

## The Gothic Novel and Novelists - The Terror Novel and Novelists of 18th century

The 18th Century novel, from Defoe to Miss Burney, was characterised by a note of realism. The novelists were mainly concerned with the real life. But towards the end of the century, a change was perceptible in the tone and temper of the novel. Instead of dealing with the real life, the novelists laid emphasis on the romantic tendency. This new group of the novelists are usually called Gothic Novelists. They are also often called the Terror Novelists for their fictional work creates an atmosphere of terror.

The Gothic and oriental romancers concentrated attention on nature, mysteries and supernaturals. They are not interested in their contemporary life, but in the depiction of the past, particularly the life of the Middle Ages. The scenes are generally laid in haunted castle and dilapidated buildings, landscapes saturated with hills, rivers, fields are presented as the background of these haunted and ruined castles. The novelists aim to produce terror and horror by creating scenes of darkness and night. Horror is also created by murders in cold blood. Supernatural agencies, in league with human beings, are introduced to bring ruin in the life of poor mortals. Magic and mystery formed the warp and woof of these novels.

Horace Walpole is the first great Gothic novelist. His monumental work is 'The Castle of Otranto'. Here, Walpole has made an attempt to paint the manners of the feudal period. Impossibilities are also introduced here. A portrait steps from its panel and can walk abroad, statue sheds and helmet of gigantic size crashes down in the courtyard. Such presentations are meant to create a sense of horror. The Castle of Otranto has been a terror novel in which we have walking skeletons, pictures that move out of their frames and other blood curdling incidents. However, it cannot be denied that Walpole has given to the Gothic

Novel the elements on which it has been to thrive for a generation to come.

The most successful of the Gothic novelists is Mrs. Anne Radcliffe. 'A Sicilian Romance' and 'The Romance of the Forest' are her masterpieces. She has a highly romantic temperament, an intense love for all that is beautiful, a passion for the mysterious and a taste for solitude. In her novels, we come across scenes of horrors, fear and violence. She cares more for the story and less for characters which are all types and become conventional. Her novels abound also in mysterious incidents. Although, the novels are set in the past, the language is that of the eighteenth century writer. Matthew Gregory Lewis is another great novelist of this tradition. His 'The Monk' is lavish in horrors. His imagination is grimmer, and fiercer than that of any other writer of the same class. Instead of Radcliffe's moral delicacy, he offers gross voluptuousness. Instead of her carefully rational explanations, he indulges in crude supernaturalism.

Charles Robert Maturin's 'Melmoth the Wanderer' and M. W. Shelley's 'Frankenstein' are also important novels in Gothic tradition. Robert Bage<sup>has</sup> also carried further this tradition. William Godwin is another important Gothic novelist. His 'Caleb Williams' can be referred to. Miss Clara Reeve has also written a number of novels of which 'The Old English Bavo' is remarkable. It is a blending of the ancient romance and the modern novel.

Thus, the Gothic novels and the novelists have made a notable contribution to the development of the novel. They have made novel an <sup>interesting</sup> imaginative account

of imaginative adventure and poetic thoughts. They have saved it from being purely utilitarian. They show that ~~so~~ outside the real world, there is also a world of wonder and delight. They have given new technique of plot construction. Of course, their characters are types and abstractions, they have <sup>paved</sup> ways for the coming generation.