

## **An Analysis of Archetypal Images in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to identify and analyze the archetypal images represented in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein using the archetypal image classification proposed by Guerin et al. (2005). This research employed a qualitative descriptive method. The primary data source was Frankenstein novel by Mary Shelley, while the data consisted of words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and narrations containing archetypal images. The data were collected through close reading and note-taking techniques and analyzed using an archetypal approach. The findings revealed ten data categorized into seven archetypal images, namely water, sun, colors, serpent, archetypal woman, wise old man, and tree. Among these categories, colors appeared most frequently, followed by water, while the remaining archetypal images appeared once each. The identified archetypal images symbolically represent themes of life, death, transformation, morality, knowledge, human relationships, and personal responsibility. The findings demonstrate that archetypal images function as universal symbols that enrich the thematic and psychological dimensions of the novel. This study contributes to the field of literary criticism by providing a deeper understanding of symbolic representations in Frankenstein and by demonstrating the applicability of archetypal image theory in revealing hidden meanings within literary texts.

**Keywords:** Archetypal Images; Literary Criticism; Frankenstein; Mary Shelley

### **INTRODUCTION**

Literature is one of the most important forms of human expression because it reflects human experiences, emotions, thoughts, and social life through creative language. Literary works are created not only to entertain readers, but also to convey meanings, messages, and values related to human life. Afdholy et al. (2024) argue that literature contributes to readers' emotional sensitivity and understanding of human experiences by providing new perspectives on life and social reality. Among various literary genres, the novel is one of the most popular forms because it presents complex characters, conflicts, and settings that represent both reality and imagination. Dobie (2002) explains that literary works enable readers to understand human behavior and psychological complexity through character interactions and narrative development.

Authors frequently employ symbols and images to convey meanings beyond the literal level of a story. These symbolic representations often function as archetypal images that reflect universal human experiences and psychological patterns. Abrams and Harpam (2015) state that literary symbols are repeatedly used to represent shared meanings across cultures and historical periods. Similarly, Jung (1968) explains that archetypes originate from the collective unconscious and manifest themselves through recurring images and symbols. According to Guerin et al. (2005), archetypal images commonly appear in the form of water, sun, colors, circle, serpent, numbers, archetypal woman, demon lover, wise old man, trickster, garden, tree, desert, and mountain. These images function as symbolic representations of universal experiences related to transformation, morality, growth, fear, and human existence.

One of the literary works that contains various archetypal images is Frankenstein novel written by Mary Shelley. As one of the most influential Gothic novels, Frankenstein explores themes of ambition, morality, isolation, revenge, and the consequences of scientific experimentation. Gothic literature frequently presents fear, psychological tension, mystery, and supernatural elements through symbolic imagery and dark atmospheres (Botting, 2014). Furthermore, Shelley's novel reflects human anxieties concerning scientific advancement, ethical responsibility, and the consequences of uncontrolled ambition. These characteristics make Frankenstein a suitable literary work for archetypal image analysis because the novel combines Gothic elements with concerns about unchecked ambition and the ethics of scientific experimentation, themes that continue to resonate with contemporary readers (Yanti et al., 2024).

Archetypal images in Frankenstein appear in several forms such as water, sun, colors, serpent, women, wise old man, and tree. These images symbolically represent hidden meanings, emotional conditions, moral conflicts, and psychological experiences experienced by the characters throughout the narrative. According to Guerin et al. (2005), archetypal images function as symbolic representations of universal human experiences and unconscious meanings. Furthermore, Purba and Ambalegin (2020) state that archetypal images in literary works are capable of conveying hidden meanings and helping readers understand symbolic messages represented in the story. Although archetypal image studies have been widely conducted in literary research, studies specifically examining archetypal images in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein remain limited. Therefore, this study fills this gap by identifying and analyzing the archetypal images represented in the novel based on Jung's theory and the archetypal image classification proposed by Guerin et al. (2005). The findings are expected to contribute to literary criticism by expanding the application of archetypal image theory in Gothic literature and by providing a deeper understanding of symbolic representations in Frankenstein.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Previous Related Study

Samosir and Rudianto (2023) conducted a study to identify archetypal images represented in Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*. The data source of the study was *Coraline* novel. The researchers applied Jung's archetypal image theory using a qualitative descriptive method. The findings revealed nine archetypal images, namely terrible mother, demon lover, black color, tree, red color, rising sun, desert, serpent, and circle. The study concluded that archetypal images were used to convey hidden meanings through symbolic representations in the novel.

Another study related to archetypal imagery was conducted by Setiawati and Hardiany (2023), who analyzed archetypal symbols in Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library*. The data source of the study was *The Midnight Library* novel. The researchers applied Jung's archetypal image theory as classified by Guerin (2005) to identify archetypal symbols represented in the novel. The findings showed that all fourteen archetypal images proposed by Guerin, namely water, sun, color, circle, serpent, number, archetypal woman, demon lover, wise old man, trickster, garden, tree, desert, and mountain, were found in the novel. The study concluded that archetypal images functioned as symbolic representations that conveyed deeper meanings and reflected the protagonist's life experiences.

Similarly, Sari and Putra (2021) investigated the archetypal images reflected in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. The data source of the study was *Dracula* novel. The researchers applied Jung's archetypal image theory using a qualitative descriptive approach. The findings revealed four archetypal images, namely sun, colors, archetypal woman, and wise old man. The study concluded that these archetypal images were used to convey implied meanings through symbolic representations found in the novel.

The previous studies reveal both similarities and differences in the representation of archetypal images across literary works. Samosir and Rudianto (2023) identified nine archetypal images in *Coraline*, whereas Setiawati and Hardiany (2023) found all fourteen archetypal image categories proposed by Guerin et al. (2005) in *The Midnight Library*. In contrast, Sari and Putra (2021) identified only four archetypal images in *Dracula*. These differences indicate that the occurrence and variety of archetypal images depend on the themes, narrative structures, and symbolic elements of each literary work. Although previous studies have successfully applied archetypal image theory to various novels, research specifically focusing on archetypal images in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* remains limited. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by identifying and analyzing the archetypal images represented in *Frankenstein* and examining their symbolic meanings within the novel.

## **Archetypal Images**

Archetypal criticism is a literary approach that examines recurring symbols, images, characters, and themes in literary works. This approach originates from Carl Jung's concept of the collective unconscious, which refers to inherited psychological patterns shared by all human beings. Jung (1968) explains that archetypes repeatedly appear in myths, legends, religions, dreams, and literary works because they represent universal human experiences. Supporting this view, Arunakumari (2025) states that archetypal criticism investigates recurring patterns such as themes, characters, settings, symbols, beliefs, and rituals that appear across literary works from different cultures and periods. Similarly, Turdaliev (2025) argues that Jungian archetypal theory remains relevant in literary criticism because it enables researchers to identify recurring symbolic patterns and interpret universal meanings represented in literary texts. Sha (2024) further notes that archetypal criticism allows researchers to examine recurring symbolic structures that transcend cultural and historical boundaries.

One of the central concepts in archetypal criticism is archetypal image. According to Guerin et al. (2005), archetypal images are universal symbols that repeatedly appear in literary works and represent common human experiences, emotions, desires, fears, and psychological conditions. Similarly, Muzaffarov (2025) explains that symbolic images function as concrete artistic representations of archetypal patterns and play an important role in communicating meaning between the author and the reader. These images frequently appear through recurring objects, settings, motifs, and natural elements that convey meanings beyond their literal interpretations. Therefore, archetypal images enable readers to understand the symbolic messages and deeper meanings embedded in literary works.

Guerin et al. (2005) classify archetypal images into fourteen categories, namely water, sun, colors, circle, serpent, numbers, archetypal woman, demon lover, wise old man, trickster, garden, tree, desert, and mountain. These categories represent recurring symbols associated with universal human experiences, emotions, psychological conditions, and moral values. Similarly, Kostova et al. (2021) explain that archetypal literary theory focuses on recurring images, motifs, and patterns that repeatedly appear across literary works and represent common human experiences. These archetypal images function as symbolic representations that help reveal deeper meanings within literary works and serve as the analytical framework of this study.

## **METHOD**

### **Design and Samples**

The research employed a qualitative descriptive design. Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that qualitative research is suitable for exploring and interpreting meanings represented in texts and social phenomena. Similarly, Lichtman (2023)

explains that qualitative research focuses on understanding and interpreting meanings derived from textual data and human experiences. This design was considered appropriate because the study sought to identify and interpret archetypal images and their symbolic meanings in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The novel served as the primary data source of the research. The data consisted of words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and narrations containing archetypal images represented in the novel. The selected data were identified and categorized based on Guerin et al.'s (2005) classification of fourteen archetypal images.

### **Instruments and Procedures**

The data were collected through library research, which involves examining information from various textual sources relevant to the research topic (Sugiyono, 2013). The primary data source of this research was Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, while the secondary data sources consisted of books, journal articles, and other scholarly references related to archetypal criticism and archetypal images. To collect the data, the researcher employed close reading and note-taking techniques to identify textual evidence representing archetypal images in the novel.

The data collection process consisted of several steps. First, the researcher read *Frankenstein* thoroughly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the story. Second, words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and narrative passages indicating archetypal images were identified and recorded. Third, the collected data were classified according to the fourteen archetypal image categories proposed by Guerin et al. (2005). Finally, the categorized data were organized for further analysis and interpretation.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis began with a preliminary examination of *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley. This stage focused on identifying the intrinsic elements of the novel, including plot, setting, characters, and themes, to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the narrative context in which archetypal images appeared. Through this process, the researcher was able to recognize significant patterns and symbolic representations embedded in the story. Flick (2014) states that preliminary analysis is essential for familiarizing the researcher with the data and identifying relevant patterns before conducting a more detailed analysis.

The data analysis consisted of several steps. First, the researcher reviewed the collected data and classified them according to the fourteen archetypal image categories proposed by Guerin et al. (2005). Second, each datum was analyzed to identify its symbolic meaning within the context of the novel. Third, the researcher interpreted how the identified archetypal images contributed to the development of characters, events, and themes in *Frankenstein*. Finally, the findings were described and discussed using a qualitative descriptive approach to reveal the symbolic meanings represented through the archetypal images. To ensure the trustworthiness

of the analysis, the researcher repeatedly reviewed the identified data and compared the interpretations with Jung's (1968) archetypal theory and Guerin et al.'s (2005) classification framework. This process helped maintain consistency and accuracy in the classification and interpretation of archetypal images throughout the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*Table 1*  
*Archetypal Images Found in Frankenstein*

No.	Archetypal Images	Frequency
1	Water	2
2	Sun	1
3	Colors	3
4	Serpent	1
5	Archetypal Woman	1
6	Wise Old Man	1
7	Tree	1
Total		10

Based on the analysis, ten data of archetypal images were identified in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Of the fourteen archetypal image categories proposed by Guerin et al. (2005), seven were found in the novel, namely water, sun, colors, serpent, archetypal woman, wise old man, and tree. Colors appeared most frequently with three occurrences, followed by water with two occurrences. Meanwhile, sun, serpent, archetypal woman, wise old man, and tree each appeared once. These findings indicate that Shelley employed various archetypal images to communicate symbolic meanings related to creation, morality, nature, knowledge, and human experience.

### **Water**

According to Guerin et al. (2005), water symbolizes birth, death, rebirth, purification, and spiritual mystery. In *Frankenstein*, water appears in the forms of the sea and river.

#### **Data 1**

"I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly...my ashes will be swept into the sea by the winds." (Shelley, 1818, p. 257)

The sea symbolizes spiritual mystery and the source of life. In this quotation, the Creature imagines his ashes being carried away by the sea after his death. The image suggests a return to the origin of existence and signifies the end of his suffering. As an archetypal image, the sea represents both dissolution and spiritual reunion, reflecting the Creature's final acceptance of his fate.

#### **Data 2**

"I continued to wind among the paths of the wood, until I came to its boundary, which was skirted by a deep and rapid river..." (Shelley, 1818, p. 157)

The river functions as a symbol of transformation and renewal. Its flowing movement reflects the continuous cycle of life, death, and rebirth. In this context,

the river marks a transitional space that separates one stage of experience from another, emphasizing personal growth and psychological development. Therefore, the river represents the archetypal process of change and regeneration. The presence of water imagery demonstrates how Shelley employs natural elements to symbolize transformation and the cyclical nature of human existence.

### **Sun**

The sun symbolizes energy, consciousness, natural law, and the cycle of life and death.

#### **Data 3**

“The cup of life was poisoned forever; and although the sun shone upon me... I saw around me nothing but a dense and frightful darkness, penetrated by no light but the glimmer of two eyes.”  
(Shelley, 1818, p. 210)

The contrast between the shining sun and the surrounding darkness emphasizes the conflict between natural order and human suffering. Although the sun continues to provide light, Victor remains trapped in emotional despair caused by the consequences of his actions. In this quotation, the sun symbolizes the enduring power of nature and the moral laws governing human life. The image reinforces the idea that personal tragedy results not from nature itself but from the violation of ethical and natural boundaries.

### **Colors**

According to Guerin et al. (2005), colors function as archetypal symbols that convey psychological and emotional meanings. In *Frankenstein*, black and red are the dominant colors identified in the novel.

(Black)

#### **Data 4**

“Beautiful!—Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness... and straight black lips.”  
(Shelley, 1818, p. 49)

The black color appears in the description of the Creature’s lips and contributes to the frightening image of his appearance. Archetypically, black symbolizes mystery, darkness, and the unknown. The use of black imagery intensifies the sense of fear and alienation associated with the Creature, highlighting his position as an outsider rejected by society. Thus, black functions as a symbol of psychological darkness and uncertainty.

(Red)

#### **Data 5**

“The blood flowed freely in my veins, but a weight of despair and remorse pressed on my heart which nothing could remove.”  
(Shelley, 1818, p. 91)

Although the color red is not explicitly mentioned, it is symbolically represented through the image of blood. Red is commonly associated with passion, emotional intensity, and suffering. Victor’s reference to blood alongside feelings of despair

and remorse reflects the psychological burden he experiences after creating the Creature. Therefore, the archetypal meaning of red emphasizes intense emotional conflict and personal anguish.

(Red)

**Data 6**

“I saw an insurmountable barrier placed between me and my fellow men; this barrier was sealed with the blood of William and Justine...” (Shelley, 1818, p. 179)

The image of blood again symbolizes the color red and represents tragedy, sacrifice, and suffering. William and Justine’s deaths create an emotional and moral barrier that isolates Victor from society. In this context, red reflects the devastating consequences of his actions and the guilt that continues to haunt him. The image reinforces the connection between bloodshed and emotional suffering throughout the novel.

**Serpent**

The serpent archetype symbolizes evil, temptation, corruption, and destructive knowledge.

**Data 7**

“It was the secrets of heaven and earth that I desired to learn...” (Shelley, 1818, p. 16)

This quotation reflects Victor’s overwhelming desire to uncover the secrets of nature and existence. Although a serpent is not directly mentioned, the theme of forbidden knowledge strongly corresponds to serpent symbolism. Similar to traditional serpent figures associated with temptation and dangerous wisdom, Victor’s ambition leads him beyond moral boundaries and ultimately results in suffering and destruction. Therefore, the quotation represents the serpent archetype through its emphasis on temptation, knowledge, and tragic consequences. The serpent image highlights one of the novel’s central themes: the dangers of excessive ambition and the pursuit of knowledge without ethical responsibility.

**Archetypal Woman**

The archetypal woman includes several forms, such as the good mother, terrible mother, and soulmate. In Frankenstein, the soulmate image is represented through Elizabeth.

**Data 8**

“I thought I saw Elizabeth, in excellent health, walking the streets of Ingolstadt...” (Shelley, 1818, p. 50)

Elizabeth is portrayed as Victor’s beloved companion and emotional support. The dream-like vision reveals the depth of Victor’s attachment to her and emphasizes her role as an idealized female figure. As an archetypal soulmate, Elizabeth represents love, emotional fulfillment, and personal connection. However, the transformation of her image into that of death foreshadows future tragedy and reinforces the fragile nature of human happiness. The soulmate archetype contributes to the emotional dimension of the narrative by illustrating Victor’s longing for affection and companionship.

### **Wise Old Man**

The wise old man archetype represents wisdom, guidance, morality, and spiritual insight.

#### **Data 9**

“The more I saw of them, the greater became my desire to claim their protection and kindness...” (Shelley, 1818, p. 144)

This quotation reflects the Creature’s admiration for the De Lacey family, particularly the values of compassion, kindness, and acceptance they embody. Although direct instruction is absent, the Creature learns moral principles by observing their behavior. Although the quotation refers to the De Lacey family collectively, the figure of De Lacey functions as a source of moral guidance and compassion for the Creature. Through his kindness and acceptance, the Creature learns values such as empathy, humanity, and social responsibility. Therefore, De Lacey reflects the characteristics of the wise old man archetype, which symbolizes wisdom and moral guidance.

### **Tree**

The tree symbolizes life, growth, regeneration, and transformation.

#### **Data 10**

“Dark pines grew before me, and here and there a broken tree lay on the ground...” (Shelley, 1818, p. 164)

The contrast between living pine trees and broken trees creates a symbolic representation of growth and destruction. Archetypically, trees signify the processes of life, renewal, and development. However, the presence of broken trees also suggests decay and mortality. This dual imagery reflects the central conflict of *Frankenstein*, where creation and destruction exist side by side. Consequently, the tree functions as a symbol of both life’s regenerative power and its inevitable fragility. The tree image reinforces the novel’s exploration of creation, transformation, and the consequences of human actions.

The findings reveal that only seven of the fourteen archetypal image categories proposed by Guerin et al. (2005) were identified in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Among these categories, color imagery appeared most frequently, followed by water imagery. This finding suggests that Shelley relies heavily on visual and natural symbols to represent emotional experiences, psychological conflicts, and moral consequences throughout the narrative. The dominance of color imagery, particularly black and red, indicates that symbolic representations of fear, guilt, suffering, and tragedy play a significant role in supporting the Gothic atmosphere of the novel. This finding is consistent with (Waham, 2023), who argues that *Frankenstein* employs Gothic elements and symbolic representations to create psychological tension, emotional intensity, and a dark atmosphere that reinforces the novel’s central themes.

The findings also demonstrate that archetypal images contribute significantly to the development of the major themes of *Frankenstein*. The serpent archetype

symbolizes the dangers of excessive ambition and forbidden knowledge, reflecting Victor Frankenstein's desire to transcend natural limitations through scientific experimentation. Similarly, the sun image emphasizes the contrast between natural order and human suffering, reinforcing the consequences of violating moral and ethical boundaries. The archetypal woman, represented through Elizabeth, highlights the importance of human relationships and emotional connection, while the wise old man archetype represented by De Lacey emphasizes moral guidance, compassion, and wisdom. Furthermore, the tree image symbolizes the coexistence of creation and destruction, which mirrors one of the central conflicts of the novel. These findings suggest that archetypal images not only function as symbolic devices but also strengthen the thematic structure of the narrative. This interpretation is supported by Rahma and Widayanti (2025), who argue that archetypal elements in literary works reveal deeper psychological processes and contribute to the development of thematic meaning throughout the narrative.

Compared with previous studies, the findings show both similarities and differences in the representation of archetypal images. Samosir and Rudianto (2023) identified nine archetypal image categories in *Coraline*, whereas Setiawati and Hardiany (2023) reported the presence of all fourteen categories in *The Midnight Library*. In contrast, Sari and Putra (2021) identified only four archetypal images in *Dracula*. The present study found seven archetypal image categories in *Frankenstein*, indicating that the occurrence and variety of archetypal images depend on the themes, narrative structure, and symbolic complexity of each literary work. A notable finding of this study is the dominance of color imagery, which appears more frequently than other archetypal images and functions as a major symbolic element in representing psychological conflict and moral suffering within the novel.

The findings contribute to the field of literary criticism by demonstrating the applicability of Guerin et al.'s (2005) archetypal image framework to Gothic literature. Through the identification of archetypal images, the study reveals how symbolic representations contribute to character development, thematic construction, and psychological depth in *Frankenstein*. This finding is in line with Petric (2023), who explains that archetypes reveal universal human thoughts, fears, desires, and psychological tendencies that are represented through stories and literary narratives. The findings also provide insight into the relationship between archetypal symbolism and Gothic themes such as ambition, isolation, responsibility, and the consequences of scientific experimentation. Therefore, archetypal image analysis offers an effective approach for uncovering deeper meanings embedded within literary texts. This finding supports Gijo and George (2021), who argue that archetypal criticism remains an effective method for examining recurring symbols and universal patterns represented in literary works.

Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations. First, the analysis was limited to a single literary work, namely Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Second, the study focused exclusively on archetypal images based on Guerin et al.'s (2005) classification and did not examine other archetypal dimensions, such as character

archetypes or mythological archetypes. Future studies may compare archetypal images across multiple Gothic novels or integrate different archetypal approaches to obtain a broader understanding of symbolic representations in literature.

## CONCLUSION

This study aimed to identify and analyze the archetypal images represented in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* using the archetypal image theory proposed by Guerin et al. (2005). The findings revealed ten data categorized into seven archetypal images, namely water, sun, colors, serpent, archetypal woman, wise old man, and tree. Among these categories, colors appeared most frequently with three occurrences, followed by water with two occurrences, while sun, serpent, archetypal woman, wise old man, and tree each appeared once. These archetypal images were represented through various symbols and narrative elements that convey meanings related to life, death, transformation, morality, knowledge, and human relationships.

The analysis demonstrates that archetypal images play a significant role in enriching the symbolic and thematic dimensions of *Frankenstein*. Through the use of universal symbols such as water, colors, the serpent, and the tree, Shelley explores psychological conflicts, the consequences of excessive ambition, moral responsibility, and the complexity of human existence. Although only seven of the fourteen archetypal image categories proposed by Guerin et al. (2005) were identified in the novel, the findings confirm that archetypal images function as important literary devices that help reveal deeper meanings within the narrative. Academically, this study contributes to literary criticism by demonstrating the applicability of archetypal image theory in analyzing symbolic representations within Gothic literature and by providing a deeper understanding of the relationship between archetypal imagery and thematic development in literary texts. The findings may also serve as a reference for students, researchers, and literary critics who are interested in applying archetypal criticism to literary analysis. Furthermore, future researchers are encouraged to examine other archetypal dimensions, such as character archetypes and mythological archetypes, or to investigate archetypal images in other Gothic literary works to provide broader perspectives on symbolic representation in literature.

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