

## Summary

### Introduction

The thesis aims to show how the demonization of women in Gothic novels written in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in England empowered women and helped them to transgress accepted gender roles. A brief survey of the feminist scholarship on Gothic novels of this period shows that critics are not much optimistic about the feminist potentials of these texts. The Gothic novels written in the Terror mode endow the heroines with partial strength and autonomy so that they might negotiate with patriarchy for a more secure and comfortable place in society. On the other hand, women have been represented not only as seductive, dangerous, and demonic but also as humble, innocent, and chaste in the novels written in the Horror mode. Initially, these novels may appear to represent women following the patriarchal assumptions. Per Faxneld in his book *Satanic Feminism* (2015) has deconstructed the biblical myth of the Great Fall to show Eve as a transgressive figure and Satan as her ally. Following Faxneld's approach, an attempt is made in the current research to relate the biblical myth of the Great Fall to a reading of the selected gothic novels. In addition to this, Maquis de Sade ideas about virtue and vice and its interpretation by Angela Carter in *The Sadean Women* (1979) show that monstrosity and vices can empower women and set them free from the sexual and other forms of slavery.

## **First Chapter**

### Enlightenment and Its Shadows: Witchcraft, Devilry and the Cult of the Feminine in Eighteenth Century England

This chapter attempts to describe the Enlightenment as the Age of Reason and the status and position of women in it. Though it was the Age of Reason, women were considered as incapable of rational scientific thinking. However, some female writers and thinkers like Mary Astell, and Mary Wollstonecraft asserted the rational capability of women and demanded equal rights in the intellectual, educational, and political sphere, but these women failed to escape the effects of the Enlightenment. As a patriarchal discourse, “reason” can hardly give voice to female subjectivity. French Feminism wants to stress that the idea that femininity is just the opposite of masculinity stems from the masculine logic. So, women should celebrate the state of being irrational and irregular going out of the male system of thought. The Gothic novels written in the Horror mode in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century represent some women characters as irrational, irregular, wild, evil and even demonic. Their world is governed by excessive passions, madness, wildness, cruelty, and irrationality. They act on their instincts and impulses. The present study aims to analyze those women characters in light of the above argument.

## **Second Chapter**

### History of Female Devilry in Literary and Cultural Representations

The second chapter tries to locate the root of the demonization of women and describe the history of female devilry in literary and cultural representations. Eve in the Bible and Lilith in the Old Testament are the two earliest examples of demonized evil

women. Thus, the association of woman with the Devil became the object of misogynist fantasy in English literature over the ages. From the Old English to the present era, English literature offers the images of women who transgress the accepted gender roles. This archetype of evil or demonic woman finds fullest expression in the literature of the Romantic Age. Mario Praz in *Romantic Agony* considers these women characters as the manifestations of male fantasy or masochism. Adriana Craciun in her book *Fatal Women of Romanticism* (2003) considers *femme fatales* as “ideologically charged figure that both male and female writers invested with a range of contemporary political, sexual, and poetic significations” (16). So she “cannot be limited to a fantasy of male masochism, as she is in Praz” (16). Writers and poets like Anne Bannerman, Letitia Landon, and Charlotte Dacre produced in their works such fatal women figures. Even in the writings of some male Gothic novelists like M. G. Lewis and William Beckford, some fatal women figures (Matilda in *The Monk*, Carathis in *Vathek*) have feminist potentials. Though there are many shreds of evidence in the text that would tempt one to interpret these characters as the reflection of male fantasy. However, unlike other fatal women figures, they have been depicted as active and sexually assertive individuals who act independently and dominate other male characters. Secondly, the fact that these evil women characters, as well as the innocent and humble ones, are destroyed at end of the novels rejects the possibility of these novels' upholding and reinforcing any stable system of patriarchal values.

### Third Chapter

She was of “the Devil’s party”: Female Devilry and the Pleasure of Transgression in  
Charlotte Dacre’s Novels

This chapter critically discusses Charlotte Dacre’s two novels *Zofloya* and *The Passions* to substantiate the arguments stated earlier. According to Craciun, Dacre consciously situated her works within this tradition of pornographic and sensationalist literature “in order to appreciate the full significance of her fatal women figures and her focus on corporeal pleasure and destruction” (111). Scandalous life of Dacre’s father Jonathon King and her own controversial affair with Nicholas Bryne, editor of *The Morning Post*, show that she was never brought up in any strict moral environment, and she hardly cared for morality and social mores. Her adoption of the pseudonym Rosa Matilda is often regarded as the reflection of her transgressive intention as Matilda, the female devil in M. G. Lewis’ novel *The Monk*, is often taken as the feminist icon by the critics. Her idolatry of Mary Robinson whose life and works became a resource for the study of eighteenth-century feminism shows Dacre’s own latent desire for transgression. Dacre’s novels are replete with such transgressive women characters whose demonic desire leads to their destruction as well as the destruction of other characters around them. *Zofloya* narrates the stories of several female transgressors. First of them, stands the heroine of the novel Victoria di Loredani. Other transgressors are Megalena Strozzi, Laurina Loredani and the wife of Zapi. In *the Passions*, Dacre’s attribution of Satanic heroism to Apollonia makes her a proto-feminist figure committed to emancipation and empowerment of women.

## Fourth Chapter

Daughters of Lucifer: Demonic and Transgressive Women in M.G Lewis's *The Monk*  
and William Beckford's *Vathek*

The fourth chapter deals with the novels of the male novelists M. G. Lewis and William Beckford. Their famous works *The Monk* (1796) and *Vathek* (1786) contain female characters who are powerful, dominant, intelligent, and transgressive as well as female characters who are humble, innocent and victims of the corrupt and cruel society. However, both these two types of women are destroyed at the end of the novels. Thus, these novels do not uphold any stable system of values where goods are rewarded, and evils are punished. Personal lives of both the authors reveal that they were libertines and had hardly any regard for the moral principles and social mores. The Proclamation society threatened Lewis with prosecution for the obscenities and immoralities represented in *The Monk*. Beckford too had to face many troubles from society for his homosexual attachment to William Courtenay. So, they expressed their discontent of various social norms, institutions, and values. *The Monk* belongs to the tradition of political pornography where church becomes the setting for an erotic story that actually conveys a political message. It recounts the stories of several powerful and dominant women characters like Matilda, the Bleeding Nun, and Marguerite. *Vathek* is often considered as a “thinly veiled fantasy-autobiography” of the author William Beckford. Though the story is centred upon the character of Vathek, other female overreachers like Carathis and Nouronihar overshadow Vathek in their lust for power and pleasure and goad him towards the Hall of Eblis for his ultimate damnation.

## **Conclusion**

Here, I have attempted to sum up the findings of the study. My reading of the select Gothic novels shows that some powerful and dominant women characters portrayed in these novels transgress the accepted gender roles. Though they are often demonized, this demonization empowers them and helps them to violate their pre-assigned roles as “proper” and virtuous women. The significance of the study lies in the fact that the existing critical works by the feminist critics are either silent or pessimistic about the feminist potential of the Gothic novels written in the Horror mode in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century British Gothic fiction.

Representation of the transgressive and demonized women may encompass a large area in English literature, but the present study focuses on the Gothic fiction written in the Horror mode in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century England. So, it also keeps the door open for further research to explore other areas of English literature of different literary periods. The concept of New Woman and vampire women and their representation in the Victorian Decadent literature can be a relevant area to explore with the same theoretical notion.