

# Attempt a critical appreciation of The Gothic Novels or Gothic Romances or The Novel of Terror.

**Introduction** - The Gothic novel or the novel of terror is a strange product of the later 18th century. It is true that the Gothic novelists concentrated their attention to the ideal aspects of life. The birth of the Gothic novel was a conscious protest against the rational and realistic creed of the novelists of the Augustan age. The Gothic novelists thought to supply the readers perennial wish for mystery and violent emotion with ghosts, portents and satanic forces.

The Gothic novelist aimed at arousing terror and horror among the readers because they describe darkness of the night and graves of the dead.

**Characteristics of Gothic novels:-**

**Terror and Horror** - The Gothic novel is a nice blending of terror and horror because in England it grew out of the mediaval day dreaming (nightmares) of the 18th century. There is the description of the death of the hero or the heroine



in such novels. We read the heart breaking pictures of ghosts, Phantom, sceptors and grave yards. It is perceived that super natural forces occur and aid incident of physical violence and mental anguish.

Villainy in the Gothic novel - A villain is the central figure of the Gothic novel. The heroine, beautiful, innocent and full of sensibility always puts to be protected by a chivalrous lover. The scene of this novels is laid in a haunted castle or a dark cloister of a ruined church. We observe that this novel inspires melancholy. Readers are delighted by their indulge in day dreams of incredible violence.

Major Gothic novelists and their contributions:-

Horace Walpole - Horace Walpole is the father of the Gothic novelist or the novel of mystery and terror. His literary master piece is 'The castle of Otranto' which is an attempt to use the translation of a medieval Italian novel. In this very novel, Walpole makes an attempt to depict the household life and manners of the feudal (baron) society. The crimes of the hero of this novel are beyond imagination and description.

The plot of this novel deals with the unexplained death of Conrad on the eve of his marriage to the daughter of Marquis of Vincenza. The prince of Otranto Manfred Conrad's father decides to marry the girl himself for this purpose, he will have to divorce his wife. In the meantime the Marquis's daughter escapes from the danger of marriage with Manfred with the aid of a peasant. Many walking skeletons are seen in this terrible novels.

Mrs. Anne Radcliff - Mrs. Radcliff continued the tradition founded by Walpole although she is an author of several terror novels yet the best known of her novels 'The Mysteries of Udolpho' (1794). In this novel she gives a vivid picture of some



mysterious passages, shrouded figures disappearing walls groans clanking of chains. In her novels entitled 'The Italian', she gives an introduction of the criminal activities and notorious evils of the contemporary Roman Catholicism. She is adept in chilling the spine and raising the hairs. Her terrors appear very real and arouse extreme excitement and suspense. A famous critic S.D. Neil quotes, "The dept of fiction to Mrs. Radcliffe was immense and her popularity was enormous." In her novels, she reconciles didacticism and sentimentalism with romance.

**Matthew Lewis — (1775-1818)** — Lewis was one of the greatest Gothic romancers. He wrote only one popular novel 'The Monk' (1797). The Monk is a classical Gothic novel which is a Night-Mayer of fiendish wickedness, ghostly supernaturalism and sadistic sensuality. In this very novel we find that there is the description of the story of Ambrosia, the priest of Madrid. This Monk is corrupted by a devil woman. In fact, she is an emissary to satan to ensnare the Monk's body and soul. S.C. Chew quotes, "The Monk may be considered the dream of an oversexed adolescent for Lewis was only 20 when she wrote it."

**C.R. Mathurine** — Mathurine was also a very popular Gothic novelist. He wrote two novels 'The fatal revenge' (1807) and his great master piece 'Melmoth, the Wanderer' (1820). The second novel is the greatest novel of the school of terror. This novel has well patterned structure and its various attempt at the analysis of motives.

**William Beckford (1760-1844)** — Beckford was certainly a man of considerable force of intellect and brilliant imagination. His famous novel is 'Vathek'.

**Conclusion** — The Gothic novel deals with desolate (cave) nature. The classical hero of the Gothic novel is flat and unenterprising (labourer). The secluded place has much importance in it.