

Reading Against the Goo: *Goosebumps*, YTV, and Canadian Children's Television

Pat Bonner

A Thesis

In

The Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts (Film Studies) at

Concordia University

Montréal, Quebec, Canada

August 2019

©Pat Bonner, 2019

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Pat Bonner
Entitled: Reading Against the Goo: *Goosebumps*, YTV, and Canadian
Children's Television

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (Film Studies)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final Examining Committee:

Catherine Russell, PhD Chair

Marc Steinberg, PhD Examiner (Internal)

Charles Acland, PhD Examiner (External)

Joshua Neves, PhD Supervisor

Approved by _____
Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

_____ 2019

Dean of Faculty, Dr. Rebecca Duclos

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the oversight of Canadian children's television through the Canadian-American co-venture *Goosebumps* (1995-1998) and the Canadian specialty children's network YTV. Grounding *Goosebumps* within the North American post-network television landscape, this thesis argues that the show anticipates hypercommercialism, a term used to define "the way in which advertisers tend to colonize media spaces" (Asquith 2012). This thesis proposes that by detaching YTV and *Goosebumps* from the threatening connotations of hypercommercialism, scholars can better engage with the show's reception. It further contends that *Goosebumps* is imbued with sensorial and perceptual operations which can help children achieve the "mastery of intertextuality" (Kinder 1999). Analyzing how the poetics of the children's horror genre are articulated through the show's form, this thesis argues that *Goosebumps* cultivates the child audience through sensorial and perceptual operations, preparing them to engage with increasingly hyper-saturated media spaces. This audience training is problematized by the suffusion of the aesthetics of children's horror into the marketing efforts of *Goosebumps* and YTV. Analyzing two multi-part episodes of *Goosebumps*, this thesis argues for the merits of textually analyzing children's programming, an approach that opens up inventive pedagogies through which young people and academics alike can critically engage with commercial children's television.

To Mom and Dad

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Context.....	2
Concepts.....	6
Chapters.....	11
Chapter One	
The Oversight of <i>Goosebumps</i>: Production, Reception, and Commercial	
Textuality	13
The Oversight of YTV.....	17
Reconsidering <i>Goosebumps</i>	21
If the Goo Sticks: Streamlining Slime with <i>Goosebumps</i> on YTV.....	23
Post-Network TV and Commercial Textuality.....	27
The Child Audience and YTV.....	34
Pleasure and Pedagogy on <i>Goosebumps</i>	38
Chapter Two	
Reader Beware!/: Hyper-Active Media Literacy on <i>Goosebumps</i>	47
Framing Fear.....	48
Reading Form.....	53
Gaming the System.....	55
Reading <i>Goosebumps</i>	64
Streamlining Fun in the <i>Chillogy</i>	66
The Gazes of <i>The Haunted Mask</i>	70
Conclusion.....	80
Works Cited.....	83

Introduction

In universities across Canada, throughout English, Film, and Media departments, students consistently show aversion to the requisite Canadian Studies courses. Natalie Coulter, in her essay “Missed Opportunity: The Oversight of Canadian Children’s Media,” writes that her students invariably hold disdain for Canadian media, complaining it “sucks,” and that they do not, apparently, “watch it, read it, or listen to it” (95). Coulter’s essay reverberates echoes of my own experience studying film, television, and literature in Canada. Her anecdote brings to mind the often bland and nationalistic curriculum taught in these Canadian courses: old National Film Board material, made-for-CBC films, the antiquated Heritage Minutes series, to name a few. Against all of this, Canadian children’s television has historically been one of Canada’s most vibrant cultural industries—both nationally and in North American markets—going back as far as CBC’s *The Friendly Giant* (1958-1985) (Coulter 97). Coulter’s work reminds me that as a child in the 1990s, myself and countless other kids of my generation *enthusiastically* consumed a plethora of visceral, cutting-edge Canadian children’s programming. Yet Canadian television scholars frequently overlook this dynamic body of work in both research and pedagogy. The crux of this thesis then, building on Coulter’s project, is my assertion that Canadian children’s television is a crucial component of Canadian media production, a fact that should be reflected in Canadian scholarship in all levels of education. Our anxieties about the future, our nostalgia for the past, and our projections of the present—these are all bound up in the stories we tell children.

This thesis will “identif[y] the gaps” and “tak[e] stock” (Coulter 96-97) of Canadian children’s television by examining the Canadian-American co-venture *Goosebumps* (YTV 1995-1998) and the Canadian specialty children’s network YTV. *Goosebumps*—the children’s horror anthology series—is one of myriad Canadian-made works that has been overlooked because it

does not easily fit into the traditional Canadian studies paradigm. Contributing further to its oversight is the fact that, in the 1990s, the book and TV series were criticized by parents and educators for their apparently lowly appeal.¹ To rectify this oversight, my thesis interrogates the show's unconventionally pedagogical mode of address—influenced by American post-network aesthetics and the poetics of the children's horror genre—which circumvents and pushes back against its supposedly odious production context. As such, this thesis argues that *Goosebumps* textually resists its commercial logic, offering a model to infuse commercial children's television—an increasingly streamlined industry—with a renewed ethos of public service.

Context

As Marian Bredin, Scott Henderson, and Sarah A. Matheson write in their introduction to *Canadian Television: Text and Context*, “the digital age is transforming all media, while globalization erodes the national boundaries that constrain media dissemination and access” (4). These changes have affected how TV is accessed and viewed in Canada while shifting focus away from the dominant identity-centred approach. The cultural, economic, and technological shifts from the 1980s into the 1990s—the evolution of video technology, advertising deregulation, changing children's tastes, and the dot-com boom—culminate in the production of *Goosebumps*. *Goosebumps* exists at the threshold of the still-emerging digital age—it was a cross-platform, commercial behemoth that communicated with children through the VCRs, their TV screens, in print, and online. Furthermore, *Goosebumps* appeals to the uncouth tastes of children in a (potentially) progressive, autonomizing fashion, much to the chagrin of adults. This

¹ The year *Goosebumps* debuted on YTV, a district school board in Nova Scotia banned the books from elementary schools (McKay F7). Moreover, *Goosebumps*'s producers have reported calls from parents complaining of the show frightening their young children (Brown 57).

thesis posits that two features of *Goosebumps*—its commercialization and its appeal to children’s tastes—are what has kept the show from being critically interrogated by scholars. My analysis indicates that *Goosebumps* reflects a transitional period in Canadian television history—one that helps us historically situate our increasingly complex multi-platform, media-saturated present.

Goosebumps was produced at a historical moment in which Canadian TV depended increasingly on the American market.² This dependency resulted in decreased emphasis on Canadian television’s nationalist goals, increased commercialization, and changes to the types of stories told on Canadian TVs. *Goosebumps* is adapted from an American book series. While it is shot in Canada with Canadian crews, episodes are set in U.S. cities. Building on the success of the books, the Canadian adaptation became a massive worldwide hit. The show spun off further series, videotapes, games, theatre productions, and blockbuster films; as such, it occupies a central position in the franchise’s larger media matrix. Furthermore, it is an early example of the Canadian TV industry’s integration into the Anglo-North American world of transmedia franchising. *Goosebumps* is part of a lineage of Canadian children’s programs, such as *The Friendly Giant*, *Polka Dot Door* (TVOntario 1971-1995), *Mr. Dressup* (CBC 1967-1996), *You Can’t Do That On Television* (CTV 1979-1990), *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* (YTV 1990-2000) and *Degrassi* (CTV 1987-1991), that were successful and influential in the United States. Canadian children’s TV has been so successful precisely because it was at the forefront of Canadian media industries’ integration into the American market. Paradoxically, this Americanization has contributed to the critical oversight of some of Canada’s most successful children’s shows and networks. Moreover, this Americanization has an effect on the Canadian

² The “Simultaneous Substitution” policy allows networks to subsidize Canadian television production by airing Canadian commercials during American broadcasts, by switching to a Canadian broadcast when two shows are airing at the same time. The derived income can then be used to “carry, produce, and purchase domestic programming” (Tate 2007).

cultural consciousness; as Coulter's anecdote suggests, many fail to realize what they are watching *is* Canadian.

This is not to say we should abandon the search for the national altogether. Rather, there is a need to reframe what we mean by the term. Stephen Crofts argues that the spread of corporate capital, the consolidation of global markets, and the speed of electronic communications has put pressure on the idea of the "national" in cinema since the 1980s and 1990s (386). This is just as relevant in the case of television. National labels, Crofts continues, are used to market variations of *otherness*, or cultural difference. In this light, the idea of the "national" in Canadian children's television is problematized. It is increasingly difficult to discern an otherness in a Canadian industry that is so firmly integrated into the American market. However, Paul Willemen writes that "the specificity of cultural formation may be marked by the presence but also by the absence of preoccupation with national identity" (Willemen q. in Croft 387). As such, it is important to look at the non-Canadianness of Canadian children's TV if one is to tease out the industry's national-cultural specificity. *Goosebumps* signals a transitional moment of Canadian television at the threshold of the emerging, globalized digital age. As a hyper-successful Canadian-American, cross-platform text, it is a meaningful site through which to resituate the national in Canadian children's media industries.

Let me briefly explore shifting perspectives around the child audience in general since the 1980s which lead to the emergence of the Canadian network YTV. JoEllen FisherKeller, writing about American children's TV, writes that "most often adults refer to youth as passive receivers of media messages and images (2). In this vein, Stephen Kline states that childhood "is a condition defined by powerlessness and dependence upon the adult community's directives and guidance" (44). These characterizations of the child as endangered and vulnerable keep children

“confined to social arenas and forms of behavior which will not prove threatening to adults, or in which adults will be unable to threaten *them*” (Buckingham 12). Adult definitions of childhood such as these serve to perpetuate a bland, overly-moralistic cultural product referred to as “green vegetable” television: programming that is lauded by adults for its educational value while remaining unpopular to children themselves (Pecora 23). A contradictory, equally pervasive perspective is the idea that the modern child of the digital age has a near-superhuman media-savviness (Buckingham 7). Both ends of this active/passive spectrum offer limited, simplistic views of children’s screen behaviours. I take up this thesis from a space between these opposing poles, while nevertheless considering the child audience as active meaning-makers. While children’s commercial culture can be potentially manipulative, the television it offers is often complexly intertextual and sensorially generative for its audience. Kline, referencing North American TV, argues that children “will forget many of the facts they learn in this TV-watching but will retain vague impressions from the thousands of stories they see” (17). Marsha Kinder, focusing of American children’s television from the 1990s, investigates the generative functionality of these impressions, contending that commercial children’s programming “introduces the basic cognitive categories for organizing perceptions of the world” (184). My own research on the child audience builds on Kinder’s project, which tracks these operations through children’s commercial network flows.

YTV, following in the footsteps of Nickelodeon, signals these shifting perspectives around childhood. The network was borne of advertising deregulation and a boom in children’s marketing in the late-80s. By 1996, the network generated more than \$200 million in Canadian television production. Television Business International called them the “busiest co-producer of children’s programming in the world (Strachan C9). Like its American counterpart, YTV claims

to respect children's tastes through its brand of puerile "gross-out" humour that children connect with (Asquith 96). *Goosebumps* became one of YTV's flagship programs in 1995. The series was the perfect fit for the network's own cross-platform ambitions; the show's campy, grotesque aesthetic integrated smoothly with YTV's slovenly network image. As David Buckingham, Hannah Davies, and David Kelley, writing about British and American TV, children tend to claim as their own programs that are "cool,"³ action-packed, and funny (484). Buckingham has shown elsewhere that in the 1990s, the horror genre was gaining popularity with children (127)—a trend YTV capitalized on in Canada. As such, *Goosebumps* and YTV help us understand changes in our understanding of children's tastes in ways that are both historically specific and regionally inflected.

Concepts

This thesis is informed by Kyle Asquith's concept of "hypercommercialism." Asquith uses the concept to explore the integration of television channels and advertising through multimedia and multi-platform marketing strategies (Asquith 99). YTV, Asquith argues, is a hypercommercial network. He notes that "Canadian broadcast licenses have historically limited the number of commercials that can be included during a program" (99). Canada's Broadcast Code for Advertising to Children limits ad time to 8 minutes per hour; as such, YTV has had to find ways for advertisers to circumvent this policy. The network has thus found ways to merge programming and commercials in increasingly imperceptible fashion. Its barrage of "weird" and "gross-out" images, crucial to its branding, results in an indistinguishable integration of advertising and content. Yet, while important to my own research, Asquith's approach treats the

³ A word that children can latch onto to differentiate themselves from adults, babies, and toddlers—to associate themselves more closely with *teens*.

child audience as vulnerable, problematizing the study of children's TV in Canada. I argue that negatively framing the network's practices⁴ discourages close reading of popular shows that children enjoy. This thesis, through John Caldwell's essay "Convergence Television," resituates the concept of hypercommercialism as an extension of post-network production practices which characterized commercial television in the 1990s. Moreover, hypercommercial children's TV is quite similar to what, in the U.S. in 1991, Kinder called "commercial supersystems of transmedia intertextuality"; systems which combined "education, entertainment, and business" (3-4).

Kinder's inclusion of education into this formula is crucial, differentiating her system from Asquith's. By moving past hypercommercialization's strictly odious connotations, we can more productively read the textual systems embedded in *Goosebumps*. Mobilizing Kinder's analysis of the organizational structures undergirding commercial children's television flows, my thesis excavates a system through which the poetics of the horror genre can prepare children for over-saturated media environments that are increasingly uncomfortable, frightening, and tough to navigate. In this way, my work builds upon Asquith's call to conceive of new literacy efforts which will *prepare* children rather than *protect* them.

This thesis is also in dialogue with Charles Acland's concept of the "adult gaze," defined as the "patriarchal function to replicate the qualities of the economic social" (118). While Acland uses the concept to explore representations of childhood in American "youth films," it is a useful term to work through children's television, both in Canada and elsewhere. Namely, the gaze helps understand children's television's disciplinary, panoptic function, through which "elusive fields of reality" are transformed into controllable objects (Ang 8). Furthermore, the adult gaze is a useful concept for exploring issues around children's tastes: it is difficult to discern whether

⁴ Hypercommercialism is a term that "avoids any positive connotations" (Asquith 101).

children's tastes are being constructed by adults cynically, in good faith, or somewhere in between. Evidently there is a complicated dynamic at play here, but it is clear that during the 80s and 90s, starting with Nickelodeon in the U.S., the puerile became popular in a way that seemed to better respect the contemporary attitudes of North American children.⁵ YTV's "kids-first" ethos can be understood as an attempt to subvert the bland, traditionally disciplinary gaze of the more conservative children's TV which came before it. Nevertheless, the network has its own patriarchal function: homogenizing convenient demographics to better manage consumer behaviour. This is merely an alternative manifestation of the gaze. Still, there is something to be said for the success found through YTV's mode of entertainment, which I argue promotes active audience engagement and alternative forms of media literacy training. *Goosebumps* embodies textual characteristics specific to the production context of commercial TV; such textual properties can then be decoded in the show's reception. These systems, in their own way, have a generative potential for young audiences, as they suggest the possibility of resisting the network's commercial logic.

The separation of entertainment from education is part of a history of divide between mass culture and so-called cultivated art forms. Justin Lewis, writing about TV in the U.S., puts it plainly: "the idea that popularly favored, commercially successful media formats are also worthy of public investment is rarely discussed" (53). Broadcast reformers have historically decided to leave "mass culture to the market," believing it has failed to "cultivate learning or self-improvement." (Ouellette and Lewis 53). These divisions are just as relevant, if not more so, in the context of Canadian television. Throughout its many shifts in regulatory policy, there has been an incessant urge to safeguard Canadian culture from outside influence—to use TV as a

⁵ A history I will explore in chapter one.

tool to forge a distinct national character, rather than as a commercial platform. As such, Canadian producers have traditionally tried to produce a “tasteful, low-key version of television better suited to [its] genteel mentality” (Beaty & Sullivan 18). There is little room for commercial, seemingly low-taste programs like *Goosebumps* in the national conscience. Similarly, there is an aversion to taking the low-brow seriously in children’s culture. Evidently, there are affinities between the paternalism of Canadian TV and the political, audience-constructing imperatives of children’s TV producers. This symbiosis of nationalist protectionism and child viewership imparts a kind of infantile status on Canada’s TV industry, reflected in the gaps and omissions in Canadian television scholarship.

In his book *Out of the Garden*, Stephen Kline writes that in the 1980s, Canada’s public broadcaster CBC “recognized that the commercial logic [of television] was not suited to children’s audiences” (128). As such, “they interpreted their public service mandate (inform, educate and entertain)” broadly as a duty to the child audience. Meanwhile, the economic limitations of public broadcasting in Canada led the CBC to prefer cheap and simple programming. CBC gradually abandoned children’s educational TV—the “unprofitable sector of the culture market” (129)—leaving it to the provincial governments to produce educational TV for kids. Through the 80s and into the 1990s, Canadian children increasingly relied on American networks for their TV viewing. The American “program-length commercial” trend, in which shows essentially served as toy advertisements, made its way to Canada despite governmental pushback. During this time, “Canadian policy-makers blithely ignored what was happening, overlooking the new infrastructure (satellite, cable, video) which transformed the distribution of children’s culture in Canada” (272). The Canadian children's TV industry needed to adapt to increasing commercialization in order to stay afloat: YTV, in this way, was filling a vacuum.

Still, with programs like *Goosebumps*—a show that sells literacy—YTV plays a socially generative and educational role while simultaneously embracing industry trends.

In an interview from 1996, YTV's then-VP of programming and production Dale Taylor explained, "we have cool shows, many of them with moral messages, all of them responsible television. But we don't want to supply schoolroom TV. That smacks of curriculum and that's a turn-off for young people. For us, the e-word means entertainment and enlightenment, not education" (Haysom 2). What is meant here by education? I argue for reconsideration of the term "educational" in the context of Canadian children's television. Kinder notes that in the U.S. in the mid-nineties, there was "disagreement among networks over how to interpret the word *educational*." While some believed that a loosely defined "morality play" constituted education, others sought shows that imparted "some kind of curriculum, like science or geography" (178). Twenty-five years later, media studies is as much curriculum material as geography, math, or literature. It is arguably more urgent, as kids' lives are unprecedentedly saturated with screen images. Therefore, it is not merely due to the glaring oversight of Canadian children's television that we need to return to shows such as *Goosebumps* in our national media studies. By revisiting commercial television and its shifts over time, we can discern changes in the construction of childhood. Moreover, we are able to analyze the ways children decode and make meaning from the television they are offered.

This thesis seeks to tease apart the educational and entertaining in children's television programming. Moreover, it attempts to identify progressive programming that has emerged out of a historically paternalistic national industry. Furthermore, by reappraising popular Canadian children's television, we can begin to rectify the historical oversight of Canadian children's media—while contributing to the field of Canadian television at large.

Chapters

To address these issues, this thesis is broken into two chapters. Chapter one, “The Oversight of *Goosebumps*: Production, Reception, and Commercial Textuality,” places *Goosebumps* within the broader post-television landscape of the 1990s. I argue that the show anticipates YTV’s increasing hypercommercialization. By detaching the program from the threatening connotations of hypercommercial children’s television, we can more productively read the textual systems embedded within. Then, considering how scholars have theorized on the child audience, I consider how active audiences are constructed through hypercommercialization. Concluding this chapter, I argue that *Goosebumps* demonstrates sensorial and perceptual operations that can help children achieve what Kinder calls the “mastery of intertextuality” (Kinder 201).

Chapter two, “Viewer Beware!: Hyper-Active Media Literacy on *Goosebumps* and YTV,” analyzes the formal properties of *Goosebumps* and their association with the poetics of the children’s horror genre. I argue that these formal properties have a generative effect on children, cultivating them as active viewers through a particular mode of sensory training. This audience training is problematized by the suffusion of the aesthetics of children’s horror into the marketing efforts of *Goosebumps* and YTV. My thesis concludes with a close reading of two episodes: *The Haunted Mask* and the three-part *Chillology*. I argue that we can consider the production and reception contexts of children’s television through their textual embeddedness in particular episodes. This approach opens up inventive pedagogies through which young people and academics alike can critically engage with commercial children’s television. Thus, I argue that we can simultaneously reinvigorate the field of Canadian children’s television studies while preparing children to navigate increasingly convergent mediascapes.

These two chapters sift through the chaotic muck of (hyper)commercial children's television. Dredging the sludge of children's trashy tastes, I uncover a textual system capable of sensorially and perceptually training the child audience, one which increases their capacity to make meaning through audiovisual communication. This system is laden with contradictions—a generative imperviousness that reflects the tensions between public good and private gain, national and global, adulthood and childhood.

Chapter One

The Oversight of *Goosebumps*: Production, Reception, and Commercial Textuality

*He warns that the police only know that it's something that looks like you'd **really** want to watch it. He says all we know is it looks **really** entertaining. But that it **really** just wants to take away your functionality. He says we know it's... **Canadian**.*

— David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest*

I know something about Goo and you.

— Sonic Youth

In her survey of the history of slime in children's media, "Ode to Green Slime," Rebecca Onion argues that "no bit of kid's culture has more wholeheartedly cleaved unto the messy, anarchic qualities of slime than Nickelodeon." Slime is an example of what anthropologist Allison James has coined "Ket." The term describes certain kinds of cheap, sugary candy that kids love for its colorful, obnoxious qualities; the term has since been broadened to describe all kinds of alluringly vulgar children's products. Ket offers children a sense of empowerment precisely because its appeal is incomprehensible to adults. This sense of autonomy imparted by ket's exclusion of adults is why slime is such an effective marketing tool for children.

Aesthetically, slime's spattering across promos and programs suggests food flung against walls in an act of play or revolt. But from a reception standpoint, slime homogenizes unruly youth demographics by shaping commercial habits that are paradoxically well-ordered. Slime has thus proven to be a kind of *uberket*: a simple, evergreen product that producers can count on to attract, excite, and maintain child audiences. Crucially, this ode to slime brings into relief a key disagreement in the field of childhood studies. On the one hand, scholars have argued that the

vulnerability of children—their innocence and impressionability—means they must be protected from TV and other media (Buckingham 41). On the other hand, some argue that children need educational, socially conscious media that will protect them from what slime, to adults, symbolizes—kids’ own poor, puerile tastes.

Canada occupies an important place in children’s media’s slime ecology. Nickelodeon, America’s #1 children’s network, has mined Canada for content since its inception in 1977 (Coulter 102). Canadian shows such as *Today’s Special* (TVOntario 1981-1987) and *Sharon Lois and Bram’s Elephant Show* (CBC 1984-1988) were aired on the American channel in the early 1980s, as “these foreign-produced programs were intelligent, educational, and prosocial” (Sandler 47). In 1981 Nick premiered the Canadian program *You Can’t Do That On Television*. It quickly became Nick’s flagship show, best exemplifying their “empowering and sophisticated kids’ entertainment” (Sandler 48). The sketch-comedy variety show centred on pre-teen life, with an on-air look defined by “the ever-present danger of getting ‘slimed with green goop.’” This gloopy aesthetic was subsequently appropriated to mark Nick’s entire network: “Slime, together with buckets of water, and other messy approaches soon became the brand trademark of Nickelodeon. Slime was often splashed upon the newly created brand logo—white letters and orange background” (Sandler 48). In 1986 Nickelodeon repurposed the Canadian program as a game show built around the sliming of youth contestants called *Double Dare* (1986-present).⁶ This stylistic shift marks an important moment both for Nickelodeon and children’s TV at large, indicating a turn from education to entertainment.

⁶ The still-running show spun off incarnations like *Family Double Dare* (1990) and *Super Sloppy Double Dare* (1987).

Early in its history Nickelodeon earned a reputation as the “green vegetable” of TV.⁷ Their gooey rebrand, emblematic of youth empowerment and rebellion, can be read as an attempt on the network’s part to lean into and subvert this reputation. By offering up televisual ket to its child audience, Nickelodeon was able to appear hip while attracting eyeballs in a controlled, profitable fashion, smartly deploying a double-logic by appealing to both parents and children. This simple, lucrative brand identity soon became the M.O. of North American children’s programming at large. Evidently, *YCDTOT* showed producers that children would rather have their green vegetables chewed up, regurgitated, and hoarded as ammo, used to assert their tastes in the faces of pedantic adults.



Figure 1

⁷ Cy Schneider, president of Nickelodeon from 1980-1984, stated in an interview: “Here was a product that grew... because adults perceived the need for better quality television for their kids—not necessarily because children demanded it” (Schneider q. in Pecora 23).

YTV, Canada's specialty children's cable network, debuted in 1988. The channel is Canada's answer to Nickelodeon. Like its American counterpart, YTV appeals to the child's rebellious instincts through ket-inspired slime branding. Moreover, both networks are permeated with gross-out jokes, potty humour, and a characteristic "no-holds-barred goofiness." YTV's original game show *Uh Oh!* (1997-2003) is a clear descendant of *Double Dare* and *YCDTOT*. This is most evident in its title card, which features the show title splattered over green goop, an obvious aping of its American predecessor [Figure 1]. *Uh Oh!* features three teams competing for points through messy physical challenges, games of chance, and trivia. The highlight of each episode—the titular "Uh Oh! Round"—is triggered when a contestant gives the incorrect answer to a near-impossible trivia question. The gimp-masked antagonist, "The Punisher," promptly appears to dump slime over another contestant's head. The green slime that characterizes popular shows like *Uh Oh!*, *Double Dare*, and *You Can't Do That On Television* is further plastered on advertisements, interstitials, and program bumpers across YTV's broadcast. Moreover, it is a major part of *Goosebumps*' marketing and aesthetics, oozing thickly down the screen in its introduction and credit sequences. Slime, for *Goosebumps*, is the stylistic node that ties the show to YTV's slovenly brand aesthetic in an early instance of convergence between advertising and content.⁸ With these programs, a prior Canadian televisual innovation is integrated back into the national conscience.

In what follows, I aim to build on this ecology of slime to reconsider a particular moment in the history of Canadian children's television that has up to now been overlooked. Through this grimy ecology, gaps in Canadian TV scholarship can be accounted for. Televisual slime does not course through borders unidirectionally, beginning in the U.S. and flowing outward. Rather, it is

⁸ This point will be expanded on in the section on "hypercommercialism," *If the Goo Sticks*.

a Canadian innovation co-opted by Nickelodeon, reclaimed by YTV, and streamlined through programs like *Goosebumps*.

The Oversight of YTV

Natalie Coulter argues that despite Canada's long history of producing rich, innovative television for children, scholarship in the field is surprisingly scant, emphasizing a need for scholars to "take stock" of its oversights. Probing these gaps in Canadian children's media scholarship serves as a means of "illustrating the depth and richness of industries here in Canada" (97) while providing a roadmap for Canadian television scholars to take up further projects in this vein. This groundwork is crucial, as it will take more than a few essays to rectify years of neglecting this critical sector of our national media industries.

Michelle Byers echoes this sentiment. She writes that the oversight of Canadian children's television in Canadian media studies stems from the "lack of study, distribution and systematic archiving [which] means that many Canadian series not only run under the radar, but are in danger of being erased from the cultural map." Against this erasure, Byers argues that "these series offer points of disruption in a global media matrix that we often imagine flowing only in one direction"—that is, from the United States (117). These "points of disruption" refer to programs that reroute dominant assumptions about children's television—such as the idea that the U.S. produces children's television and Canadians merely consume it. To address this oversight, my interest in this chapter is to revisit *Goosebumps* and YTV in order to recalibrate our critical radars, laying the groundwork for the flourishing of Canadian children's TV studies—a potentially potent field that has for too long remained dormant.

Let me begin by analyzing some of the roadblocks which up to now have held up this research. First, there is the overzealous urge to locate national identity within Canadian media—that is, to pinpoint its “Canadian-ness.” This search for the national is a dead-end for the field, playing a major role in students’ aversion to Canadian film, television, and media studies. It limits the kinds of material being taught to those that fit into a limited, traditional Canadian Studies paradigm, such as the Heritage Minutes and NFB films I mentioned in my introduction.⁹ These kinds of curricula have led to the field’s perception as worthless, undesirable, and boring. This anxiety can be treated—one need only stop probing the void of Canadian-ness to reappraise the many Canadian texts without a firm foothold in the national. This includes most commercial programming from the 1980s and 90s. These shows are less distinctly “Canadian” due to increasing dependency on American market forces, co-productions, changing forms of distribution and reception, among many other issues, which have brought about significant changes in what makes it onto Canadian screens.

Importantly, YTV has embraced Americanization even while it has re-localized it. This is evinced through the strong influence of Nickelodeon on its brand and programming. *Goosebumps*, one of YTV’s most successful shows of the 1990s, is a Canadian-American co-venture based on R.L. Stine’s American book series of the same title. The show is shot almost entirely in Ontario—featuring a predominantly Canadian cast and crew. Importantly, the show’s ties to the U.S. *Goosebumps* franchise, Scholastic Entertainment, and 20th Century Fox¹⁰ have diluted its Canadianness to media scholars committed to a specific understanding of the national. This aversion to the Americanization of Canadian television is one of the reasons YTV’s

⁹ It is not insignificant that Canadian media studies and children’s television flows have suffered similar afflictions; these “boring” Canadian materials have much in common with children’s media’s “green vegetable” television.

¹⁰ American producers and distributors, respectively.

programs are relatively absent in Canadian television studies. The “hypercommercialism” section of this chapter will resituate YTV’s production practice as a particularly localized instance of American post-network strategies from the period. This analysis will provide a new lens through which to consider YTV and Canadian commercial children’s television.

Another reason for the oversight of children’s television in Canada is the protectionist approach scholars have traditionally adopted in their study of the sub-genre. This approach neglects to analyze children’s programming in its own right. Rather, critical discourse around kids’ TV is predominantly focused on production and economics in ways that seek to protect children from the perceived threats of commercial advertising and their own supposedly infantile tastes. This problem is not particular to Canadian media studies but applies to children’s television studies more broadly. Heather Hendershot notes that in the U.S., aside from several books about *Sesame Street* (PBS 1969 - present), there is a striking lack of emphasis on individual producers, individual programs, and production companies in general. The issue is acutely felt in the study of Canadian children’s media. YTV, in the 1990s, was the most popular Canadian children’s specialty network in the country (Haysom). In 1995, half of YTV’s top ten productions were Canadian. Moreover, the network invested 35% of its profits into more original Canadian programming (Strachan C9). However, because of the network’s commercial status and its threatening, gross-out, unruly ethos, our critical literature on the network has almost no mention of its programs. There is, however, writing that focuses on the supposedly odious commercial structures of the network. Notably, media scholars have shown little interest in determining just *why* these “low-brow” programs have found so much success with child audiences. By critically analyzing *Goosebumps* at a textual level, I will provide a model for

further analyses of YTV's programming that looks beyond the more familiar focus on Americanization and endangered kids.

As Byers notes, the lack of archiving of Canadian children's programs is a major problem faced by scholars.¹¹ In order to fruitfully analyze the programs that have been overlooked, there needs to be reliable access to said programs.¹² Unless media historians can emphasize the value of these Canadian cultural artifacts and renew interest in our forgotten history, this access will remain a challenge. When I began this research, the entirety of *Goosebumps* was available on Netflix Canada (while suspiciously absent from the Canadian TV section). The show has since been removed from the streaming platform after Disney's acquisition of Fox, the show's American distributor (Lee and Barnes 2018). It is imperative for Canadian media scholars to shift their focus to these overlooked programs. In doing so, we will build and increase our capacity to archive, preserve, access, and analyze our singularly innovative oeuvre of children's television. Building on the work of Byers and Coulter, this thesis hopes to provide a small step in that direction, by accounting for the blind spot of *Goosebumps* in our national media studies.

Two concepts that are useful in working through these problems of oversight are Asquith's notion of "hypercommercialism" and Acland's term the "adult gaze," outlined in the introduction. In the sections that follow I will explore these two ideas and bring them together as they relate to problems I outline above: the rejection of children's tastes and the reluctance to take these popular, Americanized, commercial programs seriously. My analysis of *Goosebumps*

¹¹ Other successful Canadian kids' programs from the period, like *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* and *Animorphs* (YTV 1998-2000), are notably absent from any streaming services, though they can be found in poor quality on YouTube. CBC's original children's sci-fi *The Odyssey* (1992-1994) is another show that is only available — in nearly unwatchable quality — on YouTube. The show, which ran three seasons, is a bizarre steampunk fantasy set in the mind of a comatose child. YTV's digitally-animated cyberpunk saga *ReBoot* (YTV 1994-2001) has recently been made available to Crave TV subscribers, but there is no literature on the show.

¹² It would be helpful to have these shows on streaming services. But in the case of children's commercial television from the 1990s, there is a need for archived recordings of full program blocks; examining TV from this era, content cannot be divorced from advertising. This will be considered in more detail in chapter two.

is crucial in untangling these issues. It is a show embedded in a sprawling commercial matrix. Moreover, it elicits a pedagogical potential by subverting childhood media's paternalistic expectations. Canadian media studies can benefit from approaching these undervalued shows. *Goosebumps* in particular is a text through which we can better understand changes in Canadian children television's production and reception. By considering it as such, I offer new and fruitful means of engaging with Canadian children's programming.

Reconsidering *Goosebumps*

Goosebumps, adapted from the best-selling children's book series—a phenomenal success itself, selling 32 million copies in 1995 (Morris 64)—debuted on YTV in October 1995 during the network's annual Halloween Fright Night Special. The hour-long pilot, *The Haunted Mask*, later released on VHS through 20th Century Fox, gave YTV its highest ratings ever and was lauded as “hip, smart contemporary TV for the 90s” (McKay F7). The show's target audience was age 9-13, but the show appealed to pre-adolescents, older teens, and adults (Marstaud C7). In 1996, *Goosebumps* aired during three evening time slots on YTV—Tuesdays at 7:00, Fridays at 8:30, and again at 7:00 on Saturdays (McKay F7). That year, *Goosebumps* brought in an average audience of 429,000 viewers nationally, “making it one of the top watched shows” on the “top specialty channel in the country” (Haysom). The show aired concurrently on Fox, where it outperformed *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers* (Fox 1993- 1996), the top-rated live-action children's show in 1994, making it a major victory in terms of Canadian television on the American stage.

Part of *Goosebumps'* appeal to audiences young and old is its spooky, tongue-in-cheek campiness—something unusual for a children's show at the time. The show's narrative and

audiovisual strength lies in the innovative way it brings together the horror genre and children's TV. At the nexus of this convergence is the critically underassessed Canadian director William Fruet, who just a decade earlier was directing low-budget cult-Canadian horror films like *Spasms* (1983), *Killer Party* (1986), and *Blue Monkey* (1987). The director is worth mentioning here because he helps illustrate the show's particular aesthetic. The choice to have Fruet direct much of the show is another practice inspired by Nickelodeon; in 1991, the American network found success in a more creator-driven approach to programming.¹³ Fruet directed more than a third of *Goosebumps*' 74 episodes, including nearly all of the series' "stunt" episodes, part of a larger post-network strategy that will be examined later in this chapter. Some of *Goosebumps* success is attributable in its smart hiring of the veteran filmmaker Fruet, who fits into the broader post-network practices while bringing a sophisticated cinematic style to the show, contributing to its quality status. The dominant discourse that views the child audience as vulnerable and helpless suppresses this analysis of commercial children's TV as something sophisticated, ignoring any generative potential for active young spectators.

Goosebumps was not just a successful TV and book series; to this day, the franchise is a cross-promotional, multi-platform marketing vehicle.¹⁴ On top of the original book series was the popular *Give Yourself Goosebumps* (1995-2000) choose-your-own-adventure series. Multiple board games and video games were released. *Goosebumps: Live on Stage* (1998), a theatrical production, had a special-edition novella to accompany the play. Books were re-released with production notes and photos from the television adaptations. The original *Goosebumps* website was loaded with contests and broadband games to keep kids devoted to the franchise. These paratexts featured in-text ads for other products on varying platforms. While it is part of a long

¹³ With the hit programs *Rugrats*, *Doug*, and *Ren & Stimpy* (Sandler).

¹⁴ *Goosebumps 2: Haunted Halloween* was released in 2018.

history of transmedia franchising in North America, *Goosebumps* is, importantly for this research, an early instance cross-platform media production in Canada. By situating the show in the context of YTV's hypercommercialism, it is evident that the Canadian network was, in many ways, at the vanguard of the digital era in its multi-platform industry practices and online engagement. Its programs' relative exclusion from the field of Canadian media studies is, thus, keenly felt.

If the Goo Sticks: Streamlining Slime with *Goosebumps* on YTV

The following two sections will analyze *Goosebumps* and YTV's industrial ties to American post-network television culture, explored in John Caldwell's essay "Convergence Television." In doing so, I will offer a clearer picture of Canadian children's programming under "hypercommercialism," a term Kyle Asquith uses to define "the way in which advertisers tend to colonize media spaces" (100). Ultimately this analysis will ground Canadian children's television within the US/Canadian television landscape, while shedding light on an important cultural export that has been up to now overlooked. Moreover, by considering *Goosebumps* and YTV through their shared association with slime—its sickly spattering across shows, ads, promos, bumpers, websites, and branded events—I will offer a new perspective on the industrial and aesthetic practices of Canadian children's TV.

In his essay "The Case of YTV: Hypercommercialism and Canadian Children's Television," Asquith foregrounds the exploitative nature of children's programming in which advertising and programming are seamlessly integrated. This top-down emphasis—where the vulnerable child audience is exploited and endangered—has played a significant role in stifling the growth of children's TV studies in Canada. While discourses about hypercommercialism

have much to teach us, they also too often close down analysis and debate: the reception of hypercommercial TV is more complex than these discourses give credit. Instead, it is more fruitful to consider hypercommercialism as an offshoot of broader American post-network strategies under the emergent neoliberal policies of the 1990s and 2000s. This approach situates *Goosebumps* as a local instance of regional or global network practices, offering a specific example of Canadian television industries operating in concert with this changing media matrix.

Asquith excavates YTV's promotional materials and industry reports to elucidate on the way in which its entire media space is colonized by advertisers. He situates the advent of hypercommercialism around 2007, when the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) began deregulating advertising restrictions. Asquith further notes that this poses a particular threat to children's broadcasting, as "outside of Quebec, industry self-regulation is the primary way in which advertising to children is regulated in Canada" (99). There remain strict limits on the number of minutes allowed when advertising to children (unlike in the U.S.), and a Broadcast Code for Advertising to Children whose standards must be upheld. Asquith notes that YTV, however, through hypercommercialism's ability to converge ads and content, circumvents the regulations of the Broadcast Code in order to advertise more aggressively to children.

YTV—a niche, narrowcast network—is a product of deregulation and has been subject to proto-hypercommercial practices at least as far back as *Goosebumps*. The network debuted in 1988, after a rollback of earlier Canadian broadcasting policies, suggestive of a network inherently vulnerable to this kind of media colonization. The following sections will build on Asquith by situating the emergence of hypercommercialism prior to 2007. I will consider how "integration" was anticipated by *Goosebumps*' aesthetic convergence with YTV's branding,

before comparing YTV and *Goosebumps*' industry practices to American post-network approaches of the 80s and 90s. By exploring the development of hypercommercialism on YTV through its relationship to American industrial strategies, I argue that these practices are historically contingent. Moreover, there is potential for circumventing this framework to offer children rich, media-literate edutainment.

The particular audience demographic that YTV sells its media buyers—what the network called its “prized assets”—is characterized by an attitude appropriated through “weird” and “gross-out” branding that speaks to children (97). The success of YTV in addressing its audience through this systematized individualism can be attributed to the process of “integration”: the hypercommercial practice that would later become one of the services offered by the “Client-Marketing” department of Corus Entertainment, the broadcasting company that airs YTV. The voracity of this integration allows hypercommercialism to take hold of the network's entire broadcast, evident in the way certain symbols like bugs and slime pervade across programming, advertising, and interstitials. Throughout *Goosebumps*, insects regularly figure as sources of fear and anxiety. In *The Haunted Mask*, Carly Beth's bullies trick her into eating a worm-stuffed sandwich; Fruet's two-part episode *Stay Out of the Basement* features a botanist father who transforms into a green-blooded, leaf-eating plant-man. YTV's program bumpers and interstitials were further infested with bugs; one example [Figure 2] features a green fly that spits slime at the screen (Retrontario 2010). In 1996, the same year *Stay Out of the Basement* aired, a popular toy advertised was *Dr. Dreadful M.D. Creepy Clinic*—a lab set allowing children to create, among other slimy objects, molds of insects and worms (GTronTom 2011) [Figure 3].



Figure 2



Figure 3

YTV's brand attitude has been weaved through its programming and marketing efforts since before the regulatory rollbacks of the 2000s—at least as far back as *Goosebumps*. This convergence of content and advertising—what Asquith calls *highly concentrated media*—is “symptomatic of a deregulated media system, driven by the alleged ‘freedoms’ the market implies” (108). YTV emerged out of a deregulated media system in 1988 (96). It is a niche network, what Joseph Turow calls a “primary media communit[y],” within which audiences feel “part of a family, attached to the program hosts, other viewers, and sponsors” (Turow q. in Asquith 96). YTV influences this feeling of belonging by promoting a certain taste formation, through its concentrated onslaught of a “cool,” “off-beat” media. If YTV and its audience is a community, it is one borne of an efficient, technological homogenization. In his introduction to *Laws of Cool* Alan Liu explores how the language of culture is suffused into that of corporate jargon, arguing that neo-corporatism¹⁵ adapts “notions of customary culture and technological rationality so they can slot easily into each other—ways of being into ways of doing business”

¹⁵ A corporate model that appropriates, or simulates, theories of identity and class to become its own culture.

(54-55). This is echoed in the formation of industrially configured “media communities.” Since its inception as a niche network, YTV has built what it projects as “community” through integration. Evidently, the seeds of hypercommercialism have been sown since the network’s beginning. While it is important to acknowledge the problem of corporate-cultural amorphousness in media, it is also crucial to consider the texts reception—what children may make of it. In the case of *Goosebumps*, the text often pushes back against hypercommercialism; this idea will be returned to in chapter two.

Hypercommercialism flourishes on YTV because of the homogenous demographic of viewers the network offers media buyers through its commodification of a slovenly hedonism. However, children engaging in this kind of puerile media is not necessarily harmful, as kids have been crazy for gross, outrageous rubbish since at least 1970, when anthropologist Allison James coined the term “ket” (Onion 2015). Ket has proven to speak to children’s tastes; it is important to take seriously television that children have claimed as their own. One way to do this is by looking at children’s programming as one would any other type of narrative television—as a text. As such, it is imperative to consider some of the features specific to television which affect a program’s textuality.

Post-Network TV and Commercial Textuality

The hypercommercialism of YTV is significant in that it offers a particular model to consider as a local instance of Canadian children’s television production. In “Convergence Television,” John Caldwell elucidates the essential American post-network practices—practices that are echoed in hypercommercialism. It is useful to read Asquith through Caldwell’s analysis. I will explore how these post-network, multi-platform practices manifest textually in

Goosebumps. Through this specific account of YTV and hypercommercialism I argue that *Goosebumps* became one of the most successful and sophisticated Canadian TV shows of the 1990s by adopting and anticipating American post-network strategies, situating itself at the forefront of the still emergent digital era.

While Asquith locates the beginning of hypercommercialism around 2007, John Caldwell situates many similar production and advertising practices in the post-network years of the late-80s to the dot-com era in the 90s.

While many media theorists spent their time speculating on polar oppositions between “push” media (TV) and “pull” media (digital media and the Net), fewer recognized one increasingly obvious trend: television had long been making itself a “pull” medium (through interactivity), even as it merged and conglomerated in an unequivocal bid to make the internet a viable “push” medium through the deployment of programming and advertising strategies (Caldwell 46).

Goosebumps has been part of a multi-platform advertising effort since it originally aired, through its original website featuring games and contests, its brand presence at YTV’s “Weird on Wheels” marketing events, and its video distribution. Caldwell notes five fundamental changes to the look of TV during the transition to the digital age due to the instability of local production cultures: ancillary textuality (repurposing, migrating content), conglomerating textuality (convergence texts, like dot-com sites), marketing textuality (branding), ritual textuality (pitching, writing by committee), and programming textuality (stunting, sweeps). There is some overlap between these digital television practices and hypercommercialism; exploring how *Goosebumps* engages in these strategies suggests that hypercommercialism is part and parcel

with post-network television. Moreover, these strategies have had a generative impact on the televisual text of the show.

Focusing on what Caldwell terms marketing and programming textuality helps illuminate the relationship between YTV, *Goosebumps*, and director William Fruet. Marketing textuality refers to the way in which branding embeds itself into the text of the network's flow of integrated ads and programming. Caldwell uses the example of NBC to examine this strategy; in the mid-90s, when NBC witnessed CBS lose many of their affiliate stations to the newer network, Fox, they decided to shore up their brand by commissioning artists to contribute a sleeker, hip look.¹⁶ Part of *Goosebumps*' early marketing strategy was "not to over-promote [the show] or overwhelm it with products" (Gary Caplan, qtd. in Benezra 47), a hallmark of its "edgy," "cool" attitude. Fruet's low-budget horror films were produced during the cult "moment" through the seventies and eighties. *Goosebumps* acquires a kind of cult capital through its association with Fruet, subsuming YTV's "weird" and "gross-out" branding while synthesizing the network's brand with that of the *Goosebumps* franchise. Fruet's low-budget ethos lends the children's horror show an edge that reinforces the network's attitude. Evidently the network's link to Fruet is a local manifestation of post-network marketing textuality. This convergence of commercial post-network strategy in unison with the fulfillment of Canadian policy mandates (through the hiring of Fruet) proves to be quite generative in the case of *Goosebumps*, as it offers a lucrative cultural export, high network ratings, and distinctive, quality programming. Moreover, the distinct textualities surveyed by Caldwell are embedded throughout YTV and *Goosebumps*. *Goosebumps* thus embodies a system through and against which the child spectator can read ideas and images across the network's flow.

¹⁶ NBC hired Mark Malmberg, "the computer-artist guru behind *The Lawnmower Man*," and "resurrected 1960s pop-art castoff Peter Max" as a way to culturally legitimize this new look and attitude (Caldwell 57).

YTV's "Keep It Weird" brand identity is another post-network marketing strategy rooted in the tactics of American cable networks in the 90s. Similar to ABC's "yellow campaign" in 1997, which "simply plastered the color yellow on every promo in print, broadcast, or billboard" while attaching tongue-in-cheek taglines, YTV brands their promotions, bumpers, and programs with a signature green slime that symbolizes their call to youth empowerment. While the ABC campaign was seasonal, YTV's slime branding has remained their modus operandi for over a decade, their target audience a calcified homogeneity. The green gunk, a trademark of both the network and *Goosebumps*, permeates throughout the network and its marketing efforts, from *Uh Oh!*'s punitive green goo to the promotional bumpers featuring green bugs and vials of green snot. In this way YTV merges post-network branding strategies with the "hyper aspect" of hypercommercialism, which "occurs because the bombardment of promotional messages that characterizes contemporary TV reduces the effectiveness of any single message, which in turn drives media corporations to dig even deeper for creative ways to further merge brand messages and content" (Asquith 101).

This aggressive integration is a function of neoliberal industry practices which encourage the absorption of subcultural ethoi into commercial efforts. Mark Fisher notes these practices are "very much like the Thing in John Carpenter's film of the same name: a monstrous, infinitely plastic entity, capable of metabolizing and absorbing anything with which it comes in contact" (6). The Fruet-directed *Goosebumps* episodes *Monster Blood* and *More Monster Blood* reflect this production context quite astutely. Both episodes feature Evan, the young protagonist, who discovers a jar of green slime—called Monster Blood—at his Aunt Kathryn's house inside a forbidden room. Monster blood endlessly expands when released from its container, devouring everything in its wake. It flows out over bathtubs, spills under doors in floods of green. These

episodes, aside from being prescient reflections on their particular televisual context, serve as part of larger integratory effort to plaster the network with slime—much like ABC did with the color yellow. *Monster Blood* is therefore helpful in situating YTV and *Goosebumps* within the larger culture of post-network television.

Goosebumps' relationship to what Caldwell calls "programming textuality" can be analyzed through the show's "stunt" episodes. The two-part episodes directed by Fruet are part of what Caldwell refers to as stunts: "special episodes of series [that] are frequently aired to attract a higher than representative audience and so spike ratings" (61). Many of these special episodes "disregar[d] the standard look of their diegetic worlds and "became" some other look or narrative" and "stage acutely self-conscious exercises in cinematic production style" (62). All of *Goosebumps*' original two-part VHS releases open with series creator R.L. Stine addressing the camera from what is ostensibly the episode's set.¹⁷ Caldwell refers to this as the "special making-of stunt" (62). The standard look and narrative of the special episodes of *Goosebumps* diverge from the regular episodes in a few ways; the aesthetics of these episodes are notably different. There is distinct cinematic style in Fruet's episodes that is not regularly there (some non-Fruet episodes have a deadened, stagnant commercial style). This overtly cinematic style is evident through the way Fruet frames, moves, and times his actors, as well as through his careful application of special effects. His use of tableau-style shooting is particularly evident: this technique is apparent all the way back to his directorial debut *Wedding in White* (1972), but its

¹⁷ These stunt episodes, subsequently released on VHS, are also examples of "ancillary textuality," or "repurposing and migration." Repurposing and migration is synonymous with the network-era practice of syndication, but where syndication has been typically thought of as operating primarily on TV, allowing "program owners to collect the remaining surplus value of series in the less prestigious worlds of distribution outside both prime time and the networks" (47), the "ancillary afterlife" of repurposing and migrating can take a digital form with the parent corporation or a subsidiary corporation. With its 20th Century Fox deal, through which six two-part episodes were released on VHS, *Goosebumps* took advantage of these "lucrative possibilities of migrating content and program repurposing" (48).

effect is all the more striking when incorporated into *Goosebumps*' tight 4:3 aspect ratio, with its echoes of classic Hollywood and the Academy ratio.

Goosebumps' special episodes are more sophisticated than a typical twenty-two minute episode of the show; they contain less humor and more suspenseful drama than a standard episode. Moreover, they are thematically more mature, with increased technical prowess. One example is the psychologically astute pilot *The Haunted Mask*, a reflection on the seductiveness of cruel impulses, in which Kathryn Long's Gemini-winning performance of the tormented Carly Beth contains a level of emotional suffering that, for a children's show, is truly affecting. These *Goosebumps* special episodes are evidently part of a larger North American televisual tradition; stunts such as *The Haunted Mask* have been used to attract a viewership through increased production value throughout the history of post-network TV. They are also a major reason for *Goosebumps*' huge success as a television show. Caldwell notes that convergence of the kind we see in stunt episodes allows "corporate strategies [to become] viable textual and stylistic practices" (66). Jeffrey Sconce has similarly noted that "television, when forced to compete more aggressively for audiences in the 1980s and 90s, gradually came to recognize and better exploit certain textual strengths it possessed over other media" (96). *Goosebumps* clearly makes use of the post-network strategies elucidated on in Caldwell's essay; these strategies have played a role in both its commercial success and Canadian cultural canonicity.

Goosebumps is now a successful film franchise, with its television episodes only recently removed from Netflix after Fox was purchased by Disney in 2018. A prescient quote from Caldwell suggests that this state of the franchise has been nearly inevitable since its post-network days: "Even though the industry emphasis on some of these forms and strategies prefigures and continues alongside the widespread digitalization of TV, all the forms aspire to the very

conditions and endgames that digital formats discursively anticipate in what might be called the age of “convergence television” (Caldwell 47). By operating with these proto-digital industry strategies and carrying them into and through the digital age, *Goosebumps*’ back catalogue was made available to a massive Netflix audience, and its success on the streaming platform very likely played a role in *Goosebumps*’ move towards major motion pictures.

In examining YTV’s post-network strategies relative to *Goosebumps*, we are offered a clearer picture of an early instance of local Canadian industries in sync with the global media landscape. By maintaining a strong national footing in concert with its American distribution arms, *Goosebumps* successfully exports Canadian television onto the world stage to a degree that most shows have not achieved. Furthermore, this research offers better grasp of who YTV’s “prized assets” are. They are an unkempt, unruly, hyperactive demographic, whose disorderly, individualistic lifestyle is commodified to invite them as youths into the network’s ideologically hedonistic vacuum. As one Sunlight campaign proclaims: “Dirty is good.” In this way, YTV seeks to groom its child audience to be upstanding consumer citizens of the dishevelous network brand, with the hopes they will pass this attitude down through generations. But this is not to say they are passive victims of an exploitative media. YTV’s audience is more like the undead of the Fruet episode *Welcome to Dead House*; these zombies are not the mindless victims of a sensational media that we are used to seeing—*Goosebumps*’ undead can think, speak, manipulate. They represent an active youth audience with the potential to recapture a voice they are not typically granted. By resituating hypercommercialism in a way that allows for inquiry into particular children’s programs, we can more productively analyze Canadian children’s television’s active audience—not merely the audience projected by protectionist discourse.

The Child Audience and YTV

One of the major reasons for the oversight of children's TV in Canadian media studies is the reluctance to consider the child audience as an active viewership. Asquith's hypercommercialism essay is just one example of the protectionist approach to studying children's TV. Asquith argues "hypercommercialism requires new kinds of media literacy efforts, because even the most media-savvy youth may not recognize the totality of YTV's advertising practices and link them to the channel's commercial goals" (109). To develop these literacy efforts it is required we accept the child audience as active *beyond* their consumer engagement with commercial advertising. For the remainder of this chapter I will consider the competing discourses around active and passive child audiences in relation to YTV. Drawing on Acland's concept of the "adult gaze," I will consider whether YTV's ethos of youth empowerment is rooted in the spirit of public service, infusing its programs with a pedagogical potential, or if it is produced through a cynical gaze in the guise of childhood in rebellion.

At the level of the audience in general, there are two realities: the "television audience' as discursive construct and the social world of actual audiences" (Ang 13). In terms of the child audience, this primary binary is further multiplied. Educators, parents, scholars, and producers fall into one of two categories when characterizing the child audience: the child audience is either vulnerable and in need of protection, discipline, and paternal control, or they are a youthful, hip, media-savvy audience, more than capable of fending for themselves in the digital era (Buckingham 7). Both designations, passive and active, are limiting and offer a discursively simplistic view of young people's screen behaviors. There is a tension between how scholars conceive of the child audience and how the audience is addressed by YTV's programming: the academic discourse considers the audience passive, while the programming trains it to be active.

This *training* on the part of YTV's programming is not necessarily intentional.

Hypercommercialism mobilizes niche demographics for commercial gains—which, at an ideological or habitual level, assumes passivity. But by their nature children are amenable, and perhaps inclined, to read this material in unexpected ways. The social world of audiences will always evade being shoehorned into a discursive construct.

The cultural category of “childhood” is constructed by discourses about childhood for adults by adults and those produced by adults for children (Buckingham 7). These adult definitions are “designed to both protect and control children—that is, to keep them confined to social arenas and forms of behavior which will not prove threatening to adults, or in which adults will be unable to threaten *them*” (12). The adult gaze, which constructs childhood so that it will “replicate the economic social,” is one manifestation of this discourse. The adult gaze, I argue, functions differently depending on whether it operates narratively in-text or within advertisements. The gaze within a narrative might portray unruly youth acting out in order to re-integrate them into the economic social in the final act, while within advertising the gaze is used to assemble some desired consumer demographic.

YTV's kid-first image is a local instance of the adult gaze at play. The network's brand of purported youth empowerment is fostered through promoting independence and an unruly attitude. Nevertheless, this attitude is appropriated to serve the producers. By communicating this brand identity to kids, the network commodifies what Banet-Weiser refers to, in the Nickelodeon case, as a “particular definition of experience” (71). By generating these “structure[s] of feeling” (21), YTV is able to influence a particular kind of consumer citizenship in its audience, shaping certain commercial habits. In this way, the audience is efficiently segmented, regulated, and

controlled. However, wherever this kind of control is present, there is always the potential for resistance and opposition.

Ien Ang uses Foucault's work on the panopticon to emphasize how in audience research, "elusive fields of reality are transformed into discrete objects to be known and controlled at the same time" (8). The panopticon has always held the potential to be used "to try out pedagogical experiments—and in particular to take up once again the well debated problem of secluded education" (Foucault 363). Looking at pedagogical control from the late 20th-century until now, there is no better example of secluded education than children's television. This is evident in the way most broadcast regulations require a certain amount of educational programming for children. Panopticism seeks to strengthen social forces—its aims are to "increase production, to develop the economy, to spread education, raise the level of public morality" (366). In this way, the panopticon and the adult gaze share the same set of goals. This gaze manifests on YTV through the volatile child audience being neatly fitted into a controllable demographic. This hyperactive and slovenly bunch is led to feel autonomous, free from the prying parental eye. In reality, this feeling is a means to homogenize; the symbolic slime a convenient design to coalesce and satiate audiences.

YTV's mobilization of its audience, with its green, snotty imagery, has similarities to Foucault's proto-panoptic model—the plague-stricken town. It is useful to consider the plague as the correlative of children's poor tastes. Where the panopticon "must be understood as a generalizable model of functioning," the plague-stricken town model is erected to confront an "extraordinary evil," an "exceptional situation" (364). YTV's child viewers are analogous to the plague-stricken townsfolk: they are volatile and prone to act out in fascinating, unpredictable ways. Foucault's model is an apt analogy through which to better gauge YTV's audience. The

manner in which the town regiments itself around a diseased population is echoed in the way YTV attempts to insulate its goo-laden demographic. Foucault writes that “the plague is met by order; its function is to sort of every possible confusion” (358). Producers sort out the plague-like confusion of children's' unpalatable tastes by streamlining its essence for the widest possible viewership. The disease itself is tempered, manageable, no longer fatal—but the range of its transmission is broadened significantly. A workable version of the plague is spread to profitably proffer the antidote.

The plague gave rise to disciplinary projects (359) in the same way children's changing tastes required new efforts in production and aesthetics through the 80s and 90s. The plague-stricken town model is effective in conceptualizing how the adult gaze constructs taste: “in order to see the perfect disciplines functioning, rulers dreamt of the state of the plague” (359). Evidently, YTV's purported kid-first model functions to protect, control, and confine children, echoing Buckingham's argument that definitions of childhood are constructed primarily to mitigate threat. In trying to maintain control of young audiences susceptible to the infectious influence of trash television, youth networks have appropriated this imagery of disease to new, lucrative ends. In this way, YTV's particularly puerile branding efforts are a cynical projection of the adult gaze. YTV's audience, instructed with the imperative to “Keep it Weird,” is evidently one that is constructed in order to control. In the 80s, children elicited a resistance to protective television through their fascination with slime. How can the child audience be understood to resist authority when the apparatus of control is cloaked in the liberating goo?

There is a need to consider alternative avenues through which children can autonomously navigate these mediascapes. Buckingham writes that centralized power has been undermined since the inception of new media technologies. Because of this, “a great deal of children's (and

youth) culture is by definition bound to be subversive” (50). One way this subversion is possible is by reading these programs in unintended ways. There is the heightened potential for (potentially generative) misunderstandings on the part of the child audience: Stuart Hall writes in “Encoding, Decoding” that “the degrees of ‘understanding’ and ‘misunderstanding’ in the communicative exchange depend on the degrees of symmetry/asymmetry [...] established between the positions of the ‘personifications’—encoder-producer and decoder-receiver” (Hall 93). The degree of asymmetry in the communicative exchange of children’s television is acute—the transmission of the gaze’s ideology is bound to fail. For the remainder of this chapter, I want to explore how scholars have conceptualized audience pleasure and media literacy within the context of commercial children’s television. Through reframing this kind of programming as something pleasurable and generative, we can begin rectifying Canadian children’s TV’s oversight. By applying these concepts to YTV and *Goosebumps* I will examine *Goosebumps*’ pedagogical mode of address, while providing a model for further analyses of Canadian children’s programs to be taken up.

Pleasure and Pedagogy on *Goosebumps*

Children’s tastes rarely get treated seriously. Because of this, important cultural artifacts such as children’s television programs get overlooked. This dismissal of popular children’s programming has, in turn, hindered the critical discourse around Canadian children’s TV. Buckingham, Hannah Davies, and Peter Kelley, writing about American and British TV, argue for the recognition of “children’s agency in constructing and defining their own tastes and identities” (483) within childhood studies. In their research they conducted interviews with two classes of children between the ages of 10 and 11—within *Goosebumps*’ target age—finding that

kids predominantly talk about their favorite TV in terms of physicality and visceral appeal. The children they surveyed elicited a preference for action, spectacle, and humor. *Goosebumps*, with its mix of thrills and jokes, special effects and creepy costumes, fulfills every condition of a desirable children's show. During the early days of the *Goosebumps* phenomenon in the 1990s, horror increasingly became "the genre of choice for many children, girls as well as boys" (Buckingham 127). Buckingham begs an important question: "why do children choose to expose themselves to such material, and what do they make of it?" (127). I will now take these two questions up in the context of *Goosebumps*.

The popularity of the children's horror genre and *Goosebumps* in particular suggests there is pleasure to be had in learning to navigate negative feelings. David Whitley, in an analysis of death in Disney films, writes that children actively learn to accommodate feelings of fear and anxiety through television viewing. He argues that a "shared understanding of play [...] allows audiences to enjoy being manipulated into states of confusion and fear which [...] they would in other contexts find intolerable" (53). This "understanding of play" operates not only between child and text, but between children watching together. Communal viewing, Whitley notes, opens up a space for discussion among audience members. This kind of viewing presents an opportunity for confusion to transform into theorizing. The potential thus arises for children to learn "ways of relating the increasing range of their knowledge of the text's producedness to the experience and pleasure they derive from the narrative" (60). Catherine Lester echoes Whitley in her analysis of American children's horror films. She notes that watching horror is a communal activity through which children can acquire coping mechanisms for dealing with what distresses them (28). *Goosebumps* videos give kids the opportunity to take these texts on-the-go, to share the viewing experience with friends, safely exploring the limits of their capacities as spectators.

These coping mechanisms, though not taught in the classroom, are increasingly important in the digital age. Evidently YTV and *Goosebumps* are potential sites for a generative kind of secluded education.

The positive navigation of negative feelings and the understanding of “play” that children acquire through the horror genre is made possible by the genre’s weak modality. A weak modality, Whitley notes, refers to a narrative with little resemblance to reality, allowing for a distanced viewing. These modalities help children recognize differences between what is real and what is artfully produced (62). *Goosebumps*, with its kitschy aesthetic and a fusion of horror and comedy, is a show with a weak modality. Hence, it allows its child audience to navigate feelings of fear, anxiety, and disgust in productive ways. Its over-the-top costumes and goofy special effects allow the child to achieve a healthy distance from what is happening on screen. This ability to differentiate is crucial to becoming an active media reader. In fact, audiences who engage in this kind of campy material are already active participants. Buckingham writes that the child audience’s ability to distance themselves from campy violence may speak to a contemporary sophistication on their part (128). Distancing effects and weak modalities, however, do not function independently; they furthermore require repeated viewing on the part of the spectator.

In his examination of children viewing violent or scary material, Buckingham argues that a combination of distancing effects and repetition help children learn formal cues that teach them how to deal with negative emotions. Likewise, Whitley writes that “Children tolerate—indeed require—experiences they find important or pleasurable being repeated to an extent that few adults can bear” (66). Moreover, the children’s horror genre allows children to use this repetitive practice to form a “conscious coping strategy” (Lester 28). Repetitive viewing functions on

multiple levels. In the case of *Goosebumps*, it allows kids to learn how to navigate the horror genre, thus becoming a “knowledgeable player within the culture” (Kinder 183). This is partly social—it is important for young people to be in-the-know regarding popular culture. But it is also a mode of engagement promoted by *Goosebumps*, whose advertisements urge children to “Relive the Fright... Night After Night!” [Figure 4]. Children taking part in this phenomenon thus elicit a sophistication by fulfilling both social and commercial duties; by fulfilling these roles there is also the potential to become more critical viewers.



Figure 4

Marsha Kinder examines how textual operations undergird commercial children’s TV programming in the U.S.. Her analysis suggests a potential, within this kind of programming, for active viewer engagement that teaches kids to read images and ideas across different types of programming. She structurally analyzes a particular Fox Kids Saturday morning block from 1994—a year before the premiere of *Goosebumps*. Kinder excavates a system that “combines cognitive development with the transmission of ideological values, including consumerism and American supremacy within global markets” (186). Her study unearths a pedagogical

underpinning that encourages tracking “words, images, characters, and ideas” across blocks of programming that feature different shows, commercials, and interstitials. In chapter two, though I lack the archival resources to analyze full blocks of programming concurrent to *Goosebumps*’ original run, I will examine how these operations function across certain textual nodes within the series itself. I also reference advertisements and network bumpers that aired during the show’s original run to speculate on how *Goosebumps* fits into YTV’s promotional efforts of the 90s.

Kinder’s system is comprised of four textual operations: “cross referencing, serial imitation, morphing, and overriding the program” (186). Earlier in this chapter I referred to the images of slime and bugs that recur through YTV’s programming, referencing the toy bug-lab *Dr. Dreadful M.D. Creepy Clinic*. Myriad *Goosebumps* episodes feature insects as prominent sources of fear and anxiety, linking the program to YTV’s commercial efforts. The villainous librarian of *The Girl Who Cried Monster* is an insect-eating monster; *Stay Out of the Basement* features the aforementioned green-blooded plant-dad; a season two episode bears the title *Go Eat Worms!* This is evidently part of the network’s hypercommercial practice, but this does not preclude the potential for educational programming. According to Kinder, the child viewer is able to cross-reference these images across *Goosebumps* and the network as an early means of media literacy practice. It is “a method of intertextual reading that encourages children to track words, images, characters, and ideas across individual episodes, series, channels, media, and spaces” (186). This mix of pleasurable and pedagogical attributes within *Goosebumps* suggests a need to return to popular children’s texts in order to locate their generative, autonomizing potential.

The next two operations that undergird commercial kids’ TV function symbiotically on *Goosebumps*: “serial imitation” and “morphing.” The relationship is symbiotic because the act of

morphing, or transformation, is repeated serially across episodes. Serial imitation is a “chain of simulations performed by characters” that serves as a “form of repetition that many young viewers find reassuring” (189); morphing is a “high tech mode of creative transformation” (192). Kinder differentiates morphing with “mutation”: a form of transformation associated with a natural evolutionary process rather than technological rupture, a matter of agency/non-agency. *Goosebumps*’ characters both mutate and morph, so I will refer to the operation as “transformation.” Kinder contends that these dynamics raise crucial questions: “who will have access to this morphing, at what price, and what kinds of freedom or subversion will it provide?” (196). These questions are applicable to *Goosebumps*—both adults and children are affected by transformation’s narrative function, with varying consequences.

In *The Haunted Mask* Carly Beth’s transformation makes her unbearably cruel, but the experience ultimately allows her to overcome her chronic worry and fear. In *The Cuckoo Clock of Doom*, a boy travels to the past, retaining his child’s consciousness in the body of his infant self. He then tricks his parents into taking him to an antique store, where he breaks the haunted cuckoo clock to save his sister from disappearing. *My Hairiest Adventure* uses mutation into a dog as a metaphor for puberty. Adults also mutate in *Goosebumps*; the father in *Stay Out of the Basement* and the evil librarian in *The Girl Who Cried Monster* are just two examples. Transformation in *Goosebumps* is murky;¹⁸ it can be empowering, horrific, and often both. It tends to render adults evil, while for children transformation is an agent of personal growth.

Imitation also manifests independently at a formal level. Episodes of the show often open with a protagonist experiencing a jump-scare, only to have it revealed to be a prank pulled by a sibling or bully. The episodes then reveal an actual threat which the protagonist, often with the

¹⁸ To be explored in depth in chapter two.

help of the original prankster, overcomes. Through kids impersonating monsters the child audience learns how to discern the difference between real threats and non-threats—they can then discern when and when not to be prepared for fright, while being made aware of the producedness of what they are watching.



Figure 5

“Overriding the program,” Kinder posits, is a “form of reading against the grain or an aggressive form of what Henry Jenkins [...] calls textual poaching” (196)—this practice is suggested on Fox Kids through “characters watching screens and commenting on and manipulating images” (196). On YTV, after a program would finish, that program’s image would shrink and a second screen would appear picture-in-picture [Figure 5]. YTV’s hosted interstitials such as *The Zone* and *Dark Night* were places where young hosts—characters in their own right—would comment on and preview shows. At the conclusion of *The Haunted Mask*, R.L. Stine asks his fictional parents their thoughts on the episode, and the camera cuts to their comically shocked expressions. *One Day at Horrorland* features a family trapped on a talk show hosted by monsters. On this show-within-a-show, the parents are mocked for their susceptibility to consumerist whims. In the case of *Goosebumps*, there is a subversive element in seeing adults

parodically mocked and shocked: children are encouraged to learn how to manage fear as a way to assert a sense of power over authority. Kids engaging in self-referential spectatorship is one way to get young viewers thinking critically about how they engage with their favorite programs.

The purpose of this section has been to explore what this textual poaching means for the child audience of YTV—a group that is generally understood to possess distinct cognitive, perceptual, emotional, and inter-textual skills. In the following chapter, I will explore some moments in *Goosebumps* in which children can practically use these skills in ways unintended by producers. However, scholars can equally benefit from reading these texts as such, for they help us to grasp particular television contexts in illuminating ways.

Chapter two will consider these formal and narrative operations in more depth. For now, I conclude with Kinder's methodology as a way to consider how children make meaning through (hyper)commercial television. Evidently *Goosebumps* demonstrates cognitive operations that can help children achieve the "mastery of intertextuality" (201). The analysis of these operations helps better understand how the show communicates with its child audience. It is a sophisticated form of communication. The show disrupts the notion that visceral, entertaining attributes preclude any generative, educational potential. *Goosebumps* is an example of edutainment that is lamentably cast aside by scholars, critics, and educators as trash. Moreover, it signals a rich, innovative kind of Canadian children's television which proves both economically and educationally viable, while giving children the kind of entertainment they apparently desire. By treating *Goosebumps* and similar shows as such, we can begin to rectify the oversight of Canadian children's TV, a subfield of our media studies that has been reluctant to engage with children's tastes in good faith.

It is significant that one of Canada's most successful television exports, on the most watched children's network in the country, found its success through its kitschy aesthetic and cult ethos. If we are to reinvigorate the field of Canadian TV studies, it is imperative to move past antiquated ideas which suggest that our media is lacking, that kitsch is worthless, that children require protection from anything that is not spoon-fed by the purveyors of green vegetable television. These old ideas are being jettisoned elsewhere—it is up to Canadian television scholars to address these problems and seek out new directions. In the following chapter, building on the production and reception contexts I have explored, I will provide some closer analyses of formal and narrative aspects of *Goosebumps*, providing a model for future analyses of Canadian children's television to be taken up.

Chapter II

Viewer Beware!: Hyper-Active Media Literacy on *Goosebumps*

“This is Dictionopolis, a happy kingdom, advantageously located between in the Foothills of Confusion and caressed by gentle breezes from the Sea of Knowledge. Today, by royal proclamation, is market day. Have you come to buy or sell?”

— Norton Juster, *The Phantom Tollbooth*

This chapter analyzes textual nodes of *Goosebumps*' alongside its accompanying paratexts. Doing so, I will excavate the popular children's show's pedagogical underpinnings. Illuminating these operations, I argue that *Goosebumps* manifests a pedagogical framework through its mobilization and articulation of the poetics of the children's horror genre. However, this framework is problematized by its place in the hypercommercial circuitry of YTV. The formal and linguistic aesthetics of the genre are appropriated by YTV into its larger marketing strategies through a process of gamification, defined as the infusion of game mechanics into everyday contexts. Gamification, it should be noted, is a trendy buzzword used abundantly in other contexts including work, policy-making, education, medicine, and art. Considering the appropriation of elements of “play” into the show's marketing, I will examine the ways in which the very poetics of *Goosebumps* render it susceptible to aggressive commodification.

I will consider four elements of the show, beginning at a macro level before moving to focused analyses of specific episodes. I start with an analysis of the show's introduction sequence(s), borrowing from Kinder's methodology to illuminate its pedagogically generative aspects. I will then consider how the operations which elicit a system of cross-textual literacy are subsumed into marketing strategies. From here I will analyze two multi-part episodes: the three-

part *Chillogy* and the two-part pilot *The Haunted Mask*. I have chosen these two episodes as they represent two kinds of *Goosebumps* episodes: the single-medium (TV) original teleplay, and the TV-to-VHS book adaptation. Both episodes offer ways of reading production and reception contexts through specific narrative programming. *Goosebumps* evidently presents a model for entertaining live-action children's television that teaches its audience how to actively engage with an evermore integrated mediascape. However, this gamified model is two-pronged: while it trains the child's sensorium with new, hyperactive forms of media literacy suited to the hypercommercial production context, it also ensnares its audience in a complex system where brand devotion is encouraged and maintained. As my close readings suggest, this model is reflected—in all its contradictions—within episodes of the show.

Framing Fear

Goosebumps' introduction opens on a close-up of a mysterious cloaked figure, wandering through a field with a briefcase. As the camera pans, we see it labeled "R.L. Stine." The briefcase opens, and a flurry of white papers—Stine's stories—spill out. A cut reveals that the stories, along with the floating shadow of *Goosebumps'* letter *G*, have been unleashed on an unsuspecting suburb. A woman's smiling face on a billboard transforms into a dead, haunted stare as the shadow floats across her. The *G* passes a golden retriever resting on a porch, turning its eyes yellow. The shadow proceeds to imprint itself on a tree, moves along a stoney walkway, and up to the door of a house. The door opens, revealing blackness, onto which images from the show are projected over a background of green slime. These quick cuts include the possessed father from *Stay Out of the Basement*, Carly Beth's frightened close-up from *The Haunted Mask*, a dummy, and a flurry of quick cuts—werewolves, monsters, mummies, a screaming boy, a pile

of worms, hazy landscapes, monstrous hands, a creepy man, a bug-eyed ghoul, a haunted mask, hiding eyes, a fang-mouthed cry, a dog-boy, insects, rats, and a series of terror-struck faces. Finally these images are drowned in a flood of green goo, which fades into the slime-fonted title, *Goosebumps*, with the subtitle “based on the books by R.L. Stine.”

These title credits self-consciously establish the show’s diegesis as a story-world, depicting Stine’s stories set loose on a fictional neighborhood. This is an essential element of children’s horror in literature, on television, and in film.¹⁹ When articulating the horror genre for children, it is crucial to signpost the frightening things that will inevitably be portrayed; the object of terror cannot be a surprise.²⁰ In folkloric tradition, the telling of a horror story “corresponds to the existence of these texts in the children’s subculture and oral tradition” (Sergienko 175). George Toles notes that “children go to the movies without a sense of what the limits of the movie experience are, or the ability to protect themselves against the unpleasant surprises of a visual narrative whose contents have as much validity as anything else that happens to them. They cannot easily make distinctions between the things that belong to the artifice of storytelling and the life they are returning to” (41). *Goosebumps* recognizes this: through the way it televisually renders the self-conscious compositional poetics of folklore, the show offers a space for children to engage in terror-inducing programming in a safe, comfortable, and potentially productive context.

Children learn to deal with feelings of anxiety and fear through viewing narratives with little resemblance to reality—what David Whitley refers to as a weak modality. Often this is talked about in terms of animation. With live-action, attaining the appropriate modality is more

¹⁹ A Canadian contemporary of *Goosebumps*, *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* begins each episode with the more obvious framing device of a group of characters telling ghost stories around a campfire.

²⁰ Kate Mossman’s “How the BBC Terrified a Generation” is a particularly fascinating account the Halloween special *Ghostwatch*, and the dangers of “tricking” young audiences into being frightened.

fraught; as the Toles quote suggests, children need to be prepared for, rather than protected from, frightening images. In *Goosebumps*' opening credits, the viewer is shown glimpses of the show's more terrifying images right out of the gate, images that are self-referentially framed as fictional stories from a briefcase. For example, the bug-eyed ghoul glimpsed in the introduction is the librarian Mr. Mortman from *The Girl Who Cried Monster*. With his bulging eyes, rotting teeth, and appetite for tarantulas, Mr. Mortman is nightmare fuel even by adult standards [Figure 6]. The show's cautionary tagline is not enough here. By highlighting the monster with a quick cut in the intro, the child audience is shepherded into the show's frightening diegesis with not only a direct warning (viewer beware!), but a preview of what is to come. Moreover, regarding the cross-referencing operation, children are encouraged to read images across compositional elements of the text. These images can also be read across the flow of programming, advertisements, interstitials, in-book ads, and bonus video content.



Figure 6

The intro is accompanied by the iconic *Goosebumps* theme music, composed by Canadian producer Jack Lenz. The haunting synth theme is used as a refrain throughout the

show's corpus, notably near the climax of *Monster Blood*, referenced in chapter one. D.W.

Lennard quotes Patricia Pisters, who says of the musical refrain that it “create[s] a stable centre, a central point in the enormous black hole of chaos: a child comforts itself in the dark by singing softly a nursery rhyme” (Pisters q. in Lennard 136). This is one of many ways the show uses repetition in its form to create stability and allow its young audience to feel safe in fright.

Lennard's essay notes how *Deep Red* (Argento 1975) uses the refrain of a children's song to evoke disrupted domestic space, signifying the adult paranoia of children's culture. This particular use of music to conjure a sense of paranoia can be read as a manifestation of protectionism in children's media studies—the adult gaze destabilized by children's incomprehensible tastes. In *Monster Blood*, this paranoiac fear of kid's culture is undermined.

The refrain is used at the very moment the young protagonists use the forbidden goo to defeat the evil witch. Here the show uses repetition as part of a pedagogical system—in which children can track images and sounds intertextually—while simultaneously subverting tropes of the horror genre.

The alternative intros to the two-part episodes-turned-videos—in which R.L. Stine introduces the show—condense the opening sequence. When Stine introduces these stunt episodes with the warning “viewer beware, you're in for a scare!,” their status as ghost stories is emphasized. This verbal warning is the show's tagline, a riff on the book series' mantra “Reader beware, you're in for a scare!” The “viewer/reader beware” warning is audio-visually suffused into the show's protective form. This self-referential foregrounding is another example of *Goosebumps* pedagogically articulating the children's horror tradition. There are similarities between the show's set and the set on which Stine presents the tale. In *The Haunted Mask* he is in a mask shop; in *The Werewolf of Fever Swamp* he is a dilapidated cabin, in *Welcome to Dead*

House he is in an old, cobwebbed attic [Figure 7]. The fictitiousness of the live-action sets are here emphasized—a potentially strong modality weakened. These sets, moreover, feature notable props from the episodes-proper, which audiences can look for in the main text. In the intro to *A Night in Terror Tower*, Stine holds a spiked bola—a medieval torture device—and asks someone off-set to have it gift-wrapped, signaling the fictitiousness of the show’s diegesis. In this way, these introductions are alternative renderings of the main intro’s series of quick cuts which preview and demystify the episode’s frightening images. The show encourages and potentially teaches children to read TV, and media more widely, through these formal characteristics.



Figure 7

Reading Form

Kinder's model of textually analyzing commercial children's television through the flow of programming blocks is useful for examining systems of textual operations across episodes, between diegetic and extradiegetic sequences, and through paratexts such as advertisements, contests, and bonus content. As such, it is a useful model for working through the saturated media spaces of hypercommercialism. Moreover, for young viewers with little experience engaging with horror, this kind of cross-textual reading has similar cognitive, sensory, and perceptual benefits as learning a second language. As Jonathan Gray notes: "If we are new to a language, we can only decode small parts of anything that we read or hear. But fluency extends beyond mere vocabulary and grammar, to visual, imagistic, and artistic literacy and experience" (31). Evidently, this imagistic training has pedagogically generative characteristics. Throughout this section I will point to some of the myriad ways cross-referencing and serial imitation function in and across episodes. Serial imitation manifests in repetitive trends in the actions of the characters—patterns which give the child viewer a sense of reassurance. Broadening this function's scope, it is helpful to consider the formal and narrative elements that repeat themselves across the series.²¹ Through re-situating and expanding these textual operations, I argue that the repetition of narrative structure and formal components further engage active audiences. These functions promote the cultivation of media literacy, training the sensorium of the child spectator.

Nearly all of the first season's episodes begin with the protagonist encountering what appears to be some frightening creature, followed by a fade-out—what would have been a commercial break when the episodes were broadcast and syndicated. Following the break is the

²¹ The introduction sequence is one example of this.

revelation the protagonist is only being pranked. *The Haunted Mask* opens with Carly-Beth's bullies disguised as pumpkin-headed freaks;²² in *The Cuckoo Clock of Doom*, Michael is attacked by a blood-billed monster only to find out his sister is tricking him with a ketchup-smeared puppet; *The Girl Who Cried Monster* begins with Lucy's brother losing his baseball in the garden, upon which the sister pretends to be attacked by the "razor-toothed toe biter." Instances of this narrative device abound throughout the show. By beginning most episodes with light jump-scares before revealing their hidden mechanisms, *Goosebumps* draws attention to the art of the thrill as constructed or produced. This presents a comfortable context in which to engage with the diegetically "real" scares that take place later in the episodes. This narrative feature is related to the textual operations of serial imitation and cross-referencing, through which kids are encouraged to track similar images and themes across texts. The audience is invited to read actions across episodes, engaging in media literacy in their own homes at their own leisure. Simultaneously, they are being sensorially and perceptually trained as television-viewing subjects. Upon acquiring the ability to read these structures, the young spectator can learn when to brace themselves for shock, to ergonomically oscillate between feelings of pleasure and fear. This, in turn, helps them become a more seasoned consumer of a particular culture.

Serial imitation manifests in several ways. Many of the episodes feature in-text references to *Goosebumps*. *Attack of the Mutant* features a city bus emblazoned with the series logo; *Cry of the Cat* features a poster from *The Haunted Mask*. The "false denouement" trope—in which a happy ending is ominously rejected²³—repeats itself across myriad episodes. The

²² Diegetically real pumpkin-monsters reappear in season two's *Attack of the Jack-O-Lanterns* in a further instance of serial imitation.

²³ A trademark device of the children's thriller in fiction (Sergienko 184).

most striking example of this is in the conclusion to *The Cuckoo Clock of Doom*, where Michael accidentally wishes his little sister out of existence. At first glance it seems odd that a kid's show might rope an audience through a journey of empowerment and self-discovery only to have the rug ripped out. However, this narrative device is part of a system of repetition and recognition which allows viewers to comfortably navigate feelings of anxiety and uncertainty. The audience always knows that, whatever happens, they can tune in next time, whereupon the characters will return. This is abetted by the return of certain actors in different roles across the series. These endings, were they not so frequent, could be considered cheap. But, as a core part of a pedagogical formula in children's horror, kids are made privy to the mechanisms of medium and genre. Through both narrative and visual devices, *Goosebumps* encourages audiences to read across episodes and, through its very form, informally engages the child in a kind of media literacy practice. In this pedagogical self-navigation of pleasure and fear, this practice constitutes a palpable training of the senses, crucial to being a citizen of media-saturated space.

Gaming the System

So far, I have considered the pedagogically generative aspects of mobilizing the instructional poetics of children's horror. However, there are corollaries to this kind of audio-visual training in the context of hypercommercialism, where advertising and content is amalgamated imperceptibly. The formal and narrative poetics encourage an active spectatorship with the potential to liberate children from prescribed, undesirable forms of literacy training. Yet, these very poetics are susceptible to suffusion into the commercial ethos of post-network television. This section will speculate on some of the paratextual flows of the *Goosebumps* books pre-adaptation, historically situating the franchise's intertextual marketing before considering its

cross-medium manifestations. These strategies anticipate hypercommercialism and help understand its televisual articulation. I will henceforth refer to this process of the subsumption of children's horror poetics into the marketing process as *gamification*. Gamification by definition refers to “a process of enhancing a service with affordances for gameful experiences in order to support user's overall value creation” (Huotari and Hamari q. in Matallaoui, Hanner, Zarnekow 2012). It is increasingly ubiquitous in terms of knowledge production and marketing; as such it a useful term to help think through the increasingly problematic confluence of art with advertising, public enrichment with private profit. Moreover, it helps further situate *Goosebumps* and Canadian children's TV at the threshold of the digital age through its early use of what is now an important digital concept.

Due to the limited resources and scope of a Master's thesis, I do not have access to the full archive of YTV's television promos from the 1990s. Using what is at my disposal, I will nevertheless speculate on some of the implications of this amalgamation of poetics and marketing in the context of children's media. Three resources have been useful for examining *Goosebumps* and YTV's broader cross-promotional marketing efforts. A *Goosebumps Wiki* thread titled “List of in-book advertisements,” curated by user NeutralJedi, compiles an archive of several *Goosebumps* advertisements for contests, games, video releases, and more. I will look primarily at the cross-promotional ads that tie together *Goosebumps* three core mediums—the show, the video-cassettes, and the books. The YouTube compilation “The Goosebumps Giant Commercial Collection” by IsaiahTheVargas1117 is an hour-long video featuring *Goosebumps*' television and video advertisements from the show's initial run between 1995-1998. From this compilation I will focus on the VHS promotional spots and YTV-specific advertisements. The final resource I will examine is YTV's print publication for kids, *Woah! Magazine*. By analyzing

these clips, in-book advertisements, and print publications, it is evident that *Goosebumps* not only articulates horror pedagogically in-episode, but it also does so paratextually—anticipating the contemporary, increasingly aggressive hypercommercial context.

In her analysis of the literary poetics of the children’s horror genre, Inna Sergienko considers the critical role titles play in articulating horror for young audiences. Through children’s horror titles, the repetition, recognition, and “comic hyperbole of the aesthetics of horror” (178) comfort the reader and prepare them to confront frightening material. However, Sergienko suggests this characteristic of the genre renders it acutely susceptible to subsumption by commercialism. In Russian children’s literature, advertisements with no connection to the main text of the novel are often printed at the end of books, where the previewed title—part of the larger game—draws the reader’s attention. Some *Goosebumps* titles include *Attack of the Jack-O-Lanterns*, *Revenge of the Lawn Gnomes*, *Welcome to Dead House*, *Werewolf Skin*, *Welcome to Camp Nightmare*, and *Vampire Breath*. These titles are part of a larger game, adding a sense of humor to the often-unsettling content of the stories. Like the Russian literature Sergienko cites, *Goosebumps* novels feature advertisements unconnected with that novel’s main text [Figure 8, 9], prolonging the game to further grip the child consumer.²⁴ Thus, even before the show signaled the emergence of hypercommercialism on YTV, the muddying of content and advertising had been a fixture of the franchise’s marketing.

²⁴ I am using the term “main text” as Sergienko does—in reference to any particular novel, rather than the broader *Goosebumps* anthology.

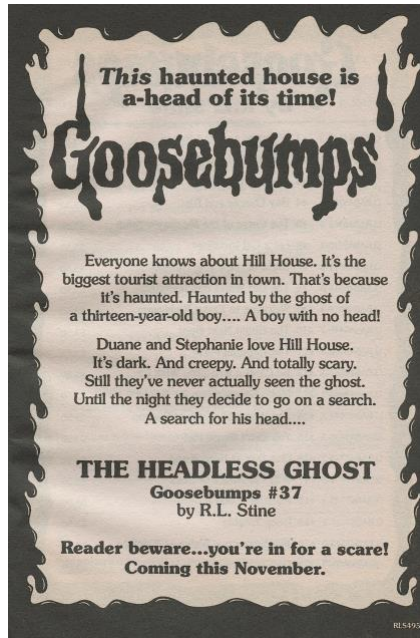


Figure 8

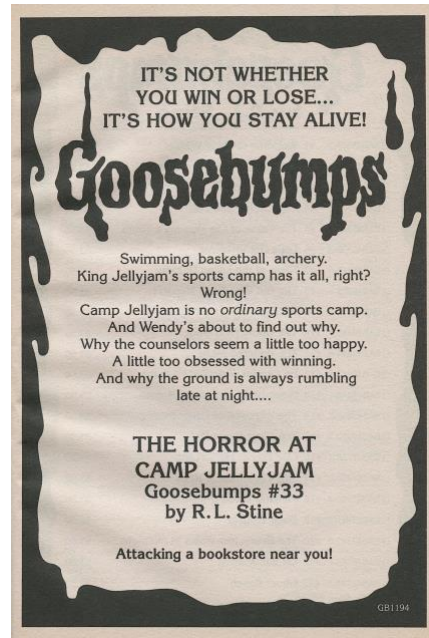


Figure 9

Goosebumps also adapts this strategy to promote the television show, spin-off books such as *Give Yourself Goosebumps* (1995-2000), the interactive *Goosebumps* website, fan clubs, toys, and even stage adaptations [Figure 10] in an early instance of convergent, integrated advertising. The patterns of repetition, recognition, and humor are appropriated by publishers and producers. Evidently what makes horror fun for children at the level of poetics is deeply intertwined with the ways in which media producers brand and sell their products, constructing and mobilizing the taste formations of children. As such, cross-promotional commercial television appropriates textual and aesthetic forms that children find entertaining. Again, Mark Fisher's metaphor of the Thing is useful in understanding how integration, as a function of capitalism, works by adsorbing the forms of whatever comes into its orbit. Asquith remarks that "hypercommercialism requires new kinds of media literacy efforts, because even the most media-savvy youth may not recognize the totality of YTV's advertising practices and link them to the channels commercial goals" (109).



Figure 10

This excavation of *Goosebumps*' in-book marketing practices helps historically situate YTV's contemporary commercial practices. This is important to understanding our present, where appeals to children's tastes are ever-more creatively employed by adult producers for commercial gain. Moreover, these materials can teach young people how to differentiate between the content they find fulfilling and entertaining, and those hypercommercial advertising efforts which have absorbed the aesthetic forms they find pleasure in.

The VHS release of *The Haunted Mask* opens with a behind-the-scenes mini documentary about another release, *A Night in Terror Tower*. In the preview, Canadian actor Corey Sevier offers the viewer a tour of the Terror Tower set. Ostensibly this clip is a cross-promotional video meant to sell products and attract devotion to a franchise. But it is also a

platform-specific compositional device offering the child spectator a comfortable distance from the frights they are to endure. The *Stay Out of the Basement* tape opens on a preview for three *Goosebumps* releases,²⁵ synopsisizing the episodes' premises before urging viewers to "collect" all three videos and watch them "over and over again." This advertisement plays on the pedagogical system belying the child audience's propensity to watch things repeatedly, thus forming coping strategies for dealing with that which is unpleasant (Whitley, Lester). Children can learn manage the pillars of pleasure and fear, simultaneously being enmeshed with a particular consumer ethos. By engaging in this system and becoming a "knowledgeable player within a culture" (Kinder 183), the child spectator immerses herself completely in the fandom of *Goosebumps*. She is steeped in the franchise's larger story-world that consumes the collector's life. Canadian kids can repeatedly watch these tapes and become better fit to tune into YTV's more risky children's programming like *Freaky Stories* (1997-2000) or the imported *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (WB 1997-2003), entering the "aspirational world of 'cool'" where children can "rehearse a kind of adulthood that is independent, autonomous, and self-sufficient" (Buckingham, Davies, Kelley 486). It is increasingly difficult to negotiate the contradictions embedded in the agglomeration of instructional and commercial poetics.

In chapter one I cited the in-book advert for the *Goosebumps* VHS series which calls for fans to "Relive the Fright—Night After Night!"; a call that engages a cross-platform expedition. The child is constantly navigating from one platform to the next. She finds a "Reading is a Scream" bookmark from a videotape, for which her parents buy her a new book from the collection. Upon reaching the end of her novel she finds an ad for the latest video. The video features an ad notifying the viewer of the new "Goosebumps Presents..." (1996-1998) series,

²⁵ *The Haunted Mask, A Night in Terror Tower, and Stay Out of the Basement.*

where novels that have been adapted are re-printed with pictures from the episodes. Children are encouraged to read every novel, while watching the tapes over and over, engrossing themselves entirely in the Stine-verse. They are told one-by-one, through their screens, that they are immensely special for inhabiting this frightening realm. An advert at the beginning of *The Werewolf of Fever Swamp* VHS inculcates the child with a sense of individualism, telling him “your parents can’t see it, your friends won’t believe it.” Ultimately, this committed engagement will drive Canadian fans to turn to YTV for more ephemeral doses of the show—potentially less popular episodes. The child’s sense of “cool” will be galvanized by familiarity with these more obscure texts. There is always the possibility that this kind of devotion will strengthen textual and cultural literacy, in terms of both screen and page. But the interconnectedness of pedagogical and (hyper)commercial is problematic, and any generative, textual system in children’s television needs to acknowledge the conflict of interest inherent in the gamification of children’s education, entertainment, and leisure.

“The Goosebumps Giant Commercial Collection” features only three Canadian clips from YTV, but there is a notable difference in the way the Canadian kids network articulates its promotion of the show as opposed to Fox in the United States. The VHS promos (produced by 20th Century Fox) and the Fox Kids spots are televisual renderings of back-page blurbs: they summarize the plots of the episodes through voiceover played over show clips. The Fox ads sell the *Goosebumps* franchise; whether kids tune in or buy tapes seems inconsequential. For YTV, the emphasis is on getting kids to engage with their network’s brand identity and to “Keep it Weird.” One promotional spot for *Goosebumps* on YTV features nearly thirty different indiscernible shots from the show over the span of less than fifteen seconds. Some of the images appear not to come from *Goosebumps* at all, but rather from stock, commercial footage. A deep,

raspy voice-over asks the viewer, “Ever wonder where they got the name of the show?... Now you know.” The *Goosebumps* title card appears, with the voiceover “*Goosebumps*—next on YTV.” A green YTV-branded bug flies into frame and spits slime onto the screen. The commercial is sheer anarchy compared to the more conservative *Goosebumps* promos aired on Fox. There is no connection to the poetics of children’s horror to be found here; what YTV seems to offer is a sort of high-strung, post-modern influx of sensory data. The quick cuts are indistinguishable and impossible to chart in the same way as those in the introduction. Any evidence of a pedagogical system is lost within an aggressive maelstrom of images. The ad promotes a brand loyalty rooted in chaos; YTV establishes a hypercommercial aesthetic rather than appropriating and re-articulating literary poetics. If the senses are being trained, it is in a frantic, overexcited fashion. YTV seems to construct an amphetaminic sensorium suited to the hyperactive subject. Beside this hectic imagery, actual episodes of *Goosebumps* seem rather tame.

Another site through which to consider YTV’s digestion of genre into its marketing is through the network-issued quarterly *Woah! Magazine*. The magazine was offered for \$3.00 at all Canadian *Pizza Hut* locations and featured games, contests, and advertisements. It released its first issue in 1999, a year after *Goosebumps* stopped production. While not produced synchronically with *Goosebumps*’ original run on YTV, the magazine borrows aesthetic and poetic properties of the series, another example of the way hypercommercialism collapses boundaries between content and advertising, not to mention its capacity to traverse and colonize media spaces from television to print to restaurant chains. Issue no. 3 features a recipe for “Slug-Dip Delight,” a dish said to taste “poo-rific,” harking back to the bug-eating Mr. Mortman of *The Girl Who Cried Monster*, or the previously cited *Dr. Dreadful M.D. Creepy Clinic*, advertised

alongside the show's original run. *Woah!* no. 4 contains a spooky tale called "Dead Head Lake." To read the story's ending the reader must flip to another page, whereupon they are invited to "Visit www.woahmagazine.com for another terrifying conclusion," echoing *Goosebumps* oft-used "false-denouement" trope by leaving off on an unresolved, frightening note. Here, the trope is mobilized as a means of sending its devoted audience across platforms, requiring the child to engage with the network in print, online, and on television. Regular columns featured in the magazine are called "3 Hairy Thumbs Up" and "Say It Don't Spray It." One could not be blamed for thinking these were titles of lost *Goosebumps* episodes—another instance in which the horror-informed play of tongue-and-cheek titles is appropriated into YTV's marketing efforts.

Examining this early instance of gamification, it is difficult to reconcile the tension between the genre's ability to train literacy and the way its formal elements are used to market to children. The problem with YTV's marketing is that there is little space to read against the grain—a cognitive process I have argued is generative to children engaging in commercial television. *Woah! Magazine* tells kids to leave their rooms messy, to cook with slugs, to fake their IQ buy buying bigger glasses [Figure 11]. To read against this grain would transform the child into the gaze's perfect subject. But marketing practices like these only do so much to construct the child subject. This thesis has argued that children's television studies must put more scholarly emphasis on the actual programs children watch. Shows such as *Goosebumps* are the meat of a network's flow—the reason children engage with YTV in the first place. It is where the bulk of the *entertainment* comes from. Moreover, episodes of *Goosebumps* are much richer and more layered than a short advertisement or an in-magazine quiz. Watching these episodes, children can read with or against the grain. I will go as far as to claim that Canadian children's TV's particularly fricative relationship between mandated broadcast policies and commercial

children’s entertainment—surveyed in the introduction to this thesis—results in more tension, or grain, to read against, especially in the case of an American/Canadian co-venture. This may manifest through different nodes of the show, to varying degrees. Narrative programming constructs more dynamic subjects than do these paratextual nuggets. I will now analyze two multi-part episodes of *Goosebumps*, considering how they reflect their production and reception contexts while offering certain modes of reading against the grain.

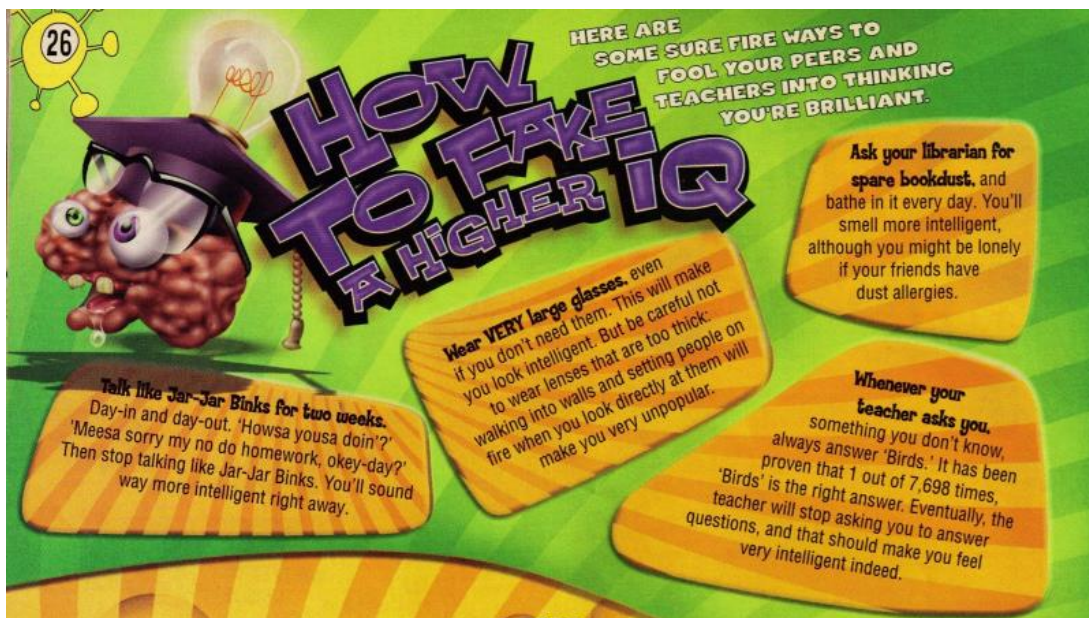


Figure 11

Reading *Goosebumps*

I will now turn to particular episodes of *Goosebumps*: the three-part *Chillogy* and the two-part *The Haunted Mask*. In their own way, both address the problems this thesis addresses. The *Chillogy* reflects the aggressive nature of hypercommercialism; the three protagonists are each trapped in a world where children’s leisure has been colonized and corporatized by adults. *The Haunted Mask*, on the other hand, explores different manifestations of the adult gaze; it

contrasts the crazed tastes of children with the milquetoast preferences of adults.²⁶ These reflections on children's culture helps better understand how *Goosebumps* and YTV view its child audience. Furthermore, both texts address the idea of the child consumer in interesting ways.

First, it is important to make note of the cultural symbolism of *the children's toy* and *possessed child* in horror narratives. These tropes have been used throughout the genre's history to neutralize the autonomy of the child, signifying a paranoia around kid's culture. *The Exorcist* (Friedkin 1973), through its treatment of the slime-vomiting young Reagan, elicits a disgust towards liberated, autonomous youth. Likewise, *Child's Play* (Holland 1988) established the evil toy as a pervasive symbol of adult paranoia representing "the child's propensity for being captured by phenomena that are implausible to adults" (Lennard 135). These tropes speak to a history of constraining incomprehensible children's tastes; they are meant to assimilate children into the adult gaze's "economic social." Significantly, these symbols play crucial roles in the *Chillogy* and *The Haunted Mask*.

Possession, a narrative operation deployed in myriad horror films, envisions unruly youth as a demographic to be contained, assimilated, exorcised of their desires. It invokes childhood rebellion as something in need of suffocation, establishing the child with special powers as one deserving of punishment. William Paul, citing *The Exorcist's* source novel of the same title, notes that the point of possession is to make us feel "vile and putrescent; without dignity; ugly; unworthy" (Blatty q. in Paul 391). Possession is the ringer the child is put through in order to come out assimilated.

²⁶ It should be noted that these are not the only self-critical episodes of *Goosebumps*: my earlier—albeit brief—analysis of *Monster Blood* in chapter one is one further example.

Chucky, the poster-boy of evil cinematic dolls, signifies the tyranny of the active child. Lennard notes that the doll's commodification is "inscribed with menace" from *Child Play*'s first sequence, in which the title card is ominously imposed onto a stack of kids toys (Lennard 139).²⁷ *The Haunted Mask* and the *Chillogy* both echo this mode of inscription. The ghoulish mask figures ominously in *The Haunted Mask*'s opening shot. Similarly, the opening sequence of the *Chillogy* features several establishing shots of "Karlsville" set to a sinister score. *Goosebumps*, then, seems to wield the very tropes that serve to assimilate and control children. These sections consider how these symbols are altered in their articulation for the child audience—particularly that of YTV, who find virtue in being filthy, unkempt, and rebellious.

Streamlining Fun in the *Chillogy*

The William Fruet-directed *Chillogy* is a text that offers certain modes of reading against the grain. The trilogy as a whole is critical of the aggressive commodification of children's leisure, narratively circumventing its production context. The episodes aired in season three; they are not adapted from any pre-existing text, but are based on an original teleplay. Moreover, the trilogy was never adapted into a "*Goosebumps* Presents..." novelization. The *Chillogy* occupies a privileged, liminal space in the larger cross-medium ecology of *Goosebumps*. In this way, it criticizes rampant consumerism from a particular vantage. I argue that the *Chillogy* rebukes the show's unchecked cross-platform commercialization in its interrogation of the gamification of children's leisure and entertainment. In the episode's world-within-a-world—Karlsville—leisure

²⁷ This trope is subverted through the character of Slappy the Dummy—the face of the *Goosebumps* franchise. In the first part of *Night of the Living Dummy III*, Slappy stands in for tasteless adult—he is purchased from an antique store, with its acquired connotation of secondhand, undesirable junk. In part two, the tyranny of the overbearing parent is displaced by the hyperbolized havoc wreaked by the doll; the two "villains" are interchangeable.

for children is manipulated and individuated by adult agents. The child protagonists are forced to use their acquired technological agency to escape this eerily prescient netherworld.

Part one, “Squeal of Fortune,” centres on Jessica, who discovers a miniature toy town in a dingy, dusty corner of her basement. Jessica is magically warped into Karlsville, a town run by a smooth-talking, shapeshifting grifter named Karl. Karl ropes Jessica into selling lemonade at his lemonade stand; in a moment of hubris following the venture’s success, she decides to raise prices and dilute the juice. When her cheat is revealed, Jessica is morphed into a pig, the popular symbol of capitalist greed. She is pursued by the thwarted townsfolk until she finds refuge in a phonebooth. Upon phoning home she is magically warped back to her bedroom. She takes Karlsville to the curb to be picked up as trash.

Part two, “Strike Three... You’re Doomed,” features Jessica’s friend Matthew—a boy donning a baseball uniform. He finds the Karlsville model on the curb and brings it to *his* room, where he suffers Jessica’s fate of being sucked into the mini-town. He is promptly greeted on a baseball diamond by Karl, masquerading as a coach. Matthew is forced to play a nightmare rendition of baseball, where running from base to base can be fatal. When he is on first base his foot is caught in a trap, rendering him immobile. A slew of life-sized cutouts of the boy appear along the basepath; a pitching machine, rising from the ground, fires at Matthew and his replicas one-by-one. Ducking and dodging, Matthew gets his shoe off and makes it to second. On his way to third he treads across a volcanic chasm that has opened beneath him. Between himself and home plate, two daemoniac monsters materialize, catching Matthew in a rundown. The baseball grows fangs and floats toward him. Against all odds, Matthew makes it to home plate and warps to his room. Jessica comes over and they plan to destroy the town. Before they can put the plan in action, Matthew’s brother Todd receives an invitation to Karlsville in the mail.

The third episode opens with Todd in the middle of a Karlsville parade. He is kidnapped and taken to a lab. Karl and a team of plastic-sheened scientists tell him they will make him a “citizen of Karlsville” by beaming him with a PlastoBlaster, turning him to a figurine. Jessica and Matthew warp to Karlsville and make their way to Todd. They escape the lab on a search for “home plate,” Matthew’s mode of return. But this doesn’t work. There is no apparent escape for Todd. In a moment of fortunate happenstance, his mom decides to clean Karlsville with a vacuum, accidentally saving the kids. Jessica, Matthew, and Todd shoo the adults out of the room, find what they mistakenly think is the plastic Karl figurine, and burn it in the fireplace. The episode ends with a muffled laugh from inside the vacuum. A tiny Karl squirms out, laughing like a maniac.

The *Chillogy* houses the textual operations that enable active viewership; a three-part “to be continued...” structure, the cross-textual easter egg of a sign reading *The Cuckoo Clock of Doom*, the “false denouement” trope, and a repetitive series of narratives. The anachronistic chaos of the episodes suggests (hyper)commercially contaminated practices run amok; they are examples of commercial children’s television which reflect upon their production contexts. Moreover, the dehumanizing commercialization of children’s leisure and entertainment in the *Chillogy* reflects this thesis’ larger concerns about children actively navigating a mediascape in which the difference between business and leisure, paratext and intertext, is indistinguishable. A lemonade stand, a baseball game, the miniature toy town itself: these activities have each been poisoned by the interests of Karl, who warps the rules of children’s play for his own ends. He is the proxy of a producer who has colonized fun.

The function of “transformation” plays out aggressively in the *Chillogy*. The text depicts a shapeshifting adult who subsumes convenient forms, a girl who becomes a greedy pig, a boy

whose individualism is rendered a simulacra, a kid forced to become to plastic figurine. Karl's transformative limits are boundless and come at no apparent price; even his capture at the trilogy's conclusion is revealed as a false denouement. On the other hand, the children of the *Chillogy* are forced to transform so that they can confront painful truths, before being re-assimilated into "normal" life. Jessica learns about the seduction of greed and avarice, Matthew is confronted with the illusion of autonomy, while Todd gets a peek behind the curtain to view the commercial mass-marketing that informs "citizenship." By analyzing how adults and children respectively morph in these episodes, we can grasp some of the ideologies encoded in the text.

I argue that these children are morphed as punishment for engaging in poor consumer behavior. They find their entertainment for free, in dusky basements and trash piles. Karlsville's status as *evil toy* is significant here. Karlsville represents a threat to the kids culture industry—an industry then dominated by *Goosebumps*. If every child scoured their attic for old, worthless kitsch, there would *be* no children's culture to sell; there would be no *Goosebumps* books, toys, games, movies, or television. Echoing Chucky, Karlsville speaks to anxieties about how children spend. However, the *Chillogy* resituates the signified of the evil toy. Used toys become synonymous with evil; they are marked because they are antithetical to the production of children's culture. They do not, like the Chucky doll, represent the threat of the child's increasing purchasing power. Rather, toys like Karlsville *impede* this consumer ability. Our three protagonists learn, through their disciplinary morphing, that it is unwise to play with toys that are not bought off store shelves, encased in plastic. They re-enter the gaze's economic social with this newly acquired knowledge.

What can be made of the *Chillogy*'s self-conscious critiques, problematized by their presentation through opaque metaphors, by those who profit from the ruse? There is palpable tension in the way the episodes engage in a criticism of mass culture, while simultaneously inhibiting this criticism through their alignment with the gaze. The mobilization of the poetics of children's horror generates a system of textual operations. However, the episodes narratively reflect a production process that would seem antithetical to this sort of pedagogy. The episodes that make up the *Chillogy* are evidently shot through with many contradictions; these contradictions elicit an intricate system of meanings and, I argue, offer a rich text through which to engage with children's culture and media literacy. By teasing out these textual systems, there is increasing potential for teaching kids how to intelligently navigate hyper-commercially convergent media-spheres.

We can address YTV's (hyper)active knowledge production by engaging with its programs' commercial textuality and aesthetics. These features offer new ways of engaging in media literacy for kids of the digital age, as they suggest the potential to read against aggressively commercial contexts. Although children's media is compromised by producers such as Karl, the *Chillogy* suggests that kids can recapture the reins of their own leisure and pedagogy through an assertion of technological agency. By learning how to navigate thrill, pleasure, and fear while being made privy to certain mechanisms, the child audience can function on its own within commercially saturated spaces like YTV and Karlsville.

The Gazes of *The Haunted Mask*

This section will use the insights into the pedagogical and hypercommercial aspects of *Goosebumps* and YTV to analyze the show's two-part pilot and best-selling video release *The*

Haunted Mask, directed by Timothy Bond. Its protagonist Carly Beth embodies the emancipatory/protectionist binary found in commercial children's television's system of cross-textual literacy—through her “true,” governable, innocent self, and the chaotic, unruly monster she becomes upon being possessed by the mask. In this analysis, I will explore how both sides of her character manifest particular iterations of the disciplinary “adult gaze.” By working through the episode's dual manifestations of the gaze, I draw insights in the value of audiovisual literacy training under hypercommercialism—whether YTV's ethos of rebellion offers anything truly generative to the child viewer, or if its brand strategy merely assimilates useful subjects through corporate strategy.

While I have made passing reference to *The Haunted Mask* throughout this thesis, it is useful to give a detailed description of the episode before moving forward. The episode opens with a close-up of the titular mask, before Stine introduces himself and the “story come alive” we are about to see. Right away he lets us know how the episode ends, “when [Carly Beth] discovers there is nothing more powerful than the love of her family and friends.”²⁸ Cut to the title card. Carly Beth and her friend Sabrina, out for a walk, notice a new novelty shop opened just in time for Halloween. Carly Beth is spooked by the shop; as she begins to walk home, the store owner watches her ominously. Her thin skin makes her an easy target for bullies Chuck and Steve, who torment her in and out of school. Carly Beth's mother has the quintessential utopian view of childhood; she has just surprised her daughter with a duck costume, and displayed a plaster mold of Carly Beth's head—a hauntingly angelic simulacra—on the mantel. The day before Halloween, Chuck and Steve trick Carly Beth into eating a worm in front of her schoolmates. Humiliated, she returns home. In a flurry of feathers she destroys her duck costume

²⁸ Framing the frightening diegesis as fictional.

and collects her secret stash of thirty dollars. She sets out to buy the scariest mask she can find, for a costume that “will make Chuck and Steve wish they never met me.”

At the novelty shop, an assortment of eerie masks are lined up in a back room—masks the owner refuses to sell. Desperately, Carly Beth steals a monstrous green mask, throws her money at the owner, and flees the store. She tests the mask on her brother, affecting an altered, gravelly voice not her own. She affixes the plaster replica of her head to a broomstick, and heads out to meet Sabrina. Carly Beth sets out on a rampage: she hollers at children, steals candy, damages property, and threatens a family. She tells her friend, “it’s not me Sabrina, the mask made me do it.” She leaves her friend and tracks down Chuck and Steve in the cemetery, where she forces them to apologize. The plaster face of Carly Beth comes to life: the eyes open, the mouth pleads for help, and the bullies flee. Carly Beth drops the broomstick and howls, enraptured, at the moon. She stalks around the graveyard like an old witch before burying the plaster head, bidding the old Carly Beth goodbye.

Carly Beth returns to Sabrina. She suddenly feels guilty and ashamed, suffering the comedown from a curse. They go home to count their candy. Trying to remove the mask, Carly Beth discovers that there is no threshold between it and her body—the mask is now her face. Through an in-mask POV, Carly Beth notices her eyes in the mirror, exclaiming, “They’re not my eyes [...] my eyes don’t look like that. Those aren’t my eyes. Where are my eyes?” She runs from the bathroom, crying “This isn’t me. This isn’t me in here.” She goes back to the novelty shop, where the owner waits. He informs her that it is not a mask, but a real face—a face that was once beautiful but became monstrous. The only way she can remove it is through a “symbol of love.” The other masks float toward Carly Beth—she escapes to the cemetery to dig up her plaster replica, her symbol of love. She lifts the head from the dirt and fends off the other cursed

masks, exclaiming “this is me!” She tears off her mask, hurrying home, and tearfully embraces her mother. Her brother enters the room, donning the haunted mask, laughing hysterically.²⁹ Fade out to R.L. Stine, who asks his mom and dad, offscreen, if they liked the episode. The camera pans to an elderly couple with shocked white faces and hair. Stine tells the audience to “have a scary day.” End credits.

The two manifestations of the adult gaze in *The Haunted Mask* are located in two symbols: the mask and the plaster replica of Carly Beth. These two objects are at the nexus of the episode’s double-bind; there is a sickness stemming from Carly Beth’s sense of inauthenticity in the mask (“these aren’t my eyes!). The only antidote for this sickness is in the plaster mold, the repressive maternal projection of Carly Beth as a beacon of innocence. Evidently, *Goosebumps* addresses, and potentially rejects, the same gaze that is reasserted by the narrative’s conclusion. Moreover, the mask and the mold reflect this thesis’ insights into the frictive relationship between “green vegetable” television and TV that reflects children’s actual taste. Carly Beth is reprimanded for her particular consumer choice: wanting a gross, slimy piece of merchandise whose appeal adults do not comprehend. The choice is mystifying, as her mother has already purchased her a perfectly fine duck suit. Carly Beth finally quashes her morbid tastes with the “symbol of love,” her mother’s mold. This angelic replica is the ultimate parental projection, a metaphor for parents’ construction of childhood. The protectionist ideology wins out in the end, privileging itself over any real emancipation of an active child audience.

The mask represents Carly Beth’s real suffering, buried under her mother’s idealistic plaster construct. It is under the spell of the mask that she can experience the realization of her deepest desires—to inflict pain on those who have treated her poorly. She tyrannizes the same

²⁹ An instance of false denouement.

neighborhood that has oppressed her, exulting gleefully as her bullies suffer. Carly Beth has become the incorrigible kid playing in dirt and smashing pumpkins that a YTV audience who “keeps it weird” should strongly identify with. As such, she is closer to being YTV’s hypercommercial subject when she is masked than when she is her innocent self. It is not until she returns to her friend that she begins to feel remorse, apparently unprovoked. Carly Beth acknowledges the curse of the gaze, crying out “this isn’t me in here!” She is (de)possessed of body and voice—rendered a monstrous misrepresentation. The curse must be reversed so that Carly Beth can assimilate back into the real world—one in which she has one friend and wears duck costumes. In terms of the demographic YTV tries to construct, the “real” Carly Beth is antithesis of “cool.”

The mask is similar to the Chucky doll in its possessive power—though it represents forbidden merchandise while Chucky is a popular toy. *The Haunted Mask*, like the *Chillogy*, resituates the signified of the evil toy. Carly Beth not punished for asserting economic agency. Rather, she is punished for engaging in the wrong kind of commerce: spending her meager reserve of cash in the back room of a shady novelty shop. The show appears to want to subvert adult gaze-fueled representations—characterizations and narrative properties that serve to inform an ideal consumer citizen. Carly Beth’s acknowledgment of the gaze and Todd’s descent into a plasticizing hell suggest this gesture. However, the very ethos of hypercommercialism, and its aim to impress a particular brand onto a child audience, infects the text. Asquith observes that “YTV’s audience is desirable because advertisers now charge children with three duties: (1) buy goods, (2) influence family buying decisions, and (3) become ‘good’ future consumers” (97)—these duties are evidently at odds with any attempt at subversion. The episodes, as hard as they try to give their audience a sense of agency, inevitably reassert the adult gaze by their conclusions.

Considering how the episode articulates the trope of the kids toy can help us get a better grip on YTV's target demographic—its “prized assets.” The child subject is not valuable if she is merely spending her own paltry savings. It is only when kids are informing their parents' spending habits that they are playing the role of the good consumer citizen. Thus, it is fair to suggest that the hyperactive, terror-inducing, unkempt version of Carly Beth—her possessed self—represents a side of her that warrants her feeling “without dignity; ugly; unworthy.” Her possession is in line with possession narratives throughout the history of the horror genre: it keeps the child in line by punishing rebellious behavior. The network's apparent allyship with its audience is a front for more self-interested goals than the social emancipation and self-realization of the child. YTV not only trains active subjects: it teaches kids how to be the *right* kind of consumers.

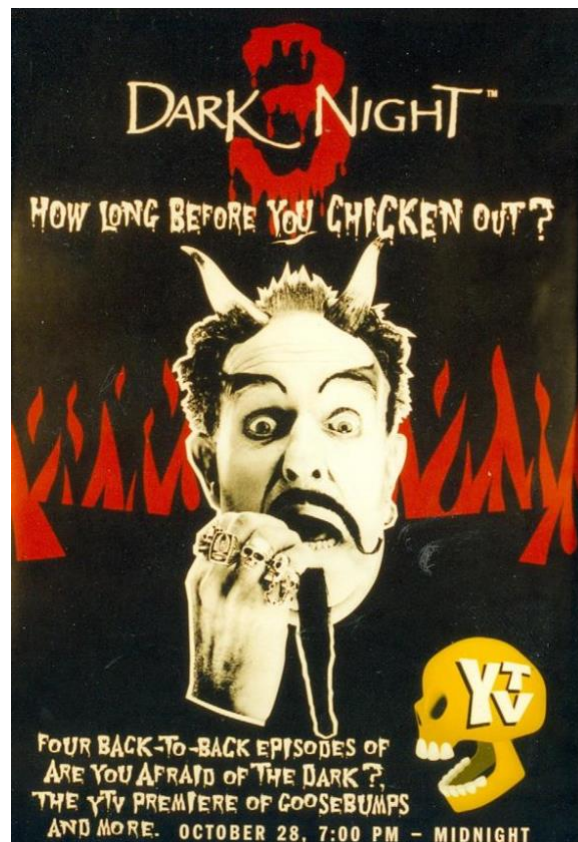


Figure 12

Kinder's textual operation of "over-riding the programming" helps conceive of how kids might approach the episode. The operation constitutes a mode of reading against the grain and is suggested, in her analysis, through "characters watching screens and commenting on [...] images" (196). At the end of the final non-diegetic sequence of *The Haunted Mask*, R.L. Stine comments on the episode alongside his petrified, fictional parents. This comical construction of adulthood evens the score: the sequence constructs a misrepresented version of parents that echoes Carly Beth's mom's construction of an idealized daughter. A horror-savvy audience who has heeded Stine's warning to "beware" will find humor in his parents' shock. This rejection of adult fear can potentially extend to a rejection of the episode's didactic morality tale. YTV's "cool, offbeat" audience should be more prone to appropriate the monstrous behaviour of Carly Beth than her angelic self projected by the gaze.³⁰ As I have noted, her possessed behavior is the very kind of acting-out the network seems to promote. Though episodes by and large conclude with the child's re-assimilation into "normal" life, the YTV audience identifying with these characters are not, like their screen analogues, required to re-enter the gaze's economic social. They can very well stay glued to the screen watching the rest of their collection of *Goosebumps* tapes. Or, they can continue to watch the show's program block companions like *Are You Afraid of the Dark* or *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* [Figure 12].

There is, in *The Haunted Mask*, a dissonance in the way the show integrates with the marketing strategies of YTV. The "adult gaze" is most evident in the representation of Carly Beth as an innocent, lonely child: the order-establishing self she returns to at the episode's end. The monstrous self the episode rejects is the very type of representation YTV's marketing seems

³⁰ The viewing experience of *Goosebumps* in Canada has been significantly altered in 2019. Watching the show on a contemporary streaming platform such as Netflix is a much different spectatorial experience than watching on a commercial network. The same can be said about watching the VHS version versus that aired on TV.

to sell to its child audience. *Goosebumps*, in this way, does not neatly conform to the hypercommercial structure of the Canadian kid's network. I argue that this results in part from the show's status as a co-venture. *Goosebumps* cannot fully integrate because it is equally bound to the American network Fox, whose ethos is quite different than YTV's—Fox does not so much sell a brand as much as it transmits the ideological value of “American supremacy within global markets,” among other things (Kinder 186). This is a potential solution to the problem of hypercommercialism, which can *possibly* have negative effects on children if they cannot tell the difference between content and advertising. By being beholden to multiple networks, programs cannot as easily be slotted into a homogenous amalgam of intertext and paratext, used primarily as a marketing tool to further galvanize a particular brand image. In this way, there are benefits to Canadian co-productions and co-ventures that go beyond the production value increases they offer.

Serra Tinic notes that both American and Canadian television industries are contradictory institutions in that they are venues for creative, artistic, and social expression, while remaining primarily profit-oriented industries. Canadian TV, she notes, is more pronounced in this regard, due to the “uneasy balance” of artistic and commercial concerns with national cultural goals (Tinic 158). It is fair to suggest that children's television industries are also pronounced in these contradictions: children's television is concerned with providing a higher degree of culturally stimulating programming. It is interesting, though not surprising, that these contradictions manifest themselves in various ways throughout *Goosebumps*, not limited to the particular texts I have focused on in this research. It is important to take note of these textual manifestations of industrial and social contradictions, like those suggested by the show's thwarted attempts to subvert the gaze. By reading into Canadian children's television in these ways, it is possible to

extract meaningful insights into Canada's evermore contradictory television industries. More importantly though, these analyses suggest that there are ways in which children can be taught difficult concepts through programming that has been proven to appeal to their tastes.

Evidently, *Goosebumps* provides a model for mass-market entertainment suffused with an educational aspect. Through its contradictions, *Goosebumps* is an extraordinarily dynamic text can be many things at once. There is enough subversive material for it to be appropriated as a generative, informally educational text for young people. It can likewise be used as a kind of morality play for children. Or it can be simple entertainment—something for large swaths of spectators, young and old, to enjoy for its visceral appeal. It can even be used by scholars to better understand a given industry. Importantly, for this thesis' sake, it is a rich text through which to think through pedagogy and commercial children's television, whether in the study of production, reception, or aesthetics. Moreover, it conveys the value in returning to overlooked Canadian children's programs from a particular era, when producers were making strange, successful, live-action kids shows—shows that took risks and were rewarded for it.

Goosebumps is just one popular text we must interrogate in order to revive Canadian TV studies. By analyzing similar programs, we can explore the relevant production and reception contexts from myriad vantage points—not limited to hypercommercialism or active/passive spectatorship. Asquith's "The Case of YTV" concludes with a call for new media literacy efforts in the age of hypercommercialism. This thesis gestures towards these efforts by exploring informally educational systems embedded in popular children's entertainments. There will continue to be a need to conceive of inventive pedagogies through which young people can critically engage with commercial television. These kinds of efforts will allow for textually embedded ideological imperatives to be teased out and discussed. This can take a more

rudimentary form in the case of younger students, while universities can engage more rigorously. By moving in this direction, children can be better prepared to navigate the increasingly convergent and globalized Canadian mediascape—exploring how it teaches, constructs, manipulates, and entertains. Furthermore, scholars will be better suited to think about Canadian children’s television and its articulations in the digital age.

This thesis has explored how the off-beat, anti-establishment ethos of YTV offers a veneer of infectious subversion in order to standardize an ungovernable demographic. It is important to note that without its relationship to inventive, compelling programming like *Goosebumps*, this brand identity would lack allure. Looking critically at these specific texts is not only useful for addressing issues of production and reception. Considering these Canadian programs is crucial to the development of the field of Canadian children’s TV studies. By unpacking specific texts, the field will begin to reflect our thriving, inventive industry. This reappraisal of children’s TV will allow a fallow field of study to flourish. *Goosebumps* is just the tip of the iceberg of quality children’s television produced in Canada in the 1990s. By continuing to excavate our unique reserve of strange, imaginative children’s programming, we can provide a significant boost to Canadian media studies—a field in which our singular, unique kind of children’s television is sorely missing.

Conclusion

I want to conclude by reflecting on the current state of YTV. While it was once true, as I have argued, that the network offered groundbreaking Canadian children’s programming infused with informally pedagogical functions, it now a significantly different, supremely Americanized network. In 1995, five of the network’s top ten shows were Canadian. At the time, they were investing 35% of their profits into Canadian programming. Today, YTV’s primetime blocks feature a different Disney film every night of the week. Leading up to these primetime offerings, YTV airs a double-header of two American series from Nickelodeon: *Henry Danger* (2014-present) and the latest season of the long-running *Double Dare*. After the films, during the 11:00-12:00 ET block, YTV plays back-to-back episodes of the Canadian hidden-camera reality series *Just Kidding* (2012-2014), in which children pull pranks on unsuspecting adults. During daytime blocks the bulk of YTV’s programming is made up of *Spongebob Squarepants* (1999-present) and *The Loud House* (2016-present), two animated series from Nickelodeon.³¹ The 2010 follow-up to *Goosebumps*, the Canadian-American anthology *R.L. Stine’s The Haunting Hour* (2010-2014) was not produced in partnership with YTV—the teen show instead aired on the American pay-television channel Discovery Family, later known as the Hub Network.³²

YTV offers the streaming service YTV On Demand through select Canadian cable providers. They purport to offer “Previous full seasons of YTV hit shows for optimal catchup and show fanatics”³³—a sentence that suggests minimal concern for the enrichment of literacy. The service offers a total of eleven series, five of them live-action. One of these live-action series, *Star Falls* (2018-present) is shot in Canada but billed as an American production. All of

³¹ <https://www.corusent.com/brands/ytv/>

³² <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1765510/>

³³ <https://www.ytv.com/faq/>

the programs are Nickelodeon offerings. For all intents and purposes, YTV, once at the forefront of airing innovative, off-kilter children's television, is now an amalgamation of Nickelodeon and The Disney Channel. The FAQ section of their website features the question: "I'm looking for information on an old TV show. Can you help?" The webpage responds, "Maybe! However, we don't keep information on programs that have been off schedule for more than a year."³⁴ What Alan Liu refers to as *creative destruction*—the incessant flow of destruction and creation wrought by contemporary society's thirst for innovation—is clearly at play here. Regrettably, this destruction is reflected in Canadian children's television studies. However, it is hard to locate any sense of innovation in their current programming. YTV On Demand's selection features long-running intellectual property like *Pokemon*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, and *Spongebob*. There is quite clearly a need for Canadian children's television studies to recapture this lost inventiveness.

In chapter one I footnoted a handful of largely forgotten Canadian children's television shows: *The Odyssey*, *Are You Afraid of the Dark*, *ReBoot*, and *Animorphs*. I now want to bring them to the fore. These shows constitute a major body of children's television programming which, like *Goosebumps*, can help us illuminate and reinvigorate areas of Canadian children's TV scholarship. *The Odyssey* represents a more-or-less failed attempt on the part of Canada's public broadcaster CBC to produce a steam-punk sci-fi show for children. *Are You Afraid of the Dark* is formally similar to *Goosebumps*, but its removal from a cross-platform Americanized matrix makes it a singular case. *ReBoot* is an early computer-animated cyberpunk adventure that reflects Canadian television's arrival into the dot-com era. *Animorphs* attempts to piggyback on the success of *Goosebumps*³⁵ with mixed results; it would be an interesting text through which to

³⁴ <https://www.ytv.com/faq/>

³⁵ *Animorphs*, like *Goosebumps*, is based on a successful book franchise.

track Canadian post-network practices into the new millennium. In a streaming era where it seems every show, new and old, is at our fingertips, it is significant and unfortunate that the majority of this Canadian programming is inaccessible. The problem of archiving and access reverberates through Canadian children's television studies, threatening the ability for scholars to account for an important decade in Canadian media history. Moreover, the erasure of this programming is reflected in the uniform, streamlined shows currently being offered to Canadian children.

In further research, I will continue my excavation of Canadian children's television. It is my hope that with more time, extra resources, and increased access, I can apply the framework of this thesis to the Canadian shows I have mentioned above, while further exploring *Goosebumps*. These myriad programs should reflect a dynamic and vast Canadian televisual history—one which may have been too expansive for the economic limits of Canadian children's broadcasting to sustain. There are without a doubt more Canadian children's programs that are overlooked. They are waiting to be rediscovered, and worthy of extensive analysis. As these projects are picked up, the field of Canadian children's television studies may soon reflect the richness of the industry's history.

Works Cited

- Acland, Charles. "The Body and the River: Youth Movies and the Adult Gaze." *Youth, Murder Spectacle: The Culture Politics of 'Youth in Crisis.'* Boulder: Westview Press, 1995. 115-134. Print.
- Ang, Ien. *Desperately Seeking the Audience.* London: Routledge Press, 1991. Print.
- Asquith, Kyle. "Hypercommercialism and Canadian Children's Television." *Canadian Television: Text and Context.* Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2012. 95-114. Print.
- Banet-Weiser, Sarah. "'We, The People of Nickelodeon': Theorizing Empowerment and Consumer Citizenship." *Kids Rule!: Nickelodeon and Consumer Citizenship.* Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007. 1-37. Print.
- Barnes, Brooks and Lee, Edmund. "Disney and Fox Shareholders Approve Deal, Ending Corporate Duel." *New York Times.* July 27, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/27/business/media/disney-fox-merger-vote>
- Beaty, Bart and Sullivan, Rebecca. "Introduction: Canadian Television Today." *Canadian Television Today.* Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2006. 1-26. Print.
- Benezra, Karen. "Scholastic's Cool Ghouls." *Brandweek.* Vol. 37, No. 23 (13 June 1996). Pg. 46-47. Web. *ProQuest.*
- Bredin, Marian, Henderson, Scott, Matheson, Sarah. "Introduction." *Canadian Television: Text and Context.* Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2012. 3-20. Print.
- Brown, Louise. "Things that go (Goose)bump celebrate with horrific tricks or gentle treats." *Toronto Star [Toronto]* 26 October 1996: SW57. Web.
- Buckingham, David. *After the Death of Childhood: Growing Up in the Age of Electronic Media.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000. Print.
- Buckingham, David, Davies, Hannah, Kelley, Peter. "In the Worst Possible Taste: Children, Television, and Cultural Value." *The Television Studies Reader.* Ed. Robert C. Allen and Annette Hill. London: Routledge Press, 2004. 479-493. Print.
- Byers, Michelle. "Canadianizing Canadians: Television, Youth, Identity." *Canadian Television: Text and Context.* Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2012. 115-134. Print.
- Caldwell, John. "Convergence Television: Aggregating Form and Repurposing Content in the Age of Conglomeration." *TV After Television: Essays on a Medium in Transition.* Ed. Jan Olsson Lynn Spigel. University Press, 2004. 40-80. Print.
- Coulter, Natalie. "Missed Opportunity: The Oversight of Canadian Children's Media." *Canadian Journal of Communications.* Vol. 41 (2006) 95-113. Web.
- Crofts, Stephen. "Concepts of National Cinema." *World Cinema: Critical Approaches.* Ed. John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson. New York: Oxford University Press. 385-394. Web.
- Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Winchester: Zero Books, 2009.
- Fishkeller, JoEllen. "Introduction." *Growing Up with Television: Everyday Learning Among Young Adolescents.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002. 1-8. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. "Panopticism (Extract)." *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory.* Ed. Neil Leach. London: Routledge Press, 1997. 356-367. Print.
- GTronTom. "YTV Commercials 1996 90s." *YouTube,* 27 April, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c1qi1TymTlo&t=4s>.

- Gordon, Kim, Moore, Thurston. "My Friend Goo." *Goo*, DGC Records, 1990, track 6. *Spotify*, <http://open.spotify.com/track/3BbPwMc572VSVDC7okGwJx?si=X91c-UomRkWw1HaAPky89w>
- Haysom, Ian. "YTV, the Canadian Children's Network, Is..." *CanWest News* [Don Mills, ON] 22 Aug 1996. Web.
- Hall, Stuart. "Encoding, decoding." *The Cultural Studies Reader*. Ed. Simon During. London: Routledge Press, 2007. 90-103. Web.
- Hendershot, Heather. "Introduction: Nickelodeon and the Business of Fun." *Nickelodeon Nation: The History, Politics, and Economics of America's Only TV Channel for Kids*. Ed. Heather Hendershot. New York: New York University Press, 2004. 1-12. Print.
- IsaiahtheVargas1117. "The Goosebumps Giant Commercial Collection." *Youtube*, 2 June 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iiriJ3kWvhQ&t=762s>
- Juster, Norton. *The Phantom Tollbooth*. New York: Random House, 1961. Print.
- Kinder, Marsha. "Ranging With Power on the Fox Kids Network: Or, Where in the World is Children's Educational Television." *Kids' Media Culture*. Ed. Marsha Kinder. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999. 177-203. Print.
- Lennard, D.W. "All fun and games: Children's culture in the horror film, from *Deep Red* to *Child's Play*." *Continuum*. Vol. 26, no. 1. (2012) 133-142. *EBSCOhost*.
- Lester, Catherine. "The Children's Horror Film: Characterizing the "Impossible" Subgenre." *Velvet Light Trap*. Vol. 78 (2016) 22-37. *EBSCOhost*.
- Lewis, Justin, Ouellette, Laurie. "Moving Beyond the "Vast Wasteland: Cultural Policy and Television in the United States." *The Television Studies Reader*. Ed. Robert C. Allen and Annette Hill. London: Routledge Press, 2004. 52-65. Print.
- Liu, Alan. "The Idea of Knowledge Work." *The Laws of Cool*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004. 23-74. Web.
- Matallaoui, Amir, Hanner, Nicolai, Zarnekow, Rudiger. "Introduction to Gamification: Foundation and Underlying Theories." *Gamification: Using Game Elements in Serious Contexts*. Ed. Stefan Stieglitz. Springer International Publishing, 2017. 3-18. eBook.
- McKay, John. "Goosebumps now top kids' show; Canadian-made YTV series hits it big on Fox." *Montreal Gazette* [Montreal] 23 Jan 1996: F7. Web.
- McKinnon, Ann. "Can-Con vs. NeoCon: Television Studies in Canada." *Textual Studies in Canada*. No. 13-14 (Summer 2001) 131. *EBSCOhost*.
- Morris, Tim. "Goosebumps: What Was Series Fiction Doing in the 1990s?" *You're Only Young Twice: Children's Literature and Film*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000. 58-86. Print.
- Mossman, Kate. "How The BBC Terrified a Generation: The Story of *Ghostwatch* — the Halloween Hoax that Changed the Language of Television." *New Statesman*, no. 5389, 2017.P. 46. Web. *EBSCOhost*.
- NeutralJedi. "List of in-book advertisements." *Goosebumps Wiki*. 30 May, 2018. https://goosebumps.fandom.com/wiki/List_of_in-book_advertisements
- Onion, Rebecca. "Ode to Green Slime." *The Atlantic*. Feb. 6, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/02/ode-to-green-slime/385088/>
- Paul, William. "Possession, Regression, Rebellion." *Laughing Screaming: Modern Hollywood Horror and Comedy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995. 287-318. Print.
- Pecora, Norma. "Nickelodeon Grows Up: The Economic Evolution of a Network." *Nickelodeon Nation: The History, Politics, and Economics of America's Only TV Channel for Kids*.

- Ed. Heather Hendershot. New York: New York University Press, 2004. 15-44. Print.
- Petley, Julian. "The Monstrous Child." *The Body's Perilous Pleasures: Dangerous Desires and Contemporary Culture*. Ed. Michele Aaron. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999. 87-107. Print.
- Retrontario. "YTV Spring 1996." *Youtube*, 15 January 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hrYpdZv_Fbk
- Sandler, Kevin. "A Kid's Gotta Do What a Kid's Gotta Do: Branding the Nickelodeon Experience." *Nickelodeon Nation: The History, Economics, and Politics of America's Only TV Channel for Kids*. Ed. Heather Hendershot. New York: New York University Press, 2004. 45-68. Print.
- Sconce, Jeffrey. "What If? Charting Television's New Textual Boundaries." *TV After Television: Essays on a Medium in Transition*. Ed. Jan Olsson Lynn Spigel. University Press, 2004. Print.
- Sergienko (Antipova), Inna. "'Horror' Genre in Modern Russian Children's Literature." *Russian Studies in Literature: A Journal of Translations*. Vol. 52, no. 2 (2016) 171-189. EBSCOhost.
- Stine, R.L., creator. *Goosebumps*. Protocol Entertainment and Scholastic Productions, 1995. Netflix.
- Strachan, Alex. "YTV has fun taking things seriously." *Vancouver Sun* [Vancouver]. 15 April 1996: C9. Web.
- Tate, Marsha Ann. "An Overview of the Canadian Television Landscape." *Canadian Television Programming Made for the United States Market: A History with Production and Broadcast Data*. McFarland & Company Inc Press, 2007. 11-20. Print.
- Tinic, Serra. "Regimes of Community in 'Hollywood North.'" *On Location: Canada's Television Industry in a Global Market*. Toronto University of Toronto Press, 2005. 152-166. Print
- Toles, George. "Being Well-Lost in Film." *A House Made of Light: Essays on the Art of Film*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001. 27-50. Print.
- Vatnsdal, Caelum. *They Came from Within: A History of Canadian Horror Cinema*. Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2004. Print.
- Wallace, David Foster. *Infinite Jest*. USA: Back Bay Books, 1996. Print.
- Whitley, David. "Reality in boxes: children's perception of television narratives." *Potent Fictions: Children's Literacy and the Challenge of Popular Culture*. Ed. Mary Hilton. London: Routledge Press, 1996. 50-70. Print.
- Woah! Magazine*. Paton Publishing, Winter 1999. *Blogspot* Web. Accessed 1 Feb 2019. <http://ytvwhoamagazine.blogspot.com/>
- Woah! Magazine*. Paton Publishing, Spring/Summer 2000. *Blogspot* Web. Accessed 1 Feb 2019. <http://ytvwhoamagazine.blogspot.com/>
- Woah! Magazine*. Paton Publishing, Fall 2000. *Blogspot* Web. Accessed 1 Feb 2019. <http://ytvwhoamagazine.blogspot.com/>

