



# Sharp Objects' Adora Crellin: a Psychoanalytical Approach

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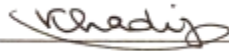
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# Abstract

The matriarchal force of destruction in Gillian Flynn's *Sharp Objects* (2006) is one which affects the characters in irreversible ways. While the existing research mainly focuses on the characters of Camille and Amma with feminist approaches, the subject of study in this research is Adora Crellin, explored through Carl Jung's psychoanalytic theories of the primary archetypes, the mother image and its complexes. The imbalance of her psyche is investigated through over identification with the persona, the repressed shadow, the animus and the disintegration of the self. In addition, the image of the mother is applied to her, in order to demonstrate her deviation from it and the complex this created in her children.

# Introduction

Gillian Flynn's *Sharp Objects* (2006) is a novel of profound violence, rooted in cycles of abuse and self harm. The deeply disturbed characters of it have been the subject of many research studies, from myriad perspectives. Yet, there remains much to be discussed about the matriarch in particular, Adora Crellin, to pick apart these generational traumas. The main objective of this analysis is to apply Carl Jung's Primary Archetypes and Mother Archetype to Adora in order to shed light upon her violent drives and abusive behaviour.

Gillian Flynn is a best-selling American novelist, born in Missouri, in 1971 and known for her dark, psychological thrillers. In addition to *Sharp Objects*, her debut novel which was published in 2006, she has written two novels, titled *Dark Places* and *Gone Girl*. (Encyclopedia Britannica). According to The Guardian, Flynn's midwestern settings are frequently inspired by her own background, and the landscape has a significant impact on the characters. The author also attributed her success to her 15 years of expertise and master's in journalism before transitioning to creative writing. She formerly worked as a film writer and television critic. She even turned to screenwriting after her critical acclaim, creating the screenplay for the David Fincher adaptation of *Gone Girl*. (The Guardian, 2013).

*Sharp Objects* is a book in which Camille Preaker, a troubled journalist, is assigned to her hometown, Wind Gap, Missouri to investigate the disappearance and murder of two young girls. Given her complex ties to her family and the residents of the town, the homecoming causes trauma to rapidly arise for the alcoholic reporter, who has spent the majority of her life fleeing the abusive cycles this town harbours.

The pain of her sister's passing still weighs heavily on her chest, and every second she spends at Wind Gap puts salt on the wound. Her domineering mother, Adora who puts her grief on display still exacerbates this suffering further. Along with the investigation, Camille's mental health deteriorates at a great rate. The victims were brutally murdered, their teeth extracted and their bodies beaten. The local police do little to assist Camille and are unable to uncover the perpetrator quick enough to ease the trauma of the situation. Furthermore, she was previously hospitalised for her habitual self-harm, which is brought back by her seemingly permanent residence in her childhood home.

As she learns more secrets about the community, including that of her own mother, Camille becomes repulsed and unable to handle the violence surrounding her. In the midst of everything, she feels compelled to look after Amma, her half-sister. Amma serves as a reminder of Marian, her deceased younger sister, although she is peculiar and obsessive. This connection is strengthened when she discovers that Adora has been poisoning Amma, as she has done in the past to Marian, who died due to the toxins in her system.

Before Camille can inform the detective that her mother might be responsible for the killings, she gets poisoned herself. After a painful period of being cared for by her mother, who has Munchausen by proxy, Adora is arrested for the murders and Camille takes her half sister back to Chicago. Shortly afterwards, a friend of Amma's turns up dead in a similar manner to that of the two young girls in Wind Gap and Camille realises that it has been her sister all along, who committed the murders. The two girls were being cared for by Adora and it sparked the jealousy of Amma, who often willingly allowed herself to be poisoned in exchange for her mother's love and care.

The narrative of murder in Wind Gap serves as a frame for the underlying generational trauma and psychology of motherhood. The quest to find the perpetrator becomes secondary to unravelling the mystery behind the unending cycles of violence in this matriarchal family, wherein everything is controlled by a mentally unstable mother. Adora damages her children to the same point of psychological instability and mental illness as her own. They share her desire for violence, as evidenced by Camille's self-harm or Amma's killing of her friends. The transference of trauma is what keeps the cycle running. The aim of this analysis is to study the complex psyche of this mother and pick apart her behaviour and driving forces.



# Literature Review

*Sharp Objects* has garnered significant critical attention, though most studies tackle the complexities of its characters through the lens of feminism or trauma theories.

In *Sharp Objects by Gillian Flynn: “Persistence of Patriarchal Motherhood and the Nascence “Odd” Monstrous-Feminine”* (2021) Siti Alifah Tamir and Mina Elfira explore patriarchal motherhood values and the monstrous femininity in *Sharp Objects*, utilising Elaine Showalter's Feminist Literary Criticism theory and Barbara Creed's Monstrous-Feminine theory. They attributed Adora's criminality to her patriarchal, strict upbringing and society's standards for perfection in motherhood. Her role as the terrible mother, as disturbing as it is to the characters, is not shown directly to society. Her unnatural behaviour is buried beneath layers upon layers of kindness and victimhood. She remains the loving, grieving mother up until her arrest at the end.

A more elaborate analysis of the monstrous mother is present within Maysaa Jaber's "Monstrous Mothers and Dead Girls in Gillian Flynn's *Sharp Objects* and *Gone Girl*." Wherein, she examines Gillian Flynn's predominant female images, including the image of the mother who inflicts harm on her children rather than nurture. The focus on motherhood within *Sharp Objects* sparks discussions on "the sociocultural standard of good versus bad mothers." and the gender identity of women, as defined by motherhood in the eyes of society. (Jaber, 2022) Often portrayed as helpless victims, the representation of female violence from a position of victimhood challenges the typical

depiction of women in the genre of thriller, such as the evil seductress and the sexual predator. The female in this novel is thus both the victim and the abuser, completely transcending the loving, docile image of feminine motherhood in patriarchal societies.

Proceeding with the theme of female perversion, Soheila Farhani Nejad, in “Inscribing Pain: Female Perversion and the Maternal Imago in Gillian Flynn’s *Sharp Objects*,” uses Estela Welldon and Anna Motz's views to connect various perverse acts of the female characters to troubled, abusive parenting and the social ideals of motherhood. Due to factors such as anxiety and emotional abandonment in mother-child relationships, perversion arises and takes the shape of hostility towards the self and others. Particularly, in females, it’s turned towards their own body or the bodies of their children. In the case of Adora, she inflicted pain upon her children, who in turn, directed it towards themselves and other people. Camille uses self-cutting to both harm and tend to herself, embodying the role of her mother. Whereas, Amma expresses her violence through murder and sexual deviance. Thus, the cycle of abuse does not end.

The psychological conditions and mental disorders of *Sharp Objects*’ characters were also discussed extensively, including post-traumatic stress disorder and Munchausen by proxy. An example of the former is “Trauma and Treatment in Gillian Flynn’s *Sharp Objects* through Judith Herman’s Theories.” Mehrgan Rezaeian, Behzad Pourgharib and Abdolbaghi Rezaei Talarposhti worked through the framework of Herman’s trauma studies to discuss symptoms of PTSD present within *Sharp Objects*’ characters. First one is titled “hyperarousal”, wherein the traumatised individual’s sympathetic nervous system is altered by the emotional shock. This is evidenced in several

effects of aggression, irritability, startledness, among others. The second being “intrusion”, taking form in nightmares and flashbacks, intruding on the mind of the victim consistently. And lastly, “constriction”, consisting of distortion of identity and reality, all of which can be linked to the behaviours of the characters in the family of Adora, who is the cause of the post-traumatic stress disorder.

After identifying the feminist and clinically psychological approaches used in previous research, as well as a lack of psychoanalytic studies, particularly on Adora Crellin, this study will fill the gap by focusing on Adora's character and psyche rather than the nature of feminine violence.

# Methodology

The series of murders, self harm and long term abuse of the novel are tied back to the mother of the main characters, who acts as the binding link of generational trauma. Thus, shedding light on her psyche and the representation of the mother figure within her will explain the behaviours of not only Adora, but her children as well. For this aim, research through Carl Jung's mother archetype and the four primary archetypes will be applied to Adora.

The image of the mother has been subject to psychological study throughout history, as it appears everywhere, from ancient mythology, to religion, art and literature. In Carl Jung's *Four Archetypes* (1970), the archetype contains figurative and literal meanings of the mother, as it is mentioned in regards to the personal mother, grandmother and any other nursing figure. Just as it is also associated with anything "arousing devotion or feelings of awe ...Heaven, earth, the woods, the sea ... because of the protection it implies, the magic circle or mandala." (15) But as peaceful and grand these associations are, the mother image has proven to be connected to far more negative aspects, such as "anything secret, hidden, dark, the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces and poisons." (16) Figures of the loving and terrible mother have been known across cultures, whether from Christian Virgin Mary "who is not only not only the Lord's mother, but also, according to the medieval allegories, his cross." (16) or Indian Kali who is the goddess of time, change, creation, power, destruction and death. These opposing sides of the mother represent her ability to both be a symbol of care and harm.

Through disturbances with the mother archetype, children, particularly females in the case of *Sharp Objects*, can develop a mother-complex, in which they suffer from either a hypertrophy of the feminine side or an atrophy of it. An increase in femininity may lead the woman to put special importance on childbirth. As Jung explains, “To her the husband is obviously of secondary importance; he is first and foremost the instrument of procreation, and she regards him merely as an object to be looked after, along with her children, poor relations, cats, dogs, and household furniture.” (21) On the other hand, an atrophy of the feminine aspect may cause identification with the mother and lack of femininity in the daughter. Jung explains this concept of the mother complex in the following excerpt. “Everything which reminds her of motherhood, responsibility, personal relationships, and erotic demands arouses feelings of inferiority and compels her to run away— to her mother naturally, who lives to perfection everything that seems unattainable to her daughter.” (23) However, this reliance on feminine projection renders the daughter’s life a “shadow existence, sucked dry by her mother.” (23) and produces a dependent individual who lives life through her mother rather than herself. Lastly, resistance to the mother is deemed the most extreme type of the negative mother complex, in which the daughter wishes to be anything but like her mother. All of her maternal instincts are thus useless and do not assist her in building her own life. It can also sometimes result in “spontaneous development of intellect for the purpose of creating a sphere of interest in which the mother has no place.” (25) This shunning of the mother from the daughter’s life can cause a vast rift in mother-daughter relationships.

Toni Wolff, a Jungian analyst expands on the image of the good and bad mother in her essay “Structural Forms of the Feminine Psyche” (1995) in which she termed four feminine archetypes, including the mother. In essence, the mother is “caring and protective, supportive, giving, instructive.” (80) Wolff describes the instincts of the mother as nurturing, responding to anything in danger or in need of assistance, as she is drawn to things she can protect and fix. The mother figure offers care, safety and emotional development. She gains fulfilment through “her relationship with anyone needing protection, help, and development, whom she then strengthens to the point where he or she can either be released from her care or can reap the benefits of the security she provides.” (80) This is the ideal structural form of the mother. When a woman is aware of her maternal structure, her “external life” mirrors such instincts through marriage or other activities which allow her maternal side to prosper. (81) However, an exaggeration of the archetype can give rise to the negative aspect of the mother. Over-mothering, over-anxiety for her subjects’ safety, making decisions for them and interfering in their lives are just a few of the effects of such extreme manifestation. “The danger arises when unaccepted aspects of her personality infect her charges-consciously by influencing them or, worse, unconsciously by filling them with a life that is not their own.” (80) Through this need to feel like a nurturing mother, she becomes overbearing and damaging to those she cares for.

On a more personal level, Jung’s primary archetypes, as stated in many of his collective works, including *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, (1959) consist of the persona, the shadow, the anima/animus, and the self. In Jess and Gregory Feist’s *Theories of Personality* (1985), These archetypes comprise a large portion of the

human psyche and are found in every individual's collective unconscious. The personal unconscious and the ego, which is thought of as the conscious side, are the other parts. The total of the conscious and unconscious is therefore the self. According to Jung's theory, psychological problems may result from an imbalance between the two. (104)

The persona is a mask of conformity, with which an individual presents themselves to the world. It is born out of social adaptation and the identity one wishes to project to others, either created from the collective unconscious or through the effects of societal norms. In his work, *The Effects Of The Unconscious Upon Consciousness* (1928), he explains: “Fundamentally the persona is nothing real: it is a compromise between individual and society as to what a man should appear to be.” (158) An increased reliance on the persona may lead to inner conflicts, due to its concealment and repression of the real self, beneath the mask of conventionality. However, it is in Jung’s view that “the unconscious self can never be repressed to the point of extinction.” (158) No matter how strong the persona is, it can never eliminate the inner self and instincts of an individual.

What is repressed, what is regarded as instinct and natural desires is called the shadow, containing all which isn’t deemed acceptable in society and fit to present within the bounds of the persona. (Feist, 1985, 107) It is often referred to as the dark side of the psyche, although most people deny its existence and bury it deep within themselves. It is easier to project such evil traits onto others rather than admit having them. However, doing so may lead to being controlled by one’s shadow. (107)

The anima is the feminine image in the male psyche, whereas the animus is the male image in the female psyche. While the persona displays traits in accordance to gender norms and identities, the anima and animus represent the true inner force which drives the individual. (108-109) It is quite difficult to become conscious of one's anima and animus, but the former appears to men in the form of moods and feelings, as well as preconceived notions of women. Whereas the latter appears to women as a symbol of thinking and reasoning, as well as preconceived notions of men. (109)



# Analysis

No shortage of violence has been displayed in the turbulent town of Wind Gap, whose patriarchal ideologies have trapped women in the institutions of marriage and motherhood to smothering degrees. Women who are not fit to be mothers are put in a position where childbirth is the sole indicator of their worth. They are to exhibit femininity and only so, remain perfect and loving and give birth to equally perfect children. Much of this social pressure falls upon the shoulders of Adora Crellin. Perfect daughter, perfect wife, perfect mother, poor bereaved mother — only satisfied when society is satisfied.

The necessity to perform in accordance with what the community demands creates a distinct schism in Adora's psyche, whose persona and shadow are in constant conflict, clawing at one another for command over her behaviour and mental wellbeing. Largely, her external demeanour is governed by the image of a hyper feminine woman, as described by Camille upon their reunion. “Glowing pale skin, with long blonde hair and pale blue eyes. She was like a girl’s very best doll, the kind you don’t play with. She was wearing a long, pink cotton dress with little white slippers.” (Flynn, 2006, 23) Delicate and borderline flawless, she manipulates the perception of all who come across her, whether acquaintance, passerby or anyone of close relation. “The town loved her, she was like a cake topping: the most beautiful, sweet girl Wind Gap had ever raised.” (66) And with adoration, comes greed. A desire for more attention and more love. Adora drinks it all in and asks for more, unable to reach satiation. It’s in Jung’s view that “to be unaware of one’s deep individuality is to become society’s puppet.” (Feist, 1985, 107)

The extent this woman goes to in order to gain Wind Gap's acceptance and compassion is violent in nature. Following Marian's murder, Adora was significantly more concerned with receiving praise than with the health of her daughter, whom she poisoned, according to her diary. "He seems quite impressed with me. Said that I was an angel, and that every child should have a mother like me" (Flynn, 2006, 203) It has also been stated several times that when she sets up her children's illnesses, she seeks attention and pity from friends. "You fall asleep all hot and drooly, and then she can bring her friends in to look at you." (165) This is a woman who would cross any boundary to maintain the mask of her persona in front of others, a society's puppet who would murder her own children to keep her carefully constructed, tragic image.

Adora also puts on a show of aversion for violence, notably child abuse and murder, to keep all suspicions at bay. "I knew those children, Camille. I'm having a very hard time, as you can imagine. Dead little girls. Who would do that?" ... "I just can't have that kind of talk around me ... about hurt children." (24) With such demeanour, she is deemed sensitive and empathetic but at least not murderous. Her persona serves as a shield from such accusations. That is how she is able to get away with murdering Marian. "Every tragedy that happens in the world happens to my mother, and this more than anything about her turns my stomach. She worries over people she's never met who have a spell of bad chance. She cries over news from across the globe. It's all too much for her, the cruelty of human beings." (61) Most of her actions are rather performative, differing greatly in front of others. For instance, In the funeral of Natalie Keene's, condolences are extended to Adora, who displays her grief as if it were her own child who was murdered. "They cooed over my mother (so brave of Adora to come) ...

Tears ran down my mother's cheeks and dripped loudly onto the leather purse she held in her lap. The woman next to her patted her hand." (28-29) And only in the presence of doctors does she put on the act of a caring mother when she visits Camille in the mental health institution. "When we were alone, she talked about the foliage and some new town rule that required Christmas lights be taken down by January 15. When my doctors joined us, she cried and petted and fretted at me. She stroked my hair and wondered why I had done this to myself." (56) Even the grief of her late daughter's loss is described as a "hobby" by Camille, given her room is still filled with medical equipment and the topic of her death is endlessly brought up.

What further assists this image of innocence is the stance of society on women's nature. Women in this community are thought to be incapable of violence. This comes in favour of Adora and her crimes, which are completely concealed beneath her persona of dainty femininity. Prior to and following the discovery of an eyewitness to a woman kidnapping Natalie, the police ruled out the possibility that a woman could have committed the murders because women are deemed too frail to go through with such acts. In fact, Bob Nash suggests "Might be a homo did it ... He didn't rape her." (20) In reference to the perpetrator of his daughter's killing, before considering a woman. "But I still think it's a man. Can't picture a woman doing all...that to a baby." (81) Even Camille thinks so at some point, despite rejecting the gender norms of Wind Gap. "But what if this person simply looked feminine? A lanky man with long hair, a transvestite, an androgynous boy? Women didn't kill this way, they just didn't." (62) Thus, to be feminine, is to be immune to judgement in regards to violence in this society.

Such a heavy reliance on one's persona is bound to affect the psyche of Adora, as is stated in Jungian theory. "True, we must acknowledge society, but if we over identify with our persona, we lose touch with our inner self and remain dependent on society's expectations of us. To become psychologically healthy, Jung believed, we must strike a balance between the demands of society and what we truly are." (Feist, 1985, 107) As flawless as Adora wishes to be, her traumas and repressed shadow prevent her from truly being perfect beyond her persona. The harm she inflicts upon her children is not only motivated by an urge to elicit a reaction from society but also deeply rooted in these suppressed desires.

This sickness has long sat within her, from the time with her mother as a child. According to Alan, her husband, she was "overly mothered." Her mother, Joya, never smiled at her or touched her in an affectionate manner. Suspiciously enough, Adora was also sick at all times "She was always having tubes and needles and such stuck in her." (Flynn, 2006, 170) Perhaps this very same act of Munchausen by proxy, poisoning one's children was passed down through the family, due to Adora's experience with it. "Her mother used to come into her room in the middle of the night and pinch her when she was a child ... I think it was because she just liked to hurt her." (141) A parallel of this instance is within a memory of Camille's, wherein she recalled Adora pinching her in her sleep. "A sharp pain on my arm. My mother standing over me in her cloudy nightgown, asking if I was okay. Kissing the pink circle and telling me to go back to sleep." (141) Joya had subjected Adora to unexplained cruelty, stripped of the love and warmth ideal motherhood can provide. "When I was a little girl, my mother took me into the North Woods and left me," Adora said. "She didn't seem angry or upset. Indifferent. Almost

bored. She didn't explain why. She didn't say a word to me, in fact." (199) The effect of this iniquity is seen through Adora's attitude towards her children. After a particularly emotional night, she confesses to Camille that she hates her because she acts as a constant reminder of Joya. "My mother never loved me, either. And if you girls won't love me, I won't love you." (126) This unhealthy repression of trauma and ultimately, her shadow reveals itself in random instances of violence, primarily towards those weaker than her — easily controllable children, who she can take her morally objectionable desires out on. "She pressed her lips hard against the baby's apple slice of a cheek. Then she opened her mouth just slightly, took a tiny bit of flesh between her teeth, and gave it a little bite. The baby wailed. The blotch faded as Adora snuggled the child, and told the other women it was just being fussy." (84) Adora seems to despise children, which is surprising for a woman who values her role as a mother and strives to appear as an ideal one. They are simply tools to satisfy her desperate need for the attention and love her mother never provided. "I think she's always had more problems with children than she'd ever admit. I think, in fact, she hates them. There's a jealousy, a resentfulness that I can feel even now, in my memory. At one point, she probably liked the idea of a daughter. When she was a girl, I bet she daydreamed of being a mother, of coddling, of licking her child like a milk-swelled cat. She has that voraciousness about children. She swoops in on them." (84) Or they are objects to be possessed and fashioned into the same perfect image she exudes. Amma, a rather wild teenager out of Adora's sight, dresses properly and pristinely in childish sundresses and straw hats at home. "I wear this for Adora. When I'm home, I'm her little doll." Even her speech begins to sound like her mother. "The phrase was definitely my mother's. Her little doll, learning to speak just like Adora." (38)

Overall, Adora exercises her persona on society and her shadow on her children. Without them, she has no outlet for her shadow. And if they do not need her nor want her around, she feels less and less like herself and more like a hollow vessel of a human being, due to the inability of expressing her true self and urges. Her hatred towards Camille is rooted in the independence she feels from her. “Let me take care of you, Camille. Just once, need me.” (200) She begs of her, as though being a good mother is solely equated to how needed she feels. That is perhaps the reason why she persisted with poisoning Marian until she died of the toxins within her system. She made her so severely ill so her little daughter would not turn out like individualistic Camille. In her diary shortly before Marian’s death, Adora wrote: “I’ve decided today to stop caring for Camille and focus on Marian. Camille has never become a good patient—being sick only makes her angry and spiteful. She doesn’t like me to touch her. I’ve never heard of such a thing. She has Joya’s spite. I hate her. Marian is such a doll when she’s ill, she dotes on me terribly and wants me with her all the time. I love wiping away her tears.” (203) Considering the sickening degrees to which this hatred extends, it comes as no surprise that Adora blatantly wishes for Camille’s death in exchange for Marian’s life. “And now you come back and all I can think of is ‘Why Marian and not her?’” (127) Only when Camille gives in to her mother’s devouring care, does she finally earn the attention and love that she yearned for her entire life. “I remember being a kid, rejecting all those tablets and medicines, and losing her by doing so.” (164) And for a child who has felt neglected, even in her sickness and deep mental disturbance, to finally be tended to and loved is welcome in all forms. That is what we see in the following excerpt, when she seems to surrender to the onslaught of poison in exchange for Adora’s care. “As I was losing consciousness, a thought: I am being cared for. My mother is in a sweat

mothering me. Flattering. No one else would do this for me. Marian. I'm jealous of Marian." (201) In this space where Adora can express her shadow, her children are always in a near-fatal condition. This imbalance is not only destructive to her psyche but also dangerous to everyone in her close proximity.

Additionally, Adora's actions are blamed on everyone else but her. Camille, Joya, Amma, and even Marian. The aforementioned hatred is one illustration of placing guilt on her daughter, rather than taking responsibility for the damage she had caused. A symbol of this is present in the way she injures herself then faults Camille for it. "She dropped the pliers to the ground, began tugging at a stem ... "Oh, now look what you've done. I'm bleeding."" (101) According to Jung, "It is easier to project the dark side of our personality onto others, to see in them the ugliness and evil that we refuse to see in ourselves." (Feist, 1985, 107) Up until the end, Adora shows little remorse for her actions. "I couldn't stop." Is the only sentence to ever hint at regret after Marian's death and even then, it is followed by "I've lost 12 pounds and am skin and bones." (203) A deeply selfish statement, considering she had killed her child.

Although hyper feminine and displaying no traditional masculine traits, the manifestation of the animus within Adora takes form in her resolute nature. In Jung's *Man and His Symbols* (1964) he contends that "even in a woman who is outwardly very feminine the animus can be an equally hard, inexorable power. One may suddenly find oneself up against something in a woman that is obstinate, cold, and completely inaccessible." (Jung, 1964, 189) This can be seen in Adora's treatment of Camille when she was a child. "As a child, I don't remember ever telling Adora my favorite color, or

what I'd like to name my daughter when I grew up. I don't think she ever knew my favorite dish, and I certainly never padded down to her room in the early morning hours, teary from nightmares. I always feel sad for the girl that I was, because it never occurred to me that my mother might comfort me. She has never told me she loved me, and I never assumed she did." (Flynn, 2006, 84) In addition, the negative aspects of the animus can lead to destructive attitudes which may drive a mother to bring illness to her children. (Jung, 1964, 191). With such imbalance in Adora's unconscious mind, the self has no hope of being unified to a healthy state.

Adora vastly deviates from the ideal archetype of the mother. Protective, nurturing, supportive, these are traits that do not exist within Adora. She embodies all that goes against the natural instincts of motherhood. While in Toni Wolff's essay, "Structural Forms of the Feminine Psyche" (1995) The mother finds fulfillment in supporting her children until they can be "released from her care" (80), Adora seems to desire trapping them even when they are old enough to care for themselves. Imagery of this is exhibited in her infantilization of Amma, particularly when she falls ill. "Baby, baby, baby," Adora murmured, rocking them both on the swing. Amma lolled sleepy as a newborn in her blanket, smacking her lips occasionally." (121) And though this is a form of care, it aligns more with the negative aspects of the mother archetype rather than the positive. In Jung's *Four Archetypes* (1970) he states that the negative side connotes "anything secret, hidden, dark, the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces and poisons." (16) In regards to secrets, an atmosphere of lies and secrecy rules over Adora's life, perpetuated solely by her in protection of her crimes and disturbing behaviour. She makes certain that all relationships in the house go through her,



separating them from one another so she may control everything with ease. This directly coincides with Wolff's description of the negative mother, who interferes with her children's lives and makes their decisions for them. (Wolff, 1995, 80) Furthermore, she lures her children into her devouring embrace with promises of care and love, only to poison them and leave them helpless. "Adora devours you, and if you don't let her, it'll be even worse for you. Look at what's happening to Amma. Look at what happened to Marian." (172) This mother, who both abuses and tends to her children in equal measure, is a significant representation of the terrible mother.

Amma's upbringing as a carbon copy of Adora is both a negative side of Adora's mother archetype and a deep mother complex within her. "The danger arises when unaccepted aspects of her personality infect her charges-consciously by influencing them or, worse, unconsciously by filling them with a life that is not their own." (Wolff, 1995, 81) or as Jung asserts, the daughter has a "shadow existence" when such a mother complex exists. She identifies with and lives through her mother, who embodies the perfection she cannot seem to achieve herself. (Jung, 1970, 23) In *Sharp Objects* (2006), Amma wishes to be murdered, as she believes that "When you die, you become perfect." (59) That is the extent to which her mother complex affects her. Moreover, she copies Adora even in the violence she exercises on her. Her murder of the two little girls is in direct parallel to the way with which Adora tends to her and Camille. "She tried to mother the little girls, to dominate them, to turn them into her own vision. When they rejected that, struggled against that, the killer flew into an outrage. The girls had to die. Strangling is the very definition of dominance." (196)

Camille on the other hand, has a more extreme type of complex. Her resistance to Adora causes her to run away from anything which resembles her mother and generally, anything feminine. She uses her own body as a canvas to carve both feminine and negative words. “The one thing I know for sure is that at the time, it was crucial to see these letters on me, and not just see them, but feel them. Burning on my left hip: petticoat.” (53) Perhaps an extreme form of both banishing and desiring femininity is used in this word-carving. She wants to identify with these feminine words but also damages her body, her temple of femininity, with them. This is likely due to Adora imposing gender norms on her, such as the use of ‘baby doll’ or ‘petticoat’ — a traditionally feminine clothing item. In this type of complex, the daughter may have a “spontaneous development of intellect for the purpose of creating a sphere of interest in which the mother has no place.” (Jung, 1970, 25) Instead of being stuck in Wind Gap as yet another housewife, Camille used her intellect to become a journalist and move away from the town where her mother controlled every aspect of her life.

Adora herself is not free of her own mother complex, which she got from Joya. Her hypertrophy of the maternal element results in an exaggeration of the feminine side and all maternal instincts. (Jung, 1970, 21) The negative aspect of this complex is “a woman whose only goal is childbirth.” (21) with the husband taking secondary importance. This emphasis on fertility renders everything else, including her husband and her own identity insignificant. This can be tied to how passive Alan, her husband, is throughout the story and how little she values him or his opinions. “First she gives birth to the children, and from then on she clings to them, for without them she has no existence whatsoever.” (22) And while this seems to fall under the loving mother

spectrum, Jung theorised that they would be “unable to make any real sacrifice. Driven by ruthless will to power and a fanatical insistence on their own maternal rights. They often succeed in annihilating not only their own personality but also the personal lives of their children.” (22) This is a case of a mother whose life revolves around her children and yet she remains a terrible mother, destructive and abusive. She desperately needs them to remain helpless, so she could baby them and use them to feel loved, to feel like a good mother. “When I had you inside of me, when I was a girl—so much younger than you are now—I thought you’d save me. I thought you’d love me. And then my mother would love me.” (127) It’s this generational cycle of abuse, mother complexes and imbalance of psyche which results in the violence committed by the women of this family and primarily, Adora Crellin.

# Conclusion

In the compelling narrative of Gillian Flynn's *Sharp Objects* (2006), violence is a consistent theme. Issues of motherhood and the damage it can cause to children are brought up through the character of Adora Crellin, matriarch of the family. Utilising Carl Jung's psychoanalytical theories of the primary archetypes, this research explored the ways in which Adora's psyche functions between imbalances of the persona, shadow and animus, creating a disintegrated self and breeding a violent environment for her and her children. Additionally, Jung's and Toni Wolff's mother archetypes and complexes were used to demonstrate how Adora deviates from the ideal image of the mother and falls into the category of the terrible mother instead.

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