

Abstract

Fred Botting in his book *Gothic* (1996) has defined Gothic as a site of excess and transgression though he has refused to consider Gothic fiction as an “unrestrained celebration of unsanctioned excesses” (8). For him, it is a site of struggle between two opposing forces of propriety and excess. Transgression in the Gothic novels, for him, gives an opportunity to interrogate and re-examine the accepted boundaries and limits. How far did transgression help women to interrogate the limits? Were they really empowered to transgress the accepted gender roles? Whether did Gothic novels offer the woman characters any agency to speak for themselves? These questions have stirred my interest to find their answers through the present research. There have been several critical works by the feminist critics on the representation of women in the Gothic novels written in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Most of the critics are less optimistic about the feminist potentials of the Gothic fiction of this time. In the Terror mode of writing popularized by Ann Radcliffe and the others, the heroines were endowed with passive strength and courage while facing patriarchal aggression. Their limited strength and their partial resistance to patriarchal aggression reflect the compromised status of their autonomy. On the other hand, the novels, which were written in the Horror mode, are often treated as misogynists for their depiction of women as seductive, dangerous, and even demonic. As far as I know, there are very few researches and critical works that have attempted to substantiate feminist potentials of these novels written in the Horror mode. Besides this, the novelists and the novels I have taken for detailed analysis is a relatively less explored area. Excepting M. G. Lewis’ *The Monk*, a few articles and essays have been written on the other novels (Charlotte Dacre’s *Zofloya* and *The Passions*, William Beckford’s *Vathek*), but any full-length study on them has hardly been attempted.

In this study, I have made a humble attempt to show that how the demonization of women in the selected Gothic novels written in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in England actually enables them to transgress the gender roles prevailing in the society. Per Faxneld in his book, *Satanic Feminism* (2015) has defined Satanic Feminism as a tactic of reading that involves “a reinterpretation of Satan, and especially his role in the Edenic myth” (29). Following Faxneld’s approach, I have tried to relate the biblical myth of the Great Fall to my reading of the selected Gothic novels written in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Besides this, Marquis de Sade’s theory of counter-ethic where conventional virtue becomes vice, and vice becomes virtue and its feminist interpretation by Angela Carter in *The Sadean Women* (1979) have helped me to show that demonization of women actually empowered women, helped them to transgress the accepted gender roles and thus boomeranged on patriarchy.