Of Monsters and Men:
Absent Mothers and Unnatural Children in the Gothic 'Family Romance'

Donna Mitchell

Introduction

This article explores how the conventional parent-child relationship is challenged and subsequently subverted in both traditional and modern Gothic literature. Traversing the texts of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* (1995), Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), and Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* (1976), it traces the genre's formation of absent mothers and unnatural children and their position within the Gothic family unit. Specifically, it analyses how these texts illustrate feminist concerns regarding the objectification of women and gender inequality within the domestic sphere, and in particular, how they present juxtaposing issues associated with motherhood, such as the effects of postnatal trauma and the challenges associated with the woman's inability to fulfil her maternal potential. The repercussions of replacing the natural mother and child with monstrous creations are considered through existing scholarship on the Gothic as well as various aspects of psychoanalysis and feminist theory. These approaches are applied to the four texts, which vary in their historical and socio-cultural contexts, but collectively they demonstrate the various struggles that are encompassed within the woman's familial role. Shelley and Perkins's texts examine the psychological and

emotional effects of motherhood, and consider how postnatal trauma can result in a temporary or permanent maternal absence in the child's life. Additionally, Shelley, Jackson and Rice's texts present versions of children whose very existence challenges the law of nature. In both *Frankenstein* and *The Vampire Chronicles*, the male protagonists become parents to a new creation who inevitably suffers from an existential crisis that leads to a dangerous resentment of its creator and patriarchal bindings. The 'child's' eventual rebellion against the parent illustrates how the literary Gothic offers tales that challenge the power relations of the traditional family unit, and question the stereotypical qualities associated with each gender and their corresponding parental roles. Underwritten by essentialist models of gender, the conventional family is based upon the procreative couple, and so the family is ripe for the Gothic's penchant to subvert fixed definitions and normative gender roles. Given that this literary genre is populated by a profusion of doppelgangers and other supernatural creatures, sexually ambivalent and unnatural characters, it is unsurprising that it also revolves around the unnatural family. However, the struggles of the various creatures within these texts are both relevant and universal because they relate to the consequences of creating life and the ensuing bonds that form within the family.

Man's elimination of the natural (m)other

The figures of absent mothers and unnatural children arise when the traditional family unit is challenged by the subversive nature of the Gothic genre. The mother, who is usually a fundamental presence in their child's life, is suddenly removed, while the newborn creation becomes an anomaly of the natural order. These shifts challenge the reader's assumptions of the characters' identity and present them with a different version of conventional familial roles. One such example is that of the parent-child model in *Frankenstein*, which offers the reader

an alternative maternal figure and illustrates the deadly consequences of eliminating the natural mother. The story can be viewed theoretically as a social depiction of the world of absent mothers that Hélène Cixous discusses in "Sorties". She blames the phallogocentric ideology for this maternal absence because it confirms the female position as the 'Other' in social and linguistic terms, through the dominance of masculinity in the construction and meaning of language in both speech and the written word, which coincides with man's identification with the 'Self'. This is the foundation of her criticism and the reason she appeals for a specifically feminine writing, an *écriture feminine*, in order to inscribe the female body and difference in language and literature, and thus to raise woman from her social position beneath man. Shelley's decision to create a literary world of absent mothers anticipates Cixous's plea for women to: 'write about women and bring women to writing ... through their bodies' (Cixous 1975, 3-14) because it focuses the reader's attention specifically on the female body and difference by means of its reproductive ability and the effects of postnatal trauma. By allowing the reader access to what is essentially a maternal experience, Shelley offers a text that emphasises the importance of the female role within the family unit, which in turn, suggests that she also deserves a social status that is equal to that of her male counterpart.

Victor's study of 'the causes of life' (Shelley 1994, 49) awakens his desire to mimic the female act of childbirth by 'giv[ing] life to an animal as complex and wonderful as man' (ibid., 51). In this, he is likened to Dr. Schreber of Sigmund Freud's *Psychoanalytic Notes upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia,* who had similar aspirations (Veeder 1986, 91). Schreber, however, believed that in order to achieve this task and be able to bear children, he must be emasculated and transform himself into a woman as he felt that 'already feminine nerves had entered into his body, from which through direct fertilization from God, [new] men ... would issue' (Freud 1903, 2). This creates a blurring of gender

that results in a problematic identity that is neither male nor female as the lone parent must now fulfil both components of their creation's parental unit. This dilemma is epitomized by Victor in *Frankenstein* as he struggles unsuccessfully to nurture or love the Monster after his birth. He speaks of his admiration for the Monster's physical beauty during its assemblage, only to proclaim his repulsion when it is finally brought to life. This illustrates the mother's wariness of her newborn, as discussed by Simone de Beauvoir, who argues against the existence of a maternal 'instinct'. She describes how a young mother can feel threatened by her baby, and that it is her 'attitude ... and her reaction to [her new situation]' (de Beauvoir 1997, 526) that decides whether she will accept or reject her child. While the text offers no explanation for the Monster's ugliness, this development contradicts Victor's previous claim that 'his limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful' (Shelley 1994, 55). Psychoanalytically, this implies, as argued below, that the Monster's transition to the grotesque can be read as Victor's perception of him, which is due to the aforementioned attitude and reaction of the parent to the newborn. The shift in his opinion occurs at the exact moment of the creature's rebirth: when 'the beauty of my dream vanished and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart' (ibid.), which suggests that Victor may have simply confused the beauty of the dead parts with the beauty of the whole organism (Baldick 1987, 33-5). The overwhelming antipathy that Victor feels for the awakened creation causes him to reject his child; an act which Ellen Moers considers the most powerful and also the most feminine in the novel. She links it to postnatal mythology, namely the natural revulsion against newborn life that encompasses the guilt surrounding birth and its consequences (Moers 1974, 81). Victor's trauma at this afterbirth makes him unable to nurture, or even name his creation, and this henceforth becomes the motive for the Monster's revenge. This gives further evidence of how any action carried out by him deflects back to Victor, whose inability to manage the Monster's terrible deeds after he has

abandoned him is best defined through de Beauvoir's study of the mother's struggle to control the infant and how this is a senseless task as she cannot possibly manage 'a being with whom [she is] not in communication' (de Beauvoir 1997, 531).

In an effort to appease his Monster, Victor promises to create a female companion as both a peace-offering and as a plea to end his rampage. His actions can be viewed as a subversion of the typical 'family romance' since his behaviour in this instance illustrates a parent who wishes to gain freedom from his child. But his inability to complete the task for fear that 'she might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate and delight in murder and wretchedness' (Shelley 1994, 160) bespeaks of an attempt to control the female and to ensure that her sexuality is not awakened. His reason for refusing her creation voices the fear of femininity that is a common feature of many Gothic texts. Furthermore, it illustrates Cixous's argument that patriarchy always demands for 'femininity to be associated with death' (Cixous 1975, 13) as both subjects are unrepresentable. Victor's destruction of the female Monster portrays this patriarchal demand because it eradicates any remaining semblance of femininity in the text, which subsequently creates a fixed connection between female identity and death. It can also be argued that Victor's failure to complete the task of her creation is due to his unacknowledged unwillingness to let his Monster go. Arguably, this separation anxiety stems from the death of his natural mother, Caroline, since this severed mother from child, a split that threatens to be repeated by a female companion for the Monster, who would then have to honour his word and abandon Victor. Additionally, this female Monster in her finished form would be a companion for his original Monster, which leads to the possibility of a sexual union between them. The procreation of this new species would be dependent on her ability to carry and deliver their progeny, which highlights the ability, and in this case, the threat of her reproductive organs. These factors monopolise her

embodiment of a monstrous version of motherhood, as well as a simultaneous new version of womanhood over whom society has no power. Victor assumes that her freedom and strength, which are traditionally male qualities, could entail deadly consequences for male supremacy as her lack of dependence on men would suggest a coinciding inability to fit the traditional mould of motherhood. This can be read as a threat to the social structure of the conventional family unit and would define her as an outsider similar to the primitive figure of the [original] 'native' whose corresponding lack of compliance with social order makes him / her 'the enemy of values … the absolute evil' (JanMohamed 1983, 5). Furthermore, man's inability to properly manage her would also mean that her sexuality would be uninhibited and similar to that of the overtly sexual 'native woman', who epitomises wild and animalistic behaviour as 'the native *is* the earthly' (Veeder 1986, 82). This practice of containing femininity is explored in Cixous's theory of 'antilove', which designates the patriarchal suppression of female sexuality by teaching women insecurity and self-hatred from a young age, as well as encouraging them to fear their own sexuality and scorn promiscuous women:

> As soon as they begin to speak ... they can be taught that their territory is black; because you are Africa, you are black. Your continent is dark. Dark is dangerous ... Men have committed the greatest crime against women ... they have led them to hate women, to be their own enemies (Cixous 1975, 5).

The creation of this 'Dark Continent' ensures women's inability to achieve a proper understanding or love of their bodies, and promotes the idea that men must always govern and control women. As the female Monster would be a new version of this 'Dark Continent', whose conquest is not guaranteed, Victor must subsequently ensure that she does enter the world of patriarchy. He is successful in doing so until Shelley Jackson resurrects the character in her hypertext, *Patchwork Girl*, which can be read as a female response to this act through the

creation of a sequel to *Frankenstein* that encompasses a contrastingly strong maternal presence.

Patchwork Girl's resurrection of the female monster

Cixous endorses feminine writing as the solution to the predicament of 'antilove' as 'woman has never had *her* turn to speak' (Cixous 1975, 7). She believes that the presence of female works in literature will 'bring the "Other" to life' (ibid., 20) and re-introduce the woman to herself by 'giving her access to her native strength' (ibid., 8). This will see her finally embrace the 'Dark Continent' of her sexuality, but she warns that it can only be done when women heed her advice to 'write your self. Your body must be heard' (ibid.). She emphasises the importance of female writing's responsibility in addressing the taboos associated with woman, and stresses the inclusion of the mother's voice in literature by linking the notion of feminine writing to the image of breast milk, claiming that 'there is always within her at least a little of that good mother's milk. She writes in white ink' (ibid., 9). Jackson fulfils this request through her definitively feminine hypertext, which reawakens the female creation and replaces Victor with Mary Shelley as her maternal creator and lover. It examines the complex familial and romantic relationship between these two women and traces the influence that this loving relationship has on the female Monster during her quest for identity. The blurring of boundaries in the nature of their relationship changes the dynamic of the 'family romance' to one of co-dependency and as such it can be viewed as the antithesis of the broken parent-child bond in *Frankenstein*. The text also traces the origins and personal histories of her various body parts for she believes that 'we are who we were; we are made up of memories' (Jackson 1995). Its format symbolises her self-professed claim that 'I am a mixed metaphor' (Jackson 1995) as it is made up of five main sections that contain a variety of links and lexias, which allow the reader to dissect and re-assemble her as according to their chosen

sequence. Furthermore, the shared history of the text's many women answers Cixous's plea for feminine writing and highlights Jackson's deliberate blurring of identity and gender, thereby leading the reader on an introspective journey that challenges traditional and social constructions of these features.

Shelley's ability to succeed where Victor failed affirms Cixous's notion that female mythology or 'the Dark Continent' is 'neither dark nor unexplorable' (Cixous 1975, 13). In order to highlight the bonds of sisterhood in the text, the female Monster becomes a symbol of women's reclaimed identity and is known simply as 'the Everywoman,' who tells her audience 'I am like you in most ways' (Jackson 1995). This label highlights her anonymity, which is a fairy tale trait that defines a nameless character as 'the Everyman' in order to allow the reader to identify with his struggle and evoke sympathy (Bettelheim 1991, 40). As the story unfolds, the Monster becomes a double of the reader, as she represents the '*Unheimliche*' or repressed monstrous potential, in all beings (Brooks 1982, 217). This doubleness is reinforced by the fact that the narrative consists of a chorus of the female voices that make up the Everywoman's unnatural identity and is a direct contrast with the male narrative voice of *Frankenstein*. By giving a voice to the various parts of her collaged anatomy, Jackson highlights the equality of all women and the bonds of sisterhood: for 'if she is a whole, it's a whole composed of parts that are whole' (Cixous 1975, 17). The fact that the hypertext's story has no fixed sequence gives further proof of the Everywoman's unconventionality and forces the reader to engage with unfamiliar territory by exploring its disordered layout. The subversion of this traditional aspect of the story, as well as the narrative structure and the nature and name of the main heroine, creates a text that examines the ambiguous nature of female identity and sexuality by presenting the reader with a chorus of distinctive, female voices through that of Shelley, Jackson, the Everywoman, and the (mostly) feminine appendages. The deliberate multivocality of these female narratives emphasises how the power of femininity

is revered and celebrated in *Patchwork Girl.* The subject matter of this text is particularly significant when it is compared to the repression of the female figure through the absent mother and the silenced female figure in *Frankenstein.* Shelley's ability to resurrect and nurture the Everywoman portrays a world that firstly confirms the importance of re-examination of the repressed female position, and secondly highlights the need for women to be the instigators of this change. This starkly contrasts the silenced female Monster in the male narrative of *Frankenstein*'s world, and Jackson's story thus creates a new legacy and freedom for the forgotten female Monster of Shelley's text. It also highlights the ability of the child to successfully develop and prosper when it has a happy and healthy relationship with its parent.

Removing the Other mothers from *Frankenstein*

In addition to the elimination of this potential mother from *Frankenstein*, all other mothers are gradually removed from the text. Caroline secures Elizabeth's role as the replacement when she 'endeavour[s] to resign [herself] cheerfully to death' (Shelley 1994, 41), and on her deathbed tells Elizabeth to marry Victor. Her demise promotes Elizabeth to her new position within the Frankenstein family. This replacement role as the family's matriarch signifies the ultimate union of both women's identities – an aspect of the story that is best illustrated in Victor's nightmare on the night of his Monster's birth. This dream sequence indicates a warning of future repercussions as it is riddled with repressive images of death, decay, sexuality and woman (Botting 1996, 102):

> I thought I saw Elizabeth in the bloom of health [but] as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death: her features appeared to change, and I thought I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms (Shelley 1994, 56).

The fusion of the two women in this imagery is an example of how identity within the Gothic genre can often be unstable, whereby one character can be replaced by

another, usually the perpetrator of their death. Elizabeth's transitional maternal identity is further demonstrated by how her time before Caroline's death was largely spent on the periphery, patiently waiting for her opportunity to secure an important position within the family unit. Additionally, the ambiguity of her status as Caroline's double is suggested from the very beginning of her time with them when she is affectionately called Victor's 'more-than-sister' and Alphonse's 'more-than-daughter' (ibid., 34). These terms are evidence that she is simply 'the substitute who is always in the ready position' (Rickels 1999, 293), and illustrate how, in the world of *Frankenstein*, one woman must die so that another can self-actualise. Caroline's introduction of Elizabeth to Victor when he was just a young boy encourages the male possessiveness that is persistent throughout the novel; as Victor declares: 'she presented Elizabeth to me as her promised gift ... mine to protect, love, and cherish ... a possession of my own ... since till death she was to be mine only' (Shelley 1994, 34). In this sense, she is immediately defined as Victor's prized possession and inferior other half, thereby demonstrating Cixous's claim of how society positions women below men. This attitude is also evident in Rice's text where Lestat and Louis's objectify Claudia by dressing her in extravagant clothes and curling her hair so that her doll-like beauty is emphasised and celebrated as a reflection of their family. Elizabeth's relationship with Victor is one of inequality that emphasises her situation as the outsider of his family, and so she takes on a servant-like role. The ambiguity of their familial roles as siblings, 'cousins', and a betrothed couple is a direct result of Elizabeth's adoption, which unavoidably defines part of her identity. According to Jane Gallop, who likens Elizabeth to Freud's Dora, because 'the servant is so much a part of the family that the child's fantasies (the unconscious) do not distinguish 'mother or nurse'; [ultimately,] she must be expelled from the family' (Gallop 1982, 145-7). This suggests that her eviction from the family unit is predetermined as soon as she embraces her servant-like status. Furthermore, her

composite identity as a double is two-fold, as she not only serves as Caroline's double, but also as that of the Monster, who later murders her. The conflict that occurs between these two characters is a direct result of Victor's rejection of the female figure in his domestic life, both through his hesitation to marry and recreate naturally with Elizabeth, as well as through the creation of his Monster (Knoepflmacher 1982, 109).

Victor's subconscious preoccupation with the death of the maternal figure is also shown in this nightmare sequence, which symbolises the ultimate sacrifice he must make in exchange for the formation of a female Monster, as Elizabeth's death is a necessary exchange for 'the transformation of a corpse into a living being' (Baldick 1987, 49). Moreover, the dream foreshadows Elizabeth's fate at the hands of the Monster, who kills the new bride, and in doing so fulfils his promise to 'be with [Victor] on [his] wedding-night' (Shelley 1994, 163). This terrible fate is predicted in the nightmare sequence. There is both a necrophilic and Oedipal significance to this event, as Victor only embraces her after she has transformed into his mother's corpse. It can be considered a foreshadowing of their eventual union when Victor later holds her corpse after she has been murdered by the Monster. These two occasions are the only times that the couple unite due to the shadow of death that follows the potential mother, Elizabeth, throughout the story. She can even be defined as the catalyst for absent mothers in the text. As a carrier of death, she is firstly responsible for the death of her own birth mother, who according to the plot-change in the 1831 version of the novel, dies of blood poisoning from residual placenta. This tragedy mirrors Shelley's own tragic birth that cost Mary Wollstonecraft her life, and also portrays the common belief in many primitive societies that the placenta is the baby's twin, and so must be cared for until it has fully decayed as 'every baby is shadowed at birth by a dead double' (Rickels 1999, 282). Secondly, Elizabeth can also claim responsibility for the death of her adoptive mother and Victor's birth mother,

Caroline, who catches her scarlet fever when nursing her back to health. The nature of this disease is especially significant because it represents Elizabeth's ability not only to contaminate and eliminate her sexual rival, but also to take over her role afterwards (Veeder 1986, 114). Her inadvertent rampage continues with the alternative mother figure of the nanny, Justine, whose death sentence is secured unintentionally by Elizabeth's testimony, as she is subsequently charged with William's death, for which Elizabeth fruitlessly claims responsibility. This destruction of maternal figures is repeated once more when the Monster murders Elizabeth, and in doing so, removes the last surviving Frankenstein woman and prospective mother from the text. In the same fashion that Elizabeth kills a maternal figure only to become her replacement, the Monster, in turn, becomes Elizabeth's replacement double. The blurring of their characters has already been anticipated by Elizabeth's earlier self-accusation in her insistence, on three occasions, of her responsibility for young William's death because she gifted him with the locket that attracted the attention of the Monster, who then murdered him (ibid., 168). The mother's absence extends beyond the Frankenstein household, and is witnessed by the Monster during his time in the wilderness. Here, he encounters the De Lacey family, and notes the sombre atmosphere that surrounds their home, describing them as a 'good' but 'unhappy' family unit that shares an unspoken sorrow, which seems to be the mourning of their mother. Their household is especially significant as it represents the typical home of the novel that has a father-oriented family whose members never mention the absent parent (ibid., 158).

The consequence of a deficient substitute for the mother figure is examined simultaneously within the concept of the sibling rivalry that is portrayed by the Monster's eventual jealousy of Victor's blood relatives. Bruno Bettelheim discusses how special attention given to one child simultaneously insults and belittles another excluded child, as the fear of comparisons and subsequent

inability to win the parents' love inflames sibling rivalry (Bettelheim 1991, 40), and in the instance of *Frankenstein*, prompts the 'excluded child' to murder his creator's younger brother, William. This character is especially important because he was inspired by Shelley's second deceased child, who was one of three Williams in her life. His name and appearance, as described in the novel, are identical to the portrayal of her late, infant son (Knoepflmacher 1982, 93). Her personal connection to him is similar to Victor's, who is portrayed as a parental figure to him more so than as a sibling. As the locket that William wears around his neck symbolizes Victor's affection and pride in his natural kinship with the young boy, so the Monster considers him to be his sibling rival in terms of Victor's parental love and acceptance. His actions are also incited by his jealousy of William's experience of the maternal love and affection that has been denied to him by Victor, and acknowledges that he will be 'forever deprived of the delights that such beautiful creatures could bestow' (Shelley 1994, 138). The Monster can be defined in psychoanalytical terms as a projection of Victor's unconscious urges, which would then suggest that the murders of Elizabeth, William, and Justine are enactments of sibling rivalry (Baldick 1987, 47). Bettelheim expands his argument on this matter by stating that while all young children are occasionally jealous of their siblings, often this develops further into a resentment of their parents for the privileges they enjoy as adults (Bettelheim 1991, 9). This parental jealousy is illustrated in *Frankenstein* by the Monster's bitterness at his father's romantic relationship with Elizabeth, as well as his other familial bonds. It is also the predominant factor in the downfall of the family unit in Rice's *Vampire Chronicles,* which mimics the world of *Frankenstein* through the existence of an absent mother figure, as well as its creation of an unnatural child in the form of Claudia. Once again, the rebirth of an unnatural creature occurs as a result of the male desire to create new life. And once again, poor relations and

resentment between the parent and child lead to the destruction of the family unit and to the pursuit of vengeance for disturbing the natural order of life and death.

Rice's eternal child

Parental jealousy is the core issue of Claudia's dysfunctional relationship with her father figures in Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*. Claudia represents the figure of the eternal child as her adult psyche is trapped forever within the body of a young girl, which leads to an inevitable resentment of her parents' adult form. Her character is inspired by the author's deceased five-year-old daughter, Michele, who died of leukaemia the year before Rice wrote the first novel in the series. She reincarnates Michele through the character of Claudia, a six-year-old orphan that enters the novel as one of Louis's victims and is given immortality by Lestat, who wishes to create a family unit of his own. This act echoes that of Victor in Shelley's text as a male character has once again created his own unnatural progeny without a female input. As parents to Claudia, Louis and Lestat do not fulfil the traditional, separate maternal and paternal roles; instead they make up various parts of the parental unit. This results in a dual persona of both mother and father figures. Together, they outline the mother's dual aspect and can be defined through the Freudian and Kleinian principle of splitting and the ancient Roman myth of the 'Janus face' as theoretically developed by Bettelheim, in which the mother is divided into the role of the good (and usually dead) mother and an evil stepmother. Despite the mother's role as the all-giving protector, she can also become the cruel stepmother if she denies the child's wishes (Bettelheim 1991, 67). In Rice's text, the wicked stepmother is represented by Lestat, who acts as the 'Janus face' of the good mother, who is represented by Louis. This clear division reassures the child that the monstrous impostor is an independent entity to the kind-hearted, original mother (Warner 1995, 212); and correspondingly in

Rice's text, such a division allows Claudia to separate and discern her parental figures in order to decide which one will make her best possible ally.

The Gothic 'family romance'

This desire to gain emancipation from Lestat and Louis is a natural stage of Claudia's childhood development and exemplifies Freud's notion of 'the neurotic's family romance', which is a fantasy system that occurs during the 'liberation of an individual, as [they] grow up, from the authority of [their] parents' (Freud 1909, 237). This phase is essential for the child's self-awareness and social skills, but inevitably creates tension within the family unit. Nonetheless, Freud dismisses this side-effect as a necessary conclusion since 'the whole progress of society rests upon the opposition between successive generations' (ibid.). This process begins at a young age when the child sees the parents as their 'only authority and the source of all belief' (ibid.), whom they desperately wish to emulate. However, as their intellect develops, the child compares their own parents to others, thus destroying their former belief of the parents' exclusivity and causing the child to become quite critical of them. This development occurs in unison with the child's Oedipal experience, thus making sexual rivalry an added factor to the dilemma; for example, the 'boy is far more inclined to feel hostile impulses towards his father than towards his mother and has a far more intense desire to get free from him than from her' (ibid., 238). Their fantasised desire to replace the real father with themselves as a superior model is a direct consequence of the child's nostalgia for 'the happy, vanished days when his father seemed to him the noblest and strongest of men and his mother the dearest and loveliest of women' (ibid., 240-1). The 'family romance' occurs twice in Claudia's development: on the first occasion, she casts Louis in the maternal role and focuses her energy on replacing Lestat as the dominant head of the family unit by freeing herself and Louis from his grasp, and on the second

occasion, she casts Madeline, the doll-maker, as her new mother figure and wishes to replace Louis's parental role by leaving him to start a new life with Madeline as her parent and protector. This is a traditional depiction of the family romance to the extent that the wish for freedom comes from the child's natural desire to gain independence from parental figures, and it occurs only when Claudia has confidence in her survival without them. This emphasises the importance of self-reliance in relation to the child's progression towards adolescence and a functional adult life, which in turn, highlights how the reverse 'family romance' of *Frankenstein* has such a traumatic effect on the Monster. In this case, the parent's choice to separate himself from his child causes so much pain partly because it occurs at such an early stage when the Monster, as the newborn, is still reliant on Victor's nurture and care. Although the Monster can be defined as an unnatural creature, his hatred towards Victor for committing this crime of nature is a very human reaction, and is one that stresses the importance of healthy relations within the 'family romance' for the continuing development of the parent-child bond after separation has taken place.

Claudia's desire for freedom comes from an awareness of her powerless position within the family, which is her greatest concern and proves to be a major catalyst for her steady descent into madness. Her fathers' joint desire to control and condition her according to their own specifications epitomises the female's struggle for autonomy within a domain of male supremacy. The innocent disguise of her youthful appearance masks the inner turmoil of her adult mind, and lulls them into a false sense of security as she plots a way to gain back her freedom and seek vengeance for their crimes. Her helpless situation mirrors the anonymous narrator's condition in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), who also manages to hide her resentment towards the dominant patriarch in her life, while silently deciding on how she will govern her own fate. Gilman's text traces a young woman's mental deterioration caused by postpartum depression,

when her physician husband, John, recommends the rest cure that proves pernicious for her psychological condition. This simultaneously illustrates both his lack of knowledge with regard to postnatal trauma and his ability to govern her treatment regardless. The power relations of the family unit within this text mirror that of Rice's as in both instances the male characters govern the fate of the female characters and infantilise them despite their adult status.

A magic doll

Claudia's exact definition within the female spectrum is quite ambiguous. Although her mind continues to develop, her body remains that of an eternal child. Her failure to gain a new physical identity over time anticipates her inevitable demise considering, as Bettelheim points out, 'only if the maiden grows into a woman, can life go on' (Bettelheim 1991, 234). Claudia can be viewed as a personification of this statement as her inability to reproduce or even evolve into adulthood proves to be her downfall. She becomes increasingly despondent about her physical entrapment and wishes to encompass a woman's form. However, her later attempt to literally attach a woman's body to her decapitated head leads to her death, as discussed in further detail below. The disconnection between her behaviour and her childlike appearance becomes clear from a very early stage of her life, and is immediately tracked by Louis. Even as a new-born vampire, he notes her newly sensual beauty and how 'her eyes were a woman's eyes, I could see it already' (Rice 1976, 104). He uses the contrasting descriptions of her child's mouth and porcelain skin with vampire eyes, to portray the complex disorder of her composition. As Louis's obsession with her grows, he becomes fixated on 'how she moved towards womanhood' (ibid., 112) within a child-like shell so innocent in appearance. She is compared to a doll incessantly throughout the text, and this association, Rice admits, was intentional as it emphasised the paradoxical blend of 'innocence and beauty with a sinister quality' (Ramsland

1995, 107) which Claudia conveys. Recalling her continuous development over the years, Louis claims that soon 'her doll-like face seemed to possess two totally aware adult eyes' (Rice 1976, 113). He confesses his discovery to Lestat, telling him that 'she's not a child any longer ... I don't know what it is. She's a woman' (116-17). As Claudia's anger reaches its pinnacle, she finally reveals an awareness of her terrible fate to have gained 'immortality in this hopeless guise, this helpless form' (283). Despite Louis's understanding of her inner struggle, she condemns him for his ignorance of the morbid conclusion, asking him: 'did you think I'd be your daughter forever? Are you the father of fools, the fool of fathers?' (225). His awareness of the disharmony between her mental state and outer appearance causes him to feel helpless about her situation, and so he attempts to ease the pain of it by simply spoiling her like a young child. Furthermore, his incapacity to address the problem adds to Claudia's mounting frustration, and encourages her to begin her plans for revenge. Her ability to do so without any hint of remorse illustrates how she has now completely departed from her previous innocent and pure youth; it also marks the maturation of her state of mind. Louis and Lestat's participation in the downfall of Claudia's mental health mirrors that of John's in *The Yellow Wallpaper*. As already mentioned, the men in both texts have complete power over the women's wellbeing and so they act as the main (albeit, unintentional) contributing factor to their descent into madness. The events of both tales reflect the power that men once had over the financial and psychological states of female family members, and subsequently make a strong connection between a silenced female voice and the issue of female madness.

Claudia's entrapment within an infantile physique is evident in her existence as a 'white, porcelain-like doll' (Ramsland 1995, 107), whose parents dress her only in 'pastel ribbons over puff-sleeved white dresses, tiny bonnets, and lace gloves ... making her look like a doll' (ibid., 71). As Rice's vampires are

physically incapable of becoming aroused or engaging in intercourse, Lestat and Louis do not have a sexual identity and so cannot be attracted to Claudia. Therefore, this practice serves only to perpetuate the façade of her role as the child within their 'perfect' family unit. Many years after her death, and despite her resistance to the charade, Lestat still upholds this false version of her legacy as he continues to think of her as 'a perfect little doll, captured immutably in [all] her childhood glory' (Rice 1976, 108). Her imprisonment is symbolised by the many dolls that Louis and Lestat give to her throughout her immortal life. While she initially loves them as a child, she soon becomes fascinated with destroying them as she sees them to be a symbol of her own social misrepresentation, claiming that 'yes, I resemble her baby dolls ... Is that what you still think I am?' (224). In an act that portrays her frustration with her own immature body and also foreshadows her own horrendous annihilation, she crushes a porcelain lady doll in front of Louis to illustrate her discontent (225). This act continues to haunt him afterwards, and he raises the issue later when he asks Madeline, the doll-maker: '[is that] what you think her to be, a doll?' (289).

Claudia's revenge

Claudia spends her immortal life mourning, not only the loss of her mortality, but also the love of her biological mother, as demonstrated by her hunting patterns. Louis reveals that 'she did not kill indiscriminately', but 'seemed [rather] obsessed with women and children' (115). Her decision to exclusively hunt mothers and daughters illustrates her fixation and jealousy of the bond between these women, who represent an intimate experience that she has been and always will be denied due to her immortal child-like form. Similarly, the narrator of *The Yellow Wallpaper* becomes fascinated with the female figures that she sees 'creeping all around the garden' (Gilman 1997, 12), and quietly cherishing her freedom within the natural world, which makes her own entrapment even more

unbearable. Their shared obsession of these particular female figures suggests that they specifically seek out women through whom they wish to live vicariously because they embody the missing elements of maternal love and freedom in their lives. They search for external projections of themselves when their conditions worsen, as illustrated by Claudia's compulsive destruction of doll-doubles, who are an exact 'replica of me, [and] always wear a duplicate of my newest dress' (Rice 1988, 214). Likewise, in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the narrator becomes increasingly fascinated with the imaginary woman of the wallpaper, who 'crawls around fast ... takes hold of the bars and shakes them hard' so as to 'shake the pattern' (Gilman 1997, 12-3). From a certain perspective, both characters gain a measure of freedom from their imprisonment by the end of the texts; Claudia succeeds in gaining her independence from Lestat when she poisons him and slits his throat, claiming that 'he deserved to die ... so we could be free' (Rice 1976, 154). Her ability to overturn the infantilisation of her situation illustrates how she has evolved into her role as avenger for her captivity. Likewise, Gilman's narrator defeats John by freeing herself of his mental restraints, 'in spite of [him]', and by pulling off 'most of the paper, so you can't put me back!' (Gilman 1997, 15). While her defiant actions are more subdued than Claudia's, they are still a significant rebellion against the constraints of male supremacy within her marriage. These strategies and events represent the determination of their struggle, as both women superficially adjust their behaviour to meet the expectations of their male counterparts while also hiding certain habits that would be met with disapproval. Their success in finally dismissing the feminine trait of passivity and embracing the 'masculine' attribute of action by seeking vengeance gives further evidence of the shared gender ambiguity of these characters by the end of their stories.

Lestat, Louis, and the reader of *The Vampire Chronicles* are all led to believe that Claudia meets her death after a short trial in the Thèâtre des

Vampires, where the coven find her guilty of the ultimate vampire crime: the attempted murder of her creator. Her crimes against Lestat see them condemn her to the final death. However, in a much later text of *The Vampire Chronicles*, the vampire Armand confesses his participation in the true events of her demise, which proves to be a morbid reversal of the birth of the Monster in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, as well as the Everywoman in Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*. Armand recounts how Claudia's body had been disassembled in death as she had begged him to relieve her of her childish anatomy. He tells how, on her request, he decapitated her so as to re-attach her head to the body of an adult vampire and give her the form that she had always desired but instead created 'a writhing jerking catastrophe' that was 'a botched reassemblage of the angelic child she had [once] been' (Rice 1998, 271). Unable to reverse the damage and finally succumbing to his suppressed jealousy of Lestat and Louis's love for her, he leaves this spoilt version of Claudia out into the sunlight to be destroyed. This suggests that his attempt to move Claudia's evolution towards a stage of maturity was always doomed to fail as the doll-like figure can only exist in youthful and passive terms. Additionally, it portrays the child's inability to successfully endure crucial developmental stages without the input of a devoted parent who wishes for the child to eventually gain independence from them.

Conclusion

The destruction of the incomplete female Monster in *Frankenstein,* and of Claudia's dismembered body in *The Vampire Chronicles,* as well as the imprisonment of the narrator in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, illustrate the various measures taken by representatives of the patriarchal order to maintain control of the female figure in terms of her physical and sexual identity. However, it is the fictional figure of Mary Shelley in *Patchwork Girl* who reclaims this identity firstly by her reconstruction of the female Monster and secondly by their ensuing

relationship. The lack of animosity in their bond in comparison to those found in Rice and Shelley's texts shows how it is possible for the alternative family unit to function once the demands of each role are understood and fulfilled, and power relations evolve in response to the child's development in order to prevent infantilisation. Victor's previous pursuit to be the sole progenitor blurs the division that separates the sexes, which illustrates the deadly cost of replacing the natural mother with a defective substitute who fails to fulfil the responsibilities of either the mother or father figures. As it is mainly the female characters who suffer the fatal consequences of this mistake, these texts highlight the social concept that considers motherhood to be the woman's primary function within the domestic sphere. Victor's hesitation to marry Elizabeth and father her children removes her potential to fulfil a maternal role within the text. In this sense, her character mirrors Claudia because the reproductive fates of both women are governed by men who, despite their love, objectify them and fail to regard them as equals. This practice inevitably leads to their (inadvertent) mistreatment and a male disruption to the natural order that secures the death of the potential mother: Elizabeth dies at the hands of Victor's creation on the very night that may result in her pregnancy, and Claudia dies during an attempt to attach herself to a female form that may give her the strength to create the vampire progeny that her original childlike state could not. The terrible events that follow their elimination emphasise the importance of the female position to the proper maintenance and balance of both the domestic and social worlds within the texts. While Elizabeth and Claudia represent women who have been denied their maternal prospects, Victor and the narrator of *The Yellow Wallpaper* portray the antithetical difficulties of the female condition with the domestic sphere. Their characters portray the emotional and psychological strain of the female experience of postnatal trauma and how it can have a coinciding effect on the parent-child bond that can result in the mother's physical or psychological absence from the child.

Collectively, the texts that are discussed in this article illustrate how the aforementioned feminist issues of objectification and gender inequality within the domestic sphere, as well as the struggles surrounding the notion of motherhood, are and have always have been a persistent feature of the female condition for many women regardless of their socio-cultural context.

Bibliography

Baldick, Chris. 1987. *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-Century Writing.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Bettelheim, Bruno. 1991. *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales.* London: Penguin Books.

Beauvoir, Simone de. 1997. *The Second Sex.* London: Vintage.

Botting, Fred. 1996. *Gothic.* New York: Routledge.

Brooks, Peter. 1982. "Godlike Science / Unhallowed Arts: Language, Nature, and Monstrosity." In *The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel*, edited by George Levine and U.C. Knoepflmacher, 205-20. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Cixous, Hélène. 1975. *The Laugh of the Medusa.* Vincennes: University of Paris VIII.

⸺. 2008. "Sorties." *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, edited by David Lodge and Nigel Wood, 358-65. Third ed. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.

Freud, Sigmund. 1909. "Family Romances." In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume IX (1906-1908): Jensen's "Gradiva" and Other Works,* edited by James Strachey, 235-42. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis.

Gallop, Jane. 1982. *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Jackson, Shelley. 1995. *Patchwork Girl.* Massachusetts: Eastgate Systems.

JanMohamed, Abdul. 2008. "The Economy of Manichean Allegory." In *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, 19-23. London: Routledge.

Knoepflmacher, U.C. 1982. "Thoughts on the Aggression of Daughters." In *The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel,* edited by Gareth Levine and U.C. Knoepflmacher, 88-119.Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kristeva, Julia. 1982. *Powers of Horror.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Moers, Ellen. 1974. "Female Gothic." In *The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel*, edited by Gerald Levine and U.C. Knoepflmacher, 77-87. California: University of California Press.

Perkins Gilman, Charlotte. 1997. '*The Yellow Wallpaper' and Other Stories.* New York: Dover Publications. First published in 1892 in *The New England Magazine* 11: 647-56.

Ramsland, Katherine. 1995. *The Vampire Companion: The Official Guide to Anne Rice's The Vampire Chronicles*. New York: Little, Brown & Company.

Rice, Anne. 1976. *Interview with the Vampire*. London: Time Warner Books.

——. 1988. *The Queen of the Damned*. London: Time Warner Books.

——. 1998. *The Vampire Armand*. London: Vintage.

Rickels, Laurence A. 1999. *The Vampire Lectures.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Shelley, Mary. 1994. *Frankenstein.* London: Penguin Books. First published in 1818 by Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor & Jones.

Veeder, William. 1986. *Mary Shelley & Frankenstein: The Fate of Androgyny.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Warner, Marina. 1995. *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers.* London: Vintage.