

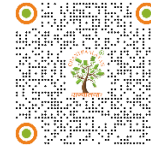
Original Article

THE LEGACY OF BROKEN BONDS ATTACHMENT DISRUPTION AND MATERNAL VILLAINY IN FLYNN'S SHARP OBJECTS

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ABSTRACT

This paper psychoanalyses Adora Crellin from Gillian Flynn's *Sharp Objects*, exploring how her early experiences of maternal neglect and disrupted attachment shape her predatory caregiving. Based on Bowlby and Ainsworth's Attachment Theory, the study argues that Adora's pathological maternal behaviour, characterised by enmeshment, emotional withdrawal, and factitious caregiving, results from an early disrupted attachment bond formed with her mother, Joya. Her mother's controlling and emotionally unresponsive attitude, coupled with the abusive grooming of Adora, fostered in her a conception of caregiving as conditional and invasive. An insecurely attached Adora repeats Joya's parenting style on her daughters, guided by her distorted internal working model of child rearing. The paper positions Adora's maternal actions as a form of intergenerational trauma, where caregiving becomes a strategy to resolve unfulfilled psychological needs. While Attachment Theory provides a potent psychological framework for interpreting her villainy, the paper also acknowledges its limitations in accounting for the sociocultural influences on her psyche. Further study of her narcissistic traits can deepen insight into how maternal violence disguises itself as care. The paper contributes to broader conversations around the representation of toxic motherhood in literature. It also calls for further exploration of the complex psychological mechanisms behind female-perpetrated abuse in contemporary fiction.

Keywords: Flynn, Adora, Attachment Theory, Internal Working Model, Secure Base, Insecure Attachment, Disrupted Attachment, Intergenerational Transmission, Predatory Caregiving, Maternal Villainy.

INTRODUCTION

Gillian Flynn, born on February 24, 1971, carved a niche in contemporary American literature with her macabre psychological thrillers. Flynn's notable crime stories come from her first three thrillers: *Sharp Objects* (2006), *Dark Places* (2009), and *Gone Girl* (2012), which have inspired cinematic reproductions. The novels stand out for their recurring theme of strong female antagonism, which has raised the question: Why does Flynn remain insistent on creating stories centred on female villainy? The author attempted to justify this thematic recurrence in her autobiographical essay "I Was Not a Nice Little Girl..." Flynn (2015). Flynn candidly described her childhood inclinations, which seemed to gravitate away from cultural conventions. She then discussed how literature normalised stories of violent men, implying that female aggression has been underestimated (paras. 1-2). The author raised the stimulating question: "Isn't it time to acknowledge the ugly side?" (para. 3) The rhetorical question implies the need to acknowledge the psychological depth of female characters—the literary exigency to explore the mental intricacies of women, particularly of those who deviate from morality.

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Received: 06 November 2025; Accepted: 23 November 2025; Published 15 December 2025

DOI: [10.29121/granthaalayah.v13.i11.2025.6511](https://doi.org/10.29121/granthaalayah.v13.i11.2025.6511)

Page Number: 131-137

Journal Title: International Journal of Research -GRANTHAALAYAH

Journal Abbreviation: Int. J. Res. Granthaalayah

Online ISSN: 2350-0530, Print ISSN: 2394-3629

Publisher: Granthaalayah Publications and Printers, India

Conflict of Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Authors' Contributions: Each author made an equal contribution to the conception and design of the study. All authors have reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

Transparency: The authors affirm that this manuscript presents an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study. All essential aspects have been included, and any deviations from the original study plan have been clearly explained. The writing process strictly adhered to established ethical standards.

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VILLAINY AND PSYCHOLOGY IN FLYNN'S DEBUT NARRATIVE

Sharp Objects set the precedent for Flynn's knack for writing psychologically nuanced female villains. Her debut novel thematically explores the mental depth of female antagonism against a backdrop of highly dysfunctional mother-daughter relations. The plot revolves around the serial murders of two young girls following their disappearance, which jolts the small town of Wind Gap, Missouri. The protagonist, Camille Preaker, a crime reporter from Chicago, estranged from her family, moves into her hometown to investigate the incidents. It is revealed that Camille's mother, Adora, and thirteen year old half sister Amma Crellin have been nurturing evil all along. What catches the reader's attention is Flynn's lack of inhibition in creating a story with diabolical antagonism from seemingly harmless members of society—a caring mother and a school-going adolescent girl. Camille, a psychiatric patient herself in her thirties, suffers from acute self-harming tendencies as she cuts words onto her skin. On the contrary, Amma deals with her anxiety by inflicting pain (verbal and physical harm) on others. Both characters deal with the perpetual frustration of having a distant mother, who shows an obsession with making her children sick and tending to them, yet deprives them of maternal affection. Camille had a deceased younger sister, Marian, whose untimely death haunts her, and she finally uncovers the truth that Adora had excessively nursed the child to death. Adora was subsequently arrested for the murders of Ann Nash and Natalie Keene, only to be revealed later that Amma was behind the murders, fuelled by a jealous need for Adora's love. Towards the climax, [Flynn \(2018\)](#) mentions that Adora suffers from the psychiatric ailment of Munchausen by Proxy (MBP). "The caregiver, usually the mother, almost always the mother, makes her child ill to get attention for herself. You got Munchausen, you make yourself sick to get attention. You got MBP, you make your child sick to show what a kind, doting mummy you are." (p. 293)

A REVIEW OF RECENT SCHOLARSHIP ON ADORA THROUGH A PSYCHOLOGICAL LENS

The crime thriller has been called "a relentlessly creepy family saga" by crime and horror writer Stephen King, featured in "Praise for Sharp Objects" of Weidenfeld and Nicholson's 2018 book reissue. The adjective "creepy" in King's description implies blatant depravity thriving in the Crellin household, stemming from the mother, Adora. Despite her youngest daughter's repugnant criminality that overshadows her masked violence, Adora occupies the position of the dominant villain. The caregiver's malevolence reveals a psychologically complex character, as glimpses of vulnerability emerge across the pages. This section revisits recent articles starting from 2019, studying Adora as a psychologically depraved mother. In Rosenbaum, Galley, and Friedman's psychiatric review (2019), Adora's MBP is examined as what is now officially termed "factitious disorder imposed on another" [American \(2022\)](#). The authors posit that Adora's pathological caregiving, controlling nature, and need for validation sprout from childhood neglect. This emotional deprivation culminates in Adora inducing illness in her daughters to gain attention, sympathy, and external validation. The review, albeit concise, underscores the psychiatric profundity of Flynn's narrative, using Adora's behaviour as a textual analogy for highlighting the ramifications of unchecked psychological disorders in individuals. [Jaber \(2022\)](#), in the context of Gothic fiction, contends that Adora's monstrosity is shaped by her matriarchal role, which stems from generational trauma, and thus modifies her into a transgressive maternal figure, subverting the conventional discourse of motherhood. The paper examines how Flynn destabilises the boundary between victim and perpetrator by portraying the murdered girls as part of a larger and complex interweaving of female criminality, trauma, and domestic power dynamics. [Mahmood \(2024\)](#) Jungian perspective of Adora explains her persona as a manifestation of the "devouring mother" archetype (p. 142). The paper examines how Adora's emotionally abusive and manipulative behaviour enduringly traumatises her daughters. The examination further delves into the novel's nuanced commentary on female identity, maternal toxicity, and the darker aspects of caregiving.

These recent studies provide valuable insights into the matriarch's psychological profile, particularly in portraying Adora as a deeply flawed yet mentally nuanced maternal figure. However, a research gap appears in their omission to address the villainous matriarch's core psychological maladjustment. This maladjustment rests on Adora's disrupted attachment patterns, which pass to her daughters as generational trauma. Upon a close textual analysis, the novel's central psychological conflict centres on attachment-related dynamics, seen in transgenerational mother-daughter relationships. Yet, none of the studies above has explicitly employed Attachment Theory to interpret Adora's antagonism. In Flynn's context, one can discern a plausible connection between villainy and mother-child attachment problems. Hence, by applying Attachment Theory, this paper attempts to address the question: How does Adora's early experience with maternal neglect and disrupted attachment influence her predatory caregiving?

This qualitative research, grounded in Attachment Theory, employs a close textual examination to psychoanalyse Adora's character. The analysis focuses on Adora's early childhood experiences, relationship patterns, and maternal behaviour depicted in the novel. This paper psychoanalytically interprets the villain by applying the concepts of insecure attachment and intergenerational trauma from the studies of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. The study aims to explain how attachment disruptions influence Adora's harmful maternal behaviour.

ATTACHMENT THEORY: DEFINITION AND GIST

[Ainsworth and Bell \(1970\)](#) defines "attachment" as "an affectional tie that one person or animal forms between himself and another specific one—a tie that binds them together in space and endures over time." (p. 50) "Attachment behaviour is any form of

behaviour that results in a person attaining or maintaining proximity to some other clearly identified individual who is conceived as better able to cope with the world." [Bowlby \(2014\)](#) Attachment Theory emerged from Bowlby's revolutionary research and writings between 1964 and 1988, supplemented by Mary Ainsworth's and Mary Main's theoretical expansion. The theory's essence lies in its spatial aspect, wherein a caregiver's proximity to the child determines the latter's mental welfare. The child's attachment needs find fulfilment through the consistent frequency of the caregiver's close presence, touch and sound. [Holmes \(2014\)](#) Emotional intensity is a clinically profound characteristic of attachment behaviour, regardless of the concerned individuals' ages. The nature of the emotion evoked depends on the vicissitudes of the relationship: a pleasant interaction elicits joy and security, a threatened bond evokes anger, anxiety, or envy, and a disrupted relationship arouses sorrow and depression. [Bowlby \(2014\)](#) Bowlby posited that a mother's past experiences with personal bonds influence her present behaviour with and affection for her child. (p. 17) Further, he championed the view that successful parenting is a requisite for the next generation's mental soundness. Therefore, Attachment Theory aims to understand parenting and its external and psychological influences. (p. 1) These Bowlbian ideas find fictional parallels in the context of Flynn's novel under consideration. Adora's inability to love her girls reflects her distant relationship with her mother. There also lies the indisputable fact that Adora's parenting is characterised by deficiencies, which will be assessed below.

INTERNAL WORKING MODEL

Understanding Bowlby's concept of the "internal working model" is key to grasping Attachment Theory as a psychoanalytic approach. Internal working models of individuals shape the way they bond or harbour expectations with attachment figures in the future. Bretherton and Munholland describe them as "experience-based mental representations" of "the self, attachment figures, and relationships" [Jones et al. \(2015\)](#). Children develop internal models of themselves and others, shaped by patterns of interactive experiences. The collective experience influences how, later, as adults, they perceive and relate to intimate relationships. These models of the self and attachment figures serve as unconscious templates which the individual relies on to form opinions, develop responses accordingly and navigate through relationships. A child whose caregiver responds inconsistently or rejects their attachment needs "will likely form representations of the self as unworthy of care, and of attachment figures as unavailable or inconsistently available." (p. 237)

SECURE AND INSECURE ATTACHMENT

A child with secure attachment installs "an internal working model of a responsive, loving, reliable caregiver, and of a self that is worthy of love and attention, and will bring these assumptions to bear on all other relationships" [Holmes \(2014\)](#). Insecure attachment manifests in a child whose internal working models are shaped by an unresponsive and negligent caregiver. The insecure child harbours a suspicious attitude towards the environment and possesses a low self-worth. Such suppositions about the world and relationships shaped in the early years can remain steadfast and resistant to change. Children develop a strong and lasting sense of security when they know that their caregiver is available and responds to their needs. This security becomes embedded in their unconscious, making them capable of functioning independently [Bolen \(2000\)](#). Avoidant, ambivalent and disorganised attachments constitute the three major variants of insecure attachment [Holmes \(2014\)](#).

SECURE BASE

The American Psychological Association (n.d.) defines "secure base" as "a place of safety, represented by an attachment figure (e.g. a parent) that an infant uses as a base from which to explore a novel environment." (para. 1) The phrase owes its coinage to Mary Ainsworth, who used it to describe an infant's tie with its mother in the course of "The Strange Situation" [Ainsworth and Bell \(1970\)](#) experiment. The ultimate role of the caregiver is to provide a secure base from which the child is equipped to enter the outside world. [Holmes \(2014\)](#) The secure base is the haven to which a child knows he/she can return for respite and reassurance from the world's hostilities [Bowlby \(2014\)](#). Bowlby asserted that a child deprived of a secure base with a disrupted early attachment to its mother showed "an excessive need for love or for revenge, gross guilt, and depression...superficiality, want of real feeling, lack of concentration, deceit, and compulsive thieving." [Fonagy \(2010\)](#)

INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION

To explain his theory on the passing of anxious behavioural patterns across generations, Bowlby reiterated Margaret Mead's view that "insecure parents [create] insecure children, who grow up to create an insecure society which in its turn creates more insecure parents." [Bowlby \(1949\)](#) This transgenerational impairment nurtures unresolved attachment trauma and may fuel a vicious cycle of inattentive and emotionally abusive parenting. Holmes explains this "intergenerational transmission of neurosis" as the condition in which a parent's unhealed childhood problems contribute to "causing and perpetuating the problems of their own children." (2014, p. 9) Furthermore, individuals suffering from psychiatric illnesses exhibit impaired capacity to form affectionate bonds, with severely lasting impacts [Bowlby \(2005\)](#). It can be understood that mental disorders in parents accelerate the cycle of traumatic insecurity, adversely impacting the welfare of future generations.

ADORA: A CARING PICTURE-PERFECT PREDATOR

"She was like a girl's very best doll, the kind you don't play with." Flynn (2018) Early on, the reader understands that Adora's appearance and manners represent flattering feminine charm. However, an unsettling aura lay in her seemingly perfect life despite being adored by the town. As the pages unravel her character, one cannot overlook Adora's subtle yet disturbing self-harming behaviour: compulsive eyelash plucking. This form of self-harm can be attributed to trichotillomania, which the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, Text Revision (DSM-5-TR) explains as "the recurring pulling out of one's own hair" American (2022). During a difficult period in Adora's past, presumably Marian's sickly years and subsequent death, a young Camille likened her inflamed eyes to those of a helpless rabbit subjected to laboratory experiments Flynn (2018). Furthermore, towards the climax, "Adora's lashes were plucked clean, her left eye dribbling plump tears..." (p. 307) as she poisoned her daughters. One notices that Adora involuntarily touches her eyelashes at the slightest feeling of distress. It indicates an enduring mental disquiet as she alleviates her vexation through sensory relief by tugging off her lashes. Another of Adora's dangerous mental conditions, factitious disorder imposed on another, makes her prone to fatally harming her children. "The caregiver, usually the mother, almost always the mother, makes her child ill to get attention for herself" Flynn (2018). The pathological need for attention indicates that Adora, perhaps, suffers from unresolved psychological wounds related to childhood rejection that may have remained unresolved. She displays a heightened sensitivity to human suffering to make herself the object of consolation and sympathy in another's tragedy. Textual instances include Adora exhibiting a sick Marian to friends, followed by an exaggerated mourning period after Marian's death. She acts deeply affected by the murders of Natalie and Ann, by shifting the attention to her past bereavement. A sinister incident that cements Adora as a predatory maternal figure involves her secretly biting a baby's cheek and dismissing its cry as fussiness Flynn (2018). This indicates that, perhaps, Adora's internal working model perceives the maternal caregiver as one whose nursing involves pain infliction. Her distorted view of caregiving suggests that her early experience as an attached figure is characterised by dysfunctional mother-child dynamics, which shaped her perception of maternal concern. Her tendency to publicly indulge in self-pity signals an internal model of herself centring on low self-worth. Bretherton (1991) asserts that an individual's working model of the self can be mapped in the context of the attachment bonds one comes from and remains shaped by. Consequently, insecurely attached children who faced parental rejection may view themselves poorly and the world as a menacing place. Adora's apparent mental disorders and nature of caregiving invite a close examination of her childhood, which involves a disrupted attachment in her relationship with Joya, her mother.

CHILDHOOD: INSECURE ATTACHMENT AND ABUSE

Adora grew up in an affluent home with distant parents who kept her "under the same strict rules they applied to their workers: no drinking, no smoking, no cursing, church service mandatory." Flynn (2018) Her parents died from cancer not long after Adora gave birth to Camille, whom she got pregnant with at seventeen. Despite what appears to be a tragedy, Adora never expressed love and longing for her parents. Joya is described as an intimidating woman with unusually long, plain fingernails who kept Adora under her strict watch. Adora admits that Joya deprived her of affection and called her mother "cold and distant and so, so smug. My mother never loved me, either." (p. 190) There is clear evidence of disrupted attachment in the mother-daughter relationship. Adora narrates her traumatising childhood ordeal with neglect when Joya took her to the woods barefoot and abandoned her. "I was eight, just a small thing. My feet were ripped into strips by the time I got home, and she just looked up at me from the evening paper, and went to her room." (p. 305) Joya's intentions appeared sinister since she forced a young Adora to walk without shoes off the trail and asked her not to follow her mother as she left. This incident permanently scars Adora as she delivers the cryptic utterances to Camille, "When a child knows that young that her mother doesn't care for her, bad things happen" (p. 305). It appears that the adult Adora attributes her transgressions and failure as a parent to Joya's lack of maternal love. Joya's definitive rejection came when a teenage Adora's expectations were quashed as she hoped for maternal attention upon conceiving Camille out of wedlock. At her daughter's moment of vulnerability, Joya remained distant and unresponsive to Adora's last call for affection and care. Based on the given account, it is plausible to state that Adora grew up as an insecurely attached child with Joya being an unresponsive attachment figure. Ironically, despite the emotionally distant parenting, Joya showed an obsession with tending to Adora in an invasive manner. Adora's childhood friend, Jackie, referred to Adora as being "overly mothered" (p. 258) by a mother who never touched her lovingly. However, a young Adora, like Marian, was subjected to excessive nursing in an abusive manner. Joya loved to peel Adora's dead, sunburnt skin off her flesh while tending to her daughter. Furthermore, Adora underwent continuous medication and invasive treatments with an illness Jackie called "just the stress of living with Joya" (p. 259). Jones et al. (2015) acknowledged studies probing into the relation of child mistreatment with insecure parenting. According to Howard, Moncher and Rodriguez Jones et al. (2015), parents with insecure attachment styles exhibited higher child abuse risk indicators than secure parents. Joya's ethically questionable methods of caregiving shaped Adora's working model of child rearing and nursing. It is also evident that Joya failed to provide a secure base for Adora, which raises concerns about Adora's future as a parent and whether she offered the secure base her children needed.

THE MOTHER AND HER PREY: INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF ABUSE

Ainsworth stated that a parent's attachment system plays a role in influencing child rearing. [Jones et al. \(2015\)](#) As a victim of maternal neglect and abuse with a disrupted attachment system, Adora perpetrated the same treatment on her girls. Her parenting seems more dangerous than Joya's since it involved the death of her second daughter and the endangerment of the surviving girls. Her other daughters remained psychologically wounded: Camille, traumatised and prone to acute self-harming; and Amma, a vicious bully-turned serial killer obsessed with seeking attachment. Adora's treatment of her three daughters varied in terms of maternal attention, yet shared the similarity of affectionate indifference. She was responsive only when she perceived her children needed tending to and submitted to her demands. "My mother never loved me, either. And if you girls won't love me, I won't love you." [Flynn \(2018\)](#) These lines prove that the matriarch could not unconditionally love and nurture her daughters.

The observation of maternal behaviour patterns across two generations suggests that there has been an intergenerational transmission of abusive and neglectful parenting. Adora, as a mother, functioned on the internal working model of an unbothered and sadistic parent, modelled after Joya's indifference. "I think she's sick, and I think what she has is contagious." (p. 261) Jackie's observation implies that Adora inherited her moral depravity from Joya and further passed it down to Amma. Joya's penchant for pain infliction seeped into Adora's working model of parental nurturing, a distortion that manifests with greater severity in Amma. To trace the full extent of Adora's disrupted attachment and its impact on her maternal antagonism, it is essential to examine how her pathology manifests differently in her relationship with each of her daughters.

Marian: Her Forever Baby. "Mother shows no interest in Marian when she is well, in fact, seems to punish her." (p. 292) This observation was made by a concerned nurse practitioner outside of Adora's social circle. Marian remained her mother's favoured child since her complete submission enabled Adora to indulge in her toxic caregiving. She was a remarkably docile child whose life was dominated by unwarranted medical treatments for several diseases. A young Camille believed that Marian's ill-health was exaggerated by Adora, and she grapples with the question of whether Marian would still be dead if she hadn't had Adora for a mother. Adora basked in superficial love, especially reserved for Marian, since caring and grieving for her brought Adora the town's admiration. Her utterance, "She'll always be my baby," (p. 305) indicates that Adora never intended Marian to live long and detach from her. [Bowlby's observations \(1999\)](#) show that a child's closeness to the parent may shift to other attachment figures during adolescence. While some may remain unwaveringly bonded with their parents, others drastically sever their bonds during this period. Adora's anxious attachment system drove her to avoid the possibility of Marian's shifting attachment. Her emphatic reference to Marian as "my baby" stems from a desire to secure her attachment to Marian firmly by ensuring that Marian never grows out of their transactional relationship. It also suggests that she prioritised her attachment needs over her daughter's fundamental well-being.

Camille: Her Rebelious Child. "I wanted to love you, Camille. But you were so hard. Marian, she was so easy." [Flynn \(2018\)](#) Adora nonchalantly admits her aversion to her oldest born since she rejected her medications as a child, and for reminding Adora of Joya. Adora's child neglect and rationalisation of her maternal indifference hint at the possibility that she deals with unresolved anxiety stemming from being neglected by her mother. Her working model and attachment behaviour system lack the capacity to overcome the pain of rejection in every sense. Camille, despite her tumultuous relationship with Adora and neglected upbringing, remains the voice of reason and compassion in the Preker-Crellin household. Throughout her adulthood, it is visible that Camille, insecurely attached, pines for Adora's love and envies Amma. It also appears that Adora's early pregnancy with Camille was planned out to upset Joya and, at the same time, get some positive attention from her. "When I had you inside of me, when I was a girl...I thought you'd save me. And then my mother would love me. That was a joke." (p. 191) These lines suggest that Adora chose motherhood without understanding how to care for and love babies. Her actions were guided by a desperate longing coming from an individual deprived of maternal love. As a result, Camille grew distant and rebellious while spiralling into depressive episodes of self-harming. Adora's distant parenting is well accounted for in chapter seven, where Camille admits that "she's always had more problems with children than she'd ever admit. I think, in fact, she hates them. There's jealousy, a resentfulness that I can feel even now, in memory." (p. 123) Her misopaedic hostility is noticeable in the incident with the baby discussed earlier. The trauma from Joya's maternal apathy imprinted in Adora a deep sense of prejudice not only towards her offspring but also extended to other children as well.

Amma: Her Doll. "Well, she doesn't like me either. Just in a different way." (p. 240) Amma, at just thirteen years, is well aware of Adora's indifference and performative caregiving towards her. Of Adora's children, Amma exhibited a severely impaired attachment system with a morbidly violent nature. Adora abrasively tended to Amma in a mechanical way resembling her care for Marian, and yet, deprived her of real motherly affection. Amma kept a four-foot dollhouse at home, furnished exactly like Adora's house to please her mother, and called herself "Adora's little doll" (p. 54). Camille describes Amma as "compliant, sweet, needy — just what she had to be, to get my mother's love...With a penchant for doing and seeing nasty things" (p. 128). Amma's attention to detail, deceptive behaviour and superficiality resembled Adora's behaviour. Amma also harboured "a gnawing desire to be the baby girl my mother mourned" (p. 173). Her mother loved to nurse her for one or the other ailments, and also put up with her volatile tantrums. It is later understood that Amma deliberately subjected herself to Adora's poisoning for attention. After Adora's arrest, Camille observes her sister as "wildly needy and afire with anxiety...demanded assurance of my love" (p. 312). These lines imply that

Amma, too, was denied a secure base by Adora and grew up with a malfunctioning attachment behaviour. She also developed delinquent tendencies fueled by her intense need to receive care and love from an attachment figure. This behavioural outcome concurs with Bowlby's theory about a child developing antisocial traits as a result of a deficient secure base. In Amma's case, she murders three girls, triggered by her intense jealous rage when she felt her attachment bond being threatened. Although much of Adora's parenting of Amma is constructed from Camille's point of view, there is sufficient material to prove that Adora's flawed and selfish mothering adversely impacts Amma's internal working model and personality.

DISCUSSION: VICTIM AND VILLAIN

"Problems always start long before you really, really see them." (p. 77) Flynn's *Sharp Objects* not only narrates a villainous mother's behaviour, but also delves into the intergenerational transmission of insecure attachment and abuse. This section rationalises how Adora's early experience with maternal neglect and disrupted attachment influences her predatory caregiving.

Bowlby and Ainsworth's studies emphasise that caregiving may not entirely be instinctual, but an individual's attachment history profoundly shapes it. This theory in practice finds a parallel in Adora, who is both a victim and a villain caught in a cycle of insecurity and harm. Her predatory maternal actions are outcomes of early emotional abandonment and abuse that her mother subjected her to. Adora's insecure attachment does not cease with her pathology, but its impact reverberates across generations, manifesting in the psychological instability of Camille and Amma. In Adora, we see internalised effects of disrupted attachment as a result of maternal neglect. Deprived of love, emotional response, and consistent care from Joya, Adora's internal working model of motherhood becomes distorted with ideas of control and narcissistic emotional validation. Her experience of getting "overly mothered"—unnecessary medical treatments and abrasive grooming—taught her of an affection-deprived way of performative caregiving. Her working model perceives that maternal concern is expressed through routine physical care isolated from empathy and nurturing love. This distorted mental concept of motherhood evolved into a pathological caregiving style that Adora exposed her children to. The need to tend to her children sprouted from self-interest to satisfy her attachment needs over responding to her children's attachment needs. Adora's unresolved attachment trauma manifests in her inability to discern her children's emotional needs separately from hers. Hence, she holds the delusional belief that her children required persistent care to maintain the close physical proximity, which she perceived as an act of nurturing attachment. Her maternal actions turn predatory since they fulfil her attachment requirements at the expense of her daughters' physical and mental welfare. Bowlby (1999) asserted that in old adults, "when attachment behaviour can no longer be directed towards members of an older generation, or even the same generation, it may come instead to be directed to members of a younger one." (p. 207) Despite her obsession with keeping her children physically close, Adora showed a fondness for the murdered girls, Natalie and Ann. She invited them to her home to groom them, which emotionally wounded Amma, who saw the girls as obstacles in her attachment bond with Adora.

In Camille and Amma, both insecurely attached in different ways, we see the destructive consequences of Adora's insecure parenting. Camille internalises maternal rejection and battles with anxiety, while severely harming herself. Amma, on the other hand, expresses her attachment-related angst by killing three girls out of jealousy. Both girls were denied a secure base by a mother who, herself, did not feel secure under Joya's care. Adora's case highlights how early attachment failures do not remain as mere psychological scars but shape the next generation's mental trajectory.

CONCLUSION

This study examined Adora Crellin's maternal transgressions in Flynn's *Sharp Objects* in the context of Attachment Theory. The analysis's main objective centred on how the villain's early experience with maternal neglect and disrupted attachment influenced her malicious caregiving. Drawing on Bowlby and Ainsworth's studies, it is plausible to state that Adora's inability to provide a secure base to her daughters is a direct result of her distant relationship with her mother.

Flynn's depiction of maternal violence challenges traditional associations of motherhood with nurturance and warmth. The author underscored an alarming aspect of abuse and cruelty in the domestic space that goes unnoticed until more devastating events take place as a consequence. Her story highlighted how a seemingly safe space can harbour psychological decay and physical illness induced by years of abuse. The study demonstrates that Flynn's story depicts villainy not merely as a topic of discussion within the moral jurisdiction but as a psychological case. The psychological relevance of the novel rests on ruptured relations and transgenerational abuse and trauma. Considering the limitations of this study, Attachment Theory does not fully account for the cultural and social dimensions that shape Adora's psyche and behaviour. Societal expectations of feminine propriety and the performative nature of domestic respectability play vital roles in shaping Adora's maternal villainy. Furthermore, the analysis relies heavily on Camille's narrative point of view, which may be tainted by traumatic bias. A multifaceted study of *Sharp Objects*' villainy might benefit from incorporating feminist psychoanalysis and trauma theory.

The present study paves the way for a more in-depth exploration of how insecure attachment and its variants operate in the novel's psychological context. Further research could examine how Adora's narcissistic traits—need for admiration, maternal validation, lack of empathy, intense sensitivity, and enmeshment with her daughters—intersect with her insecure attachment style.

Such a study of synthesising Attachment Theory with a personality disorder framework may offer a more comprehensive understanding of Flynn's villain.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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