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Cover Page Footnote

Lisa Lampert-Weissig is Professor of Literature at UCSD, where she teaches a course on vampire narrative. Her publications include *Gender and Jewish Difference from Paul to Shakespeare* (2004) and *Medieval Literature and Postcolonial Studies* (2010). She is currently at work on a new book: "Dracula's Pulse: Vampires, Science and the Rise of Medievalism."

Mormon Female Gothic: Blood, Birth, and the *Twilight* Saga

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Among the many critiques of the *Twilight* saga is the complaint that its vampires and their exploits are too sanitized: “Real Vampires Don’t Sparkle” is a catchphrase across the web.¹ Stephenie Meyer’s vampires, with their beautiful appearance, sweet smell, and “vegetarian” tendencies are, indeed, a far cry from Stoker’s Count Dracula and many other literary vampires. To find blood spilling freely in the *Twilight* saga, one must read *Breaking Dawn*. In this fourth and final novel, Meyer provides birth scenes grisly enough that their inclusion in the novel’s film adaptation has been subject to much scrutiny and debate (Crowther).

This essay will turn to that moment in the *Twilight* saga where the blood flows, examining the importance of birth and motherhood in *Breaking Dawn* through the lens of Ellen Moers’ influential term, the Female Gothic. A key source text for Moers is Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. *Frankenstein*, like Meyer’s *Twilight* saga, presents what Moers calls a “birth myth.” Both Meyer and Shelley explore the relationship between creating life and creating art, the moral implications of creating new life, the horrors that can be found in this creation, and the potential monstrosity of offspring.

But what in Shelley’s novel is a dark exploration of these elements becomes in Meyer’s a portrayal of creation as redemption. Shelley’s novel presents a world cruelly ungoverned, where a creator abandons his creation, which then goes on to murder the innocent. Meyer’s imaginative frame is in keeping with the teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, which she has publically acknowledged as a major influence in her life and thinking. We could call this Mormon Female Gothic.

In Ellen Moers’ original formulation of the term, the Female Gothic can be “easily defined: the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic” (90). Moers admits that the Gothic itself is difficult to define, “except that it has to do with fear” (90). “Female Gothic” has been important to literary examinations of the Gothic form since Moers first coined the term in the late 1970s. It has also been extensively nuanced and critiqued, notably on the grounds that it builds upon an essentialist model of the Female.²

What I want to focus on in this essay, however, is the “birth myth” element so important to Moers’ formulation, an element that arguably has fallen by the wayside in much of the critical afterlife of her work. Childbirth and its consequences are at the heart of Moers’ analysis. In it she forcefully asks, “[w]hat in fact has the experience of giving birth to do with women’s literature?” (92). The epigraph to her chapter on the Female Gothic is a quote from the then-

¹See for example: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Real-Vampires-Dont-Sparkle/122113248964>

²An outstanding guide to the critical exploration of “Female Gothic” can be found in the Introduction to Wallace and Smith, 2009. See also Becker, Brabon and Genz (Introduction), Clery, Fleenor, Hoeveler, Horner and Zlosnik, and Kahane.

influential dispenser of parenting advice, Dr. Spock. Spock describes how a newborn is “usually disappointing to a parent who hasn’t seen one before,” enumerating the many unattractive physical features that new babies often have, including misshapen heads, bruises, jaundice and scaly or hairy skin. These are babies with “monstrous” features. For Moers, Shelley’s work is distinguished as Female Gothic because it treats the disappointment, resentment and depression that can follow birth, aftereffects often, or even usually, obscured by the rhetoric of the transcendent joys of motherhood. A focus on “the birth myth” in Meyer’s novels is especially interesting in light of the strongly negative feminist response to the *Twilight* saga.³ While it seems patently clear that the values of the *Twilight* saga are deeply at odds with the feminist values that motivate a critic such as Moers, Stephenie Meyer’s work is nevertheless part of a tradition of womens’ writing that Moers helped to establish as an important part of literary history and a legitimate and worthy object of critical study. Meyer’s creation of a “birth myth” is an essential part of the saga. Evaluating the *Twilight* saga within the Female Gothic tradition may help to explain some of the popularity of these novels and more clearly to discern their literary origins and impact. Furthermore, my attempt to categorize Meyer’s saga as Mormon Female Gothic does not imply that the saga’s presentation of a “birth myth” is a monolithic representation of motherhood as sacrificial and redemptive. There are moments both in Meyer’s account of herself as a writer and in her depiction of the beautiful but deadly “Immortal Children” in *Breaking Dawn* that point to fears and frustrations that belie a uniformly positive view of sacrificial motherhood.⁴

Writerly “Birth Myths”

For both Shelley and Meyer, motherhood and the life of the writer are intertwined. We can see Shelley and Meyer as part of a Female Gothic tradition not only through their fictions, but also in the “birth myths” that each has created for their literary progeny. Both writers claim to be inspired by visions. Meyer’s account of her vision highlights her motherhood. Shelley barely mentions her experience as mother, but numerous critical studies, notably those of Moers and of Gilbert and Gubar, have argued for the importance of this experience to *Frankenstein*. As Moers observes, “Frankenstein is a birth myth, and one that was lodged in the novelist’s imagination, I am convinced, by the fact that she was herself a mother” (92).

Shelley’s journals indicate that at the time she wrote *Frankenstein* the teenager was living through a period when she was “almost continuously pregnant, ‘confined,’ or nursing” (Gilbert and Gubar 224). This experience, combined with Shelley’s intensive reading and study, appear to have profoundly shaped her novel. Moers connects *Frankenstein* to Shelley’s experience of losing her first child, who died as an infant. Shelley’s journal entry of March 19, 1815 records a dream that her dead daughter has come to life again: “that it had only been cold, and that we rubbed it before the fire, and it lived.” (cited in Moers, 96). Even if the “official” creation dream recounted in Shelley’s 1831 Introduction to *Frankenstein* is a fabrication, this dream about her dead child is almost certainly actual, and versions of it—of characters attempting to rub dead bodies back to life—appear repeatedly in the novel.⁵

³There is an extensive critique in print and on the web. See, for example, Housel and Wisnewski, Platt, Summers and Wilson.

⁴On the *Twilight* saga and the Gothic, see McElroy and McElroy.

⁵O’Rourke, 376. *Frankenstein* originally appeared in 1818. Shelley’s 1831 Introduction has been carefully scrutinized by scholars, who differ in opinion about whether or not this account of the novel’s creation and the changes she made to the 1831 text represent a new conservatism and a willingness to bow to make her work more

In her Introduction, Shelley recounts her more famous dream as a response to a question “so frequently asked...How I, then a young girl, came to think of, and to dilate upon, so very hideous an idea?”⁶ She tells her reading public that in her vision:

I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half vital motion. Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavor to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world. (x)

Shelley’s vision embeds the act of creating new life within the larger frame of Creation itself and separates out the creation of her “waking dream” from that of God’s Creation (xii). In the course of the novel itself, Frankenstein’s act of creation can lead only to disaster, as his obsession to understand the inner workings of nature and to create life in unnatural ways leads to disaster because of its hubris. As he is working on his creation, Frankenstein believes that “A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs” (40). He attempts to create life from death in order to become the ultimate father, but then instead abandons his creation when he views its horrible appearance.

Shelley ties her own act of creation as a writer to Frankenstein’s creature by referring to the novel as her “hideous progeny” (xii). Frankenstein’s dreams and creation scenes are so close to Shelley’s “dream” that it is impossible to know if the dream was an actual influence, something of which the novel is “only a transcript,” or a later fabrication designed to complement the novel (O’Rourke 372). In her 1831 Introduction, however, other details of important aspects of Shelley’s life are much less vividly described than this dream. She briefly relates that she “scribbled” as a child brought up in a literary household, but that when she became a woman that her “life became busier, and reality stood in place of fiction... Travelling, and the cares of a family, occupied my time; and study, in the way of reading or improving my ideas in communication with his [her husband, the poet Percy Shelley] far more cultivated mind was all the literary employment that engaged my attention” (v-vii).

Mary Shelley had good cause to be reticent about her domestic life, as *Frankenstein* was conceived when she was living with Shelley out of wedlock while he was still married to another. Percy Shelley’s influence and his solicitous care to help Mary be “worthy of” her “parentage” are much remarked upon in her account, but the sadder and the more sordid details of her domestic life remain unmentioned (vi).

In contrast, Meyer’s account of her creative dream vision is firmly embedded in the vicissitudes of life as a stay-at-home mother. On her official website, Meyer provides the “whole story” of how she came to write *Twilight*:

I get a ton of questions about how I came up with the story of *Twilight* and how I got it published. I woke up (on that June 2nd) from a very vivid dream. In my dream, two people were having an intense conversation in a meadow in the woods. One of these people was just your average girl. The other person was fantastically beautiful, sparkly, and a vampire. They were discussing the difficulties inherent in the facts that A) they were falling in love with each other while B) the vampire was particularly attracted to the

“palatable” to a wider audience or if it is actually a cleverly created assertion or even strengthening of earlier beliefs and goals, sometimes characterized by irony. See O’Rourke.

⁶Shelley, *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus*, 1831 edition. Literature OnLine, Cambridge, Chadwyck-Healey, 1999, v. All subsequent citations refer to this edition.

scent of her blood, and was having a difficult time restraining himself from killing her immediately.⁷

Meyer remembers the date that she began *Twilight* with such precision because it was the first day her children were to begin swimming lessons. This detail not only adds a sense of veracity to her account, but also emphasizes the dominance of maternal duties in her daily life. She woke that morning and lay in bed entranced by her dream despite a busy day ahead: “Though I had a million things to do (i.e. making breakfast for hungry children, dressing and changing the diapers of said children, finding the swimsuits that no one ever puts away in the right place, etc.), I stayed in bed, thinking about the dream.” As she later worked on *Twilight* she “mostly wrote at night, after the kids were asleep so that I could concentrate for longer than five minutes without being interrupted.” In this account, writing is the vocation from which motherhood is a distraction. Motherhood had already put a very long pause to Meyer’s creative endeavors; she recounts that she had written very little before *Twilight* and “nothing at all since the birth of my first son, six years earlier.” Shelley’s conception of *Frankenstein* took place in the “Year Without a Summer.” Meyer, in contrast, endures a “typical Arizona summer, hot, sunny, hot, and hot,” where she was often “stuck at swim lessons,” thinking all the while of her fictional world in the rainy Northwest.

While Shelley’s creation account steers away from detailing her daily life, Meyer’s creation account emphasizes the burdens and responsibilities of family life and the obstacles that it poses to creative work. In contrast to Shelley’s references to her poet husband and his esteemed friend, Lord Byron, Meyer’s account omits mention of her husband.⁸ It is Meyer’s characters, rather than her family, that bask in the glow of her maternal and romantic affections:

It took me a while to find names for my anonymous duo. For my vampire (who I was in love with from day one) I decided to use a name that had once been considered romantic, but had fallen out of popularity for decades. Charlotte Bronte’s Mr. Rochester and Jane Austen’s Mr. Ferrars were the characters that led me to the name Edward. I tried it on for size, and found that it fit well. My female lead was harder. Nothing I named her seemed just right. After spending so much time with her, I loved her like a daughter, and no name was good enough. Finally, inspired by that love, I gave her the name I was saving for my daughter, who had never shown up and was unlikely to put in an appearance at this point: Isabella. Huzzah! Edward and Bella were named.

Meyer has fallen in love with her vampire hero and draws upon the Gothic tradition for his name. Her heroine is named for the desired daughter Meyer realizes she will probably never have. In an interview, Meyer describes the embrace of this fictional family as an escape from her actual one: “I was really burned out. I really had gotten into that zombie mom way of doing things where I wasn’t Stephenie anymore,” she says. “[Writing *Twilight*] was a release. That was

⁷<http://www.stepheniemeyer.com/twilight.html>.

All subsequent references to Meyer’s “creation account” can be found here.

⁸“Though she’d been married for 15 years, Stephenie says she didn’t tell her husband at first about her new passion. ‘My husband thought I’d gone crazy. I’d barely spoken to him because I had all these things going on in my head, and I wasn’t telling him about this weird vampire obsession because I knew he’d freak out and think I’d lost my mind,’ she says.” “The Woman Behind *Twilight*” *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, November 13, 2009. http://www.oprah.com/entertainment/Twilight-Series-Author-Stephenie-Meyer_1/2

the dam bursting. I'd been bottling up who I was for so long, I needed an expression."⁹ Motherhood had reduced Meyer to a zombie, mindless and without personality. In this account, the creation of children leads to a monstrous loss of self from which the creation of literary progeny provides a powerful release.

The Horror of Creation

In *Frankenstein*, Moers notes, "Birth is a hideous thing...even before there is a monster," and death and birth are "hideously intermixed in the life of Mary Shelley as in Frankenstein's 'workshop of filthy creation'" (Moers 96). Frankenstein is creating life from death. He haunts "vaults and charnel-houses" to learn the secret of creating life and to gather together the parts needed for his creature. The final results horrify him:

It was on a dreary night of November, that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet...I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs.

How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful!--Great God! 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.

... now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. (43)

Frankenstein has devoted years of effort to create a living being, but when his quest is completed the results fill him with loathing. For Moers, it is the fact that Shelley focuses on this "trauma of the afterbirth" that makes her work "distinctly a *woman's* mythmaking" (93). Moers argues that Shelley draws on her experience as a mother, not to reveal the oft-touted glories of motherhood, but to reveal the darker side of creating life. Of course, the true horror of the novel arguably does not lie in this vision of the created monster, but in the monstrous treatment of the creature that follows. Unlike his own loving parents, Victor Frankenstein abandons his "child" and it is this act, the leaving of the creature to his own devices in the world, that eventually turns him into the bitter, heartless "fiend" who destroys those dearest to Frankenstein (76).

In *Breaking Dawn*, a similar "birth myth" scenario—the creation of a "monster"—is explored, but the most horrifying scenes in Meyer's version depict pregnancy and childbirth. A nightmare version of pregnancy--having a deadly enemy trapped within one's own body--is hinted at in the Preface to *Breaking Dawn*:

I'd had more than my fair share of near-death experiences; it wasn't something you ever really got used to. It seemed oddly inevitable, though, facing death again. Like I really was marked for disaster. I'd escaped time and time again, but it kept coming back for me. Still,

⁹"The Woman Behind *Twilight*." *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, November 13, 2009.
http://www.oprah.com/entertainment/Twilight-Series-Author-Stephenie-Meyer_1/2

this time was so different from the others. You could run from someone you feared, you could try to fight someone you hated. All my reactions were geared toward those kinds of killers—the monsters, the enemies.

When you loved the one who was killing you, it left you no options. How could you run, how could you fight, when doing so would hurt that beloved one? If your life was all you had to give your beloved, how could you not give it? If it was someone you truly loved? (*Breaking Dawn*, 1-2)

This Preface alludes to the Preface of *Twilight*, the first book in the saga, in which it appears that Bella faces imminent death. There she expresses a lack of regret for her decision to put herself in a threatening situation both because she is making a “noble” sacrifice for love and because she has been afforded a “dream beyond any...expectations” (*Twilight* 1). *Twilight*, as its epigraph, storyline and cover art imply, is about temptation, especially, but not exclusively, erotic temptation. Bella chooses Edward over her own safety and even over her existence as a human. She will attempt to run or to fight in order to stay alive and she does not regret at all that her love for Edward has put her in danger.

In contrast to the *Twilight* Preface, the Preface to *Breaking Dawn* figures the danger as coming not from outsiders, but from within Bella herself. Her own unborn child threatens her life and she is now caught in a more profound set of choices than ever before, as it seems she must trade her life to protect her child. Pregnancy leaves Bella bruised, battered, and in pain. Giving birth essentially kills her and she must be transformed into a vampire in order to survive. Early in *Breaking Dawn*, Bella has married Edward, something he has insisted upon as a “concession” in exchange for allowing Bella’s transformation into a vampire, something he has vigorously opposed. Bella wants to experience sex in her human form before transformation and so Bella and Edward make love on their honeymoon. As a result of Edward’s physical power, Bella is left severely bruised by the experience, although she hungers to repeat it and eventually does. Bella, Edward, and most vampires had believed that it was impossible for Edward to father a child, but this turns out not to be the case and Bella finds herself pregnant with what is clearly not an average fetus. The baby is developing at an extremely rapid rate and the pregnancy is physically devastating for Bella, who experiences extreme and gruesome bruising and broken ribs from the fetus’s movements, movements so strong that they also almost fracture her pelvis. Because the pregnancy is so dangerous, Edward wants her to terminate it, but Bella is steadfastly against this, despite the risks.

Jacob, the werewolf who also is in love with Bella, narrates the section of the book describing Bella’s pregnancy and labor, a departure from the usual first-person narration in Bella’s voice. Bella has necessarily needed to keep her pregnancy secret and she has been holed up in the Cullens’ home, under the care of Carlisle Cullen, the family patriarch, who is also a physician. Jacob is visiting her there when she goes into labor:

There was the strangest, muffled ripping sound from the center of her body.

“Oh!” she gasped.

And then she went totally limp, slumping toward the floor. ...Bella screamed.

It was not just a scream, it was a blood-curdling shriek of agony. The horrifying sound cut off with a gurgle, and her eyes rolled back into her head. Her body twitched, arched in Rosalie’s arms, and then Bella vomited a fountain of blood. (346-7)

Now the “disaster” that Bella has eluded for so long is ripping her apart from within, transforming her into a grotesque spectacle of agony.

Edward and Rosalie, Bella's sister-in-law, rush her upstairs into an improvised hospital room. Jacob notes that the space:

looked like an emergency ward set up in the middle of a library. The lights were brilliant and white. Bella was on a table under the glare, skin ghostly in the spotlight. Her body flopped, a fish on the sand. Rosalie pinned Bella down, yanking and ripping her clothes out of the way, while Edward stabbed a syringe in her arm.

How many times had I imagined her naked? Now I couldn't look. I was afraid to have these memories in my head. (349)

Bella is now an object of horror instead of an object of desire. She is "ghostly" and clearly in the last throes of struggling for her life. Jacob watches Bella as under the glare of the lights her "skin seemed more purple and black than it was white. Deep red was seeping beneath the skin over the huge shuddering bulge of her stomach" (349-50). Bella's labor is described as a violent aberration. Her legs are curled in an "unnatural position" as her own husband first slices her apart and then breaks through to the baby with his teeth (351-2). When Bella takes the newborn in her arms, "the warm, bloody thing" bites her, adding yet another source of pain to her suffering body. She is covered with blood: "the blood that had flowed from her mouth, the blood smeared all over the creature, and fresh blood welling out of a tiny double-crescent bite mark just over her left breast" (353).

Bella is cut apart to make way for a "thing" that then bites her in a monstrous perversion of nursing. Drenched in blood, her life is slipping away. She is saved and transformed not only by Edward's bites, but by an injection of his venom, given through a shot to her heart administered by Edward with a syringe that is "all silver, like it was made from steel" (354). Edward himself is in charge of the process: "His voice was ice, was dead. Fierce and unthinking. Like he was a machine" (354). Childbirth as depicted here is gory, deadly, and clinical, a description which one critic argues is a reflection of the contemporary experience of many American women, whose childbirths are characterized by painful, intensive medical intervention.¹⁰

Through his witness of Bella's labor, Jacob continually refers to the baby as "it," with the use of his narrative voice allowing for a point of view that places all sympathy on Bella and reacts in horror to her ordeal and views her child as a monster. Earlier Jacob's fellow werewolves had deemed this child to be "*Unnatural. Monstrous. An abomination*" (199). After witnessing the birth, Jacob feels compelled to agree, "The thing was an aberration—its existence went against nature. A black, soulless demon. Something that had no right to be. Something that had to be destroyed" (357). Jacob, filled with hate, sounds a bit like Victor Frankenstein in his determination to "cleanse the world of this abomination" (358).

When Bella's child is born, it appears that motherhood is a futile trap. Creation is perverted and Bella and Edward's union is a colossal mistake. But Meyer then completely inverts this scenario, also directly through the eyes of Jacob. In a remarkable turn-about, Jacob makes eye

¹⁰ Granger 192. On the film adaptation of the labor scene, Stephenie Meyer has this to say: "I'd love to have the birth scene be every bit as awful [as in the book]— I know it freaked people out, but for those of us who have been through childbirth a couple times, it is a scary, terrifying experience," she said. "This is just taking that to an exponential power, and I love going there." Kara Warner and Josh Horowitz, "Stephenie Meyer Wants 'Breaking Dawn' Birth Scene to be 'Awful'" Jun 30 2010 <http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1642805/stephenie-meyer-wants-breaking-dawn-birth-scene-be-awful.jhtml>

contact with the child and “imprints” on it. Imprinting in the saga is an overwhelming mating-bond experienced by werewolves. Jacob is now joined to the child, Renesmee, in an eternal unbreakable love. Instead of being a monster, the child then becomes the solution to the tension between Bella and Jacob and a link between the worlds of werewolves and vampires.

Childbirth in *Breaking Dawn* is depicted as a gruesome, horrific ordeal, the product of which is redemptive. Bella’s choice to have her child and her subsequent turn to a vampire state ends up saving her family. Childrearing is easy, as Renesmee is a model child with parents ideally suited to raise her. The sexuality that had been so physically dangerous for Bella is now part of life in a kind of eternal Paradise, her “small but perfect piece of forever” that she will share with husband, child and extended family (754). There has already been extensive commentary on this way that Meyer’s vision of sexuality, marriage, and an eternal family appears drawn from Meyer’s own beliefs as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Within the LDS belief system, the afterlife is conceived of as something shared with family, and, indeed, family is not simply part of salvation, it is an essential prerequisite for it.¹¹ Viewed within this frame, the horror that is childbirth becomes redemptive.

This depiction of redemption through the creation of new life is a complete inversion of Shelley’s depiction in *Frankenstein*. There the creation of the creature and Frankenstein’s subsequent abandonment of him results in the destruction of everyone Victor Frankenstein loves. In contrast to the cozy eternity depicted at the end of *Breaking Dawn*, *Frankenstein* concludes in a desolate expanse of icy sea as Frankenstein leaps out of the cabin window of the ship where he has been relating his story and is “soon borne away by the waves and lost in darkness and distance” (202).

Child as Monster

Within the belief system of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, motherhood, stemming back to the first motherhood of Eve, is a redemptive act and both marriage and family are necessities in order to achieve immortality. If *Frankenstein* is, in Moers’ words, “most original in its dramatization of dangerous oppositions through the struggle of a creator with monstrous creation” and its sources “were surely the anxieties of a woman who, as daughter, mistress, and mother, was a bearer of death” then Meyer’s reworking of these “dangerous oppositions” ultimately posits them as essential for life (Moers 98).

This message can be seen as underscored by the story of the “Immortal Children,” which Bella learns of just before she is married. This story of dangerous child-monsters, however, also points to the potential disasters that children can bring. Vampires are forbidden to turn children because those children, with their lack of impulse control, threaten to breach the necessary secrecy of the vampire world: “Keeping the secret meant a lot of things...And it meant not creating some things in the first place, because some creations were uncontrollable” (33). Bella is told that centuries ago children had been turned into vampires, something she finds so repulsive that she has to swallow back “the bile that rose in my throat” (33). The child vampires were “beautiful” and “enchanted.” Carlisle relates that “[y]ou had but to be near them to love them; it was an automatic thing” (33). They were, however, also extremely lethal: “Adorable two-year-olds with dimples and lips that could destroy half a village in one of their tantrums. If they hungered, they fed, and no words of warning could restrain them. Humans saw them, stories circulated, fear spread like fire in dry brush” (34). The Volturi, the cruel ruling clan of Vampires, decided that these Immortal Children must be destroyed, along with their maker. In *Breaking*

¹¹ On LDS beliefs in the Twilight saga see Arnaudin, Granger, Lampert-Weissig, Riess and Toscano.

Dawn, the final confrontation between the Volturi and the Cullen clan comes because one of the daughters of the condemned maker of the Immortal Children sees Bella and Edward's daughter, Renesmee, and believes she is an Immortal Child. The Cullens are able to face up to the Volturi in large part due to Bella's decision to become a vampire and her special abilities.

After hearing this story, Bella, on the night before her wedding, has a nightmare vision of her friends and her parents dead, killed by an "adorable boy" with "bright, bloodred eyes" (37). This vision and the epigraph for the book, the first three lines of Edna St. Vincent Millay's 1937 poem, "Childhood is the kingdom where nobody dies," lead readers to believe until the novel's conclusion that Bella, like Frankenstein, will lose those close to her due to her own choices.¹² Ultimately, however, Bella's daughter is not at all a threat. Nevertheless, in the Immortal Children we have a strong strain of the horrors potential in "the afterbirth" that Moers locates in the Female Gothic. These Immortal Children are not physically off-putting like Dr. Spock's newborns. They are instead gorgeous, but it is their very childishness, their lack of control, that makes them deadly. They are willful creation run amuck, very much like what Frankenstein fears his creature would create if given a mate: "a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth, who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror" (146). So even while Meyer glorifies motherhood, her novel and her description of her work also engages "the motif of revulsion against newborn life, and the drama of guilt, dread, and flight surrounding birth and its consequences" (93). These Immortal Children are monster toddlers. Their superhuman physical strength shows the horror that could be unleashed if toddlers had the physical strength to follow all of their urges unchecked.

Overall then, Meyer's "birth myth" can be seen as an inversion of the paradigms found in Shelley's version of the Female Gothic in *Frankenstein*. Creation may be horrifying in Meyer's account, but birth and its results are redemptive, if not holy. Nevertheless, the legend of the Immortal Children, and, perhaps more tellingly, Meyer's own account of her experiences of conflict between her roles as mother and writer, point to some cracks in the smooth façade of sacrificial motherhood. In these more subtle ways, Meyer's writings also acknowledge the "trauma of the afterbirth," even within the saga's vision of eternal familial bliss. Mormon Female Gothic may have more in common with Moer's original conception than first meets the eye.

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¹² "Childhood is not from birth to a certain age and at a certain age/The child is grown, and puts away childish things. / Childhood is the kingdom where nobody dies."

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