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The Gothic Monster Girl in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Margaret Atwood's "Lusus Naturae"

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Both Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Margaret Atwood's "Lusus Naturae" are anti-Bildungsroman narratives that focus on young women's rite of passage to womanhood. Morrison's Pecola and Atwood's vampire girl are depicted as monsters who are imprisoned within a negative self-image that transforms their world into a nightmare. These girls undergo social and familial victimization, being rejected and ostracized, while their monsterization/dehumanization is emphasized. Morrison and Atwood tackle identity issues such as the female body, femininity, sexuality and (sexual) agency. They expose how the feminine is often seen as the abject within a patriarchal system. They unmask and disclose female victimization and their respective young woman's identity issues and familial and social problems.

Keywords: Gothic; monster; adolescent; identity; dysfunctional family; community

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La monstruosa adolescente gótica en *The Bluest Eye* de Toni Morrison y "Lusus Naturae" de Margaret Atwood

Tanto *The Bluest Eye* de Toni Morrison como "Lusus Naturae" de Margaret Atwood son anti-Bildungsromans que se centran en el rito de iniciación de mujeres jóvenes. Pecola de Morrison y la chica vampiro de Atwood son representadas como monstruos aprisionados en una imagen negativa que transforma su mundo en una pesadilla. Estas adolescentes sufren victimización social y familiar, siendo rechazadas y condenadas al ostracismo, mientras se enfatiza su monstruosización/deshumanización. Morrison y Atwood abordan cuestiones

de identidad, como el cuerpo femenino, la feminidad, la sexualidad o la agencia (sexual). Exponen cómo lo femenino es frecuentemente visto como lo abyecto por el sistema patriarcal. Desenmascaran y desvelan la victimización femenina, así como la identidad, y los problemas familiares y sociales de la joven.

Palabras clave: Gótico; monstruo; adolescente; identidad; familia disfuncional; comunidad

1. Introduction

Gothic monsters, endowed with abominable features—animality, irrationality, deviancy, etc.—are the embodiment of the Other, and equated with evil. They cross the socially-sanctioned norms of white male-dominated patriarchal society, symbolizing its fears and anxieties. Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection is pivotal to understanding why "monsters" are abjected. Kristeva defines abjection as that which does not "respect borders, positions, rules" and "disturbs identity, system, order" (1982, 4). The monster "has become an epitome of the postmodern identity paradigm, assuming in-betweenness and fluidity as its nature [...] and taking up abjection as the space from where it can best exercise its subversive power" (Copati 2018, 50). The abject is fundamentally related to essential themes, such as "sexual immorality and perversion; corporeal alteration, decay and death; human sacrifice; murder; the corpse; bodily wastes; the feminine body and incest" (Creed 2000, 64). The whole idea of abjection is at the core of the Gothic. That is why Kristeva's theory has been recurrently used in the analysis of Gothic works.

Kristeva associates the Other, the monster, with the marginal subject, onto whom all that is negative is projected. In fact, the term monster has been often applied to members of other cultures, societies and races. Thus, any marginalized individual or group that stands outside the norm could be reified, ostracized and monsterized. As race has been paramount to the renditions of monstrous Others, the Gothic monster has been frequently identified with Blacks. Indeed, the Gothic symbolically racializes the monstrous Other. Besides, African-American Gothic "shudder[s] in terror over the very process of being made and masked as monstruous and the consequences of such masking, for monsters have no right and no place in civil society" (Wester 2012, 27). Monsters have proved, says Webster, a likewise suitable means to reimagine, contest and deconstruct African American history and identity (2012, 30).

On the other hand, Barbara Creed stresses the impact of sexual difference in constructing the monster (1993, 3). This aligns with Davis's assertion: "Womanhood, like blackness, is Other in this society, and the dilemma of woman in a patriarchal society is parallel to that of blacks in a racist society" (1990, 12). The Gothic often shows how the anomalous foundations readers seek to abject are culturally linked to the feminine Other (Hogle 2002, 10). Indeed, the monstruous-feminine, which has historically had manifold conceptions, underscores social concerns and is also intrinsically connected to femininity, maternal/reproduction, sexuality, (sexual)

agency, irrationality/wild/evil, animality, etc. According to Ruth Anolik, "the conventional code of the monster as female Other, as source of fear and danger, is created from a hegemonic perspective of the male who fears female power" (2007, 234). In addition, the phallocentric notion of the female monstruous is intimately connected to psychological and/or physical castration, woman as castrating Other. Males' anxiety about castration/emasculation is projected in the form of sexual abuse or rape/castration onto the sexualized female Other.

The monster metaphor has proved very effective in expressing the shattered female identity and the hardships women experience on their journey to womanhood. As part of growing up, the major biological and psychological changes girls go through have been generally misunderstood/diabolized, and lived as traumatic. When female adolescents undergo a process of exploring and shaping their sense of self and identity, they are no longer lovable or compliant. This transformative process involves testing and resisting adults' authority in their need to assert their independence, while they learn to deal with their inner conflicts. Teens, in general, —"monstrous creatures"— threaten *normativity,* "proper" behaviors. They struggle to define their own values, roles and beliefs. Thus, the tribulations of the vulnerable adolescent female monster, whose subjectivity is not yet fully developed, is most dramatic.

Female writers like Toni Morrison and Margaret Atwood employ gothic conventions to construct young women as the monstruous feminine so as to lay open female psychological and physical victimization. They resort to the Female Gothic, which centers "on a young woman's rite of passage into womanhood and her ambivalent relationship to contemporary domestic ideology" (Davidson 2004, 48), to depict the dread and terror of domestic life within the patriarchal home, and the abuses and dangers the family institution poses to the maiden. As Anolik highlights, contemporary writers create the female monster-hero to oppose the positioning of the female as victim (2007, 234). Female monstrosity unfolds the darkness of the world for young women and the social injustices they face in a male-dominated society.

The Bluest Eye uses Gothic tropes to describe systemic racism and the horrors Blacks had to confront after the Great Depression. Morrison questions and challenges the renderings of African Americans as monsters, underlining their humanity. The monsterized Pecola Breedlove, an 11-year-old black girl, exemplifies the adversities that a racially marked pubescent woman has to endure. Atwood's "Lusus Naturae" can be labelled as a modern Gothic tale of an unnamed "monster" girl who narrates, in the first-person, her plight. Her namelessness allegorically represents every young woman, as well as her lack of personal or social identity. The "monster" girl typifies the "dangerous" aspects of the female youngster's coming of age. Pecola and the unnamed girl embody the Gothic process of abjection by which many lead characters in Gothic fictions have to "deal with the tangled contradictions fundamental to their existence by throwing them off onto ghostly or monstruous counterparts that then seem 'uncanny' in their unfamiliar familiarity" (Hogle 2002, 7).

This paper tackles the Gothic monster girl in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and in Atwood's "Lusus Naturae," focusing on three main aspects: split identity and "threatening" sexuality, dysfunctional family and failed community. Both writers expose monstrousness as being at the heart of the young female's traumatic experience on her journey into adulthood. The trope of the monster girl discloses and disputes normative conceptions of gender and gender roles, female self-image and body development, female sexuality and (sexual) agency, defective families and unsafe domestic spaces, social inhumanity and cruelty, cultural colonization and institutional racism in hegemonic patriarchal society.

2. A Gothic Coming of Age: Fragmented Female Identity and Sexual Distortion

Morrison's and Atwood's stories are anti-Bildungsromans. They portray monstrousness as the very essence of puberty. They examine the adolescent transition period of women, concentrating on the physical and emotional changes, identity formation and femininity, sexuality—agency and sexual initiation—, as well as the breakdown of family and social networks. *The Bluest Eye* and "Lusus Naturae" illustrate the fragmented developing self of the Gothic pubescent female in a hostile environment. Both Pecola and the unnamed girl are traumatized adolescents who strive to survive in the hardest conceivable circumstances, and whose struggle for identity and self-worth is doomed to failure.

"Lusus Naturae" is about a Gothic heroine who, at the age of seven, suffers many calamities owing to a genetic abnormality that transmutes her into a sort of vampire.[1] The Gothic vampire myth has been "deployed for many symbolic purposes [...] [and] has been contextualized within discourses of gender, sexuality, race, class, capitalism, foreignness, colonization, and industrialization" (Silver 2004, 118). Female vampires are ambivalent, fluid, powerful, dangerous and sexually-charged figures that problematize patriarchal notions of women's passivity and conformity, the existence of "natural" feminine nurturing skills, women's conventional sexuality, etc. Young female vampires, ambiguously, juxtapose their frequent roles as "damsels in distress"—victims—with those of empowered "monsters" providing representations of the "New Woman."

In both Morrison's and Atwood's Gothic narratives—marked by instable and blurred boundaries—the supernatural plays a key part in terms of monstruous female identity. In Atwood's Radcliffian supernaturalism, ambiguity is always present given that supernatural elements are explained rationally. Jerrold Hogle states that "Gothic fictions generally play with and oscillate between the earthly laws of conventional reality and the possibilities of the supernatural [...] usually raising the possibility that the boundaries between these may have been crossed, at least psychologically but

[1] The girl has also been compared to a werewolf.

also physically or both" (2002, 2). Atwood's unnamed girl has vampire physical traits: yellow eyes, pink teeth, red fingernails, long dark hair sprouting on her chest and arms (2014, 126), which are said in the story to be the result of a medical condition called porphyria that affects the nervous system and/or the skin.

Monstrosity has been paramount to the cultural construction of the adolescent female body and femininity as Otherness in hegemonic discourse. The monster trope unsettles the patriarchal order by showing the constraints of conventional femininity, an acquired social identity closely interwoven with prevalent feminine beauty standards. In consequence, the monstrous young maiden is psychologically trapped in a negative self-image. Morrison's and Atwood's Gothic female "monsters," both victims of society's demonization, are vilified, disparaged and their humanity denied. They encapsulate "flawed" femininity. In "Lusus Naturae," science symbolizes the need that patriarchy imposes on women to fit into the standardized ideal of beauty. The vampire girl's family brings in a doctor to restore her health (looks?) by curing her of her "monstrosity" (turning her into a prototypical girl?).[2] Moreover, ugliness, recurrently linked to evil, makes the monster girl inhuman and/or wicked, and the dread and horror she instils is the outcome of the menace that boundarylessness poses. The feminine as in female vampires, that is, "undead beings" who defy the dead/alive dichotomy, blurs and destabilizes the rigid boundaries of male systems of representations. Indeed, femininity, as Gerardo Rodríguez-Salas says about Angela Carter's "The House of Love," is "a dark construction that imprisons women and turns them into living dead creatures" (2008, 121).

In *The Bluest Eye*, "monstrousness" is assigned to Pecola by Others. Her self-loathing stems from her family, peers and society, who project their hatred for blackness onto those with darker skin. In this sense, the black woman, as Cynthia Davis notes, "is 'the antithesis of American beauty' [...] Defined as the Other [...] [she] can never satisfy the gaze of society" (1990, 12). Pecola's own mother, Pauline, asserts: "I knowed [sic] she was ugly [...] Lord she was ugly" (*Bluest,* 98). Pecola embodies the pervasive negative effects of internalized racism. Her "ugliness"/blackness is devastating to her identity, increasing her low self-esteem and self-disgust, and isolating her. For this reason, she cannot construct a positive self-image. She has made Hollywood beauty standards her own, and her self-worth is totally imbricated with whiteness and its attributes. Pecola believes that drinking from a Shirley Temple cup, eating Mary Jane sweets, or having the blue eyes of a Shirley Temple doll will make her lovable and will turn things around. Her parents would say: "'Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes'" (*Bluest*, 34).

The animalistic has been "a thematic and metaphoric vehicle for otherness in Gothic literature" (Walsh, 2020, 30), and an expression of deep-rooted cultural concerns and

[2] The doctor wants to make the vampire girl the object of medical and scientific experimentation, to which, as in *Frankenstein*, gothic horrors are often connected.

anxieties about adolescents' defiance of gender roles and about a female identity and sexuality that is uncontainable within patriarchal structures. Those (young) women who do not comply with gender norms are diabolized and likened to (mythological) monsters—vampires, succubi, witches, etc. Female vampires—bestial/hybrid creatures—have historically been some of the most abject beings since their bodies denote a collapse of animal-human boundaries (Creed 1993, 83, 10). In her depiction of the nameless girl, Atwood succeeds in destabilizing the human/animal binary. Her vampire girl personifies animality interlocked with sexuality and female power/control, while, at the same time, her kind, understanding and forgiving nature undermines her animal-like condition. The animality of the vampire girl, who is associated with her cat, is revealed through her animal-like appearance and behavior, the consequence of her internalization of the gaze of Others and her ensuing estrangement from them. What is more, other animals act differently around her, as they do not know what she is. Her human condition is problematized: the doctor calls her a "lusus naturae"—"freak of nature"—and a woman in the woods shouts to her neighbors when she sees Pecola, "I saw a thing" (2014, 130). The vampire girl herself wonders if she is in fact able to assert her humanity in front of the angry mob that hounds her, since "what proof do[es] [she] have of that [being human]?" (Atwood 2014, 133). Claiming her human condition would be futile.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison emphasizes the intersections and entanglement of blackness and animality/monstrosity/the abject, which is linked to the historical association between Blacks and chattel slavery. Racist prejudices turn African Americans into "animals," dehumanizing them, such as when Pauline is giving birth to Pecola and a doctor at the hospital compares black women's childbirth to that of animals. Morrison contests and reconfigures the human/animal binary by describing her characters using animal imagery, and by distributing "human and animal characteristics amongst [them] in such a way that the human and animal worlds are unmistakably linked through a shared materiality. When humans 'nest' and dogs cough like old men, and when a 'high-yellow dream child' has a 'dog-tooth' and another girl 'whinnies' in fear, the hierarchical boundaries between the human and the animal are no longer absolute [...]" (Wong 2007, 63).

The female adolescent becomes monstrous through menstruation and her childbearing capacity. The menarche symbolically marks the transformation of the virginal girl into a sexualized woman with reproductive competence. The loss of childhood innocence results in (self-)abjection and fear of a new (sexual) identity. Female Gothic reveals how "menstrual blood and its pathologies [...] provoke a sense of horror" (Mulvey-Roberts 2005, 159). Thus, the menstrual cycle has been generally considered as dirty, and menstruating women as polluted/impure, treated with disgust and suspicion, and sometimes perceived as the source of a supernatural or mysterious power. The Gothic represents the young "monstrous" heroine's coming of age and their menarche as a traumatic experience. The startling onset of Pecola's puberty, her first menstruation,

is accompanied by fear, shame and violence—with Mrs. MacTeer whipping Frieda—, which mirrors the ordeal black girls endure when they grow into women. In turn, the sacred character of the menarche is stressed through the awe and respect—and envy—Claudia and Frieda feel towards Pecola. This passage also conveys the innocence and vulnerability of these black girls who think someone's love is necessary in order to have a baby, and are unaware of the dangers they may face. Implicit in the scene is the threat of getting pregnant, as a foreboding of Pecola's future rape.

(Young) women and their bodies—singularly their sexuality—often prompt social disquiet, which is articulated by means of blood and vampire-related metaphors (Grenfell 2003, 155). Hence, pubescent females have been often represented as monsters/vampires who thirst for blood, "a filthy and vital matter," which may signify "the pulsing nexus of vital debates and anxieties around [female] identity and the body" (Stephanou 2014, 4, 5). Blood may also stand for familial ties, pain, humanity and death. Bodily fluids are essential to the abject, such as in vampire figures, which revolve around the motif of (menstrual) blood. Their animalistic and addictive blood-thirst, Carol Groneman expounds, is correlated to the girl's sexual desire/appetite, "conjur[ing] up an aggressively sexual female who both terrifies and titillates men" (1994, 337), a maneater.

The myth of the female vampire denigrates female sexual urges and reflects a "general fear of the independent, rebellious, or sexual woman" (Silver 2004, 117-18). In Atwood's tale, the doctor who declares the girl a "lusus naturae" warns her parents that "[s]he'll want to drink blood" (Atwood 2014, 126). Burgeoning female sexuality and blood hunger are frequently interlaced with cannibalism. Cannibals—monsters who break inside-outside boundaries—are connected to evil, irrationality, inhumanity and the wild. Both the young unnamed female vampire, "a cannibalistic creature that drains/emasculates men", and Pecola, the sexualized racialized girl, respond to "inverted cannibalism," defined by Francis B. Nyamnjoh as the process by which the atrocities of ferocious (sexual) appetite are projected onto victims (2018, 60) and used to demonize them.

Virginity, intertwined with gender notions of purity, sexual innocence, sexual agency—power/control—and morality, is critical to cultural, political and social patriarchal discourse on the "monstruous" young woman: "[T]he gothic body offers a crucial site in which the centrality of virginity to popular understandings of sexual life becomes apparent" (Farrimond 2016, 150). Atwood's vampire girl is construed in terms of the dichotomies between angel (virgin)/monster and virginity/sexuality (pollution). Both her family and the priest associate her with the concepts of the bride—of Christ—and sanctity. The priest proclaims that "no man would want to pollute [her], and then [she] would go straight to Heaven" (2014, 128), hence remaining "untainted" her whole life. This mirrors Angela Carter's "The Lady of the House of Love" (1979), where the vampire Countess is a perpetual virgin bride, who is dressed in her mother's wedding gown and attacks a different male victim every night.

At the center of the young woman's monstrosity is her awakening sexuality, which has always aroused considerable the social and cultural fears that are often crystalized by Gothic literature. Phillis Roth suggests that *Dracula's* main focus is the male fear of "suddenly sexual women" (1988, 65). Lucy's transformation into a vampire in *Dracula* is equated with sexual aggressiveness thus symbolizing the pure girl that, on her initiation to sexuality, turns into a "sexually ravenous beast" (Griffin 1988, 143). Likewise, in the scene of the kiss, the vampire girl is portrayed as a man-eating predator. Females' first sexual experience/initiation and metaphorical explorations of the loss of innocence have long held a deep fascination for coming-of-age narratives and the Gothic.

In *The Bluest Eye*, the loss of their virginity is frequently traumatic for both black males and black females and it has devastating effects for their selves, conditioning their sexuality and future lives. Dissociated from love and self-esteem, sex can be used as a tool of oppression used by whites against blacks—as in the sexual initiation of Cholly, Pecola's father—and by men against women—as in Pecola's rape by her own father. Black girls are described as socially powerless victims, whose first sexual experience is illustrated through Frieda and Pecola. Frieda is groped by Mr. Henry, a boarder at MacTeer house, who makes her believe she is ruined. Pecola's sexual debut—rape—is painful and brutal, a nightmarish occurrence directly tied to gender inequality and racism. She epitomizes the long-lasting and deeply negative impact that sexual violence has on young black females' lives. Her father, who should have protected her and been her identity role-model, turns into her sexual assailant. Pecola's psychic trauma, as Doris Brothers attests, "can only be fully understood as the betrayal of trust in the self-object relationships on which selfhood depends" (quoted in Hwangbo 2004, 66). Sexual assault/rape entails violence and torture, but also humiliation and (self-)hatred. It makes pubescent women socially inferior or even worthless, as their "purity" is lost. In addition, the female sexual-maternal body, like Pecola's, with its reproductive capacity and its different stages of development, pregnancy and childbirth, is constructed as abject and seen as monstrous. Women's unstable corporeality and birth-giving ability have been much employed sources of Gothic horrific and uncanny images.

When children grow into adolescents, their early self-concept is already marked by a fragmented sense of self, which, in extreme cases, in a hostile environment, may result in insanity, both aspects being central to the female Gothic monster. Atwood's vampire girl claims to suffer from breakdowns and endless hours of pain. Moreover, schizophrenia, zoanthropy and manifestations of insanity are also associated with her illness (Copati 2018, 45). On the other hand, the dissociation of black teenagers' identity may be the result of systemic racism and the violence it generates. In a patriarchal racist society, the black man displaces his frustration and self-disgust onto the (young) black woman, the ultimate victim, who also internalizes the hegemonic culture, the ensuing outcome being self-contempt. This is a life-denying process inextricably coupled with the disavowal of person's own race: Blacks can neither reach white patriarchal standards

nor gain the acceptance and self-worth that go with it. *The Bluest Eye* centers on Pecola's ontological 'unbeing,' that is, her fragmented identity. Eventually, a domestic life plagued with lovelessness, indifference, a continuing lack of care, heinous abuse and (sexual) violence triggers Pecola's insanity. She believes her dreams have come true when Soaphead Church, a sort of pedophile magician, "grants" her blue eyes.[3] And yet, Pecola cannot achieve "the flight she thought would come with the blue eyes" (Dixon 1990, 121). In the end, she descends into a complete and irretrievable state of schizophrenia.

The vampire girl's and Pecola's monstrosity are closely connected to their pubescent female "bestial"/unstable bodies, and fragmented identities. Deviation from conventional patriarchal femininity and female roles, as well as a "threatening" sexuality in all of its aspects—menstruation, virginity and sexual initiation, pregnancy and childbirth—are also key elements in the construction of the metaphorical monster girl.

3. The Dysfunctional Gothic Family and Failed Community

During puberty, the gaze of both the family and society are critical to adolescents' identity development since one's sense of self heightens "both as an object of one's own awareness and of the awareness of others" (Laing 1990, 106). Due to their vulnerability, teenagers are more prone to be victimized, and the consequences are singularly appalling, as trauma will leave them with long-term and severe negative psychological sequelae later in their lives (Crane and Clements 2005, 1). The trope of the monster girl as a construction of (white) patriarchal gender and racial ideology has harrowing familial and social ramifications for young women. Both family and society, institutions which are at the root of the Gothic young female monster's subjectivity development and individuation, are to blame for her harsh and cruel existence, and doomed fate. The monster girl is surrounded by numerous threats, both physical or psychological, associated with the patriarchal social structure.

Gothic narratives explore patriarchal dynamics within the family, as well as its disintegration and how the family becomes the breeding ground for monsters. In "Lusus Naturae," the vampire girl is a victim of domestic and social violence because of her abnormality/monstrosity. Her "vampirization" dramatically alters family relationships in that the family struggle with their feelings of revulsion and disgust towards her and start treating her as a monster, while she longs for love and affection. Their religious and superstitious beliefs weigh heavily on them and how they see her disease, namely, as a divine punishment for their own wrongdoings, a curse. In the course of time, however, the family members either die or abandon the girl. Left alone and forced to survive on her own, the vampire girl develops a "transgressive" behavior, while on her quest for identity and a place in the world.

[3] In Morrison's novels, the supernatural is for Blacks "another way of knowing things" (2008: 61). In *The Bluest Eye*, however, the supernatural character of the act of conceding blue eyes can be easily explained by the unreliable characters: Soaphead, the delusional fortune-teller with "godlike" powers, and the traumatized Pecola.

At the core of the Gothic dysfunctional family, there is violence, resentment and self-hatred, which annihilate the social fabric of this identity stronghold, and give rise to the (young) female monster. In *The Bluest Eye*, the Breedloves are a poor family who move to Lorain, Ohio, in search of a better life. Their name is ironic, since there is little love in the family. Through the Breedloves, Morrison deconstructs "the bourgeois myths of ideal family life" (Awkward 1988, 59). As the very antithesis of the ideal white American family, they can only be seen by others, both whites and blacks, and themselves, as utterly failing "to conform to the standards by which the beauty and happiness of the primer family (and, by extension, American families in general) are measured" (1988, 58). The Breedloves suffer the damaging effects of poverty, as well as double discrimination from the racist white society and from their own community. As a result, they abandon their black communal values, which leads to the breakdown of family ties and a toxic life environment, symptomatic of the general absence of ethics and morality (Harris 1991, 38). As examples of colonized fractured psyches, Pecola's parents both have an internalized negative self-image, and have helped transmit and perpetuate the dominating racist system. In her short existence, Pecola becomes a victim of the intergenerational transfer of racial self-loathing, enduring her mother's neglect and contempt, and her father's sexual assault and rape: Pecola's estrangement from reality is the result of race, gender, class, age and personal history (Davis 1990, 14).

Gothic fiction articulates how mothers' ambivalent feelings towards their own daughters can help generate a monster girl. As stated by many psychologists, the mother's gaze is integral to the child's subjectivity formation, since the "*failure of responsiveness* on the mother's part to one or other aspect of the infant's being will have important consequences" (Laing 1990, 116; emphasis in original). In Morrison's novel, Pecola is exposed, from birth, to a shaming and condemning maternal gaze. Pauline's life revolves around the house of her white employers, the Fishers'. In the meantime, her own home and children are neglected. The black woman is all loving with the white Fisher girl, while she despises and mistreats Pecola. She utterly fails as a caregiver when she completely ignores her daughter's rape allegations. In a similar vein, in Atwood's tale, the vampire girl's distress and repudiation come in great part from her mother's family lineage, which exemplifies female collusion with patriarchy: her grandmother is determined to cure the girl from the evil spirit she thinks possesses her; her sister is happy that the vampire girl's fake death allows her to climb the social ladder; her mother's initial pity and compassion gradually turn into resentment and guilt.

Monstrosity is also intrinsically associated with the haunted house, whose true revenant is the abject Other—the monster woman/girl. The Gothic haunted house is identified with the traumatized female psyche, and its terrors are concomitant with the patriarchal family, and women's roles within it: "This domestic space, articulated as a feminized space of comfort, in reality is governed by a threatening patriarchy that offers imprisonment and death should the heroine fail to fulfil her role" (Wester 2012, 163). The Gothic haunted house becomes a place of physical and mental entrapment

for the maiden, whose imprisonment epitomizes the powerless and voicelessness of females within the patriarchy. Both Pecola's and the vampire girl's homes are Gothic houses of horrors, sites of fear for their female inhabitants. In "Lusus Naturae," after her metamorphosis, the vampire girl lives confined in her room, so the neighbors cannot see her. Her family fear what her appearance could do to their status. Only through her reading can she have a glimpse of what she is missing in life. The vampire girl's house will, in the end, become a true Gothic haunted house when, deserted by everyone, she assumes the form of a "ghostly apparition" that scares the new residents off. Ghostliness is, indeed, used as a powerful metaphor for (pubescent) women's disenfranchisement. In *The Bluest Eye*, the Gothic house is rife with female madness and terrors, which achieve unimaginable proportions in the stupefying cruelties and sexual violence Pecola experiences at the hands of her own family.

In Gothic narratives, father-daughter incest reinforces the young woman's abject position. It reveals the potential threat for her that is inherent to the nuclear patriarchal family, and the domestic space, the haunted house—the site of construction of the female adolescent's sexuality, which is intimately linked to the father figure. As Jenny Diplacidi argues, "coercive or forced incestuous assaults" are a reflection of "the wider structures of patriarchy's control of women" (2018, 10). In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola copes with a myriad of traumatizing events in her life, culminating in statutory sexual abuse and assault. As a Gothic "damsel in distress," she is helpless against her violent predacious father, "the villain," who rapes her. Consequently, even before it is born, Pecola's baby, as the product of incest, is also regarded as a "monster." The members of her community presume it will "be the ugliest thing walking" (*Bluest*, 149), in contrast to the white baby dolls that everybody adores.

In the Gothic, the young female monster embarks on a gender exploration journey through gender inversion. The blurring of gender boundaries, with male feminization or female masculinization, thrusts us into the realm of abjection, especially in vampire stories. In *Dracula,* according to Elaine Showalter, femininity and masculinity are redefined (1990, 3). Vampirism gives women extraordinary powers that are bound to the changing social roles of females —i.e. their increased "masculinity"—and the anxieties this generates. The female vampire does not abide by conventional sexual behavior. She, Creed points out, cannot be seen as "passive" (1993, 155). In fact, she takes a position of sexual dominance, that is, she becomes a "threat" to the man. Atwood's tale disrupts the traditional fairy tale pattern of "Sleeping Beauty" and challenges the traditional construction of female gender and (sexual) agency by reversing the patriarchal roles of men and women. Atwood also emphasizes teens' natural curiosity and interest in relationships, as well as their sexual immaturity. One day, in the forest—a scene linked to adolescents' sexual exploration—, the vampire girl stumbles upon two lovers who, because of her naiveté, she confuses for being of her kind. She "kisses"—bites—the sleeping male lover, who wakes up. However, he does not fall in love with the girl who has kissed him as in an inverted "Sleeping Beauty," and quite to the contrary, he flees horrified.

Morrison and Atwood showcase the bleak realities of a hostile world for the Gothic maiden. Monstrosity partly stems from the cultural association between women and wild uncontrolled nature, as well as from social alienation. Monsters are figures of alienation. As Karen Stein highlights, in Atwood's view, the Canadian landscape represents danger, darkness and power (1999, 10), an ideal gothic setting that embodies the maiden's shattered identity and the gothic horrors she faces. When the vampire girl is abandoned by her family, she ventures further into the forest where she generally keeps away from humans, who flee at the sight of her. There, she is exposed to the dangers that will result in her death. The process of othering and abjection makes the monster girl feel socially alienated, at a time when supportive social relations and a sense of belonging are crucial to her personal and social development. In their excruciating loneliness and absolute alienation, both the vampire girl and Pecola become social outcasts in their excruciating loneliness and absolute alienation. They learn the hard way that they will never partake of the pleasures of family life and community.

Atwood's and Morrison's Gothic stories highlight the role of the community in the young female's monsterization: "Abjection is that which is utterly denied within the self and projected onto an Other body. The abject monster, is both horrible and somewhat familiar" (Wester 2012, 12). Morrison's novel deals with systematic racial segregation and oppression, cultural colonization and the loss of Blacks' value system. The community discriminate against the Breedloves, who are regarded as too black, projecting their self-loathing onto them. They are monsters in the eyes of their community, but also in their own eyes. The family cannot fight both a racist society and a non-supportive community which colludes with the dominant white community in the Breedloves' victimization. A community torn apart by strife and division comes out against their own. As Hogle writes:

> [T]he Gothic also serves to symbolize our struggles and ambivalences over how dominant categorizations of people [...] can be blurred together and so threaten our convenient, but repressive thought patterns [...] Such self-exposures can create occasions for us to reassess our standard oppositions and distinctions—and thus our prejudices—at which point Gothic can activate its revolutionary and boundary-changing impulses and lead us to dissolve some of the rigidities and their otherings of people by which we live and from which much of the Gothic takes its shape. (2002, 19)

Pecola, who is subjected to prolonged domestic and social violence, personifies the young black female's history of domination and exclusion, what life can do to the destitute, to those who live on the margins of the world. She turns into a "monster"/an abject being because she is repudiated and forsaken by her community, and even her family.

In the Gothic, young women are especially susceptible to spectralization/invisibility and, as a result, abjection/exclusion. Feeling ugly—like a "monster"—or invisible—

misunderstood—are common features in puberty, particularly for girls. Moreover, the notion of spectral femininity has been used to explore dispossession, and also female experiences of social invisibility and patriarchal anxieties about female (sexual) identity. Vampires' inability to cast a reflection is metaphorically connected to low self-esteem and self-worth, as well as to social invisibility. The mirror signals the adolescent phase of auto-discovery when they come to see themselves as individuals, focused on their body, and it symbolically points to their difficulties in coping with multiples views of the self. The vampire girl cannot recognize, as her own the threatening monstrous body she sees in the mirror reflection: "Horror's métier is the violent breach of body and psyche and the lurid display of the breach's aftereffects: psychic entrapment, repetition compulsions, uncanny returns in the shape of literal monsters" (Hurley 2021, 2). That is why, the vampire girl avoids mirrors. Her true nature, "the kind and pretty girl [she] knew [herself] to be, at heart" (Atwood 2014, 131), cannot be seen in a mirror. Mirrors cannot reflect her soul, they just reflect her outward appearance.

In *The Bluest Eye*, both white society and the black community alike cause irreparable physical, but also psychological damage to Blacks, by ignoring or invisibilizing them. Furthermore, invisibility is manifestly a recurrent metaphor deployed to depict black identity: Blacks are not seen or not seen as human. When Pecola goes to Mr. Yacobowki's candy store, "[h]e does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see" (*Bluest*, 36). Pecola's story shows how "the socially mandated charade of being something one is not (white) and of not being something one is (black) makes one invisible" (Grewal 1997, 122). According to Charles Taylor, our self is partly shaped by recognition, its absence, or even misrecognition of others, which can inflict harm—a form of oppression— and imprison "someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being" (1992, 25).

The Breedloves become what Melanie Anderson calls "social ghosts," which are "a natural by-product of the national power structure of domination and freedom" (2013, 21), that undermines Blacks' personal and social identity. At the same time, in response to domestic violence, Pecola either fantasizes about being invisible, prays to God to disappear, or covers herself with a quilt in order to "vanish". In addition, she uses her "ugliness" to conceal herself from others, while her self-hatred partly derives from the awareness of her social inconspicuousness. Actually, Pecola "is not *seen* by herself until she hallucinates a self" (Morrison 1990, 220; emphasis inoriginal), a false self—the alter ego that fits her ideal of beauty—to adapt to false realities (Laing 1990, 12).

Community's demonization/monsterization of the Other comes to be "a political device for scapegoating those whom the society deem impure or unworthy—the transgressors and deviants" (Gilmore 2003, 20-21). The hate and revulsion that "monsters" engender substantiate acts of social exclusion or savagery. The monster—an embodiment of abjection—, who represents wickedness, horror, anxiety, wildness/animality, deviation/transgression, contamination and/or degradation, must be expelled or eliminated so that the community can be, as a result, be cleansed. Yet scapegoating, as a powerful tool of social cohesion, appears righteous, justified, and even therapeutic.

Atwood's and Morrison's stories tackle the social victimization process of those who are among the most vulnerable in society (young women), who are seen as scapegoats and blamed for the evil, failure and misfortunes that they experience in their lives. The vampire girl explains the scapegoat mechanism: "When demons are required someone will always be found to supply the part, and whether you step forward or are pushed is all the same in the end" (Atwood 2014, 133). Her "kiss"—an expression of her sexuality—, which is a desperate and irrepressible urge for intimacy and affection, will lead to her death. When the male lover she has disturbed, in more than one sense, in the forest tells the villagers about his encounter with the "monster," they set out to hunt the nefarious creature down carrying with them stakes and torches—phallic symbols of patriarchal repression. In the scapegoat mechanism, the mob—the hero/punisher—can itself become monstrous and be diabolized in their dealings with the monster—the villain/victim—, who is more misunderstood than evil (Williams and Prince 2018, 26). The vampire girl is perceived as a social menace to be annihilated, notwithstanding the fact that it is the community who are the real monsters. Being imbued with what Denyse Beaudet calls "god-demon duality" (1990, 88), monsters are both feared, hated and persecuted, but also revered, and even turned into ritualistic artefacts (Gilmore 2003, 20), as in the vampire girl's "finger bones [which] will be sold as dark relics" (Atwood 2014, 133).

In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola, the monstruous "Other," "will never be an insider in the black community and cannot possibly hope for acceptance beyond that community" (Harris 1991, 21). She comes to be an easy scapegoat that enables her community to cope with discrimination and racism. Moreover, in the patriarchal system, women/girls are often held responsible for the sexual abuse that befalls them, instead of condemning the true victimizers. Pecola is blamed for her rape, some people in her community saying that: "She carry [sic] some of the blame" (*Bluest*, 149). Her own baby becomes an object of utter contempt and aversion for the community, who believe it would be better if it died.

As anti-Bildungromans, Morrison's and Atwood's narratives cannot have a happy ending, since there is no place for a female monster in our society. The vampire girl's inevitable destiny is death. She commits suicide by jumping off the burning rooftop, "like a comet", blazing like a bonfire (Atwood 2014 133)—both feared and venerated—in a leap that may be taken as symbolizing both the inexorable "death" of the child so that the woman can emerge, as well as her transformation and liberation from the constraints of normative femininity. The vampire girl is wearing a white bridal dress and veil which, in their association with traditional femininity and the marriage, epitomizes how harmful these institutions are for women. Atwood also deconstructs the notion of femininity when, at the end of the tale, the vampire girl foresees herself in heaven with the appearance of an angel, and even wonders if "perhaps the angels will look like [her]" (2014, 133). Pecola's fate, on the other hand, is worse than death. Shut out of her community, she has to move to the edge of town, where she will serve as a constant reminder of the community's displaced self-hatred, an emblem of communal cruelty and inhumanity.

4. Conclusion

In *The Bluest Eye* and "Lusus Naturae," Morrison and Atwood explore the fictional possibilities of the Gothic monster girl metaphor with its subversive and deconstructive potential, revealing young women's problems with identity formation and familial and social issues within a white male-dominated society. In her liminality, the young female monster, as a perfect portrayal of the abject, blurs and dismantles boundaries—human/animal, dead/alive, angelic/evil, natural/supernatural—and functions symbolically as a site of resistance to and disruption of hegemonic discourses on race, gender and class. It forces us to reevaluate our cultural assumptions/perceptions and how we see the world.

As a pervasive Gothic trope, the monster girl centers on the passage from puberty to womanhood, with continuous emphasis on the monstrous-feminine. Physical "abnormality" and behavioral transgression/disorder are inherent characteristics of adolescence. Morrison and Atwood disclose unsettling aspects of puberty with regard to identity formation, body changes, sexual development and family and community relationships. They shine a light on the contradictions inherent to the patriarchal construction of the pubescent female self, gender roles and sexuality. Morrison and Atwood reveal how femininity is socially created and imposed upon women by male systems of representation, a "masquerade of femininity," in which the woman loses herself (Irigaray 1996, 84). They interrogate those female gender norms and stereotypes that misrepresent women: "The monster signals a surreptitious refusal of these imperatives of a conventional gender identity" (Copati 2018, 47).

The menarche, a source of horror, marks the metamorphosis of the innocent girl into a young sexualized woman, the Gothic monster, with "menacing" sexual and childbirth powers, and it also indicates their entrance into the patriarchal world where women need to conform to the socially-sanctioned female gender roles. Menstruation and reproduction, surrounded by misconceptions and stigmatizations, have been viewed as both monstrous and magical, since the blood/menstrual cycle—and unstable corporeality—, with its symbolic potential, signifies Otherness and the abject, as in the Gothic vampire. Furthermore, the often coerced and/or forced sexual awakening/initiation of the monster girl, who yearns for love and affection, leads to her misfortunes and madness, or even death. In the Gothic maiden's first sexual encounters, patriarchal sexual dynamics of power—predator/prey—are dissected and challenged.

Both the dysfunctional family and society are to blame for the fate of the monster girl, their ultimate victim. The haunted domestic space is the locus for family terrors. Abnormal sexuality, incest and entrapment are fully imbricated within the Gothic house, and the Gothic family, which fails to reenact the ideal patriarchal one. Gothic narratives uncover broken family bonds, an "absent" mother and, frequently, a villainous father. The apparent animality of the monstruous female is mirrored back at the community that victimize her, reflecting their callousness and inhumanity. The adolescent female "monster" tale is reversed by being refashioned as a story about a naive and vulnerable girl who is the victim of human cruelty, thus deconstructing the

dichotomies of gender and race. The monster girl exposes female invisibilization, social inequality and, on the whole, the injustices young women go through. The Gothic female monster as Other becomes a social scapegoat, as she threatens the patriarchal order. All the horrors inflicted on her make us wonder who the true monsters are.

In *The Bluest Eye* and "Lusus Naturae," the monster girl does not find her place in the world, as in traditional Bildungsromane, conversely, female monsters are ultimately disposed of. Morrison and Atwood question and expose the scorned and denigrated young monstruous woman, thus they lay bare and metaphorize young women' victimization and oppression at the heart of patriarchal discourse and practices.

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