

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the introduction of the study. The introduction of the study contains the background of the study, statement of problem, purpose of study, the significance of the study, and previous studies.

1.1. Background of The Study

Despite being a standalone, film can be considered a form of literature. It has a lot of relation to literature. To be clear, many films represent the screen version of literary works. Like written texts, it tells stories, develops characters, and explores themes. It uses visual storytelling, cinematography, dialogue, and editing to convey meaning, conducted by a director, much like how an author in literature employs narrative structure, imagery, and symbolism. Both mediums serve as reflections of human experience and culture. A film is an audio-visual medium that is designed to spread a message. A message that came from human thoughts, mindsets, emotions, and even an ego that resides in the unconscious. As an expression of life itself, films represent the values that are now prevalent in society, which strengthens their power to shape individual minds (Zillatullina et al, 2019).

In relation of human's minds and the one that resides in the unconscious, Austrian neurologist and founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, In the practice of psychoanalysis, employed various techniques, notably free association and dream analysis, to dig deeper into the recesses of the unconscious mind. Dream analysis involved interpreting the symbolism and content of dreams to reveal underlying unconscious conflicts. Freud's structural model of the mind included the id, ego, and superego, each contributing to the complexities of

human behavior. His emphasis on the role of early childhood experiences in shaping personality and the concept of libido as a driving force behind behavior were groundbreaking ideas. Despite facing criticism and challenges to empirical validation, Freud's work significantly influenced the field of psychology. His theories on psychosexual development, the Oedipus complex, and the unconscious mind laid the groundwork for psychodynamic psychology. Freud's legacy remains prominent, shaping not only clinical psychology but also impacting literature, art, and cultural studies. Freud, throughout his essay *Creative Writers and Daydreaming*, argues that creative writing is similar to daydreaming, where authors channel their unconscious desires and fantasies into structured narratives. This idea connects with literature and film because both often serve as outlets for psychological expression, exploring themes like repression, wish fulfillment, and the unconscious mind.

Freud compared these repressed, wish fulfilling fantasies written by creative writers as a child who plays with an imagined world to fulfill their unfulfilled wishes because these repressed fantasies may be a breach to their ego and superego if being expressed in a direct way. The fantasy of the author's imaginative world has an immensely important consequences for their works: albeit if they were real, could give no enjoyment, distressing, even, could spark pleasure and enjoyment in the realms of the consumer's realms of fantasy in the hand of creative writers, with their skilled, aesthetically-inducing tell-tales of what may be about their personal daydreams. In short, Freud argues that literature and storytelling function like daydreams—both allow individuals (authors and readers) to express unconscious desires and fantasies in a socially acceptable way—transforming their personal fantasies into stories that are enjoyable to others that resonate with it like a bridge that connects a gap between reality and fantasy.

In an attempt to explore the unconscious mind further, in 1919, Freud also wrote an essay called "*The Uncanny*" — also titled *das Unheimliche* in his

language. It is about a psychological experience that incites an discomforting feeling where something feels familiar but foreign at the same time. Usually relates to a feeling that arises when something long forgotten or repressed resurfaces, disturbing the sense of reality. It may stem from a childhood belief that had been buried deep and repressed inside the subconscious yet never went away. For example, something that can challenge one's identity and gives an uneasy feeling of existential crisis like seeing an inanimate object that looks very human or a reflection of oneself when staring at a mirror for too long. While having a contrasting topic focus, both Freud's essays are connected with human's unconscious mind that can be applied in literature.

While "*Creative Writers and Daydreams*" centered on how human's repressed desire can be fulfilled with transforming it into literature, "*The Uncanny*" focuses on exploring human's fear and discomfort and how it can be expressed by transforming it into literature. It explores the psychological experience of something being both familiar and strange at the same time, leading to feelings of discomfort and eeriness. He investigates the causes of this unsettling effect and how it manifests in literature, art, and everyday life. "*Art should comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable.*", stated by the infamous Caesar Cruz quote. Literature is part of art and Film has so many relations enough to be called literature.

As an instance of someone that is a part of cinematography whose film is known to challenge the audience's discomfort and dread, director Tod Browning— known as the Edgar Allan Poe of the cinema, is one of the most influential directors in early cinema regarding the horror genre. Several notable works directed by him, such as *The Unholy Three* (1925), *The Unknown* (1927), *West of Zanzibar* (1928), and his most timeless well-known— *Dracula* (1931). Upon seeing his works, there's a recurring theme in plenty of his works. And that recurring theme is basically one of the most appealing elements that what makes Browning known for in that classical era of cinema, the carnival of circus

performances, that's mixed with something uncanny, either its deception in deceiving the beholder, or in its placement of socially charged mutilation (minor details or what-not) appeals to the macabre, *et cetera*, perchance. However, none of those movies mentioned above are the star of this research.

This research will mainly discuss Browning's most controversial film among his other controversial films, *Freaks* (1932). Said film had been banned in the United Kingdom for three decades (1932-1963), said to be so disturbing that some people even left the movie theater upon its initial releases, the movie that drove Browning's career downhill after his peak success in 1931's *Dracula* movie. And the exact reason being the film mainly includes massively explicit, striking displays of graphic human's physical disability— from that era, we may call it Freak Show— while having its own disturbing part at the end that contributes to its disputed disability representation at large.

Connecting Freud's Uncanny theory with Browning's *Freaks*, there are a lot of things that are explorable. For starters, the effect between the author and reader— the distinction between Browning's background and his watchers, Running away from home to join the circus at the age of 16, Browning may have been exposed to familiarity of what terrifies the audience, in this case, the graphic human's physical disability. Browning's perspective of normalcy may have become distorted to the people whose eyes barely exposed to his upbringing. In retrospect, it is mentioned that the uncanny came from doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or an apparently lifeless object might not be in fact animated. To able-bodied people, to have complete limbs and complete mind are what fits the criteria of looking like a human. Keep in mind that this movie came from the early 20th century, morals have progressed thus making what's on the lenses today are distinctive to what's back then. One important thing that needs to be mentioned about Browning's *Freaks* is that — regardless of its disputable reputation upon overall portrayal of the performers and let alone the disabilities— it remains a relevant, impactful film that portrays various disabled

actors to this day (Rapold, 2023). And from the characters, be those with normal, physically-functional or disabled body, we could delve into their representations of Freud's psychoanalysis theory “*The Uncanny*” in Browning’s 1932 “*Freaks*”.

1.2. Statement of Problem

1. What is the relation between The Uncanny and the characters’ mental state in *Freaks* (1932)?
2. How was the representation of The Uncanny displayed in *Freaks* (1932)?

1.3. Research Objective

1. To find out about the relation between Freud’s The Uncanny theory and the characters’ mental state in *Freaks* (1932).
2. To explore more about the representation of The Uncanny displayed in *Freaks* (1932).

1.4. Research Significance

Sigmund Freud in his essay “*The Uncanny*”, in the study of aesthetic mentioned that it is only rarely that a psychoanalyst feels impelled to investigate the subject of aesthetics even when aesthetics is understood to mean not merely the theory of beauty, but the theory of the qualities of feeling and it is still remains true even to this day. If art is meant to disturb the comfortable and comfort the disturbed then the stability needs to keep going, just like Tod Browning’s *Freaks* still holds an importance in cinema several decades later. Where usually when it comes to uncanny what deceives us is the makeover, the property, etc but Tod Browning’s *Freaks* shows realness that incites the feeling of anxiety towards some audiences thus to touch on this subject of matters in nowadays' society.

Therefore, not only is this study beneficial to its own writer in honing and learning research skills, the study is also expected to give the readers benefits and enrich the knowledge after reading this study especially about the aesthetic of the uncanny and how its elements may have its relevance towards enhancing literary experiences, in this study, related to the cinema of film.

1.5. Previous Studies

Connecting Freud's Uncanny theory with Browning's *Freaks*, there are a lot of things that are explorable. For starters, the effect between the author and reader— the distinction between Browning's background and his watchers. Running away from home to join the circus at the age of 16, Browning may have been exposed to familiarity of what terrifies the audience, in this case, the graphic human's physical disability. Browning's perspective of normalcy may have become distorted to the people whose eyes barely exposed to his upbringing. In retrospect, it is mentioned that the uncanny came from doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or an apparently lifeless object might not be in fact animated. To able-bodied people, to have complete limbs and complete mind are what fits the criteria of looking like a human. Keep in mind that this movie came from the early 20th century, morals have progressed thus making what's on the lenses today are distinctive to what's back then. I've said that according to Freud, there are a variety of factors playing into the uncanny effects. However, before we touch into that topic, According to Freud, there are a variety of factors playing into the uncanny effects. However, before we touch into that topic, the writer would like to mention there is plenty of research being a big help to back this current research.

Starting with Bernd Herzogenrath (2003)'s "*Tod Browning's Freaks and the Fraternity of the Fragmented*". Herzogenrath in this article attempted to

connect the dots between the movie *Freaks* to a blend Freudian and Lacanian concepts of psychoanalytic theories. Relating *Freaks* to psychoanalytic theory, especially a blend of Freudian and Lacanian concepts, since the movie's associations with grotesque spectacle situate it in the Freudian realm of the fantastic and that of Lacan's mirror stage. Which will be massively helpful, given this research will utilize a similar approach and since film and psychoanalysis from their respective beginnings have sported a relationship which can be defined as both elective affinity and dangerous. Though this research mainly will focus on Freud's Uncanny theory, Lacan's concepts will be the perfect push to Freud's Uncanny theory. Herzogenrath's research correlates Browning's *Freaks* and the fragmented bodies which becomes a bridge to connect Freud's uncanny theory regarding mutilation and dismemberment. Upon Lacanian's approach, Herzogenrath mostly touch on Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, which may be useful addition to this research, however, when it's about Lacan's theory, there's another one I'd like to include to help dissecting the uncanniness of Browning's technique of deceptive deception in the showcase of his cinema.

Hugh S. Manon (2006)'s "*Seeing Through Seeing Through: The 'Trompe l'Oeil' Effect and Bodily Difference in the Cinema of Tod Browning*" brought up Browning's background upon the biographical connection between his films and his experiences as a magician's assistant and showman in American carnival sideshow circuit back in his youth days before jumping into the world of cinemas. Manon (2006) described in his study, that Browning's films are, always, revealing the secret behind deception. Which is the counter opposite of the magician's code. Manon's article brought up Jacques Lacan's description regarding *trompe l'oeil* to identify a motive within the Browning oeuvre, which is one of the terms to describe director's pattern past the cinema's costumed realism. Upon reading this article, the realization of one of the uncanny elements in Browning's movies was brought to light. The way Browning deceives deceptions may incites the hesitation within audiences. In other films, this may not be as effective as Browning's *Freaks* exclusively due to the fact that *Freaks* is basically the only

film, thus far, showing a graphic depiction of an actual, starking disability. Most films may use the help of makeup and such, through that screen. But with *Freaks*, audiences may question the usual deception of movies, with the actual actor, making them question whether the human performing is actually a human or not, given how real their limbless bodies and such are. This research may not be as relevant given how it barely even highlights the actual psychoanalysis branch used— The Uncanny. However, it could help delve deeper to find particular elements of The Uncanny from the film.

Katherine Fusco (2018)'s *"Feast Your Eyes, Glut Your Soul": Lon Chaney, Tod Browning, Disfigurement, and the Limits of Redemptive Affects"* research is as necessary as the former two also become a necessary addition to this research, given how it questions the intention of *Freaks* film, probing on the topics of which direction of disability portrayal Browning's *Freaks* is. Disembarking onto Browning's backgrounds as it's sailing into its goal, which turns out to be informative to be mentioned here. Furthermore to this article, Andrea Poppiti (2011)'s essay *"The Exploration of Humanism through Prejudice: 19th Century Freak Shows and The Images of the "Human Body"* will give additional information regarding the morals of 19th century people on how they see disabled people. It may not speak directly and has no correlation to the main topic, due to it being closer to social study. The topic, regarding people's perception of disabled-bodied people, will become a helpful key to opening the door to the question of uncanny.

Moreover, there are also web articles that shed light into this same subject. *"'Freaks' Is the Granddaddy of Disabled Horror; for Better and Worse"* by Kristen Lopez raise the topic regarding the highlighting topics in Browning's said most controversial film. It raise the talk about, in accordance to the article, that the horror film revels in the world of deformity and grotesqueness and, to a disabled viewer, that can be confusing in how relatable it is. Much of this comes from the fact that Browning himself was a part of a traveling circus in his youth. He saw

the disabled people that commonly populated what were then called “freak shows” and wanted to find a way to pay tribute to them. So when star Earles brought up to Browning that he should adapt the short story “*Spurs*” by Tod Robbins, the director made MGM buy it for Browning to direct. The basic tenets of the story in “*Spurs*” remain, namely the relationship between Hans and Cleopatra, but Browning and a series of directors worked to create a depiction that, at the time, presented the circus performers as people. And that warmth is found in snatches throughout “*Freaks*.” Outside of the community Chasnoff refers to, there are various storylines showing the day-to-day world of these performers. Frances O’Conner, who has no arms, is seen casually eating with her feet while performer Prince Randian, known as The Living Torso, rolls a cigarette with his mouth. These scenes, presented so matter-of-factly, display disability as normal. What looks unconventional to an able-bodied person is basic and unspectacular. In these scenes Browning tries to destigmatize the disabled and remind them, in 1932, that they’re people. For many disabled people who grew up without others like them, “*Freaks*” became a gateway feature to champion. The shooting process was difficult, unaided by the fact that the circus performers were forced to eat outside the MGM commissary, due to complaints from the studio’s stars about seeing them. And once the film was finished, head of production Irving Thalberg was not happy with what he saw. Test screenings were rumored to have audiences fleeing the theater. One woman allegedly threatened to sue MGM because the sight of the disabled actors on-screen caused her to have a miscarriage. It’s unclear whether much of this was created by MGM itself in order to better sell “*Freaks*” as a horror feature.

Moving on, *The Case of FREAKS* by Robin Larsen and Beth A. Haller (2010) brings upon the topic about the thirty-year ban on the 1932 circus horror film *Freaks* illustrates how deeply we share cultural notions about the disabled body and people with disabilities. The film's documentary-style exposé of images of “abnormal” bodies enjoying daily life behind the scenes of a circus sideshow greatly engaged movie audiences, but they were simultaneously outraged by its

horror-genre treatment of the same bodies collectively avenging them-selves upon “normal” bodies. Ultimately, viewers were engaged through revulsion, not empathy. Contradictory and shifting notions about what constituted “normalcy,” especially normal sexuality, were reinforced. The construction of “freak” was in transition. No longer a celebrated exotic attraction, it was becoming a pathological, scientific specimen. Many audience members were moved to action to protest the film.

Ellen Peel’s *“Psychoanalysis and the Uncanny”* (1980) discussed about the literature of the uncanny offers an excellent area in which to look at the appropriateness of psychoanalytic theory to the study of literature. An apparently supernatural event - in literature or life - may simply result from a psychological disorder in the perceiver. The uncanny also has a special literary status, because studies of the psychology of writer and reader have singled it out. In addition, because supernatural literature is free from naturalistic rules, it can present psychoanalytic concepts especially well by using devices such as the double ideas, and not to reject them. Upon discussing them, Peel also uses few examples of the uncanny, for the subjectivity at the heart of the issue makes examples incapable of proving or disproving anything. Because definitions of “the uncanny” will develop throughout her discussion, Peel concluded roughly that the feeling seems to involve both fear and eeriness - a sense of supernatural potential. Peel uses the term “supernatural” to refer to what goes beyond naturalistic causality. It relates to uncanniness, but they are actually not identical.

The article *“Reclamation of the Disabled Body: A Textual Analysis of Browning’s Freaks (1932) vs Modern Media’s Sideshow Generation”* by Sasha Dilan Krugman (2018) introduces Tod Browning’s 1932 film *Freaks*, in conversation with nineteenth century carnival and fair practices and further explains the creation and development of the freakshow. In tandem with theoretical work by authors such as Judith Butler, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Adrianna Cavarero and Lennard Davis, the article positions the freakshow within

disability and trauma through the notions of ‘staring’, ‘normal’ and ‘horrorism’. Using two contemporary texts such as *American Horror Story: Freakshow* and the reality television series *Freakshow*, this article firstly introduces these texts thematically before analysing all three in conversation with one another as a means of further contextualizing the role of the freakshow in contemporary cultural products, then connecting these texts to the notion of violence and the use of disability as a tool for horror.

Andrea Poppiti (2011)’s essay “*The Exploration of Humanism through Prejudice: 19th Century Freak Shows and The Images of the “Human Body”*” will give additional information regarding the morals of 19th century people on how they sees disabled people. It may not speak directly and has no correlation to the main topic, due to it being closer to social study. The topic, regarding people’s perception of disabled-bodied people, will become a helpful key to opening the door to the question of uncanny.

