Conclusion

Angels and demons are the two widely known patriarchal stereotypes to describe women in literature. The first two primary stereotypes for categorizing women in Western Christian culture are the Virgin Mary and Eve. While the Virgin Mary represents qualities of chastity, purity, sacrifice, and goodness, Eve represents the evil, carnality, and temptation. Arguably, Eve and Mary are the two mother archetypes that have brought forth other archetypes categorizing women as good and evil, chaste and fallen, virtuous and vicious, angels and demons, etc. Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* (1970) explored the functions of the pre-assigned gender roles for women in the works of some eminent male writers like D. H. Lawrence, Norman Mailer, Henry Miller, and Jean Genet in the Victorian period. Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970) created a trend in feminism for exposing the misogyny in the canonized works by male writers. Following this trend, one of the primary goals of the feminist critics has been to expose these stereotypes hidden in different literary texts that embody patriarchal ideologies. The aim of this research project is to show how the cultural trope of evil women can resist the patriarchal intention to subjugate women and even empower them. Per Faxneld, a scholar of History of Religion, in his book *Satanic Feminism* (2015) has deconstructed the myth of the Great Fall and Eve's role in it through his hermeneutical reading to show Eve as a transgressive figure. Faxneld has coined the term "Satanic Feminism" to refer to a new trend in feminist criticism. In it, Satan or Satanism is seen in a positive term as a liberator of women. Though Satan as a symbol of joyful transgression of the social and cultural limitations found expression in the writings of William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, William Blake, P. B. Shelley, and Lord Byron long ago in late eighteenth century, Satan's role in female liberation is a relatively new approach. Therefore, Eve's collusion with

Satan is seen in Satanic Feminism as a step towards female liberation and empowerment of women. However, the fact that Satan, a male fallen angel, helps women to transgress the limitations may raise an inevitable question: are women unable to attain freedom without the help of men? Some may argue that this subtly suggests the subjugation of women by men. This may also suggest that in Satanic Feminism, women are subjecting themselves to another patriarchal lord Satan in the place of God. However, in Satanic Feminism, Satan has been used as a metaphor. Here, Satanism, that advocates liberty, pride, individualism, and the values that favour impulses and instincts over rationalism and abstinence, can support women in their fight against the patriarchal aggression. Here, the gender of Satan is less important than the satanic values. Blanche Barton, a renowned Satanic Feminist, remarked, "I gain power from the metaphors and heroes I choose, regardless of their gender."[1] Secondly, there is a sense of ambiguity regarding the gender of Satan in his various visual representations.[2] Satan has often been depicted as a hermaphrodite with both masculine and feminine physical aspects. In some paintings, Satan has been represented as a snake with the head of a female tempting Eve. Gender confusion of Satan subverts the patriarchal discourses that fail to fix the gender identity of Satan.

My area of study is the Gothic fiction written in the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century in England. Among these Gothic novels, I have taken some novels that belong to the Horror mode represented by M. G. Lewis, William Beckford, Charlotte Dacre and Charles Maturin et al. for detailed analysis. Following the line of thought laid down by Per Faxneld in *Satanic Feminism*, my method of study involves a kind of intentional (mis)reading or counter-reading of the biblical myth of the Great Fall buried in each text. A study of the historical and cultural context of the emergence of eighteenth-century Gothic fiction shows that Gothic

emerged as a reaction against the ideas of Enlightenment. The term “Gothic” was first used to refer to a new architectural style characterized by pointed arch, rib vault, flying buttress, and intricate sculpture. Excess of this architectural style displays a sharp contrast to the neatness and precision of classical architecture. Classical buildings like classical work of arts and written text shows a sense of uniformity, proportion, and order. The dominant ideology of Enlightenment regarded Gothic architecture as deformity caused by the lack of taste of a barbaric age. Gothic appeared as a dissenting force with the implication of irrational, irregular, and barbaric past of the Middle Age. Horace Walpole used the term Gothic in the subtitle of his novel *The Castle of Otranto* to denote the Dark Age, the Middle Age. He intended to use it against the Enlightenment rationalism and Neo-classical sensibility, reviving the spirit of medievalism marked by barbarism, unrestrained passion, irrationality and superstitions.

The historians often consider Enlightenment a masculine discourse written by the canonical male authors who denied women the capacity of rational thinking. Women, it was believed, were more vulnerable to superstition and false imagination than men. So, women were recommended private schooling so that they might learn about housekeeping, domestic works and religion which, as it was presumed, did not require rational thinking. However, there were some women thinkers and activists in the eighteenth century who demanded equal rights of women in the intellectual, educational and political sphere. Mary Astell (1666-1731), who was the earliest feminist in eighteenth-century England, asserted the rational and intellectual capability of women in her book *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1694). She advised her contemporary women to cultivate self-knowledge instead of reinforcing their position as sexual objects. Besides Mary Astell in the early eighteenth century,

there were women like Bathsua Makin (1600—1675), Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673), Elizabeth Elstob (1683-1756), and Damaris Masham (1659-1708) who asserted the intellectual ability of women and demanded proper education for women. This generation of women was succeeded by the Bluestocking society in the mid-eighteenth century. This was an informal association of elite women who instead of spending time in gossiping and playing cards dealt with serious social and philosophical issues. They too showed their concern for women's education and equal rights of women. In the later half of the eighteenth century, came radical women writers like Anna Barbauld and Mary Wollstonecraft, who argued for the rights of women in the social and political sphere. Mary Wollstonecraft, a secular and rational feminist, apart from addressing the issues like women's right to education and employment, put forward the question of sexual freedom of women, which had been ignored by the early women writers. Those women thinkers and writers in the eighteenth century unanimously asserted the intellectual and rational capability of women. Some of them supported their claim with the Platonic-Christian doctrine of "sexless-soul" that speaks of the equality of man and woman in the mental and spiritual level despite their physical disparity. Others used the doctrine of Cartesian mind-body dualism that distinguished mind and body as two separate and independent mechanisms. Though these two doctrines helped the feminists of the eighteenth century to substantiate the equality of men and women in metaphysical and spiritual level, it was problematic in the sense that this neutral spirit has hardly any existence in the material world. In this context, Gothic appeared celebrating the irregular and irrational principles that were considered feminine.

Heroines of the Terror mode of Gothic resemble the Wollstonecraftian model of women who tend to be as rational and sensible as men. On the other hand, in the

Horror mode of writing, the anti-heroines embody the irregular and irrational principle of femininity. In Charlotte Dacre's novels *Zofloya* (1806) and *The Passions* (1811), the heroines and a host of other female characters, who appear demonic with their evil hearts, unrestrained passions and power, transgress the accepted gender roles in society. Dacre's personal life as a writer of profitable erotic literature shows her own desire for transgression that was, to some extent, reflected in her heroines. However, in the novels written by male writers like M. G. Lewis and William Beckford, it is difficult to find any proto-feminist elements, but their personal lives show that they did not have any misogynist grudge against women too. They were known as homosexual and libertine in their personal life. The demonic and transgressive women characters (Matilda, Bleeding Nun, Carathis, Nouronihar) in their novels *The Monk* and *The Vathek* transgress the accepted gender roles. Though there are male transgressors, they fail to show the same boldness and strength shown by the female characters. Though Ambrosio in *The Monk* violates the norms, he seems to be weak, effeminate, and procrastinating before committing every crime. Vathek is overshadowed by the strength and boldness of his mother, Carathis and wife Nouronihar. At last, both the males and the females, the virtuous and the sinners are destroyed without establishing any ethical standard against which the characters can be measured. Their novels also do not have any serious moral intention to preach the readers. Hence, the transgression by these women might be subversive enough for the contemporary domestic female readers who could indulge in sexual fantasy and identify themselves with these powerful anti-heroines.

In these novels, the demonic women characters are sometimes assisted by the Devil. Sometimes they take the role of the Devil to help others in their resistance to the repressive social forces. Thus, each novel echoes the biblical myth of the Great

Fall in some ways. In both novels, the sexual desire of women is the driving force of the action. Other emotions like jealousy, anger, pride, etc. stem from it. The Devil comes to liberate women from sexual repression. In *Zofloya*, Victoria appears to be the Eve who is encouraged by the Devil Zofloya to indulge in her passions and taste the forbidden fruit of carnal desire. Victoria's boldness and impulsive nature are considered evil and disliked by the male characters like Berenza and Victoria's father Marchese di Loredani from the early days of her life. However, Henriquez's male servant Zofloya who later turns out to be the Devil, likes these aspects of Victoria's nature. He alone in the novel praises Victoria for her boldness of spirit: "…noble intrepid Victoria! mark me, for truly do I love, and glory in your firm unshrinking spirit" (215). He encourages Victoria to break away from the feminine shield and recognize her true self. He promises to help Victoria to fulfill her desire to achieve the love of Henriquez on the condition that she must submit herself to Zofloya. The temptation scene, which echoes the biblical temptation scene, also occurs at a garden in Victoria's dream where the Devil appears to say to Victoria: "Wilt thou be mine…and none then shall oppose thee" (136). Zofloya thus encourages Victoria to eat the forbidden fruit of sexual freedom.

The myth of the Great Fall is also reflected upon the central plot structure of *The Passions*. The novel describes how a so-called virtuous woman Julia Weimer degenerates into an immoral and unfaithful woman succumbing to the instigation of another woman Appollonia Zulmer. Julia Weimer, the wife of Count Weimer, embodies the principles of ideal femininity. To Count Weimer, she is "a concentration of every benign female, virtue, grace and perfection" (1: 32). She embodies all the qualities traditionally considered as the prerequisite to be an ideal woman:

> chaste simplicity, retiring charms – diffidence, modesty, reserve; tender sensibility, yet strong reason; elegant genus, but no eccentric flights; a due estimation of the dignity of female character , without fastidiousness; a heart, formed for love – but to love only one, to seek after marriage no pleasure beyond the sphere of her duty or the wish of her husband. (1: 31)

Julia also happily internalizes those qualities that actually subjugate women and tend to rob them of their autonomy. Appollonia realizes this process of internalization in which the woman becomes "happy slave" and the man the "most excellent master" (1: 172). Appollonia with her power, boldness and independent mind takes the role of Satan to enlighten Julia about her slavery and urges her break away from the shackles of slavery. She in her satanic speech says, "The secret of your slavery must be unfolded to you. You shall taste of the tree of knowledge" (1:173). Here, "tree of knowledge," which reminds one of the biblical Tree of Knowledge, signifies sexual as well as intellectual liberation of women. She takes the responsibility of enlightening Julia to make her aware of her own power to rule over men: "I will initiate you! I will show you the extent of your dominion, and how infinitely you are sovereign over the fate of him you obey" (1: 173). At several times in the novel, Apollonia consciously identifies herself with Satan to aggrandize herself and rebel against the oppression of patriarchy. Dacre's attribution of satanic heroism to Appollonia makes her a proto-feminist figure committed to the emancipation and empowerment of women.

In Lewis's *The Monk* and Beckford's *Vathek*, the myth of the Great Fall is reflected in a different manner. Here the central male characters (Ambrosio and Vathek) are feminized. They appear weak, procrastinative, and feminine in comparison with the bold and powerful female characters (Matilda and Carathis) who overshadow them. In *The Monk*, Matilda appears as a male novice Rosario who is

described with feminine qualities. On the other hand, Ambrosio with his erect posture and lofty stature not only represents masculinity but also becomes the phallic symbol of the patriarchal church. The feminization of Ambrosio begins when Matilda reveals her real identity to declare her love for Ambrosio. With the progress of the story, Ambrosio becomes more feminine, demonstrating traits like hypocrisy, curiosity, instability of mind, indecisiveness etc. He began to be dominated by Matilda who grew more masculine after she had seduced Ambrosio. Here, Ambrosio adopts the role of Eve and Matilda the Devil. Dehumanizing education in church represses the sexual desire in Ambrosio and makes him a pervert. Matilda, in the form of the Devil, comes to liberate Ambrosio from the church's prohibition and give him a taste of the forbidden pleasure. She criticizes the dehumanizing education that church propagates and questions the validity of celibacy: "Unnatural were your vows of Celibacy; Man was not created for such a state; And were Love a crime, God never would have made it so sweet, so irresistible!" (172). She urges Ambrosio to freely indulge in pleasure: "Then banish those doubts from your brow, my Ambrosio! Indulge in those pleasures freely, without which life is worthless gift" (172). Matilda's tempting of Ambrosio resembles the biblical temptation scene where Eve falls prey to Adam's design. Here, the temptation which is mainly erotic in nature begins with Matilda's revealing of herself to Ambrosio as a woman and reaches its climax in the church's garden where Ambrosio is bitten by a serpent and is saved later by Matilda. Thus, the Church garden reminds one of the Garden of Eden. Here, Matilda wins the faith of Ambrosio with the help of the serpent. Here, the serpent, who is the Devil's agent, is also symbolic of Ambrosio's repressed desire. Thus, Matilda's seduction of Ambrosio may remind one of Satan's attempt to help humankind to transgress its limitations. In Beckford's *Vathek*, the story revolves around the central character Caliph Vathek, but

Vathek's mother Carathis plays a crucial role in controlling Vathek's action in the story. She is often compared to Lady Macbeth for her bold ambition and cruel determination. She is a Greek woman who is an expert in occult and astrology. She always strives to improve her skill in the black art and instruct Vathek not to waste time in luxury and pleasure. She teaches her all the skills to Vathek and inspires him in the quest for power and knowledge. She leads Vathek to eternal damnation and finds herself damned too at the end. She is a bad mother with incestuous desire, aggressive sexuality and vigorous masculinity. These not only make her a transgressive character, but also render Vathek, the patriarchal king, weak and submissive before her power. Her role in the novel is similar to that of Satan in Genesis, and Vathek with relatively weak determination and resembles Eve.

The brief survey of the major feminist critical works on Gothic novels written in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in the "Introduction" of this thesis has shown that the critics are less optimistic about the empowerment and emancipation of women in these Gothic novels. For some critics, heroines of Gothic novels written in Terror mode are endowed with partial strength and autonomy in the face of patriarchal aggression. However, their resistance to the patriarchy is controlled and conditioned by the patriarchy itself. They do not transgress their roles as proper and virtuous women. On the other hand, the novels written in the Horror mode, according to most of the critics, represent the women as passive figures, following the patriarchal stereotypes. For them, these novels uphold and even reinforce patriarchal ideologies that legitimize and naturalize the oppression and marginalization of women. There are very few critical works that have discussed the feminist potentials of this later group of novels. Adriana Craciun in her *Fatal Women of Romanticism* (2003) has explored the feminist potentials of some fatal women characters in the

works of some female poets and novelists of this period. Rejecting the traditional interpretation of *femme fatale* as the reflection of male fantasy, she considers it a politically charged figure endowed with various political and sexual significations by the contemporary male and female writers, but Craciun did not particularly focus on the genre of Gothic novels. She has analyzed only some Gothic novels written by Charlotte Dacre. Fatal women in her study range from real-life women like Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Antoinette to the *femme fatales* in the works of women writers and poets like Charlotte Dacre, Anne Bannerman, and Letitia Landon. Though she has talked about the possibilities of feminist potentials in fatal women figures in the works of male writers, she has not explored it in her study. Per Faxneld, a scholar of History of Religion, in his book *Satanic Feminism* (2015) has contributed a chapter on eighteenth-century Gothic fiction. In it, he has tried to show feminist potentials of the Gothic novel written in the Horror mode. Though he has taken the texts written by the male writers, his analysis of the individual text appears brief and lacking contextualization regarding the authors and the contemporary historical and cultural scenario. In this study, I have made a humble attempt to explore the feminist potentials of some Gothic novels written in the Horror mode through the critical analysis of transgressive women characters in the Gothic texts that have been almost overlooked by the critics and academicians. Except for Lewis's *The Monk*, few articles have been written on the other texts (*Zofloya, The Passions* and *Vathek*) as well as on their authors, and full-length studies on them are yet to be attempted.

Representation of the deviant and demonized women in literature is a topic that may encompass a vast area in the field of literature, but the present study focuses on the genre of Gothic fiction written in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Though it makes a general discussion on the Gothic genre of fiction written

during this period, it takes the selected Gothic novels that belong to the Horror mode for detailed analysis. It only takes the selected works of Charlotte Dacre, M. G Lewis, and William Beckford for detailed analysis. Hence, this research does not claim to study a general representation of women in Gothic novels written in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Instead, it focuses on the transgressive women who play a substantial role in the novels. Selection of the text is also based upon this notion, but the narrow range of this study has strengthened its intensive nature and prevented it from being out of track. Future researchers may use this study to explore the feminist potentials of the transgressive women represented in the literary texts of different literary periods. The concept of New Woman and its representation in the Victorian Decadent literature can be a relevant area to explore with the same theoretical notion.