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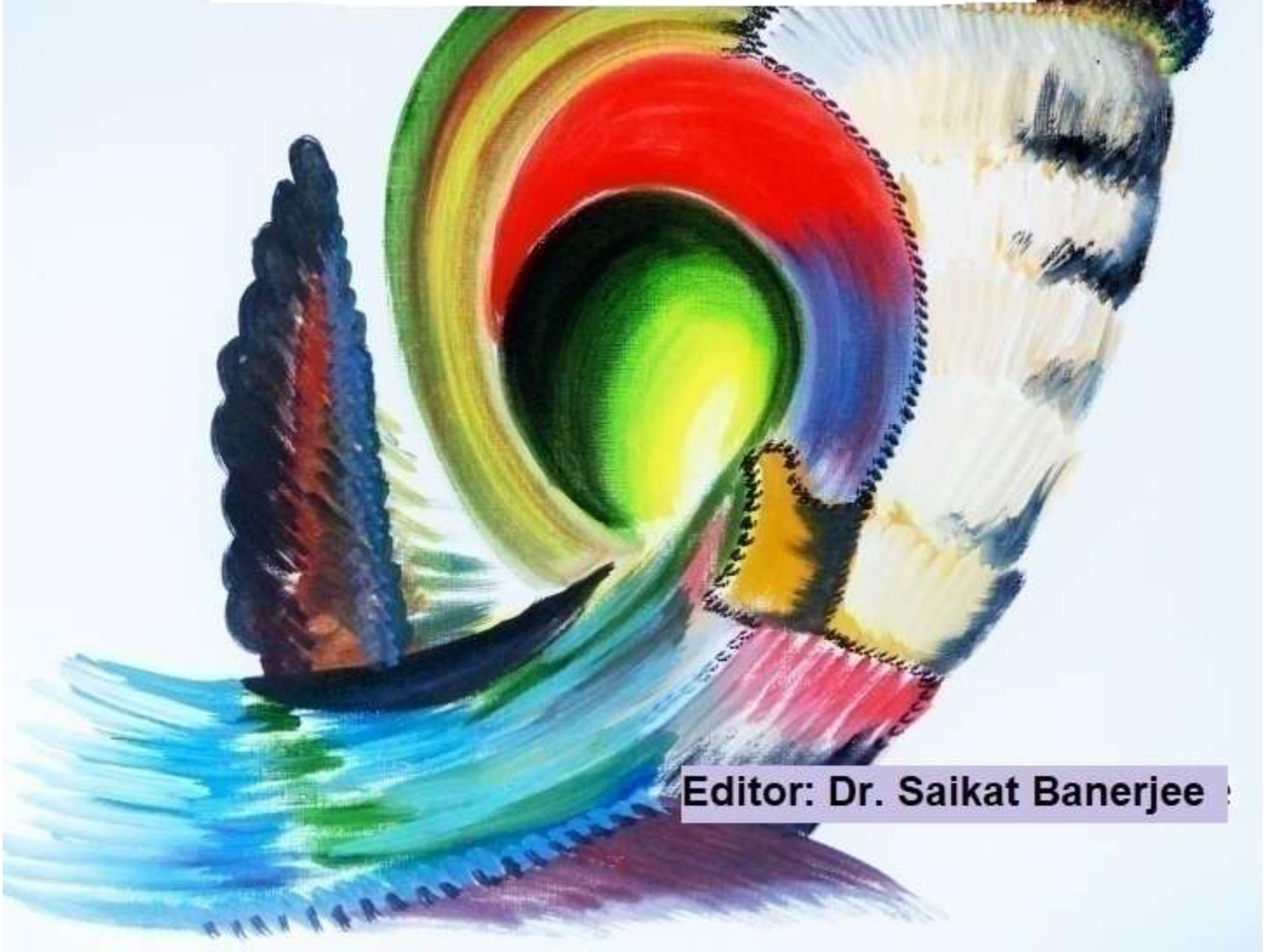

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"Monsters of the Mind: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* in the Gothic Tradition"

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Abstract: This essay examines Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* through the lens of psychoanalysis, cultural theory, and the Gothic tradition. Both novels expose the repressed desires and anxieties of their eras by deploying Gothic tropes—monstrosity, the uncanny, and the haunted landscape—as projections of the unconscious. Using Freudian models of repression and the uncanny, Jungian concepts of the shadow and the collective unconscious, and Lacanian formulations of desire and lack, the analysis demonstrates how these texts stage profound psychic conflicts. *Frankenstein* externalizes its creator's divided self in the figure of the Creature, while *Wuthering Heights* represents unconscious drives through its violent, spectral relationships. By linking the cultural anxieties of the Romantic and Victorian periods to psychological tensions, this paper argues that these canonical Gothic novels reveal the dark, unspoken forces shaping individual and collective identity.

Keywords: Gothic fiction, psychoanalysis, repression, monstrosity, unconscious, cultural theory, Freudian uncanny.

Introduction: Gothic Fiction as a Site of Psychic Unrest

The Gothic novel has long been recognized as a literary form preoccupied with the unconscious, repression, and the eruption of taboo desires. Edmund Burke's notion of the sublime as a mix of terror and pleasure reflects the aesthetic foundation of Gothic fiction—a genre that thrives on ambivalence, excess, and transgression. This essay argues that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*

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exemplify Gothic fiction's psychic complexity by transforming unconscious fears and desires into narrative spectacle.

By mobilizing Freudian, Jungian, and Lacanian theories of the unconscious, this study explores how these novels project cultural and personal anxieties onto monstrous figures, uncanny settings, and transgressive relationships. The Gothic genre serves not merely to entertain with horror but to dramatize the divided, unstable nature of subjectivity itself. As David Punter notes, the Gothic "opens up a space in which forbidden or repressed elements can be given symbolic expression" (Punter 9).

The Uncanny and the Uncanny Double in *Frankenstein*

Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny (*Das Unheimliche*) is central to interpreting *Frankenstein* as a psychological text. Freud describes the uncanny as that which is both familiar and alien, provoking dread because it reveals what should remain hidden:

> "The uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar." (Freud 124)

Victor Frankenstein's Creature embodies this uncanny quality—he is human-like yet monstrous, simultaneously self and other. Victor's horror at his creation stems from its function as his double, the externalization of his own forbidden desires for omnipotence and mastery:

> "I had worked hard for nearly two years...but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart." (*Frankenstein* 58)

Here, Victor's revulsion is not merely aesthetic but moral—a recognition of his own hubris and its consequences. The Creature acts as the return of the repressed, embodying the dark impulses Victor denies.

Moreover, Freud's theory of the uncanny double can illuminate the dynamic between creator and Creature. In projecting his denied desires onto the Creature, Victor attempts to disown them. But the Creature confronts him with his own divided self:

"I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel." (*Frankenstein* 87)

This biblical allusion underscores Victor's godlike ambition and its catastrophic reversal. The Creature is not simply other; he is Victor's unconscious made flesh.

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Repression and the Return of the Repressed

Freud's broader model of repression is equally essential to understanding the novel's psychological logic. Victor's scientific ambition is itself a form of denial—a refusal of human limits, mortality, and social bonds. Anne K. Mellor emphasizes that *Frankenstein* critiques Enlightenment rationality's repression of emotional and ethical responsibility:

> "Victor Frankenstein is a man who usurps the female role of reproduction while denying its moral implications." (Mellor 45)

Victor's repression of guilt and responsibility produces the novel's horror. The Creature's violence is not innate but the consequence of rejection and alienation. His narrative emphasizes suffering and desire for love:

"I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend." (*Frankenstein* 95)

This line implicates Victor's repression as the cause of monstrosity. The Creature's murderous rage is the return of what Victor seeks to suppress—human vulnerability, dependency, and moral accountability.

Jungian Archetypes and the Shadow in *Frankenstein*

Carl Jung's concept of the shadow—the unconscious aspect of the personality that the ego fails to recognize—offers another interpretive frame. The Creature is Victor's shadow, containing everything he refuses to acknowledge about himself:

> "Abhorred monster! Fiend that thou art!" (*Frankenstein* 96)

Jung argues that confronting the shadow is essential for psychological wholeness:

> "The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort." (Jung 20)

Victor fails this challenge spectacularly. He projects all blame onto the Creature and refuses integration. His tragedy is not merely scientific overreach but psychic disintegration.

Moreover, Jung's idea of the collective unconscious suggests that the Creature also embodies cultural anxieties about human limits, technological hubris, and the erosion of traditional moral frameworks. Shelley's novel thus stages not only individual psychology but collective fears.

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Lacanian Desire and the Lack in *Frankenstein*

Jacques Lacan's theory of desire as lack provides a further layer of analysis. Lacan contends that desire arises from absence, structured around what cannot be attained. The Creature's longing for companionship is precisely this inarticulable lack:

> "I will glut the maw of death, until it be satiated with the blood of your remaining friends." (*Frankenstein* 172)

His rage is not mindless but directed toward the impossibility of recognition and love. Victor's refusal to create a mate condemns the Creature to eternal lack, mirroring Lacanian formulations of desire as endless deferral.

Furthermore, Victor himself is driven by desire for knowledge, mastery, and godlike power—desires that can never be satisfied:

> "Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge." (*Frankenstein* 36)

Victor's tragedy lies in failing to recognize this constitutive lack, instead seeking mastery through transgressive science. Lacanian theory thus frames *Frankenstein* as a parable about the violence inherent in desire denied.

Great — let's continue with the second half of the essay, analyzing *Wuthering Heights* using Freudian, Jungian, and Lacanian psychoanalysis within Gothic and cultural frameworks.

Haunted Desires: *Wuthering Heights* and the Gothic Psyche

Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* represents one of the most enigmatic examples of Gothic fiction and psychological intensity in English literature. The novel's atmospheric setting, spectral imagery, and violent passions construct a world where emotional excess spills into physical and metaphysical terrain. Like *Frankenstein*, *Wuthering Heights* functions as a Gothic narrative that encodes personal, cultural, and unconscious anxieties, particularly those related to repression, class struggle, and sexuality.

Freud's theory of the uncanny is once again crucial. The novel's cyclical structure, ghostly visitations, and doubling create an eerie sense of repetition that signifies unresolved psychological trauma. Catherine Earnshaw's posthumous return to Heathcliff is a literal haunting and a symbolic return of the repressed:

"Let me in—let me in!" (*Wuthering Heights* 25)

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The image of Catherine's ghost at the window conflates interior and exterior space, self and other, past and present. It dramatizes the eruption of the unconscious into the symbolic order of the domestic, breaking the boundaries between life and death, love and destruction.

Freudian Drives and the Death Instinct

At the heart of *Wuthering Heights* is what Freud would later theorize as the "death drive" (*Thanatos*): a compulsion toward destruction, repetition, and the undoing of life. Heathcliff and Catherine's bond is obsessive, anti-social, and oriented toward reunion in death:

"I cannot live without my soul." (*Wuthering Heights* 123)

Catherine's assertion that she *is* Heathcliff reflects not only romantic intensity but a dissolution of ego boundaries. Freud's idea of the *id*, dominated by instinctual drives, is embodied in Heathcliff's vengeful, libidinal existence. His behavior aligns with unconscious compulsion, and his violence can be read as the acting out of unresolved psychic trauma.

Freud also identifies "repetition compulsion" as a symptom of neurosis. Heathcliff's endless reliving of Catherine's death, through his abuse of Hareton and Linton, as well as his architectural manipulation of space (blocking rooms, disturbing graves), indicates a failure to mourn and a pathological attachment to the past.

Jungian Shadow and Anima Projections

Jungian psychoanalysis deepens our understanding of the symbolic architecture of *Wuthering Heights*. Heathcliff represents Catherine's shadow self—untamed, passionate, and socially abject. Her decision to marry Edgar Linton is a choice for social conformity and repression of her instinctual self:

"It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now." (*Wuthering Heights* 81)

Yet she insists: "I am Heathcliff." This paradox reveals a psychic split. Jung argues that denying the shadow leads to neurosis. Catherine's decline and early death are symbolic of this denial. She sacrifices her unity for social respectability, and the price is psychic disintegration.

Heathcliff, too, projects his *anima*—the inner feminine—onto Catherine, which explains his lifelong fixation. Jung writes that "the projection of the anima causes a magical, idealizing perception of the other, rendering

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love obsessive" (Jung 134). Heathcliff's torment is not simply romantic grief but a metaphysical loss of inner wholeness.

Lacanian Desire and the Impossibility of Fulfillment

Lacan's theories of subjectivity and desire are particularly revealing in Brontë's narrative. For Lacan, the *Real*—the realm outside of language—can never be directly experienced. Desire is generated by lack (*manque*), and language structures subjectivity within the *Symbolic* order. The romantic idealism in *Wuthering Heights* is always already doomed by this structure.

Catherine's desire is fundamentally Lacanian: she longs for an impossible unity, a return to the pre-Oedipal realm where no boundaries separate self and other. Her famous declaration—

"Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same." (*Wuthering Heights* 82)

—reflects a desire to overcome the alienation produced by language, identity, and social order. Yet in choosing Edgar, she capitulates to the *Name-of-the-Father*, the Symbolic Law, and initiates her own psychic fragmentation.

Heathcliff's destructive actions are not simply revenge but expressions of radical discontent with the Symbolic. His attempt to break into Catherine's grave reflects a refusal to accept her symbolic loss and a regression toward the *Real*—a space beyond mourning, beyond social life, even beyond language:

"Be with me always—take any form—drive me mad!" (*Wuthering Heights* 160)

This invocation of madness, formlessness, and eternal presence articulates a death-bound desire that Lacan would locate in the subject's relationship to the *objet petit a*—the unattainable object of desire.

Spatial Symbolism and the Gothic Landscape

The geography of *Wuthering Heights* also encodes psychic topography. The two estates—Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange—embody the tension between chaos and order, id and superego, wildness and repression. Terry Eagleton reads the opposition in Marxist terms but recognizes the psychological dimension:

"Wuthering Heights represents a pre-capitalist vitality, irrational but emotionally intense, while Thrushcross Grange stands for repression, propriety, and bourgeois decay." (Eagleton 104)

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These spaces are not neutral settings but Gothic metaphors for inner states. The moors, likewise, represent a liminal space—neither civilization nor wilderness—a symbolic realm of psychic indeterminacy.

The return of the dead, the breakdown of time, and the presence of uncanny voices within this landscape mirror the fragmentation of consciousness itself. These are not merely supernatural tropes but deeply psychoanalytic expressions of subjectivity in crisis.

Cultural Theory and the Gendered Gothic

While psychoanalysis reveals much about individual drives, cultural theory situates these within broader social anxieties. Both *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights* register cultural transformations—in science, gender roles, class, and the family.

Mary Shelley, writing during the early 19th century, critiques the patriarchal and scientific rationalism of her time. As Anne Mellor notes, Victor Frankenstein's act of creation is a masculinist usurpation of female reproductive power (Mellor 56). The novel's Gothic aesthetics serve as a symbolic indictment of Enlightenment hubris and gendered alienation.

Brontë's novel, likewise, deconstructs Victorian ideals of femininity, domesticity, and class hierarchy. Catherine is not a passive angel of the house but a violently desiring subject. Her refusal to conform entirely to the feminine ideal—coupled with her psychic fragmentation—reflects the pressures of Victorian gender norms.

Heathcliff, with his ambiguous origins and racialized otherness, also reflects class and colonial tensions. As Fred Botting suggests, "the Gothic has always given voice to the culturally excluded and repressed" (Botting 12). These novels make visible what dominant ideologies seek to silence: female agency, class violence, queer longing, and psychic instability.

Conclusion: The Gothic as Psychoanalytic Allegory

Frankenstein and *Wuthering Heights* remain towering exemplars of the Gothic genre not because of their supernatural elements alone, but because they so precisely dramatize the fractures and repressions at the heart of human subjectivity. Their monsters—whether artificial beings or passionate lovers—are projections of inner chaos and longing.

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Through the lenses of Freud's repression and uncanny, Jung's archetypes and shadow, and Lacan's theories of desire and lack, we see how Gothic fiction offers not escapism but confrontation. It externalizes the tormented subject in grotesque or haunted form, allowing readers to encounter that which is most intimate and most terrifying: the self divided against itself.

Thus, Gothic literature, at its most potent, is not simply horror but revelation. It reveals the unmastered, unassimilated aspects of the psyche, dramatizing them within culturally fraught narratives that resonate across centuries. Shelley and Brontë's novels endure not simply for their aesthetic mastery, but for their piercing insight into the monsters we create—both on the page and within ourselves.

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