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Tracing Nicholas Royle's Concept of the Uncanny in the Characterization of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

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Abstract: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) is a cornerstone of Gothic literature, renowned for its dark settings and themes of death, isolation, and vengeance, all of which evoke terror. These elements create profound unease in readers, which Sigmund Freud calls the uncanny. While Freud's psychoanalytic account emphasizes repressed fears and childhood anxieties, Nicholas Royle's expanded theory redefines the uncanny as a literary mode which destabilizes identity. This article aims to apply Royle's theoretical framework to analyze Shelley's characterization of Victor Frankenstein and his Creature, focusing on five central concepts: silence and isolation, thought, the double, the phantom, and the death drive and repetition. From this vantage point, the study depicts how silence resounds with ghostly echoes in solitude, thought can make the identity fractured, doubling becomes a rupture of the self, the phantom uncovers hidden traumas and inherited secrets, and the death drive takes form as compulsive repetition which haunts the mind. These elements reframe the novel's horror as uncanny. The findings suggest that through a Roylean perspective on the uncanny, Shelley's *Frankenstein* transcends traditional Gothic boundaries by dramatizing the instability of the self and the persistence of what cannot be fully known or repressed.

Keywords: The Uncanny; Nicholas Royle; *Frankenstein*; Mary Shelley; Characterization.

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1. Introduction

Mary Shelley's Gothic novel *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818), has transcended its origin as a mere ghost story. It explores the dangers of creative ambition and the desire to master the supernatural, which has turned it into a cultural myth, retold in literature, cinema, and popular media. However, beyond its Gothic atmosphere and horror-based plot, the novel engages with the uncanny by blurring the lines between the familiar and the strange, unsettling the boundaries between self and other, human and non-human. It is in this liminal space that the novel's lasting power silently resides.

Frankenstein originated from a ghost story contest among Romantic figures, including Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, John Polidori, and Mary Shelley herself, during their stay at Lake Geneva. Its origin in 1816, "the year without a summer," and its development out of conversations about science, philosophy, and the sublime landscapes of the Alps created ground for Shelley's imagination (Hunter x–xi). Moreover, her choice of a remote and wild setting aligned perfectly with the Romantic fascination with the picturesque and the sublime, enhancing the novel's Gothic tone (Hunter xii). Influenced by Mary's dream and resembling Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798), the novel tells the story of an artificial figure who falls into isolation and despair when mistreated by a community which does not acknowledge him as one of its own. Eventually, the character turns into a vengeful persona who tries to make his creator, Victor Frankenstein, as miserable and isolated as he is.

This descent into vengeance and alienation is representative of Gothic fiction, which was especially popular around the time the novel was written. It evokes terror through introspective probing of the human psyche and the fears lurking beneath civilized surfaces. As Michael Gamer argues in a chapter on Gothic, alongside themes like darkness, horror, and mystery, Gothicism encompasses historical fantasy, sexual danger, and uncanny phenomena (289). In his widely acclaimed book, *Gothic*, Fred Botting further explains this concept:

> In the nineteenth century … [the eighteenth-century] Gothic castles, villains and ghosts, … ceased to evoke terror or horror. Their capacity to embody and externalise fears and anxieties was in decline. … External forms were signs of psychological disturbance, of increasingly uncertain subjective states dominated by fantasy, hallucination and madness. [However] The internalisation of Gothic forms reflected wider anxieties which, centring on the individual, concerned the nature of reality and society and its relation to individual freedom and imagination … A disruptive return of archaic desires and fears, the uncanny disturbs the familiar, homely and secure sense of reality and normality. (7)

It is within this space of disturbance that the concept of the uncanny becomes especially relevant. Originally, Sigmund Freud examined this notion as a class of the terrifying which leads back to something once familiar (Freud 220). Freud suggests that the uncanny occurs when a novel and unfamiliar feature is added to something once known to a person, making it frightening (Freud 221). Nicholas Royle, however, challenges this view in *The Uncanny* (2003) and develops the essay by considering forms of the uncanny overlooked in Freud's work and providing a more cultural-historical context. For Royle, the uncanny is not only a theme but also an effect which unsettles the boundaries of identity and perception. This unsettling quality lurks beneath the surface of *Frankenstein*, not only in its plot but also in its characterization.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,* a late-Romantic, Victorian novel and one of the most important works of Gothic literature, is a remarkable example of how uncanny effects emerge through narrative and character. It was initially thought to decline, like many Gothic novels of the time, yet several generations later, it is still reproduced with variety (O'Flinn 196). Among recent contributions, David Higgins's critical book *Frankenstein: Character Studies* provides a compelling analysis of the novel's Gothic characterization. He highlights how the novel blurs the line between imagination and reality by using different narrative voices, embedding the gothic theme of isolation and solitude and using the motif of the double in the Creature as a copy of human and an "other" (Higgins 12-15). Death and decay are also in keeping with the novel's Gothic atmosphere (Higgins 12).

Yet while Higgins and other critics capture the gothic elements of characterization, this article argues that this observation can go deeper through Nicholas Royle's concept of the uncanny. If, as Royle claims, the uncanny is not simply a matter of content but of how literature unsettles the boundaries of identity and perception, then *Frankenstein*'s characters, particularly the Creature, are more than gothic tropes. Examining the novel from this approach highlights how Shelley's characters blur the lines between binaries, such as self and other, human and non-human, or natural and artificial. A Roylean reading further shows how Shelley's characterization makes the act of reading itself a confrontation with the uncanny. This article, therefore, seeks to answer the following research question: How does Nicholas Royle's theory of the uncanny reframe our understanding of characterization in *Frankenstein*, particularly in the relationship between Victor and the Creature?

2. Literature Review

Scholars have examined Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in light of medical ethics, literary history, psychological doubling, transgenerational haunting, and pathological grief. These studies reveal key elements of the text, like Victor Frankenstein's moral failures, the Creature's symbolic duality, and the narrative's destabilizing effects. However, while existing discussion engages with themes central to Nicholas Royle's theory of the uncanny, such as repetition, spectrality, and fractured identity, none fully integrates these concepts concerning their collective contribution to the novel's uncanny effects. The following review examines these studies, noting their shared focus on characterization and psychological turmoil, while also identifying a gap in applying Royle's theoretical framework to *Frankenstein*'s uncanny aspects. This article aims to bridge that gap by analyzing how Royle's conceptualization of the uncanny deepens our understanding of the novel's destabilization of self, reality, and readerly experience.

Gillie Bolton's chapter analysis in *Medicine and Literature* examines *Frankenstein* through medical and scientific ethics. Bolton addresses the moral and ethical failure of Victor Frankenstein, who creates life without considering the consequences, which leads to the Creature's suffering and eventual violence. Using close reading and historical context, she finds that the Creature's initial nobility, depicted in his declaration, "I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity" (qtd. in 37), contrasts with Victor's lack of remorse. J. Paul Hunter's introduction to *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text* explores the novel's origins, influences, and cultural context. He examines how Shelley's personal experiences, literary background, and contemporary scientific debates shaped the text. Hunter combines literary history, biographical context, and textual analysis, drawing from Shelley's journals and Romantic-era philosophical discourse. He argues, *Frankenstein* "opens outward rather than closing in upon itself" (xv), reflecting its thematic ambiguity and adaptability to various critical approaches.

Paul Coates, in *The Double and the Other*, examines the theme of doubling in *Frankenstein*, arguing that Victor and his Creature are psychologically woven together. Coates asserts that "Frankenstein's actual identity with his creature is a commonplace of writing on Mary Shelley's novel" (39), framing the Creature as Victor's repressed shadow. Using a psychoanalytic approach, he explores how Shelley's anxieties about creation and death manifest in this duality. His findings reveal that the novel critiques Romantic individualism by exposing the instability of identity. Sabindra Raj Bhandari, in "The Projection of the Double in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*," builds on the doubling motif,

arguing that the Creature embodies Victor's "darker side" (102). Bhandari employs Freud's concept of the uncanny to analyze how the Creature externalizes Victor's unconscious desires. His findings highlight the novel's narratives as reinforcing psychological entanglement.

Boyd J. Petersen, in "Double or Phantom?: Transgenerational Haunting in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*," shifts the focus from doubling to the idea of the Creature as a phantom, "an unspeakable secret … from his parents that returns to haunt Victor … and [ultimately] the novel" (16). Drawing on Abraham and Torok's theory of transgenerational haunting, Petersen argues that Victor's parents' unresolved traumas return through the Creature's phantom-like existence. Thomas H. Schmid, in "Addiction and Isolation in *Frankenstein*: A Case of Terminal Uniqueness," interprets Victor's isolation as a form of addiction, aligning it with Gothic monstrosity. Schmid identifies isolation as a "central motif" (19) in the novel and the Gothic fiction, leaving space for research regarding self-other distinctions.

Sazia Islam, in *Mutations of Grief: Pathological Loss and the Psychoanalytic Journey in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein,* analyzes Victor's self-destructive obsession through Freud's death drive. Islam argues that Victor's "refusal to let go of his ambition … ensures that his death is the only possible outcome" (37). Her findings reveal how grief and narcissism fracture identity. Steven Vine, in "Filthy types: *Frankenstein*, figuration, femininity," examines how these fractured identities are constructed through repetition and distortion. Vine asserts that characters "gain … meaning through their relation to other identities … which they repeat, transform, refigure and disfigure" (247). His deconstructive approach highlights instability as a technique to blur reality and fiction.

While these scholars explore key aspects of the characterization of the novel and its doubling, phantoms, repetition, identity, and isolation, none fully synthesize these elements through Nicholas Royle's theory of the uncanny. Coates and Bhandari focus on psychological doubling without addressing its uncanny effects; Petersen introduces the phantom but neglects Derrida's spectrality as Royle does; Islam and Schmid analyze psychological breakdowns without linking them to the destabilization of self and the reader's reality; and Vine examines narrative distortion but not its uncanny repercussions. While these scholars engage with themes Royle identifies as uncanny, few synthesize these features to explore how they collectively contribute to the novel's uncanniness, an analytical gap this article aims to address.

Nicholas Royle has explored themes related to the uncanny across several of his works, including *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism, and Theory* (2023), co-authored with Andrew Bennett. While the book enumerates elements which contribute to a sense of the uncanny, it does not directly connect them to characterization or to *Frankenstein*. However, chapters such as "Ghosts," "Suspense," and "Secrets" offer relevant insights to the discussion. In a chapter called "Mutant," they also analyze *Frankenstein* (Bennett and Royle 383), but the argument does not pertain to the Creature's psychological characterization, which is the focus of this article. In his recently published interview with Adrien Ordonneau, where he explains the uncanniness "not [as] an inherent element of a piece of music, a film, a painting, a poem, or of a place or an event [but] as a reading effect" ("Reminiscing" 674), Royle reminisces theories which are relevant to my discussions on solitude and thought. Additionally, Royle's *In Memory of Jacques Derrida* develops ideas around the phantom, which, though not explicitly framed in terms of the uncanny, offers useful concepts for analyzing the novel's character construction.

David Wills associates reading Nicholas Royle with speculative fiction, "telepathic, uncannily telepathic, telepathically uncanny" (654), but does not move his argument much further than Royle's most recent works. Luísa Almeida Alvarez Rodrigues also refers to Frankenstein's Creature as "the unheimlich borne out of heimlich" (44) and has a chapter on Royle's uncanny in her study of the nineteenth-century doubles; yet she does not study how Royle's uncanny can give a more profound understanding of the psychological turmoil of the characters.

3. Theoretical Framework

The uncanny is a crucial term in contemporary debates across different disciplines and discourses, including philosophy, literature, film studies, and psychoanalysis. In simple terms, it can be described as "the thoughts and feelings that may arise on those occasions when the homely becomes unhomely, when the familiar becomes uncomfortably strange or the unfamiliar becomes strangely familiar" (Bennett and Royle 57). This concept can be traced back to Sigmund Freud, who explored it through psychoanalysis and aesthetics. In his 1919 essay "Das Unheimlich," translated as "The Uncanny", he defines it as a class of the terrifying which leads back to something once familiar (Freud 220). Freud refers to Ernst Jentsch, a German psychiatrist, who had earlier claimed that the essential factor in the production of the uncanny feeling is intellectual uncertainty (220). But rendering it incomplete, he asserts that this experience happens when a novel and unfamiliar feature is added to something once known to a person, making it frightening (Freud 221).

Freud claims that in a literary work, it is the author who determines to what degree the reader gets in touch with this feeling through the world they represent. The writer influences the reader in the way they introduce the story's setting, so if the reader is dealing with a fantasy world, they would not think the happenings uncanny. On the other hand, if the reader is encountering a world of everyday reality, the writer can make the experience uncanny by including events which rarely or never take place in real life (Freud 254). This leads the reader to react as they would if they confronted the same events in everyday life.

Nicholas Royle elaborates on this notion in his book-length study, *The Uncanny* (2003). In *The Uncanny*, Royle does more than a reading of Freud. He challenges Freud's positioning of the uncanny as a subset of psychoanalysis, arguing instead that psychoanalysis is itself haunted by the uncanny (24). Royle does not read the uncanny only aesthetically or psychoanalytically. Instead, since it existed before Freud, he transcends the essay by considering forms of the uncanny overlooked in Freud's work and providing a more cultural-historical context. Although Freud's "The Uncanny" is a reference point for many fields, Royle claims that Freud has not completely talked about it regarding literature (*Uncanny* 13).

Royle explores how the uncanny has been treated historically. Its significance heightened in the Enlightenment era and the eighteenth century as a turning point from magic to reason, generating a "new human experience of strangeness, anxiety, bafflement, and intellectual impasse" (Royle, *Uncanny* 22). In nineteenth-century Britain, the uncanny extended into broader social and political issues, especially within Victorian culture, where it was "linked both psychologically and politically to wider issues" (Royle, *Uncanny* 23). The determinants of time are those revolving around power and sexual desire in the interactions of men and women (qtd. in Royle, *Uncanny* 23). Royle highlights sexual power dynamics, especially in male/female interactions, alongside other factors such as class, race, age, imperialism, and a growing fear of the colonial Other (*Uncanny* 23). These nineteenth-century notions remain globally relevant wherever a sense of otherness can be felt (Royle, *Uncanny* 23).

Royle's multidimensional framework exceeds Freud's psychoanalytic definitions. He develops Freud's theory of the uncanny by combining literary theory, deconstruction, and cultural critique. The foundations of Royle's theory lie in the realization that the uncanny is "a peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar … [which occurs when] … something familiar unexpectedly arises in a strange context, or something

strange arises in a familiar context" (*Uncanny* 1). This duality creates what Royle terms a "crisis of the proper" (*Uncanny* 1), disrupting the borders of self/other, inside/outside, and reality/imagination. Drawing on thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Ernst Jentsch, Maria Torok, Nicholas Abraham, Bill Readings, and Jonathan Dollimore, he illustrates the manner in which the uncanny operates both as a textual effect and a psychological experience, manifesting through techniques such as repetition and the divulgence of "something unhomely at the heart of hearth and home" (Royle, *Uncanny* 1).

Royle's work analyzes uncanny phenomena, from doubles and ghosts to silence and the death drive, and investigates their functional roles in literature and cultural contexts. He draws attention to the uncanny's "performative dimension" (Royle, *Uncanny* 16), implying that text does not merely depict but actively creates unsettling effects which resist resolution and place readers in "a kind of un-happening" (Royle, *Uncanny* 2). In addition to literary texts, Royle applies this theoretical framework to teaching, politics, and media, rendering the uncanny simultaneously a reading strategy and a critical tool for analyzing contemporary culture. By combining literary examples and personal experiences, Royle makes a case for the uncanny as a theoretical reading mode.

This article argues that when read through Royle's expanded theory of the uncanny, *Frankenstein*'s characterization reveals a deeper psychological terror beyond Freudian readings. In each section, I explain a concept from Royle's book and bring textual evidence from the novel to show how that theory works. The discussion starts with Royle's theories on silence and solitude and then moves to some textual evidence from different characters in the novel. It then explains how thought helps shape the identity of the Creature and its relationship with its creator. The section on the double, which comes afterwards, shows the Creature is an uncanny representation of Victor. The next part, on the phantom, focuses on the spectral and furtive aspects of the novel's main characters and the work itself. The article finally moves on to the concept of the death drive and its central compulsion, repetition, in forming the novel's characters. Thus, viewing the Gothic characterization of the work through a Roylean perspective reveals how Shelley's characters evoke a profound sense of the uncanny.

4. Analysis

4.1. The Liminal Uncanny: Silence and Solitude

Moments of deep silence and solitude often blur the line between inner thought and outer reality, creating space for something eerily unfamiliar to surface. Royle's chapter on

silence and solitude is perhaps the most isolated of the chapters, as it offers the shortest yet one of the most haunting quotes in the book. The entire content of the chapter is:

-Did you say something?

-I heard a voice.

-In your head?

-No, in yours. (Royle, *Uncanny* 107)

Not only does this part blur the boundaries between self and other, but it also suggests a kind of intimacy between the speakers and raises questions: How can one hear something inside another person's mind? Is the silence so loud that it creates an imaginary sound? Or is the voice a mental projection- perhaps a memory or a ghost, surfacing from the past?

This destabilizing moment can show the psychological complexity of silence and solitude. It drops one into a liminal space where borders do not exist. Royle argues that the uncanny often arises from this very liminality. Silence, especially when paired with solitude, can provoke a sense of estrangement. It may feel like something happening "within oneself, but … is never one's own" (Royle, *Uncanny* 3). It means that it is "construed as a foreign body within oneself," so it has more to do with something outside the self, in the outer world, than with the self alone (Royle, *Uncanny* 3). Thus, even solitude is not entirely private; it may be shaped by memories that open up to uncanny feelings, which are difficult to explain. In *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism, and Theory*, Bennett and Royle refer to silence as one of the themes which can create a sense of the uncanny. They quote Freud's notion that the uncanniness of silence happens due to the unfound liberation of infantile anxiety in adulthood (qtd. in Bennett and Royle 55). They expand this theory by asserting that, "perhaps the uncanniness of silence is just as much, or more, to do with death – as is intimated in such everyday phrases as 'dead silence' and 'silent as the grave'" (Bennett and Royle 55).

This complex, disturbing sense of silence and solitude is a central motif in *Frankenstein*, where isolation can become a space for the uncanny to emerge. This theme is easily traceable in the two main characters in the novel. The first is Victor, who not only alienates himself in pursuit of knowledge and before creating the creature, but also after the guilt of the murdered members of his family strikes him (Schmidt 23). The secret he keeps from others is especially reason to make him isolate himself: "It was during an access of this kind that I suddenly left my home, and bending my steps towards the near Alpine valleys, sought in the magnificence, the eternity of such scenes, to forget

myself and my ephemeral, because human, sorrows" (Shelley 152). Victor attempts to escape the consequences of his actions, but he drowns even more in the ghosts that haunt him; he becomes a stranger to himself, alienated from his mind:

> I was seized by remorse and the sense of guilt, which hurried me away to a hell of intense tortures, such as no language can describe. This state of mind preyed upon my health, which had perhaps never entirely recovered from the first shock it had sustained. I shunned the face of man; all sound of joy or complacency was torture to me; solitude was my only consolation deep, dark, deathlike solitude. (Shelley 148)

One can see Bennett and Royle's argument come to life in the way that Victor keeps everything to himself to avoid the infantile anxiety of becoming alone (55). Furthermore, the way this whole secret is associated with the concept of revenge and death can amplify the uncanny effect.

The Creature is similarly isolated; however, there is a huge difference: his loneliness is not a subject of his own choosing but a mandatory state imposed on him by the society repelled by him. As he mentions in his tale to Victor, "You had endowed me with perceptions and passions and then cast me abroad an object for the scorn and horror of mankind … I travelled only at night, fearful of encountering the visage of a human being … secured by night from the view of man" (Shelley 202). In another part, he says, "Believe me, Frankenstein I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity: but am I not alone, miserably alone? You, my creator, abhor me: what hope can I gather from your fellow creatures, who owe me nothing ? they spurn and hate me" (Shelley 159). Ironically enough, he even defends himself against it: "Sometimes I wished to express my sensations in my own mode, but the uncouth and inarticulate sounds which broke from me frightened me into silence again" (Shelley 163). The Creature's experience can be rendered uncanny, as he is both rejected by others and by his own voice. One can see the reflection of Derrida's quote in this episode: "To hear oneself is the most normal and the most impossible experience" (qtd. in Royle "Reminiscing" 684). The aforementioned Creature's experience can also be examined through Royle's crisis of the proper. By this he means, "a disturbance of the very idea of personal or private property including the properness of proper names, one's so-called 'own' name, but also the proper names of others, of places, institutions and events" (Royle, *Uncanny* 1). The way that the creature cannot fully recognize the sounds he produces as his personal property creates a disconcerting sense; he feels foreign to himself, "a foreign body within oneself" (*Uncanny* 3).

4.2. Unsettled Reflection: Thought as a Haunted Identity-making Process

Thought is most uncanny when disrupted by unknown features and uncertainties; it is not a stable, singular voice but a series of haunting echoes of the past. In the chapter "Literature, Teaching, Psychoanalysis," Nicholas Royle points out that "thought is a familiar, straightforward word" (*Uncanny* 54), and since there is a familiar aspect involved, it can be a case of the uncanny. In his arguments, Royle draws on Bill Readings' *The University in Ruins* to suggest that the university is a place where "thought takes place beside thought" (qtd. in Royle, *Uncanny* 57). Thought in this model becomes a shared process with no fixed or united identity (qtd. in Royle, *Uncanny* 57). It acts as a third space between the speaker and the listener, removing their illusion of autonomy and inviting response through ongoing questioning, so it neither produces clear answers nor resolves arguments or reaches conclusions (qtd. in Royle, *Uncanny* 55).

Royle affirms, "To love teaching … certain texts [and] certain ways of thinking … is possible only in … mortal uncertainty" (*Uncanny* 57). No love exists without the uncanny, as love embodies a promise. The teaching process, then, involves deep uncertainty, where a love of ideas and texts drives teaching and learning, but always with openness and doubt. Royle borrows from Ernst Jentsch to say that the teacher is a part of this structure, not as someone who knows with certainty, but as someone whose identity includes "a certain lack of orientation" (qtd. in *Uncanny* 56). One should pay attention that this lack is not a flaw; it is the very thing that provides the ground for genuine thought and education to happen.

Time becomes essential in this process, especially when we factor in the delayed, haunted temporality that shapes reading, learning, and thinking. Royle talks about two concepts to shed light on the matter: the Freudian idea of Nachträglichkeit, or the deferred action, and the Derridean sense of ghostly temporality, where meaning arises belatedly or never fully arrives (*Uncanny* 57). Royle means that reading and teaching resist immediate understanding and are "bound up with a strange experience of deferral, of ghostly time" (*Uncanny* 57). As a result, thought becomes uncanny not solely because of its fragmentation, but because it is haunted by time. It can be shaped by what comes after, memories that return belatedly, or meanings that arrive too late.

Frankenstein provides a profound literary realization of this theory of thought and education as uncanny. In the effective monologue by Creature, he explains that upon discovering *Paradise Lost*, *Plutarch's Lives*, and *The Sorrows of Werther*, he enters a process of education. These books produce in him "an infinity of new images and feelings, that

sometimes raised me to ecstasy, but more frequently sunk me into the lowest dejection" (Shelley 189). So, his experience of learning is not linear. Instead, as Royle explains in an interview by Adrienne Ordonneau, it throws him into "a feeling of uncertainty, a putting into question, a trembling of belief" ("Reminiscing" 683): "Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination?" (Shelley 190). Thus, reading does not stabilize his identity; it disorients it. Bennett and Royle pinpoint "literature's complex and unsettling effects when it comes to thinking about thinking – when it comes to thinking about identity and about the 'I' that claims to think" (198).

The Creature identifies simultaneously with Adam, "united by no link to any other being" (Shelley 191), and with Satan, consumed by "the bitter gall of envy" at "the bliss of my protectors" (Shelley 191). His thinking is split, haunted by conflicting emotions, and his consciousness emerges not as a unified self but as a fractured one. So, Shelley's narrative presents what Royle mentions as "thought beside itself," where thinking is an unsettled process without final identity or resolution (qtd. in *Uncanny* 59). This same hesitancy to reach a resolution or revelation makes it uncanny, as both the Creature and the reader wait for an answer. Bennett and Royle use this notion to explain how suspense works in literature (335). Although this part does not necessarily create a suspenseful moment, a similar feeling is embedded in the Creature's thought process.

The Creature's encounter with Frankenstein's journal further dramatizes the Freudian structure of deferred meaning. He fully comprehends the horror of his origin only through reading this journal: "Hateful day when I received life! … Why did you form a monster so hideous that even *you* turned from me in disgust?" (Shelley 192) he asks. Freud's insight, as highlighted by Royle, that "you get news of events only when they are over" (qtd. in *Uncanny* 59), is shown here in the Creature's belated and traumatic recognition of himself. His learning is ghostly, and it never fully coincides with the moment of experience, happening after some time has passed. Bennett and Royle refer to the same feeling in the *Beloved* by Toni Morrison: the "understanding of deferred meaning, a sense of both personal and societal trauma … comes back again and again, which continues, hauntingly" (244). This haunting can create an uncanny sense in the Creature's process of identity-making.

4.3. Split Selves: The Doppelgänger and Uncanny Doubling

The figure of the double (doppelgänger) is central to the experience of the uncanny, as in this case, too, the familiar is combined with something strange. The double destabilizes the self and blurs the boundary between identity and otherness. The movement between

self and other happens in a space where desire, memory, and the mechanical repetitions of identity collide: "the matter of the heart is a matter of desire, of a rhythm of singularity and generality, and of a logic of the foreign body, the automaton and spectre at the heart of the matter" (Royle, *Uncanny* 187). Royle quotes Freud to emphasize that the double becomes "the uncanny harbinger of death" (qtd. in *Uncanny* 190). By this, he means that one may want their double dead, but the death of the double will always also be the death of oneself (Royle, *Uncanny* 190). He further draws from his personal experience with another writer named Nicholas Royle to discuss the foreignness within the self when encountering someone with the same name. He illustrates that even when it comes to something as seemingly stable as a name, there is still a sense of the uncanny because it is deeply personal and simultaneously strangely alien (Royle, *Uncanny* 191).

Mary Shelley, likewise, dramatizes these ideas to show the uncanny double in the intertwined relationship of Victor Frankenstein and his Creature. From the very moment the Creature is created, he becomes a body to carry the hidden impulses Victor does not recognize within himself. Coates emphasizes that Victor's ambition to generate life without reproduction shows his desire to split himself (40). As Bhandari argues, the Creature reflects "the darker side of its creator's psyche and forbidden desires" (106), as a grotesque externalization of Victor's ambition, rage, and guilt. The horror with which Victor first regards the Creature is the same horror he has towards his transgressive desires, one of which is to surpass nature's creation and animate the dead parts of a human body (Bhandari 105). It is visible in his language, as he refers to the Creature by "my own spirit" and "my own vampire" (qtd. in Bhandari 106). He even claims that he has committed the murders done by the Creature and that he was "not indeed, but in effect … the true murderer" (qtd. in Bhandari 106). Thus, the Creature embodies Victor's psyche, showing that even the heart is "inseparable from a certain exteriority of the automaton" (Royle, *Uncanny* 193).

The emotional trajectories of these two characters are another place to see the uncanny doubling. As explained in an earlier part, they grapple with feelings of isolation, but this is not where the resemblance stops. They have more commonalities as they long for companionship and get bitter at sensing rejection. As Bhandari argues, Victor shows this bitterness after Justine is executed, and he has to leave (106): "I wandered like an evil spirit for I had committed deeds of mischief beyond description horrible, and more, much more ... was yet behind" (qtd. in Bhandari 106). When the Creature laments, "I remembered Adam's supplication to his creator, but where was mine? He had abandoned me." (qtd. in Bhandari 106), he expresses the same bitterness due to rejection.

The destructive actions of both Victor and the Creature further reflect their uncanny bond. Just as Victor "tore to pieces the thing on which I was engaged" (Shelley 231), the to-be female companion for the Creature, the Creature kills Elizabeth, Victor's to-be wife. As Bhandari claims, this reveals that the Creature has the same regressive instincts as Victor and almost always repeats whatever he does (107). In this case, the fear of connection with friends, family, and females destroys those around (Bhandari 106).

Finally, the violent confrontation between Victor and the Creature exemplifies that the double often embodies a desire for dominance or the death of the other, which will also be the death of the self (Royle, *Uncanny* 190). When Victor destroys the female Creature, he both denies the original Creature's chance at companionship and reasserts his authority. In response, the Creature turns from pleading to threats, saying, "You are my creator, but I am your master; obey!" (Shelley 232). This unsettling inversion of roles blurs the line between their identities; they each try to assert dominance, each increasingly defined by the other. The Creature's vow "revenge remains … I may die; but first you … shall curse the sun that gazes on your misery" (Shelley 233) becomes an uncanny prophecy of what haunts Victor, which represents how the double's existence may lead to psychological terror and death.

Yet even Victor's death does not free the Creature from the torment of their doubled existence. In the final scene, the Creature mourns Victor's death with a sense of grief and self-loathing. "There he lies, white and cold in death. You hate me; but your abhorrence cannot equal that with which I regard myself" (Shelley 290), he says as he recognizes that taking revenge has not released him but intensified his suffering. Although the Creature outlives his counterpart, he is still not free. There is only a deepening of the uncanny, where life without the other becomes meaningless. As he prepares to leave, the Creature reflects, "He is dead who called me into being… and when I shall be no more, the very remembrance of us both will speedily vanish" (Shelley 290). With him, he takes the uncanny horror of a self that could never be fully separated from the one who created it.

4.4. Spectral Traces: The Phantom as Uncanny Presence and Inherited Secret

Royle explores the uncanny aspects of the phantom through two different readings, one explained in the *Spectres of Marx* by Jacques Derrida and the other proposed by Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok's "Notes on the Phantom: A Complement to Freud's Metapsychology." Both readings engage with the uncanny as the unstable, ungraspable force of what should remain hidden but returns, yet they do so through different

frameworks. While Derrida's approach is a deconstructive one associated with spectrality as a trace, Abraham and Torok's model is concerned with the dead and the gaps that they leave among the living through secrets.

Derrida opposes the traditional views on the sharp distinctions between the real and the unreal, the actual and the unactual, and the living and the nonliving (Royle, *Uncanny* 278). Instead, he suggests that "everyone reads, acts, writes with his or her ghosts" (qtd. in Royle, *Uncanny* 278), emphasizing that a spectrality exists in all acts of meaning. Phantoms, for Derrida, are disruptions in the experience of solitude, as even a private moment in someone's life can still be shaped by memories and things they cannot explain; they are full of confusion and contradiction since they are haunted by things outside. Thus, scholars should learn to live with their ghosts and "let the phantoms speak" (qtd. in Royle, *Uncanny* 278). The phantom is a trace, always returning and always still to come. The uncanny here exists in what Derrida calls "the experience of the impossible" (Royle, *Uncanny* 281), and in how language is structured by absence and haunting.

In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Derrida's concept of the phantom illuminates the Creature not simply as a being, but as an uncanny presence that disrupts identity. Firstly, the Creature is neither alive nor dead. He is made of reanimated parts of dead bodies, such as "fibres, muscles and veins" (Shelley 107), so his presence is uncertain. In *In Memory of Jacques Derrida*, Royle asserts that the fragments show the concept of différance as the Creature can never fully cohere into presence: "without presence and without absence" (qtd. in Royle 27). His physicality also reflects Derrida's notion that "every manifestation of meaning is the phantom effect of a trace which is neither present nor absent" (Royle, *Uncanny* 281): "an 'active and provocative trace', a 'promising trace', that carries with it something 'unheimlich' or uncanny" (qtd. in Royle, *Memory* 82).

Furthermore, Derrida emphasizes that "ghosts trick consciousness and skip generations" (qtd. in Royle, *Uncanny* 281), which shows phantoms as anachronistic and out of time. Shelley dramatizes this where the Creature threatens Victor about the future, as in his promise, "I shall be with you on your wedding-night" (Shelley 233). Royle refers to the Derridean idea that "it is the spectralisation of the 'coming' or 'coming on', conjoined and disjointed in the coming again of the Ghost [that] would perhaps serve to evoke that strangeness of the event" (*Memory* 64). The Creature even refuses to resolve his absence/presence and give closure at the novel's end, when "he was soon borne away by the waves, and lost in darkness and distance" (Shelley 291). In Derrida's terms, "A phantom never dies, it remains always to come and to come-back" (qtd. in Royle, *Uncanny* 282).

In contrast, Abraham and Torok conceive the phantoms as an invention of the living. They count the theme of the dead as omnipresent "on the fringes of religion and … rational systems" (qtd. in Royle, *Uncanny* 280). They argue that the phantom arises specifically when "the dead were shamed during their lifetime or... took unspeakable secrets to the grave" (qtd. in Royle, *Uncanny* 280). So, it embodies "the gap produced in us by the concealment of some part of a loved object's life" (qtd. in Royle, *Uncanny* 280). In this model, it is not the dead who haunt us, but the gaps left within us by their secrets (qtd. in Royle, *Uncanny* 280).

Petersen draws directly on Abraham and Torok's model, suggesting that "Frankenstein's [Creature] can be read as a manifestation of phantom, an unspeakable secret inherited from his parents, that returns to haunt Victor" (Petersen 16). The uncanny here is present in the phantom's intimate foreignness; it rises from within the subject. I argue Victor's erratic behavior, such as his drives of repulsion, his obsessive guilt, and his inability to put his suffering into speech, is in line with Abraham and Torok's descriptions of psychic haunting. "I was seized by remorse and the sense of guilt, which hurried me away to a hell of intense tortures, such as no language can describe," Victor admits after Justine's death (qtd. in Petersen 16). Moreover, the creature's literal emergence "from the crypt" (Petersen 17) and the imagery of pollution in different parts of the novel, especially the yellow of the Creature's eye, which Shelley links symbolically to the jaundiced "eye of the quiet moon" (qtd. in Petersen 17) reinforce the novel's obsession with contamination and secrecy. Petersen believes that even Victor's unnatural act of fatherhood, which is animated not through natural sexual reproduction but through "taking parts for his offspring from cadavers" (17), mixes the horror with transgressive creation.

Ultimately, these phantom traces reflect Royle's uncanny, as something which "ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light" (*Uncanny* 2), and point to a deeper autobiographical phantom: the death of Mary Wollstonecraft after childbirth and Mary Shelley's own dreams of reviving the dead (Petersen 18). One can argue, therefore, that *Frankenstein* is not merely a tale of invention, but a text haunted by an unspeakable maternal absence and an uncanny return of what was never fully possessed. Petersen also asserts that even the Freudian uncanny can be seen in a different light, using Abraham and Torok's theories to consider it as something "unknown to the subject of one generation and known secretly in the preceding one" (qtd. in Petersen 19). "The repressed may wait to return to the child … and rise unnaturally from the crypt of transgenerational horror and shame … it has never really died" (Petersen 19).

4.5. The Death Drive: A Compulsion to Repeat

The Uncanny presents Freud's death drive (Todestrieb) as a disturbing force that undermines the literary character's psyche and integrity. As Bennett and Royle argue, "it refers to the idea that everyone at some level (consciously or unconsciously) is driven by a desire to die, to self-destruct, to return to a state of inanimacy" (56). Its uncanniness mainly emerges through repetition, compulsion, and the return of what has been repressed. Royle offers eighteen ways the death drive works to create an uncanny effect. Mary Shelley's characterization in *Frankenstein* dramatizes a third of these ways, which are explained in the rest of this part.

Nicholas Royle observes that "something comes back because in some sense it was never properly there in the first place" (*Uncanny* 97). This phrase resonates with Victor Frankenstein's characterization. His Creature, or unnatural offspring, is not born of life. He is assembled from death, "renew[d with] life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption" (Shelley 108), rejected "miserable and … abandoned" (Shelley 289), and therefore doomed to return. The return of the Creature is not just literal; it shows Victor's unresolved guilt and grief and is a symptom of trauma that was never integrated (qtd. in Royle, *Uncanny* 91). Islam identifies this in Victor's obsessive behavior: "his fixation on killing the [Creature] is a projection of his own unconscious wish to annihilate the source of his grief and guilt" (36). Because that grief was never properly dealt with, it returns in a new form, which does not resolve the trauma and instead haunts the traumatized. The uncanny thus arises from Victor's refusal to acknowledge what he has made, and what has been lost.

Royle next quotes Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to explain how self-destructive compulsions work: "The aim of all life is death" (qtd. in *Uncanny* 84). So, the death drive gives characters an uncanny anticipation and motivation to destroy themselves, often disguised as other feelings, such as ambition. Victor's obsessive quest to "break through [the ideal bounds of life and death], and pour a torrent of light into our dark world" (Shelley 108) results not in triumph but in suicidal descent. As Islam puts it, Victor's melancholia worsens, and "his desire to hunt down and destroy [the Creature] intensifies," not as a rational pursuit of justice, but as his own latent death wish (36). As a result, his creation of life becomes a step toward self-erasure. Jonathan Dollimore clarifies that this drive is not just biological, but psychic: it has to do with a compulsion to undo the self (qtd. in Royle, *Uncanny* 85). Victor, similarly, does not look to preserve

life; he wants to assert control over death by reenacting it again and again, ultimately dying in the frozen Arctic, his personally chosen grave (Islam 37).

Victor Frankenstein does not display sudden madness or overt breakdown. It happens over time, as he deteriorates slowly and quietly. Royle points to this process when he refers to Jonathan Dollimore's ideas, "Death is right inside us, working away busy as a mole, all the time" (*Uncanny* 85). Even at the novel's beginning, one can sense a feeling of loss in Victor. he is never entirely whole:

> I need not describe the feelings of those whose dearest ties are rent by that most irreparable evil; the void that presents itself to the soul; and the despair that is exhibited on the countenance. (Shelley 97)
>
> Learn … by my example, 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. (Shelley 107)

Death has already nested inside him with the loss of his mother, the emotional reserve of his upbringing, and his repressed desires. Islam's reading emphasizes this slow internal erosion: Victor is possessed by the thought of his being guilty for making the Creature, especially after William's murder and Justine's execution (36): "a weight of despair and remorse pressed on my heart, which nothing could remove" (Shelley 148). Yet rather than articulate this guilt, he acts it out repeatedly. His psyche does not shout; it tunnels. This image of the mole captures Victor's psyche: his unraveling is subterranean, psychic, and always already in motion.

Most of what Victor withholds instead of what he says helps shape his characterization. "The death drive works in silence," Royle writes, noting that Freud found the death drive or Thanatos "mute and uncanny" (qtd. in *Uncanny* 88), unlike the bustling energies existent in Eros or the life drive (*Uncanny* 86). Victor's silence is not mere secrecy; it is the structural mark of the death drive. He does not confess the Creature's existence, remains silent as Justine gets condemned, and commits the destruction of the female creature without any words. These silences are the mode through which the death drive operates, as it removes speech and substitutes compulsion. Vine, too, points at this in the Creature: what the Creature figures is the impossibility of a stable voice (251). So, like Victor, the Creature also returns to silence and absence, most bitterly in his decision to disappear into the Arctic at the novel's end. Their identities are marked by the disintegration of expression rather than expression itself.

Repetition is the most visible aspect of the death drive in *Frankenstein*. Royle makes this central to his argument: "The death drive manifests itself in a 'compulsion to repeat'" (*Uncanny* 89). Victor repeatedly fails to prevent the consequences of his actions, but he keeps following the same psychological script each time; he refuses to share his burden with his family and withholds information: "I avoided explanation … I could not bring myself to disclose a secret which would fill my hearer with consternation, and make fear and unnatural horror the inmates of his breast" (Shelley 252), and he compulsively returns to the scene of loss: "As I was unable to rest, I resolved to visit the spot where my poor William had been murdered" (Shelley 131). Islam writes that "this pursuit is also self-destructive, as it leads Victor into increasingly dangerous and irrational behavior" (36). The same is true concerning the Creature, who cannot escape the memory of his rejection and keeps repeating it through acts of vengeance on Clerval and Elizabeth. Vine articulates this recursive identity collapse: The novel registers a failure of figuration, a collapse into repetition (247). Thus, neither character moves forward; they are locked in a loop of loss and retribution, making repetition a feature of their character and a condition of their being.

Freud's line, quoted by Royle, captures the uncanny specificity of the death drive in Victor's final journey: "The organism wishes to die only in its own fashion" (qtd. in *Uncanny* 93). Victor's pursuit of the Creature across the Arctic is not simply vengeful but ceremonial. Victor choreographs his death for himself under the illusion that he is pursuing a moral mission. Islam echoes that Victor is looking for peace in going after the destruction of the Creature; in the mission, he also seeks to end his suffering (36-7). The Creature, too, seeks to die on his own terms, telling Walton he will burn himself, a final act that reflects the same compulsion (Shelley 291). Each of these characters writes their own death, but always in a pattern and already rehearsed.

5. Conclusion

This article examines Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in light of Nicholas Royle's theory of the uncanny. Examining the novel through this approach offers a fresh perspective on its characterization and psychological depth. While existing scholarship has explored themes of doubling, isolation, and the Gothic in *Frankenstein*, this study identifies a gap in applying Royle's theoretical framework of the uncanny, which exceeds Freudian psychoanalysis and includes literary, cultural-historical, and deconstructive aspects. Applying Royle's concepts of silence and solitude, thought as an uncanny process, the doppelgänger, the phantom, and the death drive to the novel's characterization,

especially the relationship between Victor Frankenstein and the Creature, reveals the way in which Shelley's work destabilizes boundaries between self and other, human and non-human, and reality and fiction.

This study argues that Frankenstein is more than a gothic novel; it is a profound exploration of the uncanny as an effect that disrupts identity and perception. I argue that Royle's theory of silence and solitude puts Victor and the Creature in a liminal space that adds to their alienation, making them strangers even to themselves. Moreover, his notion of thought as a haunted process depicts how the Creature's fractured identity is a cause of belated and unresolved learning. The uncanny double is reflected in the way each of these characters mirrors the other's repressed fears and desires. Furthermore, I claim that the phantom theory treats the Creature as a secret from the past that comes to haunt Victor across generations. Additionally, it is through the death drive's silent, repetitive force that Victor shows his self-destructive compulsions. These findings collectively illustrate how Shelley's characterization produces uncanny effects beyond traditional Gothic boundaries and involves the reader in a narrative where identity is perpetually unstable.

This study reinterprets *Frankenstein* as a work which anticipates modern theories of the uncanny. Applying Royle's theoretical framework not only deepens the interpretation of Victor and the Creature as the main characters but also places the text as a precursor to contemporary discourses on trauma, spectrality, and posthumanism. While this analysis focuses primarily on characterization, future research could extend Royle's theory of the uncanny to the novel's narrative structure or explore its applicability to other Gothic and post-Gothic texts. Ultimately, this article affirms *Frankenstein*'s continued relevance as a narrative compelling us to confront the ambiguities of creation, self, and the limits of human knowledge.

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