

THE BLURRED LINES OF FANTASTIC: EXPLORING TZVETAN TODOROV'S FRAMEWORK
IN EDGAR ALLAN POE'S *THE OVAL PORTRAIT* AND ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON'S
OLALLA

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Abstract

Fantastic literature has been regarded as one of the most controversial genres especially because of its broad spectrum and popularity. Many critics have various insights into the fantastic literature and Tzvetan Todorov is one of the prominent theorists because of the fact that his theory's contribution to the area has been accepted since it has been put forward by him. His theory of fantastic has elements such as uncanny and marvelous and there are similarities and sharp boundaries between them. The fantastic is regarded as blurrier and more fragile when it comes to categorize a literary text as fantastic in Todorov's terms. *Olalla*, written by Robert Louis Stevenson in 1885 is a novella which has elements like gothic atmosphere, strangeness, and potentiality for supernatural incidents with uncanny characters. In these texts, a soldier who stays in a remote house as a guest in Spain, encounters family's living members goes through strange incidents, while he tries to figure out the relationship between an old painting of the member of the family and its uncanny similarity to others. Because of the ambiguity of the plot, the story provides the reader a strong background to be analyzed through the lens of Todorov's theory. Similarly, Edgar Allan Poe's short story, *The Oval Portrait* published in 1842 reflects the specialties of uncanny feelings and the Gothic literature. Also in this story, the narrative is shaped around an uncanny portrait of a lady which turns into a meta-story. In this paper, the similarities and differences between two stories in terms of their narrative styles and placement in fantastic sphere will be analysed under the light of Todorov's theory of fantastic.

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1. INTRODUCTION

“But would you kindly ponder this question: What would your good do if evil didn’t exist, and what would the earth look like if all the shadows disappeared”¹

Fantasy, for literature and beyond, has been a prominent element for ages and the 19th century has been a turning point in terms of the development of the fantastic literature. Its close bounds to imagination, perception and creativity are related to philosophical and psychological aspects to literature. Also, fantastic genre is built with a durability to be categorized and its value is hidden in its fluid and ambiguous nature, directing the readers to avoid the traditional limitations. (Jackson, 2009) Breaking off the limitations may also be seen as the fluidity of the narrative styles, periods, historical contexts because of the fact that there is a vast diversity in that sense. Although their historical backgrounds, narrative styles and themes may be considered as different from each other, from Schiller, Edgar Allan Poe, Robert Louis Stevenson to Mikhail Bulgakov and H. P Lovecraft can be united under the vast umbrella of the genre. Therefore, there have always been a major critical works upon this diversity and Todorov has been one of the prominent critics in that sense: “The value of Todorov’s work in encouraging serious critical engagement with a form of literature which had been dismissed as being rather frivolous or foolish cannot be over- estimated, and anyone working in this area has to acknowledge a large debt to his study” (Jackson, 2009, p.3). In this article, Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Olalla* (1885) and Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Oval Portrait* (1903) will be analysed throughout the lens of Todorov’s *Fantastic*.

The section of Theoretical Framework of the Uncanny in Gothic Narrative in this article explores how the concept was pioneered by Sigmund Freud as a psychoanalytic term and its etymological explanation. In addition, Tzvetan Todorov’s application of the term as a literary genre will be analysed elaborating how it resonates with Freud’s concept in literary works. Then, Todorov’s distinctive theory, *Fantastic*, is explored with its boundaries because it has peculiar conditions, as Todorov suggests, primarily hesitation. The transition between fantastic, uncanny and

marvelous will be clarified in order to be applied on the texts. As theoretical framework, Rosemary Jackson’s comments on *Fantastic* are also taken as a source of analysis which aim to clarify the theory and the ‘paraxial area’. David Punter’s comments on Edgar Allan Poe’s narrative style are explored as further examples of the uncanny and fantastic. It can be seen that his theoretical framework resonates with the elements such as imagination and reality, perception and supernatural which are the backbones of the explored literary texts in this article. In that sense, Nicholas Royle’s interpretation which points uncanny as a deconstruction, will carry the article to the prominent names such as Derrida and Roland Barthes, and their suggestion about familiar and unfamiliar is connected to the uncanny concept.

Section three examines *The Oval Portrait* and *Olalla* in terms of their resonance with the uncanny and fantastic. This article discusses that there are both similarities and differences between two stories when Todorov’s theory of fantastic is applied to them in aiming to create an interrelation between their relationship with the theory. Furthermore, the discussions mostly deal with the narrator’s hesitation. For instance, upon seeing the painting in *The Oval Portrait*, the narrator’s reaction is characterized by senses of both confusion and apprehension. This scene aligns with the idea that the uncanny occurs when one encounters with the uncertainty of evaluating animate objects as inanimate, or vice versa. At first, both narrators are in an ambiguous area with the uncanny feelings, one of which resonates with fantastic: *Olalla*. However, *The Oval Portrait*’s meta-narrative brings more precise end to the feeling of hesitation. The character’s encountering with the portrait and the questioning of the reality serves as a clinging to fantastic sphere till the explanation of the author about the portrait. Also, in further discussion, Kant’s understanding of sublime and meta-story of *The Oval Portrait* are connected in order to make a relation among the uncanny, sublime and the artistic creation.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE UNCANNY IN GOTHIC NARRATIVE

¹ Bulgakov, 2001, p. 368

Uncanny, a concept that emerges in Gothic fiction, forms a theoretical basis for fantasy literature that examines the mysterious and supernatural in terms of exploring psychological and thematic elements. Originating from the German word *unheimlich*, introduced by Sigmund Freud in his article, “*The Uncanny*” (1919), it represents the eeriness of something that is both familiar and strange. This duality creates inherently a feeling of discomfort within individuals. Through analytical perspective in analyzing gothic works of notable authors such as Edgar Allan Poe, Mary Shelley, Robert Louis Stevenson, Bram Stoker, Shirley Jackson etc., it becomes a vehicle to focus on their stories which blur the boundaries between real and illusion, natural and supernatural. The feeling of uncanniness brought by these dualities, which affects both the characters and the readers, is strengthened by the thematic elements in gothic narratives, such as ghosts, curses, mysterious portraits, and deserted castles. The theoretical discussion in this section is based on the relevant concepts, uncanny as the focal point, views in Todorov’s *The Fantastic*, arguments in Freud’s essay, “*The Uncanny*”, the analysis and interpretations of the leading theorists of Gothic fantasy literature. This perspective allows us to examine the psychological analysis that Gothic fiction elements evoke in both the characters and the reader, not only instilling fear but also challenging the traditional narrative style, which makes Todorov’s theoretical work one of the outstanding literary guides as a narrative strategy.

The uncanny has been conceptually analysed by Sigmund Freud in his seminal essay the “*Uncanny*” (1919), defined as *unheimlich* meaning unfamiliar, “return of the repressed”, and scary. He explains that the term “belongs to all that is terrible-to all that arouses dread and creeping horror” (Freud, 1919, p.219). In the essay, he clarifies what is fearful is not because of its strangeness but of strangely acquaintedness. Being strangely acquainted reminds individuals of the deepest oppressed desires inside them. Thus, the relation between strangeness and familiarity causes a sense of discomfort and anxiety. He suggests that the uncanny obscures the boundaries between what is familiar and unfamiliar, touching the hidden feelings and memories. For instance, he argues “the return of the dead” when an individual loses a

loved one and calls the dead back through dreams, it triggers and causes the person’s repressed emotions and fear to come to the surface, which is uncanny because it goes beyond the border between life and death. Based on the psychological issues relating to the uncanny, Freud extends its effects in literature where authors employ such themes from real-life occurrences in broader sense. He discusses that “in the first place a great deal that is not uncanny in fiction would be so if it happened in real life; and in the second place that there are many more means of creating uncanny effects in fiction than there are in real life” (p.18). Fiction can be used as a means to explore uncanny elements by revealing the inner world of characters who are exposed to psychologically disturbing experiences such as “Dante’s *Inferno*, or the ghostly apparitions in *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* or *Julius Caesar*” (p.18). Thus, uncanny serves as an essential element crossing the boundaries of perception in fiction as it allows writers to expand the constraints of real life.

Relying on this concept, Todorov further analysis focuses on uncanny in the genre of the fantastic which he presents as a state of indecisive situation on the part of both characters and readers, which is the first condition for establishing the position of fantastic. “The literature of the fantastic leaves us with two notions—reality and literature— each one as unsatisfactory as the other” (Todorov, 1973, p.168). He suggests that the fantastic creates ambiguity for readers to engage, and becomes a vehicle to challenge their perception of reality. For Todorov, when explaining this state of uncertainty, there must be an illusion at the center because the reader has to constantly question reality, and is always obliged to choose an option. “The ambiguity is sustained to the very end of the adventure: reality or dream? truth or illusion?” (p.25) It always leaves the reader in dilemma, causing them to question their understanding of environment. Thus, this dilemma challenges the conventional narrative form and continues to leave the reader at the point between reality and illusion. This dual experience enriches the fantastic story by turning the mysterious into a central, narrative role, rather than only a background. He explains his theory with these conditions:

The fantastic requires the fulfilment of three conditions. First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world

of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character; thus, the reader's role is entrusted to a character...the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work. Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as 'poetic' interpretations. (p.33)

Todorov states that this hesitation is the common indecision of the reader and the character. That is why his structuralist method when examining fantastic works, positions the uncanny on one side and the marvelous on the other. He puts the fantastic right in between. However, he does not give a space for the fantastic. It is placed on the borderline between the uncanny and the marvelous. Accordingly, the reader chooses one of the two and steps out of fantasy. At this point, Todorov explains the uncanny and extraordinary in his theory, "The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighboring genre, the uncanny or the marvelous". (p.25) If the events take place despite the laws of nature, they are considered uncanny; if they occur within the framework of other unknown laws, they are considered marvelous. Todorov explains this situation with the following words:

If he decides that the laws of reality remain intact and permit an explanation of the phenomena described, we say that the work belongs to another genre: the uncanny. If, on the contrary, he decides that new laws of nature must be entertained to account for the phenomena, we enter the genre of the marvelous (p.41).

In other words, if the fiction includes surprising or shocking events, and all these are explained by the existing laws of reality, the text is in the category of the uncanny. Conversely, if the occurrences end with the acceptance of the extraordinary, that is, in a way that cannot be explained by the laws of nature, the text is marvelous, which stands out as the genre closest to real fantasy. Here, it happens beyond traditional boundaries of reality. The

categorization highlights readers' role to decide both the direction of the story and the category of genre. About the role of readers, Jentsch puts it in his study that "one of the most successful devices for easily creating uncanny effects is to leave the reader in uncertainty [...] to do it in such a way that his attention is not directly focused upon his uncertainty, so that he may not be urged to go into the matter and clear it up immediately" (Jentsch, 1906, p.216). Thus, both the role and contribution of the reader are overwhelming. The narrative deepens as the reader's indecision and uncertainty evoked by the author increases the tension of the story.

The reader's reaction to the text is one of the focal points, as the blurring of the distinction space between the fantasy and reality depends on it. As Rosemary Jackson defines this space as "the paraxial area", borrowed the concept from Todorov as a meaning of space where the fantastic exists. "This paraxial area could be taken to represent the spectral region of the fantastic, whose imaginary world is neither entirely 'real' (object), nor entirely 'unreal' (image), but is located somewhere indeterminately between the two" (Jackson, 2009, p.12). She claims that the region is not completely real or fantasy; however, its implication provides readers with questioning and redefining their established values and reality. Hélène Cixous also interprets this technique as "a subtle invitation to transgression." Its usage in fantasy literature enables them to broaden the scope of literature, offering a variety range of literary devices, themes and non-linear narratives by subverting conventional perspectives in literature. This process reveals how the usage of uncanny in the fantastic brings constant judgment of the established norms together with uncertainty between familiar and unfamiliar, reality and illusion.

In this context, Edgar Allan Poe's works exemplify the uncanny genre in the fantastic and go beyond traditional writing both semantically and formally as Todorov underscores that "Poe remains very close to the authors of the fantastic both in his themes and in the techniques that he applies." (48) For Todorov, both Poe's techniques of writing such as first-person and non-linear narratives in literary forms, and uncanny and mysterious plot structures emphasize his role as fantastic author. As David

Punter puts forward, “A sense of the uncanny [...] Poe’s tales of being buried alive, of the resuscitated or returning dead, of tormented bodies and minds, of irrepressible buried secrets created a new and influential literary vocabulary” (Punter, 2012, p.179). His unique style of narrative influences and reshapes both genre and content, indicating that all eerie dichotomies such as sanity and insanity in *The Tell-Tale Heart*, life and death in *The Fall of the House of Usher*, doppelgängers in *William Wilson*, hallucination and real world in *The Black Cat* etc. are displayed in his short stories, and fall under the category of uncanny in the fantastic literature. Thus, Poe’s blurring of the distinction between reality and imagination, nature and the supernatural represents the uncanny in his themes. This brings to mind Nicholas’ interpretations that deconstruction is another name for uncanny as it challenges traditional narratives by fading these distinctions.

Therefore, Nicholas Royle defines the uncanny as a form of deconstruction as well. According to him, deconstruction which the uncanny symbolizes “makes the most apparently familiar texts strange; it renders the most apparently unequivocal and self-assured statements uncertain. It shows [...] how the strange and even unthinkable is a necessary condition of what is conventional, familiar and taken-for-granted” (Royle, 2003, p.24). As conventional ways of applying to texts when examining the works are deconstructed, it brings new strategies to seek unfamiliar familiarity. For instance, Jacques Derrida points out Roland Barthes’ texts as “familiar to me but I don’t yet know them – this is my certainty – and this is true of all writing that matters to me” (Derrida, 1988, p.264). The dual experience of encountering texts in both familiar and strange ways mirror the human conditions. For Derrida, Barthes’ texts are true and real as they reflect the reader’s inner world and evoke repressed emotions, which creates an uncanny effect on the reader. On the one hand, it is familiar as it takes the reader on a self-discovery, and on the other hand, it is strange as it deals with repressed emotions, and implies more feelings and experiences to explore. Thus, these two aspects of literature, strangeness and familiarity to both ourselves and the works, shed light on human nature as it is stated, “Literature, with its fundamental process of mirroring lived life, is by nature uncanny” (Bennett and Royle, 1995, p.179),

add meaning from the real life and deepen our reading experience by bringing repressed emotions and thoughts to the fore.

3. TRUTH OR ILLUSION? THE DUALITY IN *THE OVAL PORTRAIT AND OLALLA*

The elements of ambiguity and illusion are the prominent motifs which navigate readers to a vague area between reality and perception in fantastic literature. The dichotomy between the empirical experience and illusionary perception are one of the most common backbones of the genre. “The etymology of the word ‘fantastic’ points to an essential ambiguity: it is un-real. Like the ghost which is neither dead nor alive, the fantastic is a spectral presence, suspended between being and nothingness” (Jackson, p.12). The dichotomy of experience and illusionary perception serves as a source of conflict within the fantastic narratives. Characters deal with the question of what real and imagined are, navigating an area of the problematic subjective truths and shifting perception of reality. As Rosemary Jackson (2009) states in her text: “The fantastic problematizes vision (is it possible to trust the seeing eye?) and language (is it possible to trust the recording, speaking ‘I?’)” (p.18). Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Olalla* and Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Oval Portrait* can be the instances of narratives in which the authors present the unknown, and the ambiguous boundaries between the reality and illusion. Also, Todorov (1973) suggests that: “We are, in Freudian terms, within the perception-consciousness system. This is a relatively static relation, insofar as it implies no particular actions, but rather a position – a perception of the world rather than an interaction with it” (p. 120). Although it may be asserted that the texts share similar aspects when they are discussed throughout the fantastic genre, their differences also can be seen when one analyses the stories. The potential hesitation in their narrative, inclination to the fantastic and uncanny can be observed when they direct the readers to an uncertain area, as Todorov suggests, an area which is perceived rather than interacted.

In *Olalla*, the narrator’s storyline is interrupted by a morning light and his realization of a portrait on the wall, in which a woman from the family is portrayed. (Stevenson, 1885). Similar to *Olalla*’s protagonist’s dealing with the light, *The Oval*

Portrait's narrator tries to apprehend what he truly notices by arranging the light in order to see properly, and he declares: "I thus saw in vivid light a picture all unnoticed before. It was the portrait of a young girl just ripening into womanhood. I glanced at the painting hurriedly, and then closed my eyes. Why I did this was not at first apparent even to my own perception" (Poe, 1903, p.1). While using the light as a vehicle used for reaching the empirical reality, the character actually questions the sensible world and the reader can be positioned as being in the fantastic sphere because of the uncertainty. "[...] the fantastic refers to an ambiguous perception shared by the reader and one of the characters" (p.46). In this sense, this scene is also a portrayal of an ambiguity of perception of the character and the quest of the reader and protagonists for the reality can be observed in both texts. Also, when *Olalla's* narrator approaches to the portrait, he declares: "And yet there was a likeness, not so much speaking as immanent, not so much in any particular feature as upon the whole" (Stevenson, 1885, p. 376). It is obvious that he is in a hesitation about the appearance of the woman in the portrait because of the similarity of the physical qualities among the family.

After the narrator of *The Oval Portrait* sees the painting, his reaction brings the reader to the uncanny feeling: "I had found the spell of the picture in an absolute life-likeness of expression, which, at first startling, finally confounded, subdued, and appalled me" (p. 2) This scene resonates with the idea that uncanny feeling occurs when one has the idea that the uncertainty of evaluating an animate object as inanimate as well as the ambiguity concerning the inanimate object as animate (Freud, 1919). The similar reaction in Stevenson's story can also be realized; however, it includes a stronger feeling of hesitation for the reader, and this hesitation stems from the reader's familiarity with how *Olalla* and Felipe resemble the woman depicted in the portrait: "And yet I had a half lingering terror that she might not be dead after all, but re-arisen in the body of some descendant" (p. 372) In this scene, narrator's idea of the possibility of the woman's potential resurrection in someone else's body also directs reader to ambiguity and doubt. Thus, it brings us to the hesitation which Todorov suggests and it should be experienced by both narrator and the reader. The

sharp boundaries between the natural and supernatural are ambiguous and it leaves the reader with implications of fantastic. Thus, the clarification upon the situation is not brought in that sense. The other instance of the hesitation aimed for the reader can be recognized when the narrator builds a connection between Felipe and the portrait: "Felipe served my meals in my own apartment; and his resemblance to the portrait haunted me. At times it was not; at times, upon some change of attitude or flash of expression, it would leap out upon me like a ghost." (Stevenson, 1885, p. 372). By stating that the portrait haunts him -like a ghost- the author adds a fantastic element to the narrative, as the narrator implies the possibility of a supernatural element interrupting his perception of the reality. It can be concluded that Todorov's understanding of hesitation which builds the fantastic, is kept throughout *Olalla*. However, some critics have also considered the mother as a vampire because of the fact that she bites the protagonist's hand and there is an image of blood in that scene (Angelo Riccioni, 2020). After that incident, the soldier is bewildered by her power and does not perceive why she acts like this. The author leaves the reader in hesitation again. Thus, the reader assumes that there may be other reasons for her to act like that, meaning there are other possibilities apart from her being a vampire. This situation gives the text specialties of as fantastic in Todorov's term.

The narrator questions his feelings when he sees the paintings: "In these paintings, which depended from the walls not only in their main surfaces, but in very many nooks which the bizarre architecture of the chateau rendered necessary- in these paintings my incipient delirium, perhaps, had caused me to take deep interest" (Poe, 1903, p.1). Todorov suggests that the uncanny feeling does not have to include empirical reality but instead it is about the characters' feelings: "It is uniquely linked to the sentiments of the characters and not to a material event defying reason" (Todorov, 1973, p.47). In that sense, protagonist's delirium contributes as an emotional complexity to the text, indicating vulnerability and psychological downfall and also serves as a bridge between reality and illusion. Similarly, with the appearance of *Olalla* to the narrator portrays euphoric feelings made up of sadness and excitement by stating: "I will not say that this enthusiasm declined; rather

my soul held out in its ecstasy as in a strong castle, and was there besieged by cold and sorrowful considerations" (Stevenson, 1885, p.387). The relationship among the portrait of the lady, the mother and Olalla and the confusion they cause may be observed in this sentence.

After narrator's confusion, there is a resolution in *The Oval Portrait* which carries the reader from the area of fantastic to uncanny. Firstly, the narrator keeps the hesitation and states that: "Long- long I read- and devoutly, devotedly I gazed. Rapidly and gloriously the hours flew by and the deep midnight came" (Poe, 1903, p.1). However, after he starts to tell a story about the portrait and the woman who is depicted in it, the reader starts to abandon the area of that hesitation gradually. Because of the fact that the hesitation is not vivid and the story becomes a meta-story which portrays another realm, it can be put forward that the story departs from the sphere of fantastic. Thus, it brings the reader to Todorov's suggestion which asserts if the reader is certain about that the events depicted in a text can be rationalized thereby carrying the law of nature, the work is counted as uncanny rather than the fantastic. (Todorov, 1973). However, the reader feels the fact that the story develops more ambiguously in *Olalla*. The narrator brings about the uncertainty repetitively when it is compared to Poe's story. For instance, the echoing sound of a cry can also be considered as a motif of uncertainty because the reader may not decide whether it is a supernatural or not. Also, the narrator is hesitant if it is a sensible sound coming from an animate thing or disillusionment of him. Furthermore, the depiction of the sound is also related to sentiments of the character which may bring us to uncanny:

"At times I would doze, dream horribly, and wake again; and these snatches of oblivion confused me as to time. But it must have been late on in the night, when I was suddenly startled by an outbreak of pitiable and hateful cries. I leaped from my bed, supposing I had dreamed; but the cries still continued to fill the house, cries of pain, I thought, but certainly of rage also, and so savage and discordant that they shocked the heart. It was no illusion; some living thing, some lunatic or some wild animal, was being foully tortured" (Stevenson, 1885, p.380)

In Edgar Allan Poe's meta-narrative, the reader faces the fact that the artist fails to be in sanity. When the painter loses his control of self-consciousness and lets his wife die, it brings the reader to the point in which they question the uncanny effect of artistic production. It would be beneficial to mention Kant's understanding of the sublime in order to make a connection between the uncanny feeling which emerges from the artist's attitude. He suggests that while beauty deals with our understanding and imaginative power in a balanced way, sublime fractures it with an awe and it does not belong to nature. His negative implications about sublime addresses to the idea that beauty is a richer and more important concept rather than the sublime. Reflecting sublime in nature should be in a controlled way in an art piece, and over- reflected emotions are opposite to Kant's understanding because this kind of subjectivity would be counted as harmful for oneself. "Charms and emotions move one against one's will; they are always impudent because they rob others of their peace. To storm [*stürmen*] against my sensibilities is rude" [*unartig*] (Kant, 1987, p.100). Also, after encountering the portrait, the narrator claims that it is far from being simply beautiful and it excludes the nature's mildness in *Olalla*. It is claimed by the narrator that it does not suit the conventional artistic approach because of its harshness. Thus, it evokes a sense of bewilderment: "I remembered how it had seemed to me a thing unapproachable in the life, a creature rather of the painter's craft than of the modesty of nature, and I marveled at the thought, and exulted in the image of Olalla" (Stevenson, 1885, p.387). The relationship between sublime and uncanny takes place in their philosophical inquiry to the complexities of both cognition and the perception, which can be interpreted in two texts.

4. CONCLUSION

Todorov's theoretical analysis of the fantastic serves as a means to examine the ambiguous space between reality and illusion, leaving readers to decide its flow whether it is categorized as the uncanny or marvelous. Fantastic holds a paraxial space between the uncanny and the marvelous, and it exists only when both characters and readers are hesitant and indecisive to figure out if the occurrences can be explained by natural or supernatural laws. The readers' role determines its

classification as much as the characters as they are given two options to question and choose. Thus, the experience of hesitation and duality form the essence of the fantastic genre. On one hand, the genre becomes the uncanny if the ambiguity ends within the limits of real world, on the other hand, it is accepted as marvelous if it clarifies with supernatural laws. Therefore, Todorov's fantastic theory is highly variable and dependent on developing events and flow, meaning that it exists as long as uncertainty persists. Providing a psychological basis, Freud's seminal essay, "*The Uncanny*", introduces the term from his psychoanalytical perspective, suggesting that uncanny effects uncover the hidden desires within individuals. Freud's survey of the uncanny offered a background for Todorov's further literary analysis. What Freud regards the uncanny as a feeling of spookiness in experiencing something familiar but unknown turns into the fantastic, a literary field opened by the hesitation of readers. In other words, Freud addresses to the psychological effects of the uncanny whereas Todorov applies these elements into the narrative strategy and enable readers to engage with the events closely, indicating the turning flow of Freud's psychological concepts into literary analysis. In the theoretical framework of this study, the concepts in Todorov's work *The Fantastic*, which forms the basis of this article, are examined, and then the arguments in Freud's essay, which is the source theory of Todorov, are discussed.

After discussing the fantastic and the uncanny through the critical lens of Todorov and Freud, it is explained how this theory has been applied to works by Gothic writers who constitute other examples of the genre, such as Edgar Allan Poe and his short stories as instances of the uncanny in the fantastic. Poe also set a unique example by challenging the traditional narrative understanding, techniques and themes of the period. This includes the structuralist questioning brought by the fantastic as it crosses the boundaries between reality and fantasy. It also sheds light on the interpretations of other theorists who have contributed to the field of fantasy fiction, such as Rosemary Jackson, Hélène Cixous, David Punter,

Nicholas Royle, and Jacques Derrida. After laying the theoretical foundation, the section 3 discusses the application of this theory through the short stories, Robert Louis Stevenson's *Olalla* and Edgar Allan Poe's *The Oval Portrait*. This section deals with the intertwining of the dilemma of reality and illusion, life and death, highlighted by fantasy literature, thus constantly questioning the readers' perception of reality. It discusses how these themes are handled in *Olalla* and *The Oval Portrait* as the embodiment of the fantastic aspects. The uncanniness brought about by these dilemmas and hesitation is evident in the stories. In both stories, the object that causes the characters a feeling of discomfort and indecision revolves around the painting. The sublimation effect created by the artistic creation on the characters is interpreted through Kant's work, *The Critique of Judgment*. The effect evoked by the painting, and the emergence of repressed emotions created in the subconscious are illuminated by Todorov's concept of the uncanny.

As a result, the ambiguities and dualities brought by fantasy both challenge the characters' perceptions of reality and established norms in the text, and transcend beyond the text, making the readers an active participant, allowing them to have the same experiences, and direct the genre of the text. When we apply the theory to the short stories, it is obvious that *Olalla* maintains ambiguity, leaving readers uncertain whether the events in the text are natural or supernatural, which makes it the fantastic. On the other hand, *The Oval Portrait's* supernatural themes of uncertainty connect to real life through meta-narrative, which makes it uncanny. Considering that the active role of the reader is at the core of this concept, to which genre it belongs in Todorov's scheme will depend on the reader's interpretation. Therefore, *Olalla* concludes, "What people? There are neither men nor women in that house of Satan's! What? have you lived here so long, and never heard?" (Steven, 1885, p.403). The intersection of these two short stories, in Todorov's theoretical light, reveals the significant impact of this genre on literary forms and invites us to a journey both in the literary world and in our unconscious.

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