guts!"</u> I howl, pounding the table, crying with laughter. "I got… rats at the rubbish damp… <u>chopped them up…</u> and…" [...] (Pages 15-16)

(4) […] Mamma e papà stanno chiacchierando della giornata che li aspetta, ma quando sentono le grida rimangono paralizzati per una frazione di secondo e poi sfrecciano fuori dalla stanza. Mi sono preoccupato di sedermi in una posizione ottimale per osservare bene tutta la scena.

Gret compare sul pianerottolo prima che raggiungano le scale. Si precipita fuori dalla sua camera <u>tra urla disperate, schiaffeggiandosi le braccia e strappandosi i capelli per togliersi di dosso brandelli di carne sanguinolenta</u>. È rossa dalla testa ai piedi. […] – Che cosa hai messo nell'asciugamano? – mi chiede in tono glaciale.

<u>Viscere di ratto!</u> – esclamo battendo i pugni sul tavolo mentre gli occhi mi lacrimano per le risate. – Ho trovato… dei ratti nelle immondizie… <u>li ho tagliati a pezzettini</u>… e… […] (Page 14).

At the beginning of the second passage in the target text (excerpts 3-4), there is a syntactic intervention that makes the scene longer by reducing the number of sentences and creating a complex-compound sentence in Italian. For example, the phrase "the day ahead" is thus translated with a relative clause to ensure greater clarity. Moreover, the reference to the sink by which the parents are talking is deleted in the target text, since the paragraph begins in the kitchen at breakfast. Additionally, we may notice a sort of expansion in the same passage, as the place where Grubbs is watching the scene is clearly depicted in Italian and referred to as "posizione ottimale," adding more cinematic effect. The same occurs with the translation of the adverbial "quietly" rendered with "in tono glaciale," thereby giving more pathos to the scene. The cinematic atmosphere is maintained throughout the passage up until the climax, when the protagonist's sister appears on the scene covered in blood and rat pieces. Notably, the splatter tropes and the description of Grubb's sister being covered in blood and rat meat are not softened. Instead, they are rendered in Italian, resulting in the same horror-splatter style of the author. Specifically, "bloody shreds" is translated with "brandelli di carne sanguinolenta," which is a more accurate and evocative choice.

(5) […] I edge closer to Mum and Dad's room. […] <u>The door feels red hot</u>, as though a fire is burning behind it. I press an ear to the wood – if I hear the crackle of flames, I'll race straight to the phone and dial 999. But there's no crackle. No smoke. Just deep, heavy breathing… and a <u>curious dripping sound.</u> […] Inside the room, somebody giggles – low, throaty, <u>sadistic</u>. Not Mum, Dad or Gret. <u>There's a ripping sound, followed by snaps and crunches.</u> […] (Pages 31-32)

(6) […] Mi avvicino lentamente alla camera da letto di mamma e papà. […] <u>La porta arde di un rosso rovente</u>, come se nella stanza dall'altra parte fosse scoppiato un incendio. Premo un orecchio contro <u>l'uscio:</u> se sento uno sfrigolare di fiamme, mi precipiterò subito al telefono per chiamare i <u>vigili del fuoco.</u> Nessun rumore di fiamme. Niente fumo. Solo un respiro profondo e pesante<u>… e uno strano sgocciolio.</u> […] Dentro la stanza qualcuno sta sghignazzando, una risatina sommessa, rauca, <u>crudele.</u> Non è la voce di mamma, di papà o Gret. <u>Un rumore di strappi, seguito da schiocchi e scrocchi.</u> […] (Page 30)

The two samples above are probably the most fearful and rich with macabre details, and, according to Carroll's analysis, they are part of the monster's discovery. In particular, Grubb opens his bedroom parents' door to find the demon and its monstrous minions playing with the corpses of his family. This horrifying scene is prepared at the end of the previous chapter, where an ajar door lets the protagonist gaze at a strange red light and macabre sounds until the terrible discovery in the following chapter. We may notice a couple of cultural adaptations in the translation of "wood", referring to the typical British houses made entirely of wood, as well as the explicitation of the 999-emergency number changed into "vigili del fuoco" (fire brigade). These changes may be necessary because those elements may not be understood by a young audience due to a lack of encyclopedic knowledge. Finally, sensorial elements, linked to sounds (the blood dripping and the giggling) and colours (the red of the light coming from the room) are translated with powerful equivalence, thereby preparing the reader for the following gruesome scene.

(7) <u>Blood everywhere. Nightmarish splashes and gory pools. Wild streaks across the floor and walls.</u>
    <u>Except the walls aren't walls. I'm surrounded on all four sides by webs.</u> Millions of strands thicker than my arm, some connecting in orderly designs, others running chaotically apart. Many of the strands are stained with blood. […] My eyes snap from the walls. […] <u>The dripping sound – a body hanging upside down from the webbing ceiling in the centre of the room. No head. Blood drops to the floor from the gaping red O of the neck.</u> Even without the head, I recognise him.
    "Dad!" I scream, and the cry almost rips my vocal chords apart.
    To my left, an obscene creature spins round and snarls. <u>It has the body of a very large dog, the head of a crocodile. Beneath it, motionless – Mum. Or what's left of her.</u>
    A dreadful howl to my right. <u>Gret! Sitting on the floor, staring at me, weaving sideways, her face white, except where it's smeared with blood.</u> I start to call to her. <u>She half-turns</u>

and I realise that she's been split in two. Something's behind her, in the cavity at the back, moving her like a hand puppet.

The 'something' pushes Gret away. It's a child, but no child of this world. It has the body of a three-year-old, with a head much larger than any normal person's. Pale green skin. No eyes – a small ball of fire flickers in each of the empty sockets. No hair – yet its head is alive with movement. As the hell-child advances, I see that the objects are cockroaches. Living. Feeding on its rotten flesh.

[…] A man slides out from behind a clump of webby strands. Thin. Pale red skin, misshapen, lumpy, as though made out of coloured dough. His hands are mangled, bones sticking out of the skin, one finger melting into another. Bald. Strange eyes – no white, just a dark red iris and an even darker pupil. There's a gaping, jagged hole in the left side of his chest. I can look clean through it. Inside the hole – snakes. Dozens of tiny, hissing, coiled serpents, with long curved fangs. (Pages 33/35: *Demons*)

(8) Sangue dappertutto. Spaventosi schizzi rossi e pozze vermiglie. Scarabocchi disperati sul pavimento e sulle pareti.

Solo che le pareti non sono pareti. Sono circondato da ragnatele. Milioni di fili più spessi del mio braccio, alcuni disposti secondo schemi ordinati, altri confusi nelle direzioni più disparate. Molti sono macchiati di sangue. […] Con uno scatto distolgo lo sguardo. […] Quel gocciolio…Un corpo pende a testa in giù dal soffitto di ragnatele al centro della stanza. Decapitato. Sangue gocciola sul pavimento dalla cavità aperta sul collo.

Anche senza testa, lo riconosco.

PAPÀ! – L'urlo quasi mi strappa le corde vocali.

Alla mia sinistra, una creatura disgustosa si volta e ringhia. Ha il corpo di un grosso cane e la testa da coccodrillo. Tra le sue zampe, immobile… mamma. O meglio, quello che ne rimane.

Un grido terrificante alla mia destra. Gret! Seduta per terra con lo sguardo fisso su di me sta per accasciarsi su un fianco… Ha il viso pallido, tranne dov'è macchiato di sangue. Spalanco la bocca per chiamarla, ma lei si volta e mi rendo conto che è stata squarciata in due. Qualcuno o qualcosa dentro di lei, la sta muovendo come un burattino dalla cavità che ha sulla schiena.

Questo qualcuno o qualcosa spinge via Gret. Si tratta di un bambino, inumano. Ha il corpo di un frugoletto di tre anni, ma la testa molto più grande di qualsiasi persona normale e la pelle verdastra. È senza occhi: una minuscola palla di fuoco gli arde nelle orbite vuote. E non ha nemmeno i capelli, anche se la pelle del cranio brulica di

movimento. Quando lo vedo avanzare verso di me, mi accorgo che sulla testa gli zampetta uno sciame di scarafaggi. Sono vivi e si nutrono della sua carne putrefatta.

[…] Un uomo sbuca da dietro un ammasso di fili di ragnatela. È piuttosto esile e ha la pelle rossa, deturpata e bitorzoluta, come se fosse stata modellata con il pongo. Ha testa completamente calva e le mani maciullate: le ossa gli spuntano fuori dalla pelle e le dita sembrano fondersi l'una con l'altra. Occhi senza bianco, soltanto un'iride di un rosso intenso e una pupilla più scura. Sul lato sinistro del petto gli si apre una cavità slabbrata e irregolare in cui riesco a guardare chiaramente: all'interno pulsa una miriade di minuscole serpi aggrovigliate e sibilanti, dalle lunghe zanne ricurve. (Pages 31-33: *Demoni*)

When we observe the gruesome descriptions of the family bodies, there are no traces of adaptation, and the descriptions in the target text reproduce the equivalent effect of the source. In both texts, Grubbs is confronted with a terrifying scene, rich with details which gives the feeling that the time has stopped. Indeed, it is the discovery of the monster and what has been done to Grubbs' family that is depicted, leaving no room for imagination. References to blood and body parts are translated and no attempt to mitigate the scene comes through the translation strategy.

The chapter opens with three noun phrases, focusing the reader's attention on the blood in the room. The sensorial element of the dripping sound prepares for the first gruesome scene, where Grubbs discovers his father's corpse hanging upside down and beheaded. This sensorial element, the phrase "The dripping sound" is translated as "Quel gocciolio," taking the reader back to the end of the previous chapter, thus becoming more specific. Furthermore, the noun phrase "No head" is rendered with a participle *Decapitato*, which makes the description even crueller, as it provides a certain specificity about his fate. The gaping red O of the neck is also explicit by the word *cavità* (cavity), giving an anatomical splatter description of the body. As for the other descriptions of his family members, the lexical choices are accurate such, as using the verb "squarciata in due" for his sister, which accurately gives more emphasis to the scene.

As for the demons in the room, they are all introduced by noun phrases that focus attention on the monsters' horrible features. In the translation, those noun phrases are mostly changed into descriptive clauses, probably in the attempt to avoid interrupting the rhythm of the narration in Italian. The monster with the head of a child and the body of a kind of bug is described in the target text as "It is a child, but not a child of this world." This last phrase is rendered with a simple adjective, *inumano* (inhuman), presenting a case of explicitation, as it marks its monstrous nature. Moreover, the use of the word *frugoletto* in Italian, which denotes a sweet little child, is in sharp contrast with the rest of the body of this eyeless creature, which

is made of rotten flesh and covered with cockroaches, adding more horror to the scene. Similarly, the same accuracy is conveyed in the demon's description as the adjective *slabbrata* is used to translate the two pre-modifiers "gaping" and "jagged" referring to the hole in his chest, in Italian translated with the specialized term of *cavità* (cavity). As we may observe, all references to body injuries or gruesome imperfections (such as those on the demon) are translated with more accurate – and sometimes specialised – terms. For this reason, though intended to target a young audience, the translation strategies adopted tend towards a more adult readership, able to appreciate the accurate and specialised language in the body description.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of the samples containing explicit horror and gruesome descriptions indicates that the editorial direction aimed at launching a new literary genre, inspired by Shan's success in the UK and other countries. However, *The Demonata Saga*, which consists of ten volumes, was published only up to the sixth book, which seemingly provided a satisfactory conclusion to the story. It appears that the series did not sell as well as anticipated, perhaps because the public found it too explicit and gory for a children's audience. This assessment is further supported by the author, who confirmed via e-mail that the Italian publishing house was dissatisfied with the sales.

Moreover, while a few scattered comments on Amazon expressed enthusiasm for the book, they also suggested that it was inappropriate for children.[1] Consequently, the publication did not pave the way for the development of an Italian horror splatter genre for children; instead, most books labelled as horror are still translations primarily from English.

Interestingly, the Gothic genre seems more suitable for children, as we can observe by searching major Italian e-bookstore catalogues (e.g. Mondadori). When horror books for children are present, we typically find Gothic stories featuring ghosts, haunted manors and castles, or supernatural events, yet without splatter episodes. This trend is further confirmed by the visual elements of these books. When examining their covers, there is a clear trend towards dark and sombre designs in a pure (neo-) Gothic style. Therefore, Gothic and fearsome elements in children's literature remain acceptable as long as they are softened or clearly targeted at young adults.

For example, Salani published the first book of Jonathan Stroud's *Lockwood & Co.* series (2023), initially featuring a Disney-style cover with two kids about to climb a haunted staircase, where a ghastly woman floats at its centre. Actually, in the story, the staircase was the site of a massacre. When Netflix adapted the first of the five books into a series, Salani released the

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[1] https://www.amazon.it/signore-dei-demoni-Demonata/dp/8804569581/. Last visited 27/04/2025.

book again with a new cover taken from the marketing tv-show poster showcasing the three young adult ghost detectives in a more realistic and sombre style, thus clearly targeting a young adult readership.

These commercial and marketing choices lead us to consider the impact of the contemporary Italian cultural concept of childhood, which influences the educational choices made by adults. It is likely that in Italy, childhood is often viewed as a life stage where pain and fear should be limited or at least mitigated. Thus, commercial choices intersect with cultural values that shape individual educational decisions. The translational approach used in *Lord Loss* appears to shift the target readership towards young adult or pre-teen children (10-12 years old). This is partly suggested by the book covers, which display a realistic drawing style more suitable to those age groups.

In conclusion, while fear remains an acceptable theme for children, it should not be conflated with the splatter genre, which is deemed more suitable for an older audience.

Bionote

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