"Don't Look at Her, She's Mad": Mama and Frankenstein Reveal Modern-Day Preoccupations

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ABSTRACT

“DON’T LOOK AT HER, SHE’S MAD”:
MAMA AND FRANKENSTEIN REVEAL MODERN-DAY PREOCCUPATIONS

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Northern Illinois University, 2020
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Viewing the film Mama (2013) through the lens of a certain Gothic text, Mary Shelley’s
Frankenstein, reveals similar fears of the feminine alongside the focus of the nature of the in-
between. These commonalities between the texts reveal an emerging trend in modern monster-
horror films—the narrative-driven analysis of the role of the other and multiculturalism in the
social consciousness. In this paper, I examine how Mama as an Imperial Gothic film builds on
the tradition of indigenous stories, like La Llorona, and the Gothic. By referencing and
combining these histories in the genre markers, it uses motherhood and the other to express the
traumas and relationship between “colonized” and “colonizer” in the 21st century. The growth of
the Imperial Gothic genre represents a movement towards a “neo-Imperial Gothic” which looks
towards how to deal with Imperialism in the present and future rather than focusing on the
traumas and fears of the past.
“DON’T LOOK AT HER, SHE’S MAD”: MAMA AND FRANKENSTEIN

REVEAL MODERN-DAY PREOCCUPATIONS

BY

CAITLIN LEE GAMBLE
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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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INTRODUCTION

Viewing the film *Mama* (2013) through the lens of a certain Gothic text, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, reveals similar fears of the feminine alongside the focus of the nature of the in-between. These commonalities between the texts reveal an emerging trend in modern monster-horror films—the narrative-driven analysis of the role of the other and multiculturalism in the social consciousness. This essay will use the feminist perspective present in *Mama* and *Frankenstein* to analyze the role of the feminine-other in modern horror and its connections to Shelley’s Gothic. *Mama*’s focus on motherhood is an at once physical, social, and ideological calling that serves as a vehicle for the examination of constructed borders and binaries in Western culture.

*Mama* is a film about two young girls, Victoria and Lily. They are taken in by Mama, a ghost, after their father kidnapped and attempted to murder them in a house in the woods. Mama protects the girls by murdering their father and raises them alone for five years in the Helvetia house. Eventually, they are discovered by men hired by their uncle Luke. Luke and his unconventional girlfriend, Annabel, adopt the girls after making an arrangement with child psychologist Dr. Dreyfus to stay in his research house. Mama follows the girls to the house, threatened by their abduction from her protection. She eventually attacks Luke and sends him to the hospital leaving Annabel alone with the girls. Annabel and the girls slowly warm up to each other and eventually Victoria and Annabel become very close. Meanwhile, Dr. Dreyfus discovers the existence of Mama and attempts to expose her to the scientific community. Mama kills him and becomes more enraged by the girls’ growing distance from her. She lashes out, attacking Annabel and bringing the girls back to the Helvetia house. In a recreation of the
moment Mama died, she prepares the girls to have them jump from a cliff with her—uniting them forever. Annabel and Luke show up to stop her, but ultimately Lily chooses to go with Mama. The film ends with Luke, Annabel, and Victoria hugging at the edge of the cliff while a moth representing Mama and Lily flies towards the camera.

*Mama*, with its use of frame storytelling and othering, creates a link between the Gothic and present-day monster-horror. When compared to *Frankenstein*, the film’s concerns with feminism, motherhood, and thus creation become a double-directional critique of the role of the Gothic and ideologies like feminism, multiculturalism, and imperialism in present-day society.

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is a 19th-century Gothic text that is preoccupied with many of the same concerns as *Mama*. Critical readings of *Frankenstein* discuss its use of the other to analyze and critique feminist and imperialist concerns. Jonathan Crimmins, in “Mediation’s Sleight of Hand: The Two Vectors of the Gothic in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*,” argues that the novel sets the Gothicized sentimental against the Gothicized romantic in a “double-directional critique” (562), which is presented within the ideologies and bodies of the novel’s characters. By analyzing the features of the Imperial Gothic within both the 19th and 21st centuries, Johan Höglund, in “Hollywood and the Imperial Gothic,” argues that the Gothic is used as a vehicle of official discourse that has the ability to transcend boundaries. By analyzing the features of the Gothic in *Frankenstein* and *Mama*, my thesis asserts that while specific cultural values have changed through history, the Gothic still presents narratives the opportunity to discuss and transcend cultural and political ideologies. The link between *Mama* and *Frankenstein* calls for the (re)analysis, (re)assertion, and (re)definition of the other in a global, multicultural scale. The film makes a step towards a kind of “neo-Gothic Imperialism.”
The scholarship surrounding *Mama* is primarily based in analyzing the film from a feminist or eco-feminist perspective alongside its psychoanalytic connections to Julia Kristeva and Carl Jung. Zoila Clark, in the article, “The Myth of *La Llorona* in the Film *Mama,*” outlines *Mama*’s connections to both eco-feminism and the film’s Mexican/Hispanic roots in the indigenous tale of *La Llorona,* the crying woman. Clark notes that *La Llorona* began as an Aztec myth about the goddess Cihuacoatl; however, once the Spanish conquered the region, the imposition of Christianity transformed the myth (64). The more current version centers on a *mestiza* (mixed-race) woman who marries into a higher social class but her husband abandons her. In anger, she drowns their two children and dies from suffering; her spirit continues to walk along the river looking for her children (65). Importantly, Clark also notes that as an oral story, the “narrative has taken on many variations.” In the case of *Mama,* I will argue that the film uses the allusion to the *La Llorona* myth to give voice to the Other within the Imperial Gothic genre.

Director Andy Muschietti’s narrative in *Mama* makes strong connections between Hollywood, international filmmaking, and the Gothic. These concepts are also familiar to producer Guillermo del Toro who is credited with helping Muschietti financially and technically with his first feature-length film. For a number of cultural and economic reasons, del Toro uses a mix of classic Hollywood and European art-cinema to “transcend national and cultural barriers,” a strategy which Alec Morgan describes in “Creating Cinematic Esperanto: Guillermo del Toro.” Gothic storytelling is also prominent in del Toro’s film *Crimson Peak* (2015) and he has noted his passion for *Frankenstein* and hopes for creating a film adaptation of the novel. Both Muschietti and del Toro have strong international backgrounds coming from Argentina and Mexico respectively. The backgrounds of Muschietti and del Toro alongside the international production and filming of *Mama* give an important backdrop to my discussion of imperialism.
and multiculturalism as it is represented in current-day film. As the world moves towards international film makers, producers, and distributors, a question that must be asked is how these different people, cultures, and ideologies interact with the film. Further, how does the self-reflective genre of the Gothic interact with the ideologies presented in the narrative?

Scholarship on the Gothic genre as it persists throughout history and artistic mediums is fairly extensive. Writers such as Noel Carroll, David Punter, Glennis Byron, Clive Bloom, Andrew Cooper, Roger Luckhurst, Agnieszka Soltysk Monnet, and Patrick Brantlinger all give accounts defining Gothic genre traits, its various cultural influences and influencers, and its historical journey into the 21st century. Suzanne Rintoul pulls together these various explanations in her article, “Gothic Anxieties: Struggling with a Definition,” to argue that the Gothic genre itself creates much debate on its definition precisely because it is so preoccupied with creating and breaking boundaries—with dealing with the interstitial. This interstitial nature reveals the importance of the Gothic as it connects politically and historically with feminism and imperialism/war. I will discuss further these Gothic traits emphasizing the importance of narrative and cultural time as it interacts with in-betweenness in Mama. Through close analysis of the strange emphasis on and breaking of boundaries surrounding Mama and her interactions with the other characters, societies, and values in the film, I argue that she resembles the traits and life of the Gothic genre in the 21st century and its current-day preoccupations with feminism and imperialism.
CHAPTER 1: MAMA, NOT MERELY A HORROR FILM

Mama and Feminism in a Horror Film

Mama’s title exhibits its major preoccupation with exploring motherhood. Producer Guillermo del Toro also explicitly states in an interview that the film’s major concern revolves around a mother’s love—a love so strong it is suffocating. The film centers around a ghostly mother, but it also interrogates a living mother in Annabel’s character, and the ideological values of motherhood through the care-giver roles that Uncle Lucas and Aunt Jean provide for the girls. Each one of these kinds of motherhood represents a different one of the multiple roles that motherhood can represent in contemporary society on individual, social, and ideological levels. Zoila Clark argues that the role of the feminine and the mother works on an individual, social, and ideological level in the film in part because of the film’s role as a modern version of the La Llorona myth. Annabel and Mama must deal with the personal responsibilities and calls of motherhood, the social imperative to become specific kinds of mothers, and the ideological balance that motherhood brings between Man and Nature and European/Euro-American society and the indigenous populations represented through the myth of La Llorona present as part of the film and character of Mama.

The social roles of the characters represent the gender roles they must take on in society. Clark argues that the father’s (Jeffrey Dusange’s) acts of murder and attempted murder-suicide at the opening of the film are where he “falls from grace in the social hierarchy” (65). Since “his persona, or social role, is of primary importance to him, and he cannot imagine any other kind of existence without a job status,” his impulse is to destroy the rest of his symbolic role as a father figure. The same strong call to socially acceptable gender roles applies to the women in the film
as they are drawn to motherhood. Mama is compelled to return as a ghost to find her missing child and proceeds to protect Victoria and Lily, raising them as best she can within the Helvetia house. She is obviously not an ideal mother—the girls cannot easily return to contemporary society—but she does keep them alive and raises them according to a traditional feminine gender role. Mama crafts dolls from sticks and nuts in the woods surrounding the house and sings lullabies to the girls which they in turn sing to themselves even outside of her presence. Before she died, Mama also tried to fulfill her duties as a mother. In life, Mama, known as Edith Brennan, escapes from an asylum with a baby, presumably hers, and once cornered, jumps off of a cliff to protect the two of them from her police pursuers.¹ When the living world threatens to take Lily and Victoria from her, Mama repeats the same cycle. Like Jeffrey, once Mama feels replaced, she also feels compelled to end the threat in the only way she knows how: by killing herself and her child. Only thereby may she escape the power of a social indoctrination not within her accepted social role.

Analysis of Mama’s representations of gender roles and motherhood must also address the film’s use of horror to differentiate between Mama and Annabel. This analysis helps to explain why the ending (the splitting up of Lily and Victoria) includes such sad, and also positive, imagery; it is because the film attempts to work with modern and conflicting ideologies of motherhood. The imperfections of Mama and Annabel’s motherhood revolve around the horror genre’s focus on the body. Noël Carroll defines art horror as a work that “is designed to elicit a certain kind of affect” (52) in the audience: one of “an occurrent emotional state” or an

¹The film is not explicit about why Edith was in the asylum nor whether the baby she jumps from the cliff with was actually hers. This information is given through a dream-sequence without dialogue and Dr. Dreyfus does not comment on Edith’s hospitalization except to note that she existed at Clifton Forge. In either case, Mama believes the baby is hers which reinforces her drive to become its mother.
“emotional state that has both physical and cognitive dimensions” (54). In other words, the horror genre attempts to create real emotional and physical responses in the audience; with regards to monsters in horror, this means that the narrative’s representation of the monster should in some way connect physically with the audience. An effective method of evoking an “occurrent emotional state” is a focus on the body. Caleb Turner discusses how contemporary mainstream Anglo-American cinema portrays and interprets the body and how technology affects those relationships. He notes that to construct humanness “is to also create a set of narrative devices that not only mimic human behavior but also positions that behavior within the threshold of a context designed solely to elicit a specific meaning upon them” (Wood qtd Turner 13). While Annabel is shown to be a non-traditional, or imperfect, mother, her representation by Jessica Chastain does not move outside of traditional humanness. In the case of Mama, she is constructed as a feminine and bodily character with both human and inhuman traits.² Mama, as a being, inhabits many different bodies—as a living being, as a ghost, and as a being possessing another’s body. While Mama has some physical, feminine, and care-giving traits similar to Annabel, Mama is not human. Her inhuman traits become immediately obvious in her broken and twisted body which can travel through holes in walls, float, and spawn moths. The combination of her human and non-human behaviors examines meanings around the cultural categories surrounding life/death, human/non-human, and motherhood through her interstitial, non-human body—especially when compared to Annabel. Noël Carroll draws from Douglas’ argument to define the interstitial as things “that cross the boundaries of the deep categories of a culture’s conceptual scheme” (55) and goes on to note that interstitial beings are capable of

² It is also important to note that the character of Mama is made up of a combination of practical effects and CG to enhance her horrific effect on the audience.
provoking an “occurrent emotional state.” A focus on Mama’s interstitial body reveals different social and individual calls to emotion related to motherhood.

To help further narrow the differences between acceptable and horrific forms of individual or socially-accepted motherhood in Mama, I would like to draw from Karen Macfarlane’s discussion of failure and imperfection. In the article “Aesthetics, Value, and the Joy of Imperfections,” Macfarlane discusses the difference between failure and imperfection in contemporary Western culture. She argues that, compared to failure, imperfection “is spontaneous, sometimes raucous, often hidden, generally ordinary, and almost always interesting” and “is about what is there” (11). What is present in the narrative for both Mama and Annabel is their own individuality, motherhood, and representations through the body. A character’s body in Mama symbolizes the societal acceptance or rejection of motherhood. Mama is a societal failure as a mother because she does not possess a living body and her children cannot adapt to the film’s contemporary, living society. However, she is an individually imperfect mother because her body possesses the capacity to intervene in the living world to love and protect as a mother. Marina Levina and Diem-My T. Bui argue that “life in the twenty-first century constructs monstrosity not just as a representational category, but also as ontology—a way of being or becoming” (6). The imperfections that Annabel and Mama exhibit in their individual motherhoods are part of their becoming (or becoming flawed) mothers. A mother’s body, a direct representation of her actions that “are there,” play off of what Barbara Creed notes as a trope of the horror film: “the identity of monstrous female figures . . . the ‘monstrous-feminine’ . . . is always tied to their maternal role” (qtd Grafius 2). Grafius adds that monstrous mothers are “real-life mothers who have become monstrous due to a disruption in their relationship with their child.” In combination with Levina and Bui’s argument, a mother in the
horror genre is a mother who has become monstrous before the audience. In Mama, this sense of becoming a mother receives extra focus as Annabel and Mama’s bodies change according to their positive or negative maternal relationships with the children. As individuals, the mothers are imperfect (rather than failures) because the social role of motherhood is a trait already within them as an ordinary trope of the horror genre. When Mama is seen as a failed mother, it is also when her body elicits an “occurrent emotional state” connected to the horror genre. Thus, her failure as a mother is related to her status as a socially-accepted mother by the film’s other characters and the audience. In combination, the response of acceptance or horror associated with imperfections or failures reinforces the differences between the individual and social duties of a mother. The analysis of the tropes of the horror genre helps to identify the film’s ideology surrounding motherhood.

To examine more closely the kinds of mothers Annabel and Mama represent, I would like to focus on a few specific moments in the film. As an individual, Annabel is an imperfect mother because she is an unwilling mother; however, her actions teach her how to become a more ideal mother. Her motherly abilities are hidden within her rather than existing on the other side of a gap she cannot cross. She is introduced in the film sitting in the bathroom nervously awaiting the results of a pregnancy test. After the close-up of the clearly negative test, the film cuts to a mid-shot of Annabel looking upwards and enthusiastically stating, “Thank you God...Sweet!” In the background, Lucas is heard talking with Burnsie about the lack of payment for the search operation. As she enters the room to his frustration at what looks to be the end of the search for his nieces, she teases him about the search and announces, “Hey, guess who’s not pregnant.” Annabel is uninterested, even hostile towards the idea of becoming a mother. Her attitude begins to change when the searchers find the girls. Dr. Dreyfus gives a small introductory speech before
Lucas goes in to meet the girls. Initially, Dr. Dreyfus introduces himself to Annabel and then Lucas—asserting a preference to speak with the maternal figure before the paternal, even if Lucas is more closely interested in the girls’ wellbeing. The doctor notes that they were “very fortunate that Victoria was old enough to retain much of her vocabulary,” and as he begins to describe Lily’s more complicated development, Annabel interrupts him: “What about the other one?” As she asks the question, she moves towards the camera in a two-shot with Dr. Dreyfus—Lucas in-between the two. While Annabel may have been reluctant to care for children, she takes on a socially accepted role as a concerned caregiver while Lucas hangs back. In this scene, Annabel begins to show that she is able to act out her social role as a mother, even if she is reluctant individually. Her sacrifice to leave her band and her slow progression from acting out her motherly duties (tucking the girls in or making them dinner) to enjoying the girl’s company foreshadows the major risks she takes to save the girls at the end of the film: her final act as an individual accepting the societal role of mother. What makes Annabel an individually imperfect mother is her ability to bring the girls into the living world. This focus on her living body is what also allows her to become a socially imperfect, rather than failed, mother.

Viewed from the film’s contemporary society, Mama is a failure as a mother. Macfarlane draws from Halberstam and Beckett to argue that failure is a critique that is an “exposure of the contradictions of a society” and which “is about what is not there: about the impossible, the gap between kinds of articulation, the inability to translate between types of expression” (11). Mama is able to keep Lily and Victoria alive and indoctrinate them into her own social world, but that world is not the same as the rest of society portrayed by the living. The difference between Mama and Annabel is that Mama is the failure to be a living, or contemporary, mother. The gap she cannot translate is that of the living-dead and individual-societal binaries. Even though
Mama exists as a being within the living world, she is not considered a living being. The film follows her failure compared to living characters so as to emphasize this. At one point, Lily follows Mama outside but is abandoned to sleep under a tree in the cold night. Mama must leave Lily because Dr. Dreyfus is at the Helvetia house to expose the secret of her existence in the living world. Annabel finds Lily, brings her inside, and forces her to stay in her lap while she warms up the girl’s hands. The camera zooms in on Lily’s face as she stops struggling, accepts Annabel breathing on her hand, and copies the action. Part of Lily’s surprise is because Mama, up to this point her most trusted caregiver, cannot physically breathe on her hand to provide warmth—she may not even be warm at all. Lily accepts Annabel’s role as a mother because Annabel uses the power of her physical living body to connect with Lily’s own living body. Annabel’s connection as a living mother to Lily makes Mama’s inability to respond to Lily’s body all the more threatening for Lily’s future in living society. It becomes clear that Lily will not be able to become part of living society while she still views Mama as a mother.

The important differences socially between Annabel and Mama as mothers becomes a focus on their bodies and their individuality. To emphasize Mama’s failure as a living being, her inability to move across the gap, she possesses Aunt Jean in order to act more authoritatively in the living world with the girls. Towards the end of the film, Mama feels threatened by Annabel and the living world influencing Lily and Victoria. She takes over Aunt Jean’s body, but it does not make her truly alive. Her contorted, moth-covered face terrifies Victoria; it is not a convincing living body but a terrifying representation of both life and death. The possession functions well enough to somehow allow Mama to bring the girls to Helvetia, but Aunt Jean’s corpse is left behind in the house as a rejected husk. Mama sheds the disguise of a living being to remain in her true, individual form with the girls. She feels the most capable of providing for
them as a ghost in her individually created social realm rather than as a mixed-monster—a being which represents her failure to bridge the gap of her social role as a mother.

The focus on motherhood is not limited to the women characters: it also is enacted by the “ghost story” traumas that multiple characters work through within their own plot lines. Uncle Lucas and Aunt Jean both work through the trauma of losing their family members through the custody battle—a battle to provide a nurturing home. Even the ghosts of the film use motherhood as a way to deal with the past. Jeffrey Dusange’s ghost appears to Lucas at the hospital. As the lights flicker, a tilted shot shows the computer screen typing out “M A M A.” Moths flutter towards the flickering florescent lights and the camera pans down to reveal a black and white scene of Jeffrey walking out to point out his body. He commands, “Save my girls. Go to the cabin,” before Lucas begins to convulse. The computer screen rapidly types out the repeated phrase “M A M A M A M A” as doctors rush into the room. Why would Jeffrey’s ghost employ the imagery attributed to Mama, his murderer? What is the point of typing out “MAMA?” Jeffrey is concerned about his girls and wants to protect them from the past trauma that Mama has inflicted on him (and his children) by taking away his final empowered act as a disgraced “father figure.” Since he has already failed as a father figure in society, he must now use the power of Mama, the power of motherhood, to protect his children and restore his power. Jeffrey uses haunted imagery of Mama/Mama to fulfill a duty as a mother-figure in society by protecting his children, thus repairing his own failure as a father.

*Mama*’s use of horror genre tropes relays societal values about motherhood and trauma which further reveal each character’s individual concepts of motherhood. Grafius notes that “rather than a past that has created lingering trauma in only one character, the haunting in *Mama* is bi-directional, with multiple characters working through traumatic events” (2). The term bi-
directional is useful in thinking about how characters view time in order to deal with trauma. The characters understand past trauma in the present by working in the present to decode the past. Combining motherhood and trauma, the characters negotiate past trauma in the present through their caregiver relationship with the girls, or their socially-identified role as a mother. Jeffrey, a ghost trapped by his past, is able to use the imagery of his past (his association with Mama) in present time to save himself from further trauma surrounding his children. By doing so, he changes how he is viewed in the past as a failed father figure. The bi-directional trauma that each character faces is represented by the bi-directional sense of time each character experiences as a failed or imperfect mother. Each of these traumas focuses on a character’s difficulty relating to the present because of the past. What makes the film unique is that the ghost and living characters are able to navigate the different senses of time in the present and past. “Mama recognizes that haunting is often bi-directional, in that both the ghost and the human characters have difficulties in relinquishing the past, and are somehow drawn in to the tangled web of haunting” (Grafius 7). The focus on the haunting in the film becomes a focus on the characters and on motherhood. Each must relate to the sense of time present in the horror genre. Therefore, each character’s relationship with their own trauma, their relationship with the past, present, and past-in-the-present, is amplified by the narrative’s structure and sense of time in the horror genre.

The structure of the narrative in the horror genre upsets the sense of time in the film. Susan Stewart discusses multiple features of a horror story including how time and narrative function and interact with the audience. “In the horror story the expectations and tensions of receiving information sequentially are heightened and exaggerated in such a way that each addition of narrative information will not only affect the status of information given previously, it will affect the status of the listener himself” (33). The opening to Mama introduces this
concept of time and tension in order to establish the story within the context of a horror narrative.
The opening shot of the film begins with a child’s handwriting silently scratching out the words “oNCE UPoN A tiME...” while wind whistles in the background. As “tiME” is spelled out, a newscaster’s voice overlaps the sound of the wind relating the information about “panic” and violence previously attributed to the “crash of ’29” and “1987’s Black Monday.” The framing of the story as a fairy tale with the phrase “once upon a time” suggests that the next pieces of information will be vital to understanding the main action of the narrative. Already the film frames the sequential order, the order in which a fairy tale will relate vital information, as simultaneously important and missing. The next frame is simply black with the sound of the wind and the word “panic” bridging the title and opening shot. The “panic” not only makes the idea that the more eternal time inherent and presented by “once upon a time” is sinister in this narrative, it also implies that the next piece of information given to the audience will be sinister. Thus, when the newscaster/narrator discusses the murders committed by Jeffrey Dusange, the opening shot is tinged with unease and the idea that this story will be a fairy tale is mixed with its function as a horror narrative.

The combination of the opening title and first shot also serves to upset the idea of a sequential order for the audience altogether. The opening shot is a crane shot that moves diagonally downwards from dead tree branches to a car with the driver-side door wide open. As the camera moves towards the car door, the newscaster’s voice becomes louder and (along with the ding-sound from the open car door) it becomes clearer that the sound is coming from the car radio rather than non-diegetically. This shot connected to the words “once upon a time” creates a sense of unease about the concept of time itself. The sound mixing of the once non-diegetic news report blends with the diegetic radio and connects the news report on the radio with the more
abstract time in the opening shot of the child’s handwriting. Thus, the narrative’s present time mixes with the more unclear time implied by the fairy tale opening. Furthermore, the sound of the newscaster/narrator connecting the past with the recent news taking place does not match the visuals presented on screen. The newscaster/narrator is attempting to create a sense of understanding about the violence—by placing it within history. The film contrasts the contextualization by presenting it as a fairy tale—outside of time—and as a black screen in which the visuals to be presented do not have to make sense; they only need to relate to panic. The mis-matched audio and visuals suggests panic or unease even while the audience or the medium itself attempt to make the narrative comprehensible.

The narrative focus on time and trauma culminates in the final scene of the movie at the cliff’s edge. Mama, Lily, and Victoria are each forced to confront their own trauma through their relationship with each other; in doing so at the climax of the movie, each represents Mama’s final thoughts about the role of motherhood. Mama prepares the girls to fall from the cliff with her—re-enacting her previous loss. However, she is interrupted when Lucas stops Lily from joining Mama. Mama is about to kill Lucas when Annabel presents her with the lost baby’s body. A mid-shot of Mama cradling the bones, then a close-up of the baby’s head, and finally a reverse shot close-up of Mama’s teary eyes emphasizes the power of Mama’s relationship with her lost child. Annabel, Lucas, and the girls watch Mama as the camera pans around in a close-up of Mama’s new, more human-like face. In these moments, the camera freezes and Mama moves within the frame—sometimes escaping it altogether. She sobs with the first sound even remotely like a living woman’s voice as she clutches the body. Her confrontation with her past trauma, as Grafius argues, draws her further into the haunting. She is not human, or alive, but rather a more fully ethereal ghost. Her motherly status, her societally-accepted motherly form,
returns because her motherly relationship to her first child also allows her to deal with her past trauma.³ In other words, the ghost-as-human (rather than Aunt Jean’s possession form of human-as-ghost) becomes symbolic of the bi-directional relationship of motherhood and trauma in the film. She becomes a ghost-as-human, trapped in the trauma and joy of her reunion forever because her status culminates in the fairy-tale-endless time that the film narrative opens with. The “once upon a time” of the opening credits traps Mama within the tangled web of linear and non-linear time established in the opening shot. Mama’s connection to the narrative pacing of the film is also evident in the lack of tension in the shot. The music swells with a repeated line of melody evoking compassion, and the family—mirroring the audience—simply watches Mama. Linear time is returned to Mama, and the narrative, when Lily cries out. The sequential time Stewart describes as a feature of horror reasserts a linear timeline on the narrative which reintroduces tension for the audience. Mama turns away from the baby’s body and asks, “Lily?” She screams and hurls the baby’s bones off of the cliff’s edge in a slow-motion shot. The slow-motion reintroduces a sense of time to the narrative, emphasizing narrative tension alongside Mama’s return to a non-ethereal form. Her rejection of socially-acceptable motherhood, traumatic acceptance, and the timeless narrative reasserts her commitment to her own individual motherhood rooted in the film’s present with Lily. Mama becomes committed to the bi-directional motherhood that her body, itself interstitial, represents.

The strange ending in which Lily and Victoria are split up also articulates the film’s themes of trauma, time, and motherhood. Lily must deal with the trauma of being reintroduced to living society after living with Mama; Victoria must deal with her reintroduction and her loss of

³ An important note here is that Mama’s body does not return in this moment. She is still a ghost and not a living, physical body. As I will argue later, Mama does not regain her physical body because her ghostly body represents the ideology (rather than material form) of motherhood.
connection to living society from her time at Helvetia. Victoria negotiates her past in the living world and her past with Mama as they converge in her present reintroduction to society. Acting as the eyes of society, Dr. Dreyfus (mis)diagnoses Victoria with a split personality disorder in which she literally becomes Mama to deal with her experience in the cabin. He attempts to act out the film’s relationship between motherhood and trauma by imposing the diagnosis on Victoria. However, his diagnosis fails to account for Victoria’s self-advocacy: her chance to let go of the past, of Mama, to accept Annabel and move towards her future in living society.

Victoria is able to move away from the traumatic “web of haunting” that Grafius describes. Dr. Dreyfus’s misdiagnosis and the narrative time surrounding Victoria’s trauma has connections with her motherly actions at the end of the film. Victoria’s choice to stay is the moment she takes on part of the role of mother for herself. Similar to how Jeffrey uses Mama’s imagery to correct his past, Victoria also uses Mama to confront her trauma. When Annabel grabs Victoria’s robe and Victoria pauses, Mama turns to understand her decision. Victoria says goodbye in a two-shot close-up of Mama and Victoria in which Victoria holds a strand of Mama’s hair. The close-up again slows narrative time as Victoria acknowledges Mama and the motherhood/trauma that she represents for Victoria. As Victoria releases the hair and tearfully tells Lily “Victoria stay,” she makes her own decision about her future. Mama’s hair and Victoria’s momentary adoption of the language she used with Mama represent her use of Mama’s imagery to confront her past.

Annabel’s presence holding her robe help gives her the strength to realize her relationship to her trauma, but ultimately, Victoria herself is the one that says goodbye. Victoria’s self-empowerment, her role as a mother for herself, allows her to move beyond her trauma into the future.
As the girls are separated, Lily must deal with her trauma: she must confront her re-introduction to living society. Initially, she cries for Victoria, but as Mama pulls her over the cliff’s edge, a mid-shot of the two reveals Lily focused only on Mama’s face. Lily, supported by Mama, also decides to move past her trauma. While Lily’s rejection of the living world seems to be a rejection of dealing with her trauma, the film indicates that this was a good decision for Lily. A close-up shot of Mama and Lily reveal the two smiling and laughing before a white light encompasses the moment. The camera, from a lower perspective at the bottom of the cliff, reveals the pair hitting the same dead tree that previously separated Mama and her baby and exploding into thousands of moths. The camera cuts to a zoom in on Victoria and Annabel crying at the top of the cliff as they watch the aftermath. The camera’s relationship with the audience is important to analyzing this moment. In this scene, whenever the camera focuses on Mama’s timeless sense of narrative time, it is frozen in place. The frozen camera returns as Lily and Mama interact in the cocoon. Not yet outside time, the pair slowly rotate within the frame until they return to an upright position. Lily has chosen to remove herself from her trauma, to ironically not relinquish the past and become “drawn in to the web of haunting” (Grafius 7). It is also important to note Mama’s decision to return to her trauma and the world of the living in order to re-connect with Lily. The pair’s choice of each other asserts the importance of the interstitial relationship that Mama has in the living world. Lily becomes part of this concept when a beautiful, colorful moth lands on Victoria’s hand. A close-up of the moth spreading its wings and then flying away as Victoria asks, “Lily?” reasserts her new-found body in the living world. Is Lily really the moth? Does she exist as a truly living moth or is she timeless? The unclear ending confirms the power of the interstitial relationship that the filmic society has with
everything Mama represents about trauma and individual motherhood. I will discuss later further implications of this ending on an ideological scale as it interacts with the Imperial Gothic.

*Mama* as a Gothic Text

Mama is not simply a feminist, horror film; it also has strong roots in the Gothic. The Gothic and horror genres have some similarities in narrative characteristics; however, the differences in literary, critical, and historical reception and analysis speak to different functions. Clive Bloom discusses the differences, generically and historically, between horror and the Gothic. As a broad definition, he argues that “horror is the literature of disjunction. The dark passage that leads to the locked door becomes the paradigmatic scene, symbolic of the meeting of different worlds, the journey to the ‘other side,’ the site of the inexplicable at horror’s core” (221). In *Mama*, the “other side” is not as clear-cut as within Bloom’s definition. First, Mama, herself an interstitial being, does not represent simply an other; she is, after all, Lily and Victoria’s mother. Thus, when she crosses into the boundaries of living society, her passageways do not lead from a completely othered space. Secondly, Helvetia is a house abandoned in the woods; however, except for the influence of Mama’s presence, it is a typical house. When Jeffrey Dusange and the girls first encounter the house, it looks run down, but not uninhabitable. A legible sign surrounded by birds in flight invite the group inside. In fact, the house only becomes foreboding when elements directly related to Mama appear (a moth and her figure across the window). The furniture is outdated with a few leaves spread about, but in usable condition; after Jeffrey lights a fire in the stone fireplace, a mid-shot reveals his dark silhouette in front of the cheery fire and orderly, even colorful, bookshelf built into the wall. His presence in the house is more ominous than the house itself. Even the house in which the girls stay with Annabel and Luke is a mixture of familiar and other. The “research house” is filled with the
family’s things, the paint is new, the doorframes and lines all neat and straight, and the family dog fits in comfortably. However, its status as a house connected to Dr. Dreyfus’s research institution makes the presence of the family there more unnerving. The family is watched not only by Mama but also by Dr. Dreyfus because of his scientific research. Contrary to Bloom’s description of horror, both major settings are simultaneously ordinary and othered because of the characters associated with them. Furthermore, the ‘journey’ that Lily makes with Mama is left unclear. Does she travel to the ‘other side’? She certainly transforms, but her presence as a moth, within the world of the living, leaves the ending open for debate. The mixed status of setting and character growth makes a distinct movement from familiar to the ‘other side’ difficult to immediately discern.

Part of this movement away from horror can be explained by Suzanne Rintoul’s description of the interaction between the Gothic genre and Gothic criticism over time: “Gothic criticism comprises two structural camps. The first consists of surveys that attempt to cover several aspects of the Gothic in order to define it in its most expansive sense⁴” (702). The lack of borders and character journeys to the other side is one example of this movement away from horror and towards the Gothic. Rintoul’s second structural camp “consists of more focused studies of individual works that situate a definition of the genre along a historical, cultural, and political continuum⁵” (702). I would like to focus on this type of critical definition in order to discuss how the influence of ghost stories, folk tales, and the rise of film has shaped the genre.

⁴ Rintoul notes the following as examples: Fred Botting’s Gothic (1996), David Punter’s A Companion to the Gothic (1999), and Markman Ellis’s The History of Gothic Fiction (2001).
⁵ Rintoul notes the following as examples: Eugenia Delamotte’s Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic (1990), David Punter’s Gothic Pathologies: The Text, the Body and the Law (1998), and Andrew Smith and William Hugh’s Empire and the Gothic: The Politics of Genre (2002).
On a final note about a Gothic definition, Rintoul argues that while Gothic criticism is divided in its approach it is important to consider “how Gothic criticism might itself be read as it struggles to define—or resist defining—the fragmentary genre upon which it is built.” The strange relationship of the Gothic and horror elements within *Mama* (and surrounding the character of Mama) reinforce the fragmentary nature of the Gothic within the film.

Historically, the relationship between the ghost story and Gothic narrative is strongly linked. Briggs discusses the differences, similarities, and history between ghost stories and the Gothic: “the most characteristic form taken by the Gothic from, perhaps, 1830 to 1930 is the ghost story” (177). *Mama*, a 2013 film, draws from this same vein in its connection to the ghost story and its incorporation of the ghost as a character instead of a “natural” force to be confronted. In terms of film history, Heidi Kaye, in “Gothic Film,” argues that many of the “earliest motion pictures were based on Gothic fiction” while during the twentieth century “Gothic elements crept into filmic genres from science fiction to film noir and from thriller to comedy, so that it can be difficult to come up with a definitive idea of what constitutes ‘Gothic film’” (239). Furthermore, producer Guillermo del Toro’s direct interest in the Gothic solidifies the connection between the mixed elements of horror and Gothic present in the film. In combination, *Mama*’s filmic adaptation of the Gothic ghost story, like Gothic literature, resists a straight-forward definition of the genre and its use of the other—which may help to explain how Mama’s presence can have such a mixed relationship with the two genres.

*Mama*’s connection to the ghost story and its incorporation of the ghost as a character instead of a “natural” force to be confronted reinforces the film as a Gothic narrative. Briggs argues that “the ghost story reverts to a world in which imagination can produce physical effects, a world that is potentially within our power to change by the energy of our thoughts” (178). This
element of the ghost story is present in Mama’s rebirth into the world—her strong desire to fulfill her personal motherly duties compels her to return. However, the steps that each character takes to surpass past traumas do not mark only the power of an individual character’s thoughts. Both Mama and Annabel as imperfect mothers feel compelled to meet the standards set forward by the society (of the living) that they must interact with. Ultimately, they must confront their own individuality against the power of society, and the ideologies that reside in that society. Even Mama as an interstitial being cannot escape the social imperatives present in motherhood. When she is reunited with her baby’s bones she becomes trapped in the bi-directional trauma of the relationship between motherhood and loss. Mama’s rejection of her old baby and her acceptance of Lily also does not allow her to escape the social imperative of motherhood. She and Lily are still connected to the living world through their relationship with Victoria and the audience that marks their progress. In terms of the living society, Mama is a failure as a mother, even if individually she may be simply an imperfect one. Her strong push to fulfill her ideology as a mother, to fulfill her duty to her past trauma which transformed her into a ghost, is what pushes the film’s narrative forward. Mama’s societal failure as a mother reflects the horror genre in its attempt to keep characters trapped in their traumatic pasts; Mama’s ability to become an imperfect mother (to Lily and Victoria) complicates her relationship to a traumatic past. Because Mama is able to grow and adapt to the girls she makes the film difficult to categorize as simply a horror narrative. This unique ghostly presence in the film represents the “difficult-to-define” quality of the Gothic genre.

Mama’s strange role re reconnects the film to the critical discussion of unique aspects of the Gothic to refine its definition. The film’s resistance to a familiar setting also resists a clear character journey to the ‘other side’ moving Mama away from horror and towards the Gothic.
Perhaps the only journey undertaken to a “core” is that taken by individual characters—and each of those is unique to the character’s personal trauma or definition of horror. Two examples of horrific journeys that run parallel to the settings of Helvetia and the research house are the journeys undertaken by Dr. Dreyfus and Mama (both of which emphasize the portal that Mama uses to travel between locations). For Dr. Dreyfus when he finds out about Mama, his scientific inquiry prompts him to go to Helvetia to confront Mama within her domain. The horror in this scene is translated to the audience because of Dr. Dreyfus’s association with the living. The film emphasizes his journey to the ‘other side’ for Dr. Dreyfus through his own investigation. Dr. Dreyfus narrates over several shots involving Mama interacting with the girls, his own trip driving to Helvetia, and his journey becoming lost in the woods searching for the house. The end of this sequence is punctuated by his voice-over dialogue, “I will come back from Clifton Forge with an answer.” The framing of his voice-over indicates that, for him, this journey will be a trip into a place unknown to science from which he will return with new evidence to present before the scientific community—the holders of familiar knowledge. The film goes on to punctuate this journey with its own narrative pacing. Before returning to Dr. Dreyfus at Helvetia the film returns to a scene in which Annabel learns the history of Mama in a dream—from Mama herself. The jump between dream and waking in itself indicates a journey for Annabel: one towards realizing the truth of who is with her in the house. Finally, when the narrative returns to Dr. Dreyfus discovering Helvetia, he is confronted by the abandoned house in the darkness of night. To emphasize its otherness, the front door is covered in police tape and he discovers the portal covered in moths that Mama uses almost immediately. As he reaches forward to touch the portal, 

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6 Although the audience might relate with Dr. Dreyfus, his motivation to keep the girls close in order to use them for research also marks his relationship as uncomfortable for the family and potentially the audience as well.
the camera follows his hand in a closeup until his discovery of the other is interrupted by Mama’s guttural, heaving cry.

Perhaps on the opposite end of the other-familiar relationship is Mama’s journey into the core of her own personal horror: the loss of her children. For Mama, her journey to the other side is her travel to the research house. The other for her is less clear to the audience due to her use of the dripping moth portal. To the viewer, (like Dr. Dreyfus or Annabel) this portal is an encounter with the other, but for Mama it is part of her own power. Like the manifestation of the moths, it is a part of her self; so, for Mama, what is mundane in the research house is Othered. To explain Mama’s powers further, the relationship between Mama and the moths is revealed in the dream sequence story to Annabel (just before Dr. Dreyfus’s encounter at Helvetia); the moths erupt from her body after it has been floating in the lake after her fatal jump from the cliff. The reveal of the familiar relationship between Mama and moths emphasizes their own lack of ‘otherness’ for her own character—even while they are emphasized as ‘other’ for Dr. Dreyfus in the next scene. Ultimately, while the portal is familiar to Mama, it does take her to the world of the living where her girls now reside—for her, the “other side.” Thus, the combination within the narrative of the other side being both Helvetia and the more-familiar-to-the-living research house is another example of an interstitial relationship between the familiar and other: neither house is entirely familiar or foreign. The movement of Mama, or Dr. Dreyfus, between settings marks the introduction of the Gothic to the ghost story: “James’s view that the element of the supernatural should erupt within the familiar marks another significant point of difference from the Gothic, which more often follows romance in locating its events in exotic or bizarre settings, whereas the ghost story often takes place in a very mundane and often urban context” (Briggs 181). Each character moves from familiar to other, but the audience does not follow those exact perspectives
at all times. The fact that neither the research house nor Helvetia is ever entirely familiar means that there is always a sense of exotic or bizarre in the setting. For example, because Mama and her powers are consistently shown as other to the human characters, and therefore the audience, her presence in Helvetia—her domain—is still unsettling. Therefore, while for individual characters the supernatural “erupts” as in a ghost or horror story, the broader setting resists familiarity in order to create a more Gothic, bizarre atmosphere.

The premise of *Mama* as a ghost story also makes the film difficult to define as simply a horror narrative. As Bloom points out, the primary principle of the horror tale is that there is “always the presence of the supernatural, demonic, violent, and unpredictable usually present without explanation or logic and glimpsed at the moment it breaks into our world” (221). This may seem a good description of Mama’s ghostly presence within the film-world. However, while she is a supernatural and threatening presence for Annabel, Luke, and Dr. Dreyfus, she is also Lily and Victoria’s mother. Moreover, her actions are predictable: she cares so strongly for her child that she is willing to act as a surrogate mother for the girls and will do anything she can to protect them from outside forces. In addition, Mama does not break into a familiar world. As I argued previously, Mama’s portal never truly connects her to a solely familiar place—it takes her to the research house. Finally, the story of persecution she tells, and that the viewer/characters witness, is one of being birthed from our own world. Her birth is the movement from life to death and back into our world, but, ultimately, Mama’s creation starts in the familiar rather than the unfamiliar. Her backstory gives some diegetic explanation for her existence: “unlike the Gothic tale, the horror tale proper refuses rational explanation, appealing to a level of visceral

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7 Mama is able to “tell” her story through dream sequences; it is implied that this what Annabel sees. Victoria tells Dr. Dreyfus that she was able to see Mama’s story “through a dream” in one of their hypnosis sessions.
response beyond conscious interpretation” (Bloom 221). The rationalization of the supernatural character is due in part to the film’s connection to the ghost story and/or Gothic genre. Bloom tracks the historical connections between ghost stories and the Gothic; he notes that “[Gothic] supernatural events might be allowed to proliferate without explanation, or, in the alternative model favored by Ann Radcliffe and others, they might be rationally explained away. Ghost stories commonly provide an alternative structure of cause and effect, in which the supernatural is not explained away but offers its own pseudo-explanation according to some kind of spiritual law of action and reaction” (177). Along the ghost story line, the director at the library gives an explanation for ghosts in the filmic world by telling Dr. Dreyfus that a ghost is “an emotion bent out of shape, condemned to repeat itself time and time again, until it rights the wrong that was done.” Mama attempts to understand and explain the presence of Mama as a ghost story. However, the film also explores the othered ‘horror’ element, through multiple channels: Dr. Dreyfus’s investigation, her relationship with the girls, her story as shown to Annabel and viewers, and through direct dialogue explaining the diegetic universe. Unlike a ghost story, the film attempts to explore more deeply (or rationally) not just the cause of Mama’s existence, but also how she functions in the world as a rational being. This unique treatment of the ghost character arises from the elements of a ghost story and Gothic tale connecting with and combined in her character in the film.

The importance of the connections between the Gothic and the ghost story and/or horror elements are more readily analyzed by juxtaposing the film with a culminating Gothic novel—Mary Shelley’s 1818 version of Frankenstein. The connection between these two stories is present in how they both use elements of the Gothic and horror. Manuel Aguirre argues that the
“Gothic . . . owes a great debt to legend and folktale\(^8\) (especially in, respectively, their ghost-tale and fairytale varieties), while also partaking of the nature of myth” (3). After analyzing how *Frankenstein* follows the same path as Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* for the Heroic Biography, Aguirre argues that the “Gothic ought to be studied as a modern mythological system, one that has lent a new lease of life to a folklore threatened with obsolescence” (14). Both *Frankenstein* and *Mama* draw from folklore to relate their tales. Clark notes the strong connection between Mama and the “Mexican myth of *La Llorona, The Crying Woman of the River*” (64). I will argue further in chapter two about how this folklore connection between the film and the mythic indigenous figure of La Llorona serves to reinforce the film’s presentation of an imperialist ideology. For now, what is important to note is that both *Mama* and *Frankenstein* use a connection to a folklore structure as a traditionally Gothic structural element.

The specific elements of horror in *Mama* resist definition as simply horror—they also become distinctly Gothic in relation to the film’s connection to ghost stories and folktales. Narratively, both stories interrupt plot time through the use of a frame, or story within a story. In the case of the Gothic, Briggs argues that “from its beginnings, Gothic narrative had shown a tendency to proliferate, including interwoven episodes and insets, so that a story’s interaction with its frame might itself contribute to the tension between natural and supernatural explanations” (179-80). The frame of *Mama* presents itself/functions in two key scenes, the opening and Mama’s backstory dream. The opening phrase “oNCE UPoN A tiME...” introduces

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\(^8\) Aguirre places a folktale within the larger genre of folklore which “includes the prose narrative genres of myth, [and] legend . . . wondertales or fairytales being a subset of [folktales]. While myth and, (in a different way) legend, are grounded in a belief in the truth of their contents, folktales disavow any such claim” (3).
the action taking place on the screen as a story told from someone’s perspective while simultaneously displacing a sense of time. The true narrator is unclear (is it Mama, the newscaster, the director and/or screenwriters, Annabel?). The words are distanced even further by the newscaster’s voice on the radio introducing the tension of the abandoned car and Lily and Victoria’s father at their mother’s house. This frame storytelling is present at the start of *Frankenstein* as well. Volume I begins with a series of letters from Walton to his sister, Margaret. Within the letter he relates his background as an educated upper-class man searching for glory (9) and the eventual entrapment of the boat in the icy waters of the north (13). The letter in which Walton encounters Victor Frankenstein and the Creature similarly displaces time and narrative voice. Walton’s narration is typically in a present or timeless manner, as if he were truly talking to Margaret: “I write a few lines in haste, to say that I am safe” (12). The opening of “Letter IV” begins in the present perfect but alludes his present action of writing and a future in which they will reunite: “So strange an accident has happened to us, that I cannot forbear recording it, although it is very probable that you will see me before these papers can come into your possession” (emphasis my own 13). Like Mama’s fairy tale timeless opening, Walton’s letter throws the sense of time off balance before discussing the events of the main plot. The unbalance created between the timelessness and past events (discovering the Creature and Victor) solidify the past as dramatic precisely because it is concrete. The fate of Walton, where he is in time, is unstable, so the reader must look to the past events for security. However, since those events relate such strange (even terrifying news) the narration takes on a more tense tone.

The frame storytelling of the dream in which Mama relates her past corresponds to the Creature’s own story of self-discovery. The sense of tension that Briggs describes between the natural and supernatural is heightened in these scenes because of the double-layered structure of
the narrative at these moments. In *Frankenstein*, Walton’s narrative voice disappears in preference for Victor. The first time the Creature speaks as the narrator is while he hopes to persuade Victor to create a female mate/partner. Volume II Chapter III marks the start of the Creature’s story. Compared to Victor’s narration (or Walton’s) the Creature’s paragraphs begin with quotation marks to highlight the layers present in the overall narration. This heightened sense of the double narration distances the reader: how much truth can be drawn from the story being passed on by multiple people? The effect is that doubt which is cast upon the story itself is cast on the Creature’s plea for a mate. Further, the Creature’s superfluous language adds to the confusion of who and how to trust the story. The Creature describes his birth and consciousness scientifically: “It was with considerable difficulty that I remember the original æra of my being: all the events of that period appear confused and indistinct. A strange multiplicity of sensations seized me, and I saw, felt, heard, and smelt, at the same time” (70). Ordinarily, or like Victor or Walton’s accounts of their own journeys, this drab introduction and description of birth/consciousness does not hold much tension. The Creature follows a linear timeline and splits up the description of each sense even as it was split for him during development. However, the reader’s awareness of the story within a story within a story, projects Walton and Victor’s consciousness onto the story. The reader is aware of Victor’s fear of the being and his position seated “by the fire which [his] odious companion had lighted” (70). The tension in the introduction comes from what Briggs interprets as the story’s interaction with its frame.

This tension between frame and story-told-through-monster is paralleled in *Mama* and Mama’s dream-story told to Annabel (and Victoria). Mama tells her story “directly” through a dream that Annabel experiences. The camera travels from Dr. Dreyfus near Helvetia to the research house, and through Annabel’s bedroom door before rotating 90 degrees so that
Annabel’s body looks like it is in a standing position. As the camera rotates, the music comes in with a high-pitched choir that eerily slides down in pitch. Mama’s hand, holding a bloody sewing needle breaks into the frame with a loud musical note. Similar to the transition implied by the quotation marks in *Frankenstein* between narrator Victor and the Creature, it is unclear where the music truly belongs: is it diegetic or non-diegetic? Annabel’s eyes slam open as Mama’s hand enters the frame and the music hits. Does Annabel react to the dream, the sound, the hand, any or all of those presences? The lack of clarity in what element she reacts to makes the scene more unnerving. Like the double-framed story in *Frankenstein*, it is not immediately clear who is relating the story: is this a third person view from the camera; is it a first person view from Mama herself; or is it simply Annabel dreaming? The ending of the dream also emphasizes the multiple layers around the dream-story. Annabel wakes up as Mama’s arms hit the water below the cliff (that she jumps from) and the camera again rotates 90 degrees so that Annabel is framed *lying* in bed with her arms up like Mama’s. For a moment, Annabel and Mama inhabit the same mind—just like the squishing of Walton and Victor as narrator. *Mama* zooms out from a second layer of narration as Annabel turns towards Victoria (who is watching Mama gnawing on the mattress from under the bed). As Mama climbs up over the side of the bed to directly confront Annabel, she turns over screaming in terror. The bedsheets wipe the screen and both Mama and Victoria disappear from the room—Annabel and the audience are left wondering if it was truly a dream. The interwoven narratives contribute to the strange tension that is present in *Mama* between the narrator and the action unfolding on screen. As Briggs describes, the moment highlights tension between the natural/true and unnatural/Mama.

The similar mixing of narrative elements between the Gothic and horror becomes more apparent in the dangers the creatures (Mama and the monster) present to humanity. Susan
Stewart describes how horror narratives interact with audiences: “in the horror story audience time and narrative time collapse into each other as the storyteller proceeds” (34). She describes the clearest example of this being a “jump scare” in horror films. In *Mama* and *Frankenstein*, this time mixing takes place as the monsters tell their own backstories, and as the outer frame (Walton’s narration or the “once upon a time” shot) brings the reader/audience into the plot. However, the time-mixing of audience and narrative takes place most strongly in the most dangerous moments for the human characters; this narrative moment highlights the monster’s otherness. This moment emerges in *Frankenstein* when the monster unwittingly discovers Frankenstein’s younger brother (100). The boy is terrified of the monster, and the Creature attempts to persuade the boy to accept and stay with him. The double-layered narrator slows time by relating the Creature’s hope for love: “urged by this impulse, I seized on the boy as he passed.” Time is further slowed as the boy struggles and converses with the Creature. The tension builds as the Creature describes the boy’s words moving from calling him monstrous to talking about his father’s retaliation. The reader and Victor are both aware of the effect the named father will have on the monster. The narrative tension is released as the Creature’s narrative moves away from dialogue and speeds up the action by describing his murder: “I grasped his throat to silence him, and in a moment he lay dead at my feet” (100). The release of tension with the boy’s death, and the first murder by the Creature’s hand, marks a collapsed sense of time between the audience and the Creature experiencing the boy’s death. It also marks a distancing of the Creature from the boy, his humanity, and the reader’s humanity. The murder marks the final othering of the Creature in his inability to return to human society, humanity, or innocence; this transformation is mirrored by the audience’s reaction to his deed. If the reader was willing to give mercy to the Creature for his actions, Victor’s horror (given almost
immediately after the description of the event) at the murder and the Creature’s proposal to create a mate reinforces the response that the reader should have: “I could no longer suppress the rage that burned within me” (101).

In Mama, this narrative collapse to prompt the monster’s othering happens when the girls discover Mama, angry, downstairs. Victoria wakes up to find the closet wide open and Mama’s portal clearly exposed. After Victoria checks on Annabel, the camera pans back through the door towards Lily, centered in the frame. The camera moves shakily to the left as Mama’s form is revealed over Lily’s shoulder. Victoria's narration/directions to Lily slow time as Mama unfolds her arms: “Lily. Don’t look at her...she’s mad.” When Lily looks back towards Mama, Mama screeches and runs at the girls. Narrative and audience time collapse during the jump scare—again facilitated by the use of dialogue into quick action. The collapsing time connects the audience to Lily and Victoria, the human characters, and labels their enemy in the moment, Mama, as other. Like Mama’s children, William Frankenstein rejects the monster due to its otherness and the monster, like Mama, violently rejects his othering by the boy. In both cases, the otherness of the beings is highlighted by the jump scare technique interacting with the reader; both create tension through heavy use of dialogue and imagery until the “scare moment” brings together the plot and audience timelines. The bridge in timelines becomes important as the other begins to interact with the audience physically, socially, and ideologically allowing each element to transcend the narrative. The implications of the argument present at each level have the ability to become real in their interactions with the audience.

Gothic and Audience Interaction

Furthermore, the Gothic’s presence in Mama also connects the film to broader ideological arguments surrounding the Other. Like the ideologies of motherhood, the ideology of
Other-ness is represented in the bodies of the characters. The narrative tension created by Mama or Frankenstein’s monster becoming othered within a narrative becomes a focus on their bodies. The first horror (upon which other horrors build) that Victor feels towards his monster is the physical reaction to its body. As he looks over the body of the Creature before he re-animates it to life he notes that he had “selected his features as beautiful” but that “his yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips” (35). Victor anticipated that each component would create a more beautiful completion, but instead each body part fails to transcend a gap. The Creature’s body is a failure and, like Mama, it is a failure expressed through the body to achieve human life. Instead, the Creature becomes an interstitial being which at once crosses the boundaries between life and death but it cannot truly transcend the gap to become a living human being; rather, its ‘life’ is the image of death in a moving creature. As Victor escapes the room, he “listen[s] attentively, catching and fearing each sounds as if it were to announce the approach of the demoniacal corpse to which I had so miserably given life” (36). To punctuate the category of life-death that the Creature fails to cross, Victor defines its body as a corpse rather than a living creature. The Creature’s body defines its otherness. Briggs notes that in ghost stories, including that found within Frankenstein and the monster, “even the very ghosts themselves, are reproductions or simulacra of human beings” (qtd Punter 179). The novel’s characteristics as a Gothic ghost story use the Othered body of the Creature to emphasize Victor’s—and thus the broader culture’s—values.
The representation of the Other is emphasized further in *Mama* as the film uses the visual language of film to discuss her Otherness. While describing audience reaction to virtual bodies on screen, Purse argues that within the reasoning of the Judeo-Christian tradition, “the animated virtual body apparently draws to itself . . . an awareness of its ‘instability’ and ‘mutability’, unfolding an even greater sense of dread towards this ‘instrumental realisation of physical metamorphosis’ resulting in a feeling of being obliterated and only left with our ‘shattered and dispersed selves’” (qtd Turner 5). *Mama* uses a mix of make-up, practical effects, and CG effects to bring the character of Mama to life on the screen. By incorporating CG, the audience simultaneously with the diegetic characters become aware of Mama’s body and its mutability as a not-dead, not-alive being. Similar to all of the parts coming together to form Frankenstein’s Creature, so too do all of the parts of Mama come together to create a horrific interstitial being. The film, functioning within the horror narrative, uses the destabilization of Mama’s body to interact with the audience. When narrative time collapses during jump scares (as Stewart describes), these moments are accented by the Creature’s presence. In the case of Mama, her body alongside the narrative timing reinforce (and perhaps double) her Otherness for the characters and audience.

The consequence of the narrative interacting with the audience on a personal level through the elements of horror and/or the Gothic connects *Mama* to a broader ideological and social history—one with real-world implications for those who interact with the narrative. Noël Carroll defines a specific kind of horror in novels: “art horror” has an “intended capacity to provoke a certain affective response” in which “ideally, the emotive responses of the audience run parallel to the emotions of characters” and where “the humans regard the monsters that they encounter as abnormal, as disturbances of the natural order” (52). I argue that this affective
response is present in the Gothic abnormal monsters of *Frankenstein* and *Mama* propelled by the reactions of the characters, especially as timelines collapse. What is further compelling about the Gothic and horror narratives surrounding Mama and the Creature is that the ideologies that they represent also interact with the audiences.

The discussions of the functions of horror are immediately relevant as the monsters interact with the audience—making the stories and ideologies real to a non-diegetic audience. Bloom pulls from Carroll to argue that “art-horror becomes supra-rational, overriding the mechanisms of conscious response with pure emotion, felt through the reactions of the physical body” (220). When the audience reacts to the narrative collapse of jump scares, they are reacting to the monster’s Otherness in their own world. In the cases of *Mama* and *Frankenstein*, the Otherness is centered on the monster’s body and its inability to cross specific boundaries—particularly the life/death and non-human/human gaps. When the monsters attempt to cross those boundaries, their attempts are met with horror rather than sympathy because of their Otherness.

I will talk further about the importance of Frankenstein’s Creature attempting to integrate into society, but, for now, I would like to focus on an instance that functions more directly in *Mama* as well. The Creature, upon being freshly animated into the living world, is unable to speak. The sounds of the Creature instead pull Victor’s attention back to its body and thus inhumaness: “His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. He might have spoken, but I did not hear” (36). Later in the story, the Creature is able to talk, and also to relate its story to Victor. This highlights another important feature of the horror story: the power of an interchangeable narrator. The story’s narrator changes from Walton, to Victor, to the monster. This switch “further confuses the position of the audience. The narrator has become a listener and the story eerily begins to tell itself. Those who were speaking
are now silenced and those who were silent and inanimate now have voices and motion” (Stewart 37). In *Frankenstein*, this means that the once silenced Creature develops a sense of agency—its body can take on real-world consequences with the audience. Furthermore, the characters of Victor and Walton are silenced as they listen to the Creature. As I describe earlier, this adds tension to the narrative as the two men’s thoughts are projected onto the Creature’s narrative. In addition, the Creature’s story is able to take on a life of its own. This life, interacting with the audience, is the story “telling itself.”

The power of the story “telling itself” is shown in the comparison between the Creature telling its story to Victor and when Walton encounters the Creature for himself. The tension of the story through Victor is increased in the reader, but so is Frankenstein’s sense of sympathy for the Creature’s plight. The first time the Creature speaks, to plead for a mate and garner sympathy for its hard life thus far, Frankenstein has a mixed reaction. Towards the sympathetic side: “I felt there was some justice in his argument. His tale, and the feelings he now expressed, proved him to be a creature of fine sensations” (102); and “His words had a strange effect upon me. I compassionated him, and sometimes felt a wish to console him” (103). In the larger frame of the narrative as a whole, Frankenstein was the narrator but was replaced by the Creature. In this moment, his narrative influence returns to the reader and the story is framed by his reaction. Frankenstein’s emotional reaction prompts the reader’s reaction to the Creature. The difference between the reader and Frankenstein is emphasized in their status as actors in the story: their position as diegetic or non-diegetic entities in the narrative. Thus, when Frankenstein is able to look upon the Creature, his disgust begins to outweigh any sympathy the Creature’s story may have held: “but when I looked upon him, when I saw the filthy mass that moved and talked, my
heart sickened, and my feelings were altered to those of horror and hatred.” He attempts to ignore his bodily reaction to the Otherness of the Creature and acquiesces to create a mate.

However, Frankenstein’s initial sympathy for the Creature is reflected back to the audience—evidenced by the first layer of audience for Victor’s story—Walton. The double framing of the Creature’s story has another effect that Stewart describes, “rather than canceling the significance of the original event by displacing it, the horror story increases that event’s significance, multiplying its effect with each repetition” (36). In this case, the event’s significance is the sympathy the Creature creates with its plea. When Walton first encounters the Creature, he “involuntarily” feels sympathy for the Creature, at least enough to hear its side of the tale directly by “calling on him to stay” (158). In this moment, Walton’s involuntary refusal of witnessing the Creature’s Othered body emphasizes the sympathy expressed in the first telling of the Creature’s story. Walton acts out what Stewart describes is the consequence of narrator and audience switching. Walton’s sympathy for the Creature is involuntary because he has encountered the story through two narrative layers: that of Frankenstein from the Creature. Both sought to gain Walton’s sympathy, and thus Walton is compelled to react with sympathy—to listen. Walton, like the victim-character of a horror story, falls victim to the narrator’s tale. “While the audience is occupied in attending to the details of the victim’s plight, the narrator successfully snares the context of the tale and transforms the audience into the victim. The larger pattern of significance becomes the recounting of the narrative itself and its real consequences in the situation at hand” (Stewart 48). Walton’s purpose in the narrative of Frankenstein is to relate the story to his sister (and/or the reader) and thus the “real consequence” for him becomes his function as listener and story-teller. These are the “real” actions he can take. The power of listening is especially important in Stewart’s final note of the power of oral storytelling: “In oral
stories the direct quote and the sound effect serve [to victimize the audience], for there is nothing that intrinsically marks their effects as merely fictive” (39). Thus, Walton, believing the stories to be true, confirming the truth of the story in the appearance of the Creature, is compelled to speak his truth in the letter to his sister.

The final layer of the Creature-Frankenstein-Walton narrative is its connection to the audience through the singular narrative layer (that of the letter from Walton to his sister/the reader). The continued pulling back from the narratives creates the doubling effect that Stewart describes on the sympathetic power of the Creature’s story. The reader is prompted to feel sympathy through the lack of emotional response from Walton and tension from the realization of the narrative frame. The frame’s tension is found in the hostile landscape the Creature delves into: “He was soon borne away by the waves, and lost in darkness and distance” (161). Will the Creature truly disappear and stop his murderous spree? Will he no longer be a blight upon the Earth? These unanswered questions remain for the reader, aware of their being left behind by the end of Walton’s narrative. But, the power of sympathy is also present in these words. Before escaping, the Creature describes its sins—explicitly as sins—and expresses its wish to die. At the end of a long monologue it states: “Soon these burning miseries will be extinct. I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly, and exult in the agony of the torturing flames. The light of that conflagration will fade away; my ashes will be swept into the sea by the winds. My spirit will sleep in peace; or if it thinks, it will not surely think thus. Farewell” (161). This emotional plea recalls the emotional plea to Victor in the Creature’s request for a mate. The audience is prompted, like Walton, to sympathize with the Creature and its hope for the extinguishing of its sins through the extinguishing of its body. Thus, disappearing into the “darkness and distance”
also takes on a note of loneliness if the audience is able to connect with the sympathy extended by the narrative.

The effect of the story “telling itself” through the switch between narrator and audience also takes place in *Mama*. And, just like in *Frankenstein*, it takes place around the ‘telling’ of the monster’s backstory to elicit sympathy. I discussed the scene in which Mama tells her story as an example of narrative collapse—which also serves to build tension. However, the change in the camera’s point of view also serves as a framing for Mama’s story. The camera moves away from Dr. Dreyfus’s perspective and enters the house alone to find Annabel asleep in bed. As the dream begins, the camera tilts so that Annabel is in an upright position rather than laying down. Mama’s hand enters the frame and the narration is in the point of view of Mama—and Annabel through her status as the dreamer. Mama’s story is sinister as it tells of her murder of a nun, but it also elicits sympathy as the audience sees her desperation while trying to escape the police with the baby. She attempts to act as its mother. A similar camera set-up happens when Lily and Mama fall from the cliff. Victoria screams and the camera cuts to a shot of the pair falling from the cliff—outside of a character’s perception. A second cut to a dark frame shows Mama and Lily’s faces slowly rotating within the frame—in the opposite direction as the dream. They start at a canted angle, with Mama’s head in the lower left corner, and end in an upright position, still nose to nose. Lily giggles as the light brightens behind them. The effect of the shot moving from a canted angle to the upright position alongside the positive maternal imagery reinforces the concept that Lily and Mama are both happy. This form of motherhood is a positive experience for both of them. The rotation of the camera recalls the rotation from Annabel’s dream. Is this truly an objective camera or is it Mama trying to tell her story? Similar to *Frankenstein’s* use of pulling away from different narrative frames, *Mama* uses the objective camera as a way to pull
away from different narrative frames in order to elicit sympathy for Mama. The objective camera becomes Mama’s way of controlling the narrative for the audience. The change in perspective for the objective camera after this point also changes the significance of Lily’s moth fluttering towards the camera. The camera moves from close-up shots of Annabel and Victoria hugging at the edge of the cliff to a close up of Lily’s moth on Victoria’s hand. As the moth flies away, the camera pulls out and pans slightly to keep both girls in the frame. The moth eventually flutters out of frame when Luke joins the hug—the family’s subjective shot is reintroduced. This serves to emphasize the “objective” camera as it pulls away from the hug on the cliff’s edge. The shot is interrupted by the Lily-moth flying into frame and towards the audience. This ending shot is the final pull away from the living being and family’s narrative towards Mama’s perspective. As the moth (as Lily, Mama, and/or Lily-Mama) covers the frame it takes over the objective camera to provide an alternative model for what the family at the cliffside could be. The objective camera becomes a sympathetic eye for Mama.

The sympathy expressed by the objective camera is connected to the Gothic framing of the Other in *Frankenstein*. Not only do both deal with a monster as Other, *both also* use the Other as a connection to a broader discussion of the politics surrounding the Other. I have already discussed the social role of motherhood in *Mama*, but Clark’s connection between Mama and La Llorona adds further significance to the ideological role of motherhood in the film. In the article, Clark uses an eco-feminist perspective to argue that *Mama* and Mama are representative of the *La Llorona* myth because of their shared “narrative of a traumatic memory that repeats itself in different versions from generation to generation by word of mouth, in literature, songs, films, and other representations of popular culture” (65) related to “targets of abuse through the conquest and colonization of new territories and their people” (73). The representation of Mama,
the Other, as a figure related to the politics of colonialism relays another layer of her role as a mother within the film. This relationship between Mama, La Llorona, and the politics of colonialism is better understood through its connection to the Gothic, *Frankenstein*, and ideologies.

The ideologies in *Frankenstein* also have a complicated relationship with the material (bodies). Jonathan Crimmins argues that “Shelley sets a Gothicized sentimental against a Gothicized romantic in a double-directional critique. She critiques the utopian spirit in the genres of both the romantic and the sentimental by Gothicizing her two heroes, treating both Frankenstein and his Creature as the fallen angels of conflicting value systems and setting the two against each other as antagonists” (562). The Creature represents the path of the “materialist vector [which] originates in the bodily impulses, it travels upwards towards conscious thought at which point the head of the vector turns back to contemplate its origins” (Crimmins 569). Thus, while trying to understand the world through his physical sensations he must return to that materiality to understand ideological concepts like love. Victor, on the other hand, represents “the ideological vector [which] originates with the sociocultural and travels down towards individual experience, at which point it too turns back on its origins” (Crimmins 569) While trying to understand the death of his mother, Frankenstein becomes obsessed with materiality, creating material life through his study of ideologies (Crimmins 573). Both characters are trapped within their own systems of understanding which attempt to transcend themselves (either the material or ideological), but that movement leads to tragic consequences. When the two encounter and interact with each other they “provoke a Gothically violent response, and each becomes disordered by the painful haunting of the other.” The interaction between the character’s vectors and the Gothic reveals the power (or lack thereof) of different ideologies in
their lives. I will discuss in chapter two how the ideologies of imperialism interact with Crimmins’ notions of material, ideological, and the Gothic. First, I will focus on how Mama and Annabel represent similar vectors in Mama.

In the case of Mama, Mama is the ideological vector and Annabel the material. As I have already argued, Mama represents an alternative kind of motherhood: the kind of ideological motherhood which can be used to help character’s resolve trauma. Jeffrey, as a ghost, uses Mama’s imagery to restore his status as the symbolic father—he uses her status as a mother-figure to redeem himself. In the case of Annabel, she represents a physical motherhood: her ability to be an imperfect mother is based on her living body; and her ability to connect with Lily revolves around her body’s warmness. Annabel’s body relates most closely to the audience, as living beings, and thus is not read as terrifying like Mama. When Mama tries to understand the material, she possesses Aunt Jean which ultimately fails. Mama’s total embracing of her motherhood for her original child at the end of the film also prompts her body to change to a more ethereal, ghostly state similar to the ethereal ideology she represents. Thus, with positive or negative traits, Mama is seen as a ghostly figure. The focus on how Mama’s body interacts with the ideology of motherhood represents her ideological vector’s movement towards the material. Short notes that “positive traits (compassion, tolerance, empathy, understanding, etc.) are ‘claimed’ as being human, while more negative traits (aggression, megalomania, ruthlessness, unfairness, etc.) are associated with a ‘convenient’ Other: a historically-rooted process of subjugation” (Turner 12). In other words, when Mama holds her original baby she looks more like a human ghost because her body is associated with the positive motherly ideology of the living. When Mama is possessive and controlling over the girls (especially when faced with the living world) her body is terrifying and Othered. In both cases, while the ideological vector
moves towards the material in terms of its human (or non-humanness), ultimately its distinct comparison to Annabel’s body keeps Mama within the realm of the ideological. The “violent Gothic response” also takes place between Annabel and Mama as their material and ideological motherhoods interact. Annabel creates trauma for Mama when she begins to care for the girls—prompting Mama’s response of a physical abduction of the children. The material world intrudes on Mama, so she attempts to respond in a material sense to regain control. Mama creates trauma for Annabel when she takes Lily (and almost Victoria) at the end of the film. Annabel must interact with her own ideology as a mother by emotionally attaching herself to the children in order to save them. It is important to note, however, that like Mama’s inability to express the material, Annabel also cannot express the ideology. Annabel physically grabs on to Victoria’s robe and expresses her embrace of motherhood with a physical embrace of the girl. Ultimately, Annabel must stop the girls from becoming children with a mother in a non-material sense (in death/ideology) after they jump from the cliff through her materiality. I will talk further in chapter two about how the ideology of colonialism also interacts with the ideology, material, and Gothic relationship present in the film.
CHAPTER 2: FRANKENSTEIN, MAMA, AND THE IMPERIAL GOTHIC

*Frankenstein* and *Mama* are both Gothic texts that focus on a monstrous character in order to explore Gothic fears and ideologies surrounding the Other. The Other is also a preoccupation of the subgenre of the Imperial Gothic. Patrick Brantlinger defines the Imperial Gothic as “Gothicised adventure stories set in unfamiliar, faraway places,” and “it also includes stories in which characters, creatures or uncanny objects from those faraway places invade Britain, threatening domestic peace and harmony” (203).¹ Major themes of the Imperial Gothic include “going native . . . insanity, which is how going native is often interpreted . . . reverse invasion or colonisation . . . racial, civilisational or psychological degeneration, ‘sexual anarchy’ . . . and the possible reality of hauntings and other occult phenomena” (Brantlinger 204). The fear of “reverse invasion,” the “reality of hauntings,” and the unfamiliar are immediately relatable to *Mama* with Mama’s invasion of the living world through the girls and through her connection to the *La Llorona* myth. Clark describes the variations of the story which change due to region and storyteller. For example, some “Chicana feminists have created many empowering versions.” Domino Renee Perez’s *There was a Woman: La Llorona from Folklore to Popular Culture* argues that “La Llorona serves as a kind of cultural ambassador who can bring diverse communities into conversation about the cultural, economic, political, and social issues that inform the lore” (qtd Clark 65). The reference to *La Llorona* through the character of Mama brings the culture she represents into the film. This background connects her monstrous body’s Otherness to the Other of Imperialism.

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¹ Brantlinger gives examples of invasion stories including Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* and Richard Marsh’s horror story *The Beetle.*
The legacy of *La Llorona* in *Mama* combines with the other broad features of the Imperial Gothic as it functions within an empire. Ibreez Shabkhez argues that the Imperial Gothic “was essentially a tool for romanticising Imperialism, and the ‘exotic’ experience a compensation to both the colonised and the coloniser” (60). Joseba Gabilondo adds to that argument by noting that “the inhumanity mobilized by the Gothic novel is not only biopolitical but also geopolitical: it is not only about individual monsters or horrific characters but also about places and locations of horror” (156). The designations “colonised” and the “coloniser” are based on the location (or origin) of a character. Furthermore, when a character is monstrous they are part of the “colonised” or have been influenced by the “colonised.” In other words, the “colonised” is connected to the Gothic’s conception of the Other. As I argue in chapter one, Mama’s controlling behavior towards the girls, her failure as a socially-accepted mother, and her existence as a ghost make her monstrous to the film’s society and the audience. Thus, the film frames her as part of the “colonized.” The film’s movement between the Helvetia house and the research house create a character-dependent Othered space. This physical space intensifies the Otherness of the monster by adding the “geopolitical” to the colonized character. Like Gabilondo’s analysis of Imperial Gothic, the Otherness in *Mama* is also part of a physical space Othered by the world-view of the character in that space. As I argue in chapter 1, Helvetia is Othered for the living when Mama is present while the research house is considered Other for Mama. Like the fear of “reverse invasion” this movement of the Other between places is consistent with Gothic Imperialism.

The function of the Imperial Gothic during the 19th century as nation-building rhetoric appears in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), but with a cautionary tone. Glennis Byron notes that “Gothic fictions that address the issue of globalization . . . tend to expose the darker side of
the new world order, most notably in the ways they register disturbances to traditional identities and cultures. Globalization itself becomes a Gothic manifestation, a material and psychic invasion, a force of contamination and dominance” (372). In *Frankenstein*, the Imperial Gothic is, in part, represented by the relationship between colonizer, Victor, and colonized, the Creature. Victor, as the protagonist, is framed by Walton’s narration as someone trustworthy, a fellow colonizer—especially in comparison to the Creature. “He was not, as the other traveller seemed to be, a savage inhabitant of some undiscovered island, but an European” (14). Walton connects Victor with himself, but not completely. Victor speaks in English but “with a foreign accent.” In this way, Walton, who has yet to truly reach his dream of treading on “a land never before imprinted by the foot of man” (7), is still untouched by the physical and corrupting influence of a colonizer-colonized relationship. He is about to see the horror of it manifested in Victor as his fellow European/colonizer. Once Victor leaves his home in Geneva, he learns how to create the Creature. This is the beginning of the corruption Walton sees within Victor at the beginning of the novel: “his eyes have generally an expression of wildness, and even madness; but there are moments when, if any one performs an act of kindness towards him . . . his whole countenance is lighted up . . . with a beam of benevolence and sweetness that I never saw equalled” (15). After reading about Victor’s experiences with the Creature, it becomes clear that Victor’s initial description is due to his relationship with the Creature. Not only does the Creature interrupt Victor’s life after its creation, it also goes on to murder his brother, friend, and wife in different countries which prompts Frankenstein to chase it around the world in order to destroy it. Their ability to move between countries speaks to an increasingly global society; the dangers of their relationship speaks to the dangers of Imperialism in an increasingly global society. As Victor and the Creature interact with each other, their relationship becomes more destructive to everyone
around them. The threat of the colonizer-colonized relationship in Imperialism is the physical danger the Creature presents to the world because of its relationship with Victor. The physical threat of Imperialism is further implied by Victor’s positive reaction to the physical actions taken to help him. Thus, while Walton initially idealizes conquering the globe, his attitude is met with the sobering reality from Victor. The novel presents incredible advances in knowledge, science, and exploration while also warning of the dangers present to the nation and men involved.

I discussed in chapter 1 how in *Mama* the body is the focus of the ideology of motherhood. The impact of Mama’s monstrous body also represents a broader argument related to the ideology of the Imperial Gothic. Jeffery Jerome Cohen discusses the general traits of monsters in the article “Monster Theory (Seven Theses).” He argues that “the monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read” (4). Mama’s body can clearly be read in her social failure as a mother, but her body also emphasizes what is (un)acceptable. “The monster prevents mobility (intellectual, geographic, or sexual), delimiting the social spaces through which private bodies may move” (Cohen 12). Mama represents an ultimately individual motherhood—one that proves that mothers can be individuals, but that individuality is not socially acceptable. Mama’s unacceptable motherhood because of her lack of living body *alone* does not entirely explain the melancholic yet positive ending to the film. Diving into the film’s connection to the Imperial Gothic and *Frankenstein* helps to explain the strange tone. The connection between Mama, the Creature, and the Imperial Gothic also helps to explain how the Imperial Gothic has changed in the time between *Frankenstein* and *Mama*. Cohen notes that “‘Monster theory’ must . . . concern itself with strings of cultural moments, connected by a logic that always threatens to shift; invigorated by change and escape” (6). In chapter two, I would like to examine some of the cultural moments surrounding the Other in
Mama and Frankenstein to analyze the changing landscape of the Gothic and Imperialism surrounding each respective monster.

In Frankenstein, the Creature’s own focus on its body to interpret new experiences melds with the outside world connecting it to the landscape and people othered from Victor. In chapter one, I connect Mama’s Annabel and Mama with Crimmins argument that Frankenstein’s Victor and the Creature show how the different vectors of the Gothic align with the Gothic romantic and sentimental genres:

the materialist vector with the romantic, and the ideological vector with the sentimental. The materialist vector originates in the bodily impulses, it travels upwards towards conscious thought at which point the head of the vector turns back to contemplate its origins. The ideological vector originates with the sociocultural and travels down towards individual experience, at which point it too turns back on its origins. (569)

To add to Crimmins examples, the material-to-thought movement occurs when the Creature describes its awakening. The narration begins by describing the Creature’s material composition, body parts. After it leaves Victor and goes outside, the Creature embraces its symbolic material vector as it focuses on the physical sensations present in its body, rather than making a comparison to ideologies: “Before, dark and opaque bodies had surrounded me, impervious to my touch or sight . . . the light became more and more oppressive to me.” This description moves towards the ideological when the Creature awakens again: “It was dark when I awoke; I felt cold also, and half-frightened as it were instinctively, finding myself so desolate” (70). In this instance the Creature describes the same disconnection from the world and others, but bodies impervious to touch and sight are replaced by less material descriptions of fear and isolation. The Creature then discovers a village which also focuses on its body. The Creature recounts the experience stating, “some fled, some attacked me, until, grievously bruised by stones and many other kinds of missile weapons, I escaped to the open country, and fearfully took refuge in a low
hovel, quite bare, and making a wretched appearance after the palaces I had beheld in the village” (73). Rather than take an intellectually mediated approach to the world as does Victor through studies, the Creature reacts to the sights, feelings, and bodily registers of the world around him. He even notes the differences between himself and the villagers in their material houses. Thus, the Creature reads his own monstrous body in comparison to the village in order to determine how he fits into what Byron calls the “world order.” Within the Creature, and recognized by the Creature itself in its horror at its own appearance (78), the fear of the Other and the role of Imperialization, is “physically manifested.” Additionally, the movement of Crimmins’s vectors are at play here. The Creature attempts to learn about the idea of civilization—since he is not a part of it yet—and is met by a physical response which he understands by returning to the material description of their houses and his bodily pain. The villagers, as an unnamed mass to the Creature-narrator, represent ideology. Like Victor, they represent the ideological vector as a sociocultural response; and, like Victor, they move towards the individual/material as they physically attack the Creature before returning to ideology again as the Creature recognizes its own Otherness. This encounter connects the Gothic genres with the Imperialistic ideologies present in the concept of an Othered monster.

The connection between the monster and the Imperial Gothic ‘Other’ is reasserted in how the Creature’s creation and body come to represent what Edward Said calls the “Orient.” Drawing from Said’s argument, Shabkhez argues that the literature of the British empire represented “the image of the ‘uncultured’ savage [as] closer to human nature . . . this comparison was used to justify the narrative that the British were meant to civilise people of colour and the east, without conceding that their civilisation became ‘inhuman’ in its essence by this token” (53). In Frankenstein, the Creature’s strong association with nature through its body
asserts ‘Otherness’ as a being more connected to a “savage” human nature. In the previous village example, the Creature returns to nature in order to protect himself from humanity. Additionally, the Creature is directly connected to the eastern “Orient.” Jeffrey Einboden discusses *Frankenstein*’s (and Mary Shelley’s) references to the “Muslim East” and the important role it plays to drive forward the plot. The novel begins with Captain Walton’s descriptions of a friend with “unflattering attributes” which “[a]s the first gesture to an Eastern identity . . . this Turkish ‘silence’ seems an unpromising start, hinting at a pejorative, and perhaps peripheral, role for Islam in this Romantic novel” (Einboden 148). The Creature’s creation is also associated with the east: “Exemplifying its theme of ‘animation’ with an ‘Arabian’ allusion, *Frankenstein* not only imbues the catalyst of its dramatic action with an Eastern color, but also suggests the Eastern directions the novel will subsequently pursue” (Einboden 150). In Victor’s description of his astonishing discovery he compares himself to “the Arabian who had been buried with the dead, and found a passage to life aided only by one glimmering, and seemingly ineffectual, light” (32). This allusion is followed by another caution of leaving one’s home to go out into the world: “Learn from me . . . how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge, and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow.” The combined representation of the Creature’s body as monstrous and connected to the east reinforces the notion of the east and Imperialization as simultaneously exotic and “savage,” especially compared to Captain Walton. In this way, the Imperial Gothic combines the Other and the East with the monstrous and uncanny.

However, while the east in *Frankenstein* is viewed as ‘Other,’ it is not always viewed in an entirely negative light or as entirely distant. On top of the direct allusions from Walton and
within Victor’s warning, Einboden again points out that “the Muslim East will prove a consistent object of ‘interest and sympathy’ in Shelley’s novel, relegated not to mere passing references, but serving as a pivotal catalyst in the novel’s plot and its protagonists’ development” (148).

Victor again dips into eastern imagery to discuss his research and creation: “Both immediately before, and immediately after, his tragic creation, Frankenstein’s intellectual pursuits are framed through ‘Arabian’ precedents, with the East enveloping his Monster’s animation” (Einboden 151). This connection between eastern ideologies and Victor’s education, between “savage” and “civilized,” represents another fusion of the role of the Other in Imperial Gothic and Monster theory. Cohen notes that “in its function as dialectical Other or third-term supplement, the monster is an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond—of all those loci that are rhetorically placed as distant and distinct but originate Within” (7). Thus, while the east is spatially and ideologically argued to go about its intellectual business far from English values and civilization, Victor must incorporate it into his own framework to reach his goals—the east must become part of him, “within” him. In so incorporating from his readings what he then goes on to create, the Creature—the monster, is a “political-cultural monster, the embodiment of radical difference” (Cohen 11). Or, in Brantlinger’s terms, the monster as a fusion of east and west represents a kind of embodied “reverse invasion.” In *Frankenstein*, the monster’s creation is symbolic of the socio-cultural background of its creator; thus, the ideologies the monster represents, like the east, also become part of his creator. Ultimately, the two share the same tragic fate. The difference between monster/‘Other’ and the creator/civilized literally shrivels as the story continues and Victor is drawn deeper into the monster’s represented ideologies. As Cohen argues, the ‘political-cultural monster’ “paradoxically threatens to erase difference in the world of its creators” (11). This movement between Victor and the Creature as they develop (i.e. the
“erasing” of differences) also helps to explain Crimmins’ argument that Shelley critiques the Gothicized romantic and Gothicized sentimental as the vectors of ideology and materiality move bi-directionally. As the west confronts the east and the east “invades,” western ideas are framed more often with an “eastern light.” This influence is at once enlightening and “savage,” so it maintains a conflicted position of interest and separation. Ultimately, like the movement of the Creature from material to ideological back to material, the influence of the eastern culture becomes part of western culture while also maintaining distance in its Otherness. For example, Victor connects with eastern ideologies to frame the creation of the monster, uniting eastern and western thought. But, once he realizes the creation is a monster, he separates the Creature from himself and banishes them both from the world because of their monstrosity. Neither of them can (re)join society. The bi-directional movement between the Creature and Victor is also the bi-directional movement of empire and ‘Other.’

Even if *Frankenstein* is more than merely an Imperial Gothic text, *Mama* draws from *Frankenstein*’s mode of the Imperial Gothic in order to develop its monster, Mama. The result is a version of neo-Imperialist ideology represented by Mama and her monstrousness/‘Otherness.’ I have already described *Mama* as a Gothic film, especially when compared to a Gothic novel like *Frankenstein*. Byron asserts that

if one of the most striking features of Western Gothic has always been its propensity to prey upon itself, to delight in consuming and recycling certain persistent motifs, then the transnational flows that characterize globalization have functioned both to reinvigorate and intensify this tendency by opening up multiple new fields of play: the literature and film of different countries are feeding off each other to produce new forms of Gothic that reveal the increasing cross-cultural dynamics of the globalized world. (373)

*Mama* too draws from *Frankenstein* and other Gothic sources to create the ideology surrounding Mama. The use of previous Western Gothic source texts like *Frankenstein* maintains the push and pull between “colonized-colonizer” and Other-familiar in Mama and in her interactions. The
allusion to *La Llorona* is the first step towards Byron’s description of “cross-cultural dynamics of a globalized world” which also follow in the tradition of the Imperial Gothic. Brantlinger argues that Imperial Gothic tales evoke the “uncanny and supernatural” and, furthermore, that they “utilise a number of conventions drawn from older Gothic romances such as Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796) and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818, revised 1831)” (204). The allusion to the *La Llorona* myth alongside the Gothic elements from *Frankenstein* sustain the Imperial Gothic within *Mama*. I will analyze the common elements of the Imperial Gothic in *Frankenstein* and *Mama* in order to reach my final claim: *Mama* represents what Byron calls a “new form of Gothic.”

*Mama* and *Frankenstein* warn against the power of globalization and knowledge gained by colonialist means. When Victor first begins his tale, translated through Walton’s letters, he starts to talk about the books he voraciously read as a child. Victor argues that “[a] human being in perfection ought always to preserve a calm and peaceful mind” (34). This thought directly “moralizes” on Imperialism as he ends the paragraph: “If no man allowed any pursuit whatsoever to interfere with the tranquility of his domestic affections, Greece had not been enslaved; Caesar would have spared his country; America would have been discovered more gradually; and the empires of Mexico and Peru had not been destroyed.” Victor does not entirely discourage the pursuit of knowledge, only cautions that the learner-colonizer should maintain a sense of calm and distance. It is of great risk to the colonizer to go out into the world with too much pride or “imagination.” This message is repeated in *Mama* with Dr. Dreyfus’s death. After Dr. Dreyfus confronts Victoria about Mama’s existence, he argues that he must go to the Other place, Helvetia, to “embrace a different reality” and “[make] science expand beyond the limits of what we know.” Dr. Dreyfus’s decision puts the Dusange family and Mama in danger because he
intends to expose Mama to the world. While this research may lead to important discoveries in science, his quick-moving obsession leads to his death. He does not even consider how Mama, the ultimate individual, will consider his actions. Dr. Dreyfus’s death, compared to Victor’s, is a strange moment in the film. Up until this point, he has been a source of authority, safety, and comfort for the Dusange family; he is portrayed as a selfish but reliable and sympathetic character. But, as I argue in chapter one, the audience’s perspective does not always align with a single character like Dr. Dreyfus or Mama. Instead, it moves back and forth between and around each character. The narrative of the film before Dr. Dreyfus’s death gives Mama’s sympathetic backstory immediately after Dr. Dreyfus’s pursuit for knowledge. By including only the audience in these two narratively concurrent moments, the audience is set up to sympathize with both characters—for the pursuit of knowledge and for the victims that pursuit can create. The warning about the pursuit of scientific knowledge matches the concerns of *Frankenstein* and what Brantlinger notes as elements of the Imperial Gothic: (1) it “expresses anxieties about decline and fall that always seem to haunt political, military and economic success” and; (2) it shows the “possible reality of hauntings and other occult phenomena,” (204) usually associated with the “colonized Other.” Furthermore, the build up of narrative sympathy for scientist and monster is similar to that of *Frankenstein*. However, *Mama* moves away from *Frankenstein* and Brantlinger’s Imperial Gothic in its ending. The positive notes in the overall tone of the ending acknowledge the Imperial Gothic with the real presence of Mama while also pointing towards the fulfillment of some her wishes as a colonized Other.

As I argue in chapter one, the concept of Crimmins’s different vectors of the gothic, the ideological in Victor and material in the Creature, also appear in Mama and Annabel. In *Frankenstein*, the horror of the Creature’s body is the horror of Imperialism “physically
manifested.” Mama and Annabel are opposite vectors to Victor and the Creature. Yet, the bi-directional movement remains the same. Mama’s ideological vector moves towards the material as she tries to understand the living world the girls have been brought into. After her jealous outburst at Annabel, Mama notices Aunt Jean in the house. She possesses Aunt Jean as her first attempt to combine with the material world. This combination is met with rejection, however, when Victoria encounters Mama/Aunt Jean and screams in horror. Like the Creature, Mama’s attempt to interact with the other side of the vector results in her movement back towards her own because of rejection. The possession of Aunt Jean also signifies her connection to the “colonizer” since she is now connected to the material and in a position of power. In this moment, “reverse colonization” has become real. The film does not explain how Mama/Aunt Jean return to the cliff near Helvetia; it is only clear from the left-over husk of Aunt Jean’s body that Mama had to use the material to bring the girls back. Just as the Creature in *Frankenstein* interacts with ideology through literature to ultimately return to Victor for peace and then ultimately revenge, Mama too uses her rival’s materiality against her to achieve her own goals. In other words, Mama is able to use what Byron calls the “Gothic manifestation” of globalization as a “material and psychic invasion . . . of contamination and dominance” (372) to assert her own dominance. The Others in *Frankenstein* and *Mama* both use their status as an Other to assert their own authority, but the threat in *Mama* is that the threat of Imperialism is material—it has physical consequences for even the bystanders. This helps to explain the change in tone at the conclusion of each story. *Frankenstein*’s Creature escaping into the “darkness and distance” is ominous; Mama’s escape into the light with Lily is met with a combination of horror and peace depending on who is viewing the event. The tone of the film’s ending moves away from Brantlinger’s description of the Imperial Gothic as a “rendering of characters and actions in
Manichaean terms, treating good and evil as warring, irreconcilable absolutes” (204). *Mama* uses the history and imagery of the Imperial Gothic to further blur the lines between “colonized” and “colonizer.”

The difference in tone between the endings of *Mama* and *Frankenstein* can be partially attributed to the function of the Imperial Gothic in each. For *Mama*, characters are given agency and the audience is asked to look at the situation from multiple perspectives. The “irreconcilable absolutes” Brantlinger attributes to the Imperial Gothic are more flexible because Otherness is attributed to point of view rather than an essential characteristic. This is most clear in *Mama’s* use of frames within the narrative and specifically in how those frames deal with the dreams involving Mama—making her position in the living world more uncertain yet pitiable. While *Frankenstein* also frames the monster’s story, the narrative falls within Victor and Walton’s point of view. In *Mama*, her point of view is both within and outside of Annabel due to the objective camera. These small changes to perspective build on the tradition of the Imperial Gothic and *Frankenstein*, while also developing the genre further. *Mama* is able to be her own narrator and visually speak directly to the audience. As in *Frankenstein*, the narrative framing suggests sympathy for the monster, and by doing so, there is a sense of sympathy surrounding Mama’s version of motherhood and her representation of an Other based in Latin and South American culture. This movement away from a traditional Imperial Gothic is a movement towards a “neo-Imperial Gothic” which attempts to give the Other of Imperialism a voice and agency while simultaneously representing the suffering from colonization.

*Mama* uses the interplay between British Imperial Gothic from *Frankenstein* and the history of Imperialism in Latin and South America to give space for indigenous voices. The film uses the Imperial Gothic tradition of drawing from “colonized” culture to create its monster,
Mama/La Llorona. According to Cohen’s discussion of Monster theory, the monster functions “within the intricate matrix of relations (social, cultural, and literary-historical) that generate them” (5). Thus, Mama presents a series of different perspectives in order to balance the mixing of “colonized” and “colonizer” and the history of British and Spanish Imperialism taking place within the narrative. Joseba Gabilondo gives a historical background on the relationship between Spain and the rise of the Imperial Gothic in Britain’s empire-building. During the nineteenth century: “southern Europe is contemplated as the location of past imperialist powers that were feared in the past but now have become a decadent, eroticized space” (160). In order to build its own version of empire, Britain had to distance itself and its ideology from that of southern Europe, in particular Spain and Italy. This makes the combination of Frankenstein with the myth of La Llorona in Mama more complicated as it represents historically multiple layers of Othering. The multiple perspectives in Mama must account for the British Othering of Spain, Spanish Othering of the indigenous peoples, and the indigenous people’s Othering of the Europeans.

The distancing and Othering of British Imperial Gothic from Spain is also connected to director Andy Muschietti and producer Guillermo del Toro’s backgrounds as Argentinean and Mexican filmmakers, respectively. The film’s use of an indigenous legend becomes another kind of distancing move—this time away from British Imperial Gothic tradition. Byron notes that “Gothic in these [Canadian, Australian, and New Zealander] contexts frequently functions to contest the more optimistic foundational narratives of new worlds, and, in a more contemporary context, often continues to give expression to lingering traumas produced by colonial life, with buried pasts resurfacing in horrific form to disturb the present” (369). Like Byron’s note of Canadian, Australian, and New Zealander narratives, Mama also attempts to express the
lingering trauma produced by colonial life.” Characters are pulled deeper “into the web of haunting” as they fail to deal with their own trauma; this haunting can either help or hurt characters further. Mama’s interaction with the “colonizing” material world is traumatic for her; she must define her own sense of motherhood to achieve her happy ending with Lily. Lily and Victoria being taken from Mama leads to further trauma for the girls as they confront living society; the next generation living in an Imperialist world face traumas from the Othering and separation associated with the binary of “colonized” and “colonizer” culture in a combined world.

The combination of voices in Mama as they revolve around the monster resonate with the ideologies of other contemporary Imperial Gothic films and producer Guillermo del Toro’s own attempt to create a multi-cultural film-making language. Alec Morgan discusses the aesthetic and political reach of del Toro. Morgan notes that del Toro was dissatisfied by a “lack of humanistic themes” in North American horror and hoped to create his own “cinematic Esperanto,” a new cinematic language that “will transcend national and cultural barriers by reducing the reliance on expositional dialogue . . . and replacing it with compositional elements capable of expressing the narrative both visually and symbolically” (89) as a counter. Guillermo del Toro’s attempt to globalize cinematic language, effectively making it more accessible to a wider audience, means that more audience members will be able to interact with a larger variety of cultural impacts. Byron notes an important precaution with this effect of globalization: “as new figures from myth and folklore become internationally appropriated . . . a kind of cultural deterritorialization often seems to take place” (374). The consequence of this international filmic language which, like monsters, dissolves the barriers between different cultures can limit how the narrative expresses the impact of ideologies and Imperialism. For example, Johan Höglund discusses contemporary
Imperial Gothic films such as *War of the Worlds* (2005) and *The Chronicles of Riddick* (2004). He draws from Teresa Doddu’s *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation*, to argue that “the gothic can remain continuous with official narratives, even when it apparently contradicts them . . . its transformative power can be limited” (31). In other words, gothic texts still tend to reinforce the Imperialist ideologies they seemingly subvert. Höglund notes that *War of the Worlds* reaffirms “traditional family values and . . . the culture of fear that has permeated the United States after 9/11” even while it allows “a counter-current of imperial critique through its depiction of a people suffering the ruthless exploitation of an inhuman coloniser” (37). Along the same lines, *Mama* questions motherhood within a traditional family structure yet also re-affirms a traditional family structure by keeping Victoria within a traditional family with a socially-accepted mother and father figure. Comparatively, *The Chronicles of Riddick* attempts to “transform, at least on a subliminal level, official discourse” through a contrast of the “hero with an oppressive, ideologically conservative and militarily superior empire” (Höglund 36). *Riddick*’s straightforward rejection of the empire allows it to straightforwardly reject the empire of Imperialism. Mama and Annabel’s motherhoods are more complicated. While Annabel is generally rejected by the authority figures who contact her, she is still a socially-acceptable mother as a living being according to the narrative. Mama, contrasted with Annabel, is initially a failure as a mother, but as the film builds sympathy around her character, her motherhood becomes more acceptable. The ending to *Mama* suggests that both kinds of motherhood are acceptable since both characters remain mothers. While *Riddick* draws from a gothic villain of the “late-Victorian novel” (Höglund 37) to create sympathy for the Other, *Mama*’s connection to the Imperial Gothic tradition in *Frankenstein* to subvert the audience’s view of the monster allows the traditional, British colonizer concepts of motherhood to continue with the Other.
The impact of Byron’s “deterritorialization” within the framework of the Imperial Gothic explains the complicated narrative tone at the end of *Mama*. Byron gives a final clear remark about how indigenous characters might be viewed by a global audience with regards to a history of the Imperial Gothic. He discusses another film which, like *Mama*, attempts to use *La Llorona* within an Imperial Gothic format: “*Kilómetro 31* makes Gothic the cycle of aggression and revenge underlying the *La Llorona* myth to deal more generally with the horrific returns of the past” (375). *Mama*, like *Kilómetro 31*, also uses aggression and revenge within *Mama/La Llorona* to deal with the traumas of Imperialism. The opposition between indigenous and colonizer in the Imperial Gothic upholds the tendency “to preserve and enforce binary thinking and to articulate a nostalgic fantasy of a return to a culture and tradition, reinstating supposedly ‘purer’ and more ‘stable’ worlds and identities in the face of what are seen as the homogenizing and dehumanizing forces of the new world order” (Byron 372). However, Mama’s function as a caring and capable individual mother-figure, like the role of the monster, allows it to move away from simple binaries. For example, Mama is allowed a sympathetic moment with Lily, thus validating her motherhood for the audience (rather than for the other non-present characters). This moment reconnects with gothic novels set in Spain: “when the gothic novels are situated in Spain identification works in a more powerful and haunting way because there is a simultaneous and final disidentification” (Gabilondo 161). The disidentification with Mama as she moves entirely away from a socially-accepted mother and towards a complete ‘Other’ is the moment she gives up her humanoid form to transform into moths which flutter away. Yet, her combination with Lily makes her more human since she now has a stronger connection to the Dusange family. In terms of the symbolism of the Imperial Gothic, the combination of Mama and Lily allows the Other to return to what Byron calls a “pure” and “stable world.” Mama-Lily and the Dusange
family respectively are able to return to their own sense of stability. They are no longer a “homogenized” or “dehumanized” “new world order.” In this sense, the film creates a “happy ending.” But, the film continues to blur boundaries. The Mama-Lily moth is tragic because Victoria and Lily are separated—the tragedy of Imperialism is still real. Additionally, the Mama-Lily moth is ominous because it is a reminder of the Other. Like Frankenstein’s Creature, its disappearance into the blackout at the end of the film leaves the audience wondering if the monster is truly gone. Will Mama return? Is she satisfied? Her presence lingers as does the Creature’s. Her impact is still felt. What makes Mama different from Frankenstein is that the film builds on this idea of lingering Imperial trauma. Rather than disappearing into the “darkness and distance” Lily-Mama flies right at the camera. She does not fade; she takes up the entire frame. The Other of monstrosity, motherhood, and Imperialism does not disappear. It impacts Victoria and the audience and blurs the lines between familiar and Other.

The conclusion to Mama is also a final note on the role of Gothic Imperialism as a kind of “neo-Gothic Imperialism” within the film. Mama’s transformation solidifies her Otherness yet brings her closer to humanity. The final disidentification of the film keeps her voice from fading away because she remains immediate and individual to the audience because of her combination with Lily and because of her direct audience connection via the horror/narrative elements. Since Mama’s story is told visually in dreams, the visual combination of Mama-Lily in the moth retains a sense of Mama’s individualism. In this way, the monster Mama, as a representation of “the colonized” in Imperialism does not lose her individual voice to the ideology of colonization. Finally, the sense of realism at the ending of the film upsets the fairy-tale time introduced in the opening’s “once upon a time.” The revelation of Mama’s real existence through Dr. Dreyfus’s research and her ability to materially impact the Dusange family asserts her real existence. Thus,
the moth flying towards the camera at the end suggests her real relationship to the audience. It asserts her real relationship to the indigenous myth of *La Llorona* and the real impact of Imperialism for the audience. The Mama-Lily moth as simultaneously happy, tragic, and ominous represents both the individual voices lost to Imperialism while also valuing the world with all of its trauma that has been created because of it. The mixed-up ending asserts that returning to the fairy-tale opening is impossible and we must confront the monster before us.
CONCLUSION

*Mama* is a film that deals with the individual, social, and ideological implications and responsibilities of motherhood. Mama herself, while an individually imperfect mother, is a socially failed mother because she does not have a living body. In comparison, Annabel is a socially acceptable mother precisely because of her body. The film’s focus on the body reveals a major preoccupation of a modern monster film: watching someone/thing *become* a monster. The focus on the body as an element of becoming monstrous reveals societal binaries and boundaries surrounding different ideologies. In the case of *Mama*, this reveals motherhood as a function rather than as a state-of-being. Motherhood is then used in the film to help characters work through different kinds of trauma.

The film’s use of narrative framing, time, and focus on the body is also a fundamental element of the Gothic genre. Comparing *Mama* to *Frankenstein* reveals similarities in how both treat the Other and what the Other represents. For both sets of characters, the material and ideological vectors (that Crimmins analyzes in *Frankenstein*) are used to break down the binaries of life-death and human-nonhuman. The narrative framing of a Gothic text also connects the narrative directly to the audience. The story is able to become simultaneously real and fictional to those interacting with it.

The connection between material and ideologies comes together in *Frankenstein* and *Mama*’s discussion of the Imperial Gothic. *Frankenstein* parallels more closely Brantlinger’s definition with the elements of “reverse invasion,” “fear of a new world order,” and treatment of the East as a feared and exoticized Other. While *Mama* also draws these elements from *Frankenstein* and the Imperial Gothic, it also moves towards what Byron calls a new form of the
genre. By adding more independent voice to the Othered Mama in the narrative, the film allows
the “colonized” to speak through the tradition of Imperialism. The film’s ending becomes like a
puzzle: it is possible to see the picture of the whole tradition of Imperialism while also noting the
picture on each piece individually. This perspective speaks to del Toro’s imaginings of a
“cinematic Esperanto” able to reach a broader audience through its visuals and symbolism since
there are so many represented perspectives. In the case of Mama, this also means that the film
can register and confront the audience about the tragedy, fear, and hope present in modern-day
society due to the ideologies of Imperialism.

The next step is to consider other films and texts which deal with this kind of “neo-
Imperial Gothic.” Is this kind of voice only possible within the frame of modern monster or
horror films, or do other genres use similar methods to confront audiences? It is also important to
consider the positives and negatives of a “deterritorialized” global storytelling. While del Toro’s
cinematic Esperanto can bring new stories and ideas to a broader audience, what cultural
background does the audience miss? If someone does not know about La Llorona, can they still
connect to the Gothic Imperialist themes present in the film? Should they? These questions all
lead back to another message of Mama: we cannot treat our past like a fairy tale. We must
confront the realities of our history, even if they are ugly or painful. We have to be able to look
at her—even if she’s mad.


