

Gothic Feedback and the Dark Side of Human Nature in *the Little Stranger* by Sarah Waters: A Freudian Psychoanalytic"

Hawar Sardar Ali

Assistant Lecturer, Ministry of Education – General Directorate of Kirkuk Open Educational College /
Kirkuk Center

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.91100303>

Received: 01 December 2025; Accepted: 05 December 2025; Published: 08 December 2025

ABSTRACT

In *Little Strangers*, Waters blends gothic fiction and Freudian psychoanalysis to critique the decays and struggles of the British aristocratic society. With the gothic and evocative backdrop of Hundreds Hall, fabled to be one of the most exquisite manors, the house comes alive in the tale's backbone, reverberating its stark remnants with the dormant terrors and hopes of the characters. The prose of *the Little Stranger* comes alive with the interviews and volatile feelings and the architecture of the house, as one as its decaying spires and cob webbed with the dissipated antagonistic feelings, concealed hallucinations and conquering dominion of the stifling ancestry of the house. Fraythe narrates his own picture of post imperial repression of England blending the ralted order of rationality with an unconscious island surging with repressed desires, of which his infatuation with Caroline Ayres epitomizes Freudian notions of repression and return of the repressed. The mysterious happenings within the hall are psychological as well as supernatural; they are the psychological manifestations of a person's unresolved psychological conflicts. This inquiry, considers Freudian notions of the uncanny, repression and the double to argue that the true horror in the story stems from the psychological constructions of reality which result due to the weakening of the mind. Through Waters's narrative, *The Little Stranger* lays forth ideas of the blurring of the conscious and subconscious paving way to the harrowing impact occur when restrained liberated emotions emerge.

Keywords: Freudian psychoanalysis, repression, the uncanny and its relation to psychological decay, Hundreds Hall, Dr. Faraday, repressed desires, gothic.

INTRODUCTION

The year 2009 saw the release of *The Little Stranger*, a novel by Sarah Waters that fuses gothic horror with Freudian psychoanalysis to examine the deep psychological and emotional currents underpinning human action. The story, set in post-war Britain, follows the life of Dr. Faraday, an orderly and rational physician, succumbing to the intrigue of the Ayres family and their ancestral home, Hundreds Hall, which is seemingly experiencing a decline in social relevance. Far from being a mere supernatural apparition, the ghost is a psychological construct of haunting emotions, dread, and trauma due to the class divide. Gothic tropes such as the dilapidated mansion, claustrophobic setting, and dreams and reality become one are some of the features used by Waters to delve into the disturbing elements within humanity. Christopher Baldick states that within Gothic literature, there is often the sentiment of "stages the return of what is psychologically, socially, or historically repressed" (Baldick 46). In *the Little Stranger*, the return of the repressed manifests through both ghostly and psychological apparitions that expose unsettling truths about a decaying British aristocracy.

Applying Freudian psychoanalytic theory in *The Little Stranger* demonstrates that the novel functions on several psychological fronts, especially concerning repression, the return of the repressed, and the uncanny. Freud's concept of the unconscious with its repressed wishes and traumas deeply shapes the characters as well as the strange happenings in the novel. The figure of Dr. Faraday, the unreliable narrator of the novel, embodies the clash between rationalism and repressed wish. His preoccupation with Hundreds Hall and its decaying aristocratic residents reveals the extent of his class envy, and also his unacknowledged desires. Freud noted, 'Repression occurs, so to speak, when an inclination which is socially or individually unacceptable is thrust into

the unconscious. “This is done in other neatly explosive way (Freud 147).” Across the novel, these impulses are repressed, yet manifest imaginatively with psychological disintegration, acts of violence bordering on the unspeakable, and phenomena of a spectral nature. Freud’s definition of the uncanny is concerned with “that which has been kept concealed and which wishes to be revealed (Freud 241)” and it is precisely for the purpose of the haunting of Hundreds Hall that such a definition exists. The house becomes a site of psychological transference: it literally shelters everything the family wishes to mourn—their insufferable shame and terror of social extinction.

As the novel undertakes the exploration of the anxieties within the Gothic tradition of the subconscious, the Gothic novel’s preoccupied terrors often serve as euphemisms for external struggles. Within the novel, the Ayres family that consists of Mrs. Ayres, her daughter Caroline, and her son Roderick, each has to bear the weight of grief, and alongside, guilt and the sense of becoming obsolete. Frederick’s assertion that trauma is never reconciled will always recoil back in self-destructive forms of self-violence and rage, is evident in the gradual deterioration in the house’s condition alongside the Ayres family’s mental condition. As Julian Wolfreys points out, Gothic literature contains structures that serve as “material representations of psychological decay and repression” (Wolfrey 88). Within the novel, the Hundreds Hall in ‘The Little Stranger’ is oppressive and a dilapidated husk, the weight of the years having become taut and releasing terror in myriad forms, psychological and otherwise.

Also, it became conspicuous that Waters’ novel also critiques class structures and social positioning. The decline of British gentry during that times, evokes the specter of the Ayres family, and their impending ‘downfall’ in the eyes of the public, as they struggle to maintain their prewar elitism in a rapidly changing world. The Dr. Faraday’s love for Hundreds Hall stems from the working-class, as he fantasizes to be in the upper class. It may be the class resentment and anxiety that is the actual cause for the disturbances in the house. “Gothic’s long-standing fascination with economic instability, social displacement, and the fear of downward mobility” as *Lucie Armitt* has observed, is also found in *The Little Stranger*. Thus, the novel’s horror stems from more than the supernatural; it is neuropsychological in that it displays the resentment of social playing and social expectation that is intricately weaved within the human condition. By synthesizing Freudian psychoanalytic theory with Gothic horror, Waters creates a narrative that is psychologically unsettling and socially critical at the same time. This novel, in its own way, encapsulates the fragmentation of identity, the ever-present reality of the social ladder, and the suffocating nature of repression. The text explores the constructs of infatuation, self-deception, and unrestrained psychological turmoil in more benign forms with Dr. Faraday’s involvement as the haunting grows more nebulous. *The Little Stranger* is thus able to extend the boundaries of Gothic fiction, while at the same time plumbing the depths of the human mind. The novel, on the other hand and through a Freudian lens, posits that what is terrifying is not the ghost, but the parts of the self that are so tenderly hidden and are waiting to explode in great fury and violate the semblance of control one is so desperate to pose.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sarah Waters’ *The Little Stranger* is a borderline novel of psychological horror and supernatural fiction that explores themes of haunting and social decay in a repressed setting. The story tackles gothic themes through a Freudian lens and demonstrates how class anxiety and repressed wishes manifest in disturbing and horrific ways. There has been academic debate about whether the specters that appear in the novel are the consequence of a supernatural phenomenon or whether they are products of Dr. Faraday’s mental struggles. Using Freudian psychoanalytic criticism and Gothic criticism, *The Little Stranger* is, above all, a disturbing portrayal of the subconscious and the heavy yoke of history.

The most profound understanding of ‘*The Little Stranger*’ might be to examine it through Freud’s concept of ‘The Return of the Repressed’. Freud theorizes that the traumas, emotions, and wounds that people wish to forget do not vanish. Rather, these traumas return to the surface in the most disturbing and unwanted form (Freud, 241). In Waters’ story, the Ayres family clings to the vestiges of their aristocratic ancestry and their inability to reconcile their descent in post-war Britain is baffling. All the odd occurrences in Hundreds Hall — the writings on the walls, the odd noises, the demise of unfortunate people — do not feel like supernatural occurrences, but instead, manifestations of deep-seated worries. Laura Joyce claims that the novel “haunting as a psychological rather than a supernatural force” (Joyce, 134). Even as it supports the thesis of the modifications brought about

in the novel being imaginary, it underlines the fact that the changes were not ghosts changed to an altered form of the reality. The protagonist, Doctor Faraday, also demonstrates repression. His the most admired character, Hundreds Hall, is not adored in an 'classical feeling' way, but is rather obsessively attributed to fantasized, unclass-sustaining dreams and ambitions.

Faraday hides himself under a mask of rationalism and distance, but he is unable to conceal the contradictions posed by his behavior and feelings. Freud argued that uncanny is the quality of being at once familiar and strange, soothing yet frightening, which in this case finds its perfect metaphor in the house itself. It is a poignant metaphor for memory as well as for decline and decomposition. Julian Wolfreys argues that some forms of Gothic fiction seem to manifest internal strife in the form of a haunted space, which means that the ghost in *The Little Stranger* is more of a primal projection than an actual being (Wolfreys 74). In this regard, Hundreds Hall starts to function as a mental battlefield where Faraday's suppressed grudges and the Ayres' unresolved mourning take shape in eerie and violent forms.

The Gothic genre has always captured social fears – Waters beautifully reflects the downfall of British high society during and after the Second World War using Gothic elements. The past is often viewed as a source of danger, and as with other Gothic novels, *The Little Stranger* does not shy away from this theme. Christopher Baldick claims that Gothic literature often “stages anxieties about historical decline, social instability, and personal disintegration” (Baldick 52). This is strikingly clear with the Ayres family, who, like their disintegrating mind and finances, are mentally strained. Their once opulent estate, which was the pinnacle of their social status, is now in ruins.

Lucie Armitt equally highlights the fact that *The Little Stranger's* horror does not stem from anything preternatural, but rather the slow disintegration of its characters. In her view, true horror resides in the collapse of people trying to persist in a society that does not consider them worthwhile (Armitt 139). This is most apparent in Caroline Ayres who wants so much to escape from the deadening solitude of Hundreds Hall, and ultimately encounters death in a tragic and enigmatic manner. The house becomes a dilapidated shadow of itself, an entity that ought to be deserted, but instead, like a parasite, it clutches onto its occupants and feeds off their suffering.

The Little Stranger captures far more than a thrilling ghost story – it reveals the deep-seated societal class conflicts looming within the dying aristocratic system and the emerging capitalist society. Waters sets her novel in a period where the histories of the past are being rewritten, where class systems stratified with industrialization are beginning to soften. Dr. Faraday, an educated son of a servant, is supposed to symbolize the new epoch of social mobility. But like the rest of us outcasts, he is never accepted into the world he admires; the so-called society does not embrace him, no matter how educated and successful he is. His life is filled with contradictions – deep admiration towards the Ayres family is soured by an equally strong resentment.

Through reading the story we that the narrator's himself in *The Little Stranger* becomes one of the most disputed matters in the book. Dr. Faraday's character is constructed as a sane, albeit peculiar, systematize of the happenings at Hundreds Hall. As the novel unfolds, the cracks in his sanity start to show. What if he is behind all the calamities that happen to the Ayres family? Is it possible that he is unconsciously producing the chaos he zealously suppresses? Some critics argue whether the author intended such meaning is part of the sophistication of the text. Marie Lulu Kohlke proposes that Waters “invites a reading in which the supernatural elements are less important than the psychological distortions of the narrator” (Kohlke 178). The claim supports the infamous projection theory of Freud's, which states that people put forth their hidden feelings onto others. Is it likely that the true terror in *The Little Stranger* is not supernatural apparitions, but the chilling corners of humanity's psyche?

The depth and breadth of *The Little Stranger* by Sarah Waters certainly puts it within the Gothic genre with its dreams and terrors, its haunted places, and the grip of the past upon the present. Dr. Faraday, the protagonist, is an odd individual who fixates on the run-down Hundreds Hall, which becomes the epicenter of a number of strange disasters. Waters incorporates the essential ingredients of Gothic literature: the mad with the supernatural, the aged mansion, and the tragedy-bound family, a head-spinning concoction that hovers at the interface between the psychological and the uncanny.

The novel's intense mood is centered at Hundreds Hall, which is more than just a setting; it is a living organism unto itself that devours the anxiety and terror of its occupants. After the Ayres family's decline, the house lost its former appellation of 'a glorious exponent of aristocratic power' and is now a mindless shell. The trope of the decrepit mansion is versatile enough to capture the essence of gothic literature; just like the decline of societal civility, it is inimitable. In this regard, it is fitting to point out that 'Gothic fiction is more concerned with ruins and decaying architecture than buildings that are new, and in good condition' (Armitt 142). This is how Lucie Armitt attempts to describe the setting of the novel in relation to 'the psychological and emotional instability of its characters'. Within this captured entity, 'the ghostly peering wallpaper, the walls that have crumbled and remain, the darkness of the corridors that threaten with their tight and dreadful surround' (Armitt 142) condemn each character to face the awful history that is decreed by the structure itself.

In addition, the haunting noises, strange disturbances, and freak malfunctioning contribute more towards its haunting presence. It still remains undecided whether these objects are mere illusions or subconsciously dreamt, but one cannot deny the fact that the house has an undeniable pull on each character, Caroline and Dr. Faraday being the most delicate. In support of this, Julian Wolfreys argues that it is quite common in gothic literature to come across the idea that houses serve the direct purpose of "repositories of repressed emotions and secrets" (Wolfreys 81). This validates Hundreds Hall possessing the vitality of reflectiveness dwelling within the fears and desires of its inhabitants.

The Ayres family is a quintessentially Gothic family: insular, tortured, and apparently bewitched. Roderick Ayres, the last scion of Hundreds Hall, is a psychologically distressed individual, 'suffering terribly from his injuries of war'. He appears to be merging into paranoia along with claims of a malignant entity residing in the house. This correlates to Gothic madness and fiction's endless obsession with unreliable perception. Freud's concept, "return of the repressed", comes to mind precisely at this point since Roderick's trauma comes to life in horrifying ways to conclude in an Asylum (Freud 243). It was propelled by some invisible force or succumbed to her subconscious despair remains one of the most unsettling ambiguities in the novel.

Mrs. Ayres, the matriarch, struggles with her nostalgia as it drives her to the brink of disintegration. Her mental struggles, whether stemming from her grief and guilt or the literal ghost of her deceased daughter Susan, is not clarified. This combination of her past fixation and failure to progress forward aligns with the Gothic – the past is another impediment that does not remain buried and threaded throughout literature such as *Wuthering Heights* and *The Turn of the Screw* (Baldick 57).

Like all other genres, Gothic fiction possesses a certain element that is uncanny. That is, the fascinatingly strange sentiment generated when something familiar turns alien. Freud mentions that the uncanny is, "the return of something once known yet long repressed" (Freud 245). The *Little Stranger* expresses this at Hundreds Hall with the uncanny happenings like doors opening and shutting on their own, writing that appears on the walls, and indiscriminate breaking of objects. All these occurrences can either be attributed to supernatural forces or the unconscious mind of the family suffering from mental decline.

Dr. Faraday, the narrator of the novel, overlooks these occurrences as the outcome of misaligned coincidences or simply stress at first, but his reliability as a narrator begins to concern me later on in the plot. Is it possible that he has unconsciously become one of the culprits of these disturbances? His intense anger against everything related to the upper class and at the same time an obsession towards Hundreds Hall leads to the assumption that there is some kind of psychological force which is incorporating itself from the background. Marie-Luise Kohlke claims that *The Little Stranger* "plays with Gothic ambiguity, refusing to confirm or deny the supernatural, instead leaving the reader in a state of perpetual uncertainty" (Kohlke 182). The amalgam of rational explanations and what cannot be understood defies logic and reason, trying to bring balance to things that does not allow for balance at all, and it is precisely this clash that makes Gothic literature so powerful. It enables the audience to confront their own fears, and that is the ultimate showdown with the inevitable reality of the unknown.

Domion conflict is one of the main ideas of gothic fiction. In the *Little Stranger*, it is seen in the conflict of the declining aristocracy versus the invading middle-class gentry. Dr. Faraday, an uninvited guest, personifies some of the more worrying aspects of Britain in the aftermath of the world war: a country with class divisions turned on its head. The control he has over the Ayres family, his slow but steady social integration to the life of Hundreds

Hall, his fixation to the point of obsession to the house, suggest an unsettling variation on the ghost story: the house is not only stalked by the specters of the past, it is actually under siege by the oncoming tide of the new dominion.

Andrew Smith states that “Gothic fiction has always been bound with our civilization’s dread of disturbance and change” (Smith 108). The real ghost in *The Little Stranger* is not so much an apparition but a spatial manifestation of how the Ayres family once existed. Dr. Faraday is almost too rational, to the point of becoming a more parasitic, sanguine figure, who feeds off the decline of Hundreds Hall while rationalizing his delusions of grandeur that he is its savior. In his last scene, which consists of him continuing to abandon the house and talking to its empty rooms, he cements his status as both its demolisher and its last, haunted, living phantom. Similar to other great Gothic tales, *The Little Stranger* revolves around one’s inability to escape the past. The novel concludes with a sense of uncanny unresolved anticipation—Hundreds Hall is deserted, but still stands poised, waiting for Faraday to abandon his grip on it. This leaves him eternally destined to wander the wreckage of his aspirations while the ruins of the Ayres family only emerge as a testament to a family’s failure turned savage alongside the too dynamic world. As Ann Heilmann notes, “Gothic fiction is obsessed with cycles of repetition - of the past bleeding into the present” (Heilmann 219). It is evident with this novel that there is no resolution to be found, rather a supernatural horror, a psychological breakdown, or a soft death within the erosion of life might just best fit here. In true Gothic fashion, it could very well be all three. While writing *The Little Stranger*, Sarah Waters seamlessly weaves in psychological and supernatural stories using the elements of Gothic fiction. Through the decaying mansion, the tormented and self-absorbed characters, and the complex psychological interplay, *The Little Stranger* stands as a modern Gothic masterpiece. There’s a haunting aspect to this story, both metaphorically and literally, the coexistence of reality and fantasy, where the past and present collide resembles the darkest existence which isn’t confined to the shadows but rather in the empty spaces of one’s head.

METHODOLOGY

The study employs qualitative methodology applying Freudian psychoanalytic criticism to account for the psychological repression, subconscious dread, and lingering psychological conflicts that not only add to the sheer misery of the characters, but also to the ruthlessly haunting atmosphere of the novel. In addition, an application of the Gothic framework of literary criticism was done to the setting, themes, and narrative style of the novel.

This research concentrates on the interpretation of the text within the confines of the novel’s storyline, symbols, and cast. Qualitative research does not use statistical analysis and this enables the scholar to focus on the psychological and thematic issues of the text. In Creswell’s words, qualitative research can be employed to analyze ‘the intricate emotional, cultural, and psychological layers’ of a piece of literature.

The methodology employs close reading and thematic analysis to demonstrate how the Gothic horror in *The Little Stranger* is not merely an external supernatural threat, but also inner manifestations of the character’s social fears and anxieties. The research incorporates class conflict and post-war anxieties to demonstrate how the conflict gives rise to terror in the novel within a broader framework of history and sociocultural conditions.

The foundation for this research derives from Freudian psychoanalysis. To a certain degree, the uncanny, with the repression with the return of the repressed, do engage with the concepts of the novel. As Freud has put it: the uncanny is a phenomenon where something familiar becomes strangely dislocated all at once and causes a great sense of discomfort. This is true for *The Little Stranger*, where Hundreds Hall, once a picturesque and soothing setting, has transformed into something menacing and psychologically terrifying.

The research focuses on Dr. Faraday’s obsession with Hundred’s Hall and the repressed desire for greater social standing determining his class arrogance and socially induced urge to ascend the class structure. The psychologically tortured Ayres’s, particularly Roderick and Mrs. Ayres, and the ways in which their suffering transforms into ghostly manifestations in the novel, along with the guilt and trauma that precede the tragedies like the death of Susan Ayres, which. The family’s slow descent into madness is said to support Freudian claims of unresolved grief, that in time, manifests in terrifying forms, leading to madness. As Botting argues, “Gothic fiction reveals the latent fears and anxieties embedded within social order”. This perspective is examined in *The*

Little Stranger with regard to Britain's post-war anxiety over class, social mobility, and the diminishing aristocracy.

- ❖ Setting and atmosphere: how Hundreds Hall functions as a decaying Gothic space, paralleling psychological and social collapse.
- ❖ Plot development and unreliable narration: how Dr. Faraday's view creates uncertainty around the novel's supernatural events.
- ❖ The uncanny: how psychological horror is fashioned through uncertainty rather than overt supernatural phenomena.

This research is premised on a close reading of *The Little Stranger*, focusing on extracts demonstrating the issues of repression, psychological haunting, and class anxiety. It also draws upon secondary sources such as scholarly articles, and Gothic literature as well as Freudian psychoanalysis. Some of the literary critics used in the research include Julian Wolfreys, Ann Heilmann, and Lucie Armitt who discuss the psychological dimensions of horror in literature within the context of Gothic traditions.

DISCUSSION THE RESULTS

In *The Little Stranger* by Sarah Waters, the supernatural is not bounded to the traditional definition of ghosts, but instead takes form as the haunting aspects of human psychology. From a Freudian perspective, the haunting phenomena at Hundreds Hall are excruciating echoes of fears, anguish, and traumas that are deeply repressed instead of being paranormal activities. The Gothic elements within the novel are discovered to be manifestations of the characters' subconsciousness's, controlling their behaviors, worries, and eventual demise. The discussion is organized around three principal ideas: the decaying mind, class antagonism, and the waning upper-class society as gothic elements.

The psychological terror depicted in *The Little Stranger* is best understood by exploring the concept of the unconscious mind developed by Sigmund Freud. Freudian theory divides human psyche into three parts: the id, ego, and superego. He further argued on conflict within self and its aftermath leads to bizarre resolutions – symbolically in the form of dreams, visions or unfounded fears (Freud, *The Uncanny* 241). This comprehension fits perfectly within the narrative of the book which suggests instances of supposed supernatural activities are actually manifestations of underlying concerns and wishes, especially from the protagonist, Dr. Faraday, and the Ayres.

What stands out the most in the novel is how the uncanny elements of the supernatural events are intertwined with Freud's definition of the uncanny (*Das Unheimliche*). Freud uncannily describes uncanny as “that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (Freud, *The Uncanny* 217). This literally describes the setting of the novel Hundreds Hall. It was once a place of security and grandeur. Now, it has decayed into a place that does not feel like home. The house is crumbling into ruin and so is the psychology of the people who live there. The inhabitants experience the house not as a home, but as an altered nightmare that they ironically remember.

For example, Mrs. Ayres is purported to be stalked by what she thinks to be the spirit of her departed daughter, Susan. Freud's theory would, however, suggest that what Mrs. Ayres attributes as haunting is merely a manifestation of her repressed trauma. Freud postulated that emotions that are not dealt with, especially guilt and grief, do not vanish; instead, they are suppressed in the unconscious mind and persist in influencing behaviors and thoughts in unforeseen ways (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 19). The haunting experiences that Mrs. Ayres has of her daughter are not supernatural but symbolic of her guilt for not being able to save her child. Heilmann further supports this position by stating that “the feminine Gothic often projects the trauma of the self onto the world as a ghostly figure” (Heilmann 94). Hence, Mrs. Ayres does not come undone from the shackles of reality because of a ghost, but because she is subsumed by grief and unable to process her heart's sorrow in light of current events.

In a similar fashion, Roderick Ayres, the successor of Hundreds Hall, suffers from what he considers to be a haunting and sinister presence. He undergoes peculiar disturbances where objects seem to move without a cause and disembodied voices can be heard within the house. However, a Freudian interpretation posits these elements stem from an individual's anxiety about their shortcomings regarding assumptions of inheritance and war induced trauma, rather than some external force. Freud argued that repression occurs when the ego expels the distressing memories and wishes into the void of consciousness to guard the self from harm (Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis 146). In this way, Roderick's notion of being rejected by the house is interpretatively his failure being realized by his subconscious.

The pivotal instance of Roderick's psychological decline takes place when he screams that something in the house is attacking him, citing its presence as leaving burns on his skin. Freudian psychoanalysis would interpret this act of self-flaming as a return to repressed violent urges exerted through self-harm (Beyond the Pleasure Principle 37). Roderick, devoid of the ability to face his failure and loss of control, perceives these emotions as external forces rather than internal strife. In this manner, *The Little Stranger* turns the Gothic horror of a haunted house into a metaphor for the true horrors: the mind.

Dr. Faraday is perhaps one of the most intricate personages within the novel, and as a narrator, he presents himself in a rational and calm manner, which to some degree makes one overlook the resentment and desire that lies underneath. Faraday's fixation over Hundreds Hall and the aristocratic society it encapsulates could be interpreted using Freud's theory of id, ego, and superego. The infatuated side, or the id, dictates one's less socially acceptable urges. On the other hand, the ego attempts to control how these instincts are expressed in the world, and the superego ensures that moral and social standards are followed (Freud: *The Ego and the Id* 24).

Born into a working-class family, Faraday has spent his life attempting to integrating into the upper class society. He seems to be a detached observer, a scientifically-inclined gentleman devoid of wonder who dismisses superstition, and yet his psyche reveals a stronger, much darker bondage to Hundreds Hall. Faraday's childhood longing to possess that which was denied to him encaged him psychologically and is crystallized in the moment he first steps into the house as a boy and carves out its architectural molding. From his very first visit, it is as though he has dreamed of removing fragments of the upper class's civilization—aristocracy. Freud argued that childhood fixations often dictate shackles of obsession in adulthood, and in Faraday's case, it is all too real as his endless delight in Hundreds Hall serves no purpose deeper than nostalgia. (Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis 30).

The death drive (Thanatos) could be a fitting explanation. Freud has speculated that alongside the will to survive (Eros), humans also have an innate urge to destroy and self-destruct (Beyond the Pleasure Principle 50). Perhaps Faraday's deep-seated disdain for the upper classes was so heavily bottled up, it presented itself through acts of violence against the so-called people he cared for. His stubbornness to allow the house to leave his life after Caroline's death reveals a misplaced loyalty of some sort, a syndrome-like bond to the estate. The audience is left with an uneasy answer seeing Faraday in the desolate ruins of Hundreds Hall, outlining the empty walls of the estate and speaking to Caroline as if she was physically there. To me, was the actual horror more psychological than supernatural. As a potent Gothic symbol, Hundreds Hall represents the decline of British aristocracy as well as the waning of human psyche. Freud postulated that repressed memories and emotions tend to re-emerge in uncanny ways, and the house also appears to resist attempts at modifying its fate. It is a Gothic tradition to present houses as manifestations of their occupants, and in *The Little Stranger*, the estate embodies the tormented psyche of its inhabitants.

The house is a setting where the past is permanently etched, memories are indelible, and characters are rendered incapable of escaping the labyrinths of their mind. In this sense, the narrative relocates Freud's ideas within the confines of the Gothic by turning heightened subconscious terror into an entity. The last scene of the novel, where Faraday is depicted aimlessly traversing the desolate house, engaged in a one-sided conversation with an ungraciously absent Caroline, is perhaps the most chilling in the novel because it implies that the true horror can be found not in ghosts but in the boundless dominion of the mind.

Through the lens of Freudian psychoanalysis, *The Little Stranger* reveals that the horror contained in the novel is not supernatural, but psychological in nature. The novel expertly mingles the concepts of outer invasions and

inner perturbances, showcasing the extent to which the mind masters emotional-essences of suppressed wishes, traumas, and grievances. Ultimately, the phantoms of Hundreds Hall are not ghostly figures, but remnants of the psyche—asserting that true terror derives not from the otherworldly, but from the internal self.

A particular fascination with *The Little Stranger* is the immersion in the concept of uncanny as proposed by Freud (*Das Unheimliche*). As described by Freud, the uncanny is the unsettling feeling that emerges from the familiar becoming strange and merging with reality, or when fears and desires which have been buried come back in altered forms (*The Uncanny* 217). Notably, as with all of Sarah Waters' works, the ghostly undertones are portrayed instead as psychological phantoms, the disintegrating Hundreds Hall, and the vague suggestion of some force which is either otherworldly or wholly self-made by the characters—their own unconscious' strivings endowed with life.

Freud describes the uncanny as “that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (Freud *The Uncanny* 217). This is perfectly captured in *The Little Stranger* where Hundreds Hall is both an uncanny and unsettling space. To Dr. Faraday, the house used to be a childhood wonder, but it now sits as an unfamiliar and eerie decaying structure that is off putting to both the inhabitants and the readers alike. This example aligns with Freud's idea of the uncanny emerging when something once known — such as a childhood home — instills deep discomfort and fear. The state of Hundreds Hall not only symbolizes the decline of the aristocracy, but also serves as a reminder of the shattered psyche of the people living in it, unable to come to terms with their former greatness and their current reality.

Additionally, another uncanny element of the novel is the idea of the double (*Doppelgänger*)—a concept that Freud addressed as part of the struggle of the unconscious between self-preservation and self-destruction (*The Uncanny* 234). In *The Little Stranger*, Faraday's psychologically ambivalent attitude toward the house and the Ayres family gives rise to a doubling effect where his repressed emotions—both desire and resentment—forge an unsettling contrast to his rational, orderly external self. Furthermore, Faraday's character is intrinsically linked to the decline of the Ayres family and, as Freud puts it, “the double may become the uncanny harbinger of death” (*The Uncanny* 236).

In the novel, Dr. Faraday maintains constancy in his scientific worldview while disregarding the occurrences as delusions or supernatural hysteria. The strange sequence of deaths and misfortunes that coincide with Dr. Faraday's life paint a picture that hint at the distinct possibility that even his subconscious alters events in more profound ways than he realizes. This correlates with Freud's notion of repressed impulses not vanishing, but rather reverting in different, more distorted forms outside the individual's control (*Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis* 30). If indeed Faraday is an agent of destruction, it is not through some deliberate action, but rather his haunting, passive, resentful ‘actions’ embodying the novel's spectral elements.

The situation is more unsettling still in the case of Caroline Ayres. In the entire novel, she is portrayed as the last shred of hope for the survival of Hundreds Hall, yet she suffers a most unfathomable and tragic demise. The story never elaborates on whether she accidentally plummets to her death, takes her own life, or is taken by forces beyond her control; but Freud's reasoning on the uncanny states that the real terror lies in the uncertainty. In this case, the certainty that Caroline was, in fact, pushed—if not by a ghost, perhaps by Faraday's unrelenting desire. Freud pointed out that the feeling of the uncanny is particularly strong when it is married to a suppressed wish, usually of an aggressive nature, which the rational part of the brain cannot accept. In this case, Faraday's infatuation with Caroline, his botched attempt to claim her as a husband, and his striking inability to dominate her departure suggest a more profound force operating her death. The characters of the novel also possess some uncanny elements. Psychological realism mixed with supernatural terror seems to pervade the text. While Dr. Faraday as a narrator attempts to be rational and scientific, there are so many missing pieces, contradictions and ... presumed amnesia gaps in his discourse. This is in line with Freud's notion of the uncanny, wherein there is often a sense of, “the return of the repressed,” a strange reemergence of buried memories, and, thus, the repressed memories emerge.

The presentation of the text does not formally assert that Faraday is the one responsible for the disturbances in Hundreds Hall, but in each case, the man's presence seems to coincide with the climaxes of the ensuing crises. This storytelling is so uncanny it strains the reader's sensibility. Does it follow that Faraday the unreliable

narrator does, rather unknowingly, inflict harm? Or is there some form of a supernatural entity that carries out this violent act? The text does not intend to offer any answers, and in the end, these questions are merely a psychological void, a void, to cite, is exactly the impression that Freud seeks to the core of the uncanny. The Uncanny 219. In 'The Little Stranger', the Freudian interpretation of the uncanny is an ambiguous horror that is both horrifying and perplexing. The narrative does not provide resolution and instead allows the performers and the audience to wrestle with ghastly remnants that are not simply phantoms but the shadowy folds of the psyche. Hundreds Hall is a site where remembrance, trauma, and repression intertwine and imposes a never-ending demand to have the past recalled. We could take Freud's theories of the uncanny, suppression, and the return of the repressed to work with the notion that the real terror of the novel does not reside in the supernatural, but in the *unheimlich* notion that our reality could be fashioned out of our deepest fears and most unyielding desires.

CONCLUSION

In Sarah Waters' *The Little Stranger*, there is a skillful mixing of Gothic form with Freudian psychoanalysis. The result centers of the outer limits of the human condition. Applying Freud's notion of repression, the uncanny, and the return of the repressed, it is clear that Hundreds Hall is not simply a haunted house. Rather it is a deeply symbolic manifestation of the psychological decay of its inhabitants. From a Freudian perspective, the house personifies the unacknowledged and neglected fantasies, apprehensions, and tension of Dr. Faraday and the Ayres family.

Doctor Faraday, the narrator, is an illustration of the conjunction of desire and repression. The terrible events that transpire at Hundreds Hall, with particular attention to the sub customarily held desires that he has around Caroline Ayres, are a testament to the apocalyptic ways that repressed emotions take form. This serves to demonstrate that reality is not the same as what is held in the consciousness. One of the ways in which the uncanny is experienced, according to Freud, is to explain that which is both strange and familiar. It is an unrecognizable part of the psychological stream that governs a human, which is devoid of humanity.

Exploring the notions of the uncanny double intern deeper the psychological components of the narrative. Faraday's obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) regarding the self-control over the events unfolding around him – in this case, the obsessive fixation with Caroline – increases the perplexity of the reasoned self and the sinister disposition of the antagonist. Those elements certainly do not possess any fantastical or supernatural elements, but rather the vague and terrifying psychological shadows which control the existence of the characters. In the setting of Hundreds Hall, which has an eerie disposition, Waters portrays the decay of the British upper class together with the social disintegration which often accompanies such decay.

Ultimately, the narrative fuses elements of psychological thrillers with Gothic elements, creating a story in which the focal point of anxiety is not the visions of ghosts, but the horrors which lie in the unexplored parts of the human psyche. Freudian in the approaches of psychoanalysis, the paranormal elements in the story do not need to be exotic, but instead don't magically stem from a perverted wish with paranormal elements which is deeply buried in the psyche. It drives readers to ponder the fragility of existence, the power of the unconscious, and the psyche's rigid duality, leaving them discomforted or, at the very least, discomforted with a controversial insight of the pervasive layers of human nature.

According to Freud, the uncanny and the excluded are never fully absent, but, rather, remain dormant in the interstice of the stagnant and the emerging. In *The Little Stranger*, this is exquisitely illustrated, presenting a form of psychological horror, and revealing the emotional repression tyranny can engender. The horror that the narrative describes is not of the Ayres family's ghostly companion, but rather the more profound horror—repressed and repressed into the unconscious, a void of lost and interlaced fears, desires, and memories that is seething inside the lynchpin of our psyche.

WORKS CITED

1. Armitt, Lucie. *Twentieth-Century Gothic*. University of Wales Press, 2011.
2. Baldick, Christopher. *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*. Oxford University Press, 2009.
3. Botting, Fred. *Gothic*. Routledge, 1996.

4. Creswell, John W. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Sage, 2013.
5. Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. W.W. Norton & Company, 1920.
6. Freud, Sigmund. *The Uncanny*. Penguin Classics, 1919.
7. Freud, Sigmund. *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. W.W. Norton & Company, 1910.
8. Freud, Sigmund. *The Uncanny*. Translated by David McLintock, Penguin Books, 2003.
9. Heilmann, Ann. *Gothic and Gender*. Routledge, 2004.
10. Heilmann, Ann. *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians and Gothic Fiction*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
11. Kohlke, Marie-Luise. "The Haunted Consciousness in Neo-Gothic Fiction." *Gothic Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2016, pp. 175-190.
12. Smith, Andrew. *Gothic Literature and the Social Unconscious*. Manchester University Press, 2015.
13. Waters, Sarah. *The Little Stranger*. Riverhead Books, 2009.
14. Williams, Raymond. *The Country and the City*. Oxford University Press, 1973.
15. Wolfreys, Julian. *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.