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Exploring Uncanny and Abjection in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein: Implications for Literature Education

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* through the theoretical frameworks of the uncanny and abjection, using Nicholas Royle's and Julia Kristeva's perspectives. The creature was examined as Victor Frankenstein's uncanny double and as an abject figure that disrupted the boundary between life and death. Through these lenses, the novel's critique of unchecked scientific ambition, identity crisis, and moral consequences was revealed. Importantly, the analysis highlighted the relevance of *Frankenstein* in literature education, as it fosters students' critical thinking on ethical responsibility, the dangers of technological advancement, and the complexity of human identity. By integrating Gothic themes with contemporary educational concerns, this paper emphasized *Frankenstein's* enduring value in fostering ethical reflection, narrative analysis, and interdisciplinary dialogue in the literature classroom. The findings supported using classic Gothic literature as a pedagogical tool for developing students' analytical, moral, and critical reasoning skills.

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1. INTRODUCTION

For centuries, Gothic literature has fascinated audiences with its exploration of the eerie, the uncanny, and the shadowy corners of the human psyche (Khodjamkulov *et al.*, 2024). Among the most enduring and influential works in this genre is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, a novel that continues to captivate readers with its haunting tale of ambition, isolation, and the unintended consequences of human innovation. This article conducts an in-depth exploration of Gothic fiction, using *Frankenstein* as a primary case study to reveal the genre's thematic depth and symbolic complexity. Far more than a simple horror story, Shelley's work examines the boundaries between science and nature, creator and creation, and the known and the unknowable (Bolton, 2014; Waham, 2023; Nicholson, 2020).

In Gothic fiction, characters often occupy a liminal space between the natural and the supernatural. Gothic novels are characterized by spooky castles, foreboding portents, mystery, and tension (Mishra *et al.*, 2023). In *Dracula*, the titular figure straddles life and death, transitioning between human and monstrous forms to manipulate and dominate. Similarly, in *Frankenstein*, the creature shares an uncanny bond with Victor, relentlessly tracking him across continents. Victor matches the monster's extraordinary, almost otherworldly speed, chasing his creation into the desolate expanse of the Arctic. Through such haunting parallels and supernatural elements, Mary Shelley masterfully constructs a Gothic narrative that resonates deeply with readers.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* incorporates central concepts of Gothic literature—the uncanny and abjection. The novel presents unsettling experiences of the familiar made strange, disrupting the boundary between human and non-human through the actions of Victor Frankenstein and his creation. Some researchers offers a framework to analyze the creature as a disturbing double of Victor, reflecting the perils of unchecked scientific ambition and identity fragmentation (see Royle in 2003 regarding *The uncanny* published in Manchester University Press). Meanwhile, Kristeva emphasizes the violation of self and societal boundaries, examining the fear of transgressing these limits physically and psychologically (see Kristeva, in 1982 regarding *Powers of horror: An essay on abjection* published in Columbia University Press). This paper explores the intersection of uncanny and abjection in *Frankenstein* and argues that the creature, as both an uncanny double and an abject figure, challenges social norms, natural law, and unrestrained technological ambition.

The purpose of this study is to examine *Frankenstein* through the combined perspectives of the uncanny and abjection, while highlighting its pedagogical relevance for literature education. The novelty of this research lies in integrating psychological theories with educational implications, offering a multidisciplinary approach that connects Gothic literature to modern classroom instruction. By engaging students with complex ethical, psychological, and scientific questions, this study emphasizes the enduring value of *Frankenstein* in promoting critical thinking, moral reasoning, and interdisciplinary learning in literature education.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative content analysis method guided by established theoretical frameworks. Detailed information regarding this method is explained elsewhere (Susilawati *et al.*, 2025). The primary source of data was Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which was examined through the lenses of the uncanny and abjection. The analysis applied the theory of the uncanny as presented in previous studies and the concept of abjection as developed in psychological literature. Supporting scholarly works were reviewed to enrich the

interpretation and ensure academic rigor (Bolton, 2014; Mishra *et al.*, 2023; Sherma, 2025; Waham, 2023). The analysis focused on identifying how the novel reflects the psychological and philosophical dimensions of Gothic literature, particularly concerning uncanny doubling and abjection. Additionally, the study explored how these theoretical insights can inform literature education by fostering students' critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and interdisciplinary learning.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Brief Summary of Frankenstein

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* narrates the story of Victor Frankenstein, a young scientist who becomes obsessed with discovering the secret of life. Driven by ambition, he collects body parts from corpses and successfully reanimates a living being. However, Victor is horrified by the grotesque appearance of his creation and abandons it immediately (Mishra *et al.*, 2023). The creature, experiencing loneliness and rejection from society, becomes increasingly bitter and vengeful. As a result, it begins to destroy everything Victor loves, leading to the deaths of Victor's friends and family members (Waham, 2023). In pursuit of the monster, Victor travels across Europe and finally into the Arctic, where he dies from exhaustion. The creature, upon discovering Victor's death, mourns his creator and disappears, intending to end its own life (Bolton, 2014).

The novel blends elements of Gothic and Romantic literature, exploring the consequences of human ambition, the dangers of violating natural laws, and the responsibility that comes with scientific discovery (see <https://blog.oup.com/2018/04/modern-prometheus-relevance-frankenstein-200-years/Nicholson>). Shelley combines supernatural horror with ethical and philosophical questions that remain relevant today. For educational purposes, *Frankenstein* serves as a powerful narrative for discussing moral responsibility, the limits of scientific experimentation, and the emotional consequences of social isolation. The novel provides valuable insights for students to reflect on ethical dilemmas and the complexities of human identity, making it a meaningful text for interdisciplinary literature education (Sherma, 2025).

3.2. The Representation of the Uncanny in Frankenstein

In *Frankenstein*, the concept of the uncanny is central to understanding Victor's relationship with his creation. The uncanny, as described in literary theory, refers to the disturbing experience of something familiar that has become unfamiliar and unsettling. Victor assembles the creature from human body parts, elements that are ordinarily familiar, but the combination of these parts into a living being results in a grotesque and horrifying entity that instills fear in both its creator and society (see Royle in 2003 regarding *The Uncanny* published in Manchester University Press). This transformation of the familiar into the terrifying reflects the core of the uncanny experience within the narrative.

The doubling effect between Victor and his creature further intensifies the uncanny dimension of the novel. The creature can be viewed as a mirror of Victor's own hidden desires and ambitions. As Victor seeks to transcend natural boundaries through scientific experimentation, his creation embodies the dark consequences of his unchecked ambition. The creature's existence reflects Victor's repressed fears and desires, making it an uncanny double that haunts him throughout the narrative. The pursuit between Victor and the creature across vast landscapes symbolizes the inseparable connection between the creator and his creation.

The uncanny in *Frankenstein* also resonates with broader societal anxieties about rapid scientific progress during the period in which Shelley wrote. The novel reflects contemporary

fears about humanity's growing ability to manipulate life and nature, highlighting the ethical uncertainties surrounding scientific advancements (see <https://blog.oup.com/2018/04/modern-prometheus-relevance-frankenstein-200-years/Nicholson>). In the context of education, this portrayal of the uncanny allows students to explore critical questions about the moral responsibilities of scientific discovery, the consequences of ambition, and the psychological dimensions of human identity. By analyzing the uncanny elements in Frankenstein, students can develop deeper insights into the ethical and psychological complexities that remain relevant in modern scientific and technological debates (Waham, 2023).

3.3. The Embodiment of Abjection in The Creature's Identity

The concept of abjection is essential to understanding the creature's identity in Frankenstein. Abjection refers to that which disrupts established boundaries, causing fear, disgust, and repulsion. The creature, assembled from dead body parts and brought to life through unnatural means, challenges the distinction between life and death, human and non-human, and nature and science (see Kristeva, in 1982 regarding Powers of horror: An essay on abjection published in Columbia University Press). Its physical form violates societal norms of what is considered acceptable and coherent, provoking horror in everyone who encounters it.

Victor himself experiences abjection upon seeing the creature come to life. Although he succeeds in his scientific pursuit, he is immediately repulsed by the very being he created. The creature's existence embodies Victor's transgression of moral and natural laws, symbolizing the breakdown of order and the intrusion of chaos (Bolton, 2014). The monster's body becomes a physical manifestation of the abject, constantly reminding both Victor and society of the consequences of overstepping ethical and natural boundaries (Waham, 2023).

In the educational context, the abjection in Frankenstein offers a valuable platform for students to explore ethical dilemmas related to science, technology, and human identity. Analyzing the creature's abject identity encourages learners to reflect on the importance of respecting ethical limitations in scientific innovation and to examine the societal treatment of individuals who exist outside normative definitions of humanity (Sherma, 2025). Such discussions foster critical thinking and ethical awareness, making Frankenstein an important text for interdisciplinary learning.

3.4. Intersection of Uncanny and Abjection: Blurring Boundaries of Humanity

In Frankenstein, the creature simultaneously embodies both the uncanny and the abject, blurring the boundaries that define humanity. As Victor's creation, the creature is a living reflection of Victor's inner conflicts and ambitions, serving as his uncanny double. At the same time, the creature's grotesque, unnatural form positions it as an abject figure that violates the limits of life, death, and human identity (see Kristeva, in 1982 regarding Powers of horror: An essay on abjection published in Columbia University Press). It is well-explained in Royle in 2003 regarding The uncanny published in Manchester University Press.

The intersection of uncanny and abjection intensifies the psychological horror present in the novel. Victor's scientific ambition leads him to create life by assembling dead body parts, an act that disrupts natural order and social norms (Bolton, 2014; Van den Belt, 2009). The resulting being, although capable of thought, emotion, and speech, is constantly rejected by society due to its terrifying appearance. Its existence creates both fear and pity, emphasizing the complexity of human responses to what is simultaneously familiar and alien.

From an educational perspective, this intersection offers students a comprehensive lens to analyze how literature reflects ethical, psychological, and societal anxieties. Engaging with these concepts allows learners to critically examine issues such as scientific responsibility, social exclusion, and the moral consequences of innovation (Waham, 2023; Sherma, 2025). The novel encourages reflection on how society defines humanity and the ethical implications of crossing natural boundaries.

3.5. Moral and Ethical Lesson from Frankenstein

Frankenstein presents profound moral and ethical lessons that remain relevant to contemporary scientific and educational discussions. Victor's obsessive pursuit of scientific knowledge leads him to transgress natural boundaries, resulting in disastrous consequences for himself, his family, and his creation. The novel emphasizes the dangers of unchecked ambition and the need for scientists to consider the ethical implications of their work before engaging in experimentation (see <https://blog.oup.com/2018/04/modern-prometheus-relevance-frankenstein-200-years/Nicholson>).

Victor's failure to take responsibility for his creation highlights the importance of accountability in scientific endeavors. Although he achieves his goal of reanimating life, his refusal to nurture, guide, or accept the creature results in suffering and tragedy. The narrative serves as a cautionary tale, illustrating how the absence of ethical responsibility can lead to unintended harm (Bolton, 2014).

In educational contexts, these moral lessons encourage students to critically evaluate the responsibilities that accompany scientific and technological progress. By analyzing Victor's ethical failures, students are challenged to reflect on their own values, consider the broader impact of scientific advancements, and develop a sense of moral responsibility that extends beyond personal achievement (Waham, 2023; Sherma, 2025). This ethical inquiry fosters not only academic knowledge but also character development, which is essential in shaping responsible future scientists, educators, and citizens.

3.6. Pedagogical Implication for Literature Education

Teaching Frankenstein in literature classrooms offers valuable opportunities for developing students' critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and interdisciplinary understanding. The novel's complex exploration of scientific ambition, moral responsibility, and social exclusion allows educators to engage students in meaningful discussions that extend beyond literary analysis. By examining the consequences of Victor's actions, students are encouraged to evaluate the ethical dimensions of scientific research and technological innovation (see <https://blog.oup.com/2018/04/modern-prometheus-relevance-frankenstein-200-years/Nicholson>).

Furthermore, integrating theoretical frameworks such as the uncanny and abjection enables students to approach the text from multiple analytical perspectives. These frameworks challenge learners to explore psychological and philosophical dimensions of human identity, encouraging deeper comprehension of character motivations and societal reactions (see Kristeva, in 1982 regarding Powers of horror: An essay on abjection published in Columbia University Press). It is explained in Royle in 2003 regarding The uncanny published in Manchester University Press. Through these analyses, students develop skills in applying abstract theoretical concepts to concrete literary examples, enhancing both their analytical and interpretive abilities (Bolton, 2014).

In addition, Frankenstein serves as a useful tool for interdisciplinary education, connecting literature with ethics, science, psychology, and philosophy. This interdisciplinary approach

promotes holistic learning, allowing students to recognize the interconnectedness of knowledge across fields while developing their capacity for ethical judgment and reflective thinking (Waham, 2023; Sherma, 2025). As such, *Frankenstein* remains a highly effective text for fostering intellectual engagement and personal growth within literature education.

3.7. Relevance of *Frankenstein* in Modern Educational Contexts

Frankenstein remains highly relevant in contemporary educational contexts due to its exploration of timeless ethical, scientific, and social issues. In an era marked by rapid advancements in artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, and biotechnology, the novel serves as a powerful cautionary narrative that encourages students to critically examine the moral responsibilities associated with scientific discovery (see <https://blog.oup.com/2018/04/modern-prometheus-relevance-frankenstein-200-years/Nicholson>). By engaging with the novel, learners can reflect on how scientific innovation must be balanced with ethical considerations to prevent unintended consequences (Bolton, 2014).

The novel also addresses themes of identity, alienation, and social exclusion, which remain significant in modern discussions on diversity, inclusion, and human rights. The creature's experiences of rejection and marginalization provide a platform for students to explore the importance of empathy, acceptance, and ethical treatment of those who differ from societal norms (Waham, 2023; Causadias *et al.*, 2018). These discussions foster a greater understanding of contemporary social challenges and prepare students to navigate complex moral landscapes in their personal and professional lives (Sherma, 2025).

By incorporating *Frankenstein* into modern curricula, educators can promote interdisciplinary dialogue that connects literature with contemporary scientific, psychological, and ethical debates. The novel's enduring relevance supports the development of critical reasoning, moral sensitivity, and interdisciplinary competence among students, making it an essential text for twenty-first-century education (Mishra *et al.*, 2023).

3.8. Integrating Theoretical and Educational Perspectives in *Frankenstein*

The integration of the uncanny and abjection in *Frankenstein* provides a comprehensive understanding of the novel's psychological depth and its educational value. The creature embodies Victor's internal fears and unchecked ambition, reflecting the psychological conflict of the uncanny, while simultaneously existing as an abject figure that disrupts natural and societal boundaries (see Kristeva, in 1982 regarding *Powers of horror: An essay on abjection* published in Columbia University Press). This dual representation enhances the novel's complexity and its relevance to contemporary discussions on scientific responsibility and ethical dilemmas (Bolton, 2014).

From an educational standpoint, applying these theoretical perspectives offers students the opportunity to analyze complex literary concepts while connecting them to modern issues (see <https://blog.oup.com/2018/04/modern-prometheus-relevance-frankenstein-200-years/Nicholson>). The novel serves as an effective platform for interdisciplinary learning, encouraging students to explore literature not only as a form of artistic expression but also as a medium for ethical inquiry and social reflection (Waham, 2023; Sherma, 2025). Through this approach, learners engage with critical themes such as ambition, identity, social exclusion, and moral responsibility, developing skills that extend beyond literary analysis and contribute to ethical awareness in contemporary academic and professional environments (Mishra *et al.*, 2023). Finally, this adds new information regarding the language education, as reported

elsewhere (Haristiani & Rifa'i, 2020; Haristiani & Rifa'i, 2021; Fatawi *et al.*, 2024; Luckyardi *et al.*, 2024; Farida *et al.*, 2024).

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* by applying the theories of the uncanny and abjection to reveal the novel's layered exploration of psychological, ethical, and educational dimensions. The creature's existence, shaped by Victor Frankenstein's scientific ambition, challenges the boundaries between life and death, human and non-human, while also exposing the dangers of exceeding natural limits without accountability. The novel illustrates how unchecked ambition can lead to personal tragedy, social rejection, and unforeseen consequences. In the context of education, *Frankenstein* remains highly relevant for developing students' critical thinking and ethical reasoning skills. The novel's complex narrative allows learners to engage with interdisciplinary topics that intersect literature, science, psychology, and moral philosophy. By analyzing the consequences of Victor's actions, students are encouraged to reflect on the responsibilities that accompany scientific advancement and human innovation. This reflective process fosters not only intellectual growth but also personal development, as students confront questions about identity, ambition, responsibility, and empathy. As modern society continues to face new technological and ethical challenges, *Frankenstein* offers timeless lessons that contribute meaningfully to contemporary educational discourse and lifelong learning.

5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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