

## Diabolical Crossings: Generic Transitions Between the Gothic and the Sensational in Dacre and Alcott

Elena Emma Sottilotta

*To be a writer of fiction, for a woman, has never been a totally respectable occupation. Let her write a gentle and sensitive poem or so, perhaps [...]. But to let the imagination fly is to allow it to fly into unwarrantable places, to contemplate the uncontemplatable.*

–Fay Weldon<sup>1</sup>

Although it has long been suggested that the gothic novel gave way to the Sensation novel, such a statement is not convincing if it is not supported by concrete literary examples. This article aims to identify that connection between the gothic and the Sensation genres through a comparative analysis of recurrent literary themes and tropes in Charlotte Dacre's British gothic novel *Zofloya; or The Moor* (1806) and Louisa May Alcott's American Sensation novel *A Long Fatal Love Chase* (1866). In order to trace the evolution of one genre into the other, this essay examines their interchangeable characteristics in *Zofloya*, a marginal and atypical female-gothic work, and in *Chase*, an exemplary but rejected work of Sensation fiction. Indeed, *Zofloya* and *Chase* pose problems of genre categorisation: although both works fulfilled readerly expectations of their genres, they also simultaneously transcended their respective generic boundaries.

In his essay on the Sensation novel, Patrick Brantlinger makes reference to Derrida's theory on genre, stating,

Jacques Derrida argues that it may be 'impossible not to mix genres' because 'lodged within the heart of the law of [genre] itself [is] a law of impurity or a principle of contamination'. Derrida suggests that the peculiar mark or structural feature that defines any genre can never belong exclusively to that genre but always falls partly outside it.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Fay Weldon, Preface to *A Double Life: Newly Discovered Thrillers of Louisa May Alcott*, ed. by Madeleine B. Stern, Joel Myerson, and Daniel Shealy (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 1–3.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, 'What is "Sensational" about the "Sensation Novel"?', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 37.1 (1982), 1–28, (p. 2), quoting from Jacques Derrida, 'The Law of Genre', trans. by Avital Ronell, *Critical Inquiry*, 7 (1980), 55–81 (p. 57).

The comparative analysis of *Zofloya* and *Chase* will demonstrate how ‘impossible’ genre purity is. By exploring convergences and dissimilarities between these two novels, it becomes clear that *Zofloya* actually contains some of the elements of the Sensation novel, acting as a sort of precursor of this genre, while, on the other hand, *Chase* features typical residual gothic elements, inscribing itself in the distinctively British literary tradition of this genre. Indeed, both Dacre and Alcott dealt with Sensational topics, but using the gothic mode, ‘combining the journalistic and the fantastic, the domestic and the exotic, realism and melodrama’.<sup>3</sup> As such, *Zofloya* and *Chase* can consequently be considered as paragons of the ‘generic hybridity’ postulated by Lyn Pykett.<sup>4</sup> The concept of ‘hybridity’, traditionally drawn from biological and evolutionary studies, in recent years has acquired a wide popularity in the field of genre theory, since it allows the various elements that contribute to the definition of a literary work to be embraced and taken into consideration, rather than simply classifying it into a single rigid frame.<sup>5</sup> Bearing this in mind, the term ‘hybrid’ seems particularly appropriate if applied to the ‘strange cases’ of *Zofloya* and *Chase*. The ‘premonitory dreams’, the ‘hallucinatory or uncanny scenes’, the ‘depiction of extreme emotional states, such as hysteria, jealousy, sexual obsession’, the ‘representation of madness and other forms of social or sexual transgression or deviance’, are all components that Pykett described as characteristic of the Sensation novel, which can be extensively traced in the gothic novel *Zofloya*.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, *Chase* contains traces of the gothic romance, marked by ‘a sense of excess and hysteria, of events escaping from their ordinary temporal bounds’.<sup>7</sup>

In both literary works under consideration, the collapse of genre as a shaping principle determines a series of textual transgressions which go hand in hand with a transgressive representation of femininity. Consequently, this article has a double focus on *genre* and *gender*: the comparison between the two genres needs to be carried out through a gender perspective, since both gothic and Sensation novels have been regarded as feminine and consequently minor genres, set aside from the mainstream fiction of their time. The first section is therefore devoted to the exploration of the generic crossings between these two novels, while, in the second section, the focus shifts to a close reading of *Zofloya*’s and

---

<sup>3</sup> Lyn Pykett, ‘Sensation and the Fantastic in the Victorian Novel’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. by Deirdre David (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 211–30 (p. 222).

<sup>4</sup> Pykett, ‘Sensation and the Fantastic in the Victorian Novel’, p. 222.

<sup>5</sup> David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan, ‘Hybrid Genres’ and ‘Hybridity’, in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 227.

<sup>6</sup> Pykett, ‘Sensation and the Fantastic in the Victorian Novel’, p. 223.

<sup>7</sup> Eugenia C. DeLamotte, *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 94.

*Chase*'s female protagonists. As will be shown, Victoria, presumably the main character of the gothic novel *Zofloya*, is actually an exemplary Sensational heroine. Likewise, Rosamond is a modernisation of the female-gothic 'damsel in distress'. Their transgressiveness not only reflects the novels' deviation from their respective genres but also functions as a critique of patriarchal power.

### **What is Sensational about *Zofloya* and What is Gothic about *A Long Fatal Love Chase*?<sup>8</sup>**

With *Zofloya* and *Chase*, Charlotte Dacre (1771?–1825) and Louisa May Alcott (1832–1888) certainly meant to shock, amaze, and entertain their audiences. In this sense, both works can be considered as escapist literature, although this does not exclude the writers' involvement with contemporary cultural and social issues. Despite being separated by a geo-cultural and chronological gap, Dacre's and Alcott's novels function as relevant examples of the influence of gothic fiction on the evolution of Sensation fiction. The techniques they employ to convey suspense and mystery throughout the novels, the twists and turns of their plots, the overtly melodramatic scenes, the excessiveness that pervades the depictions of their transgressive heroines and their spiteful demon lovers, are all elements linked to the gothic and Sensation fiction, genres which are interlaced and, at times, impossible to separate.<sup>9</sup> As Pykett has observed,

Gothic and other women's genres of the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries offered a useful model for re-reading the women's sensation novel which, like the Gothic, reworks the conventions and the assumptions of the domestic novel — 'driving women to the importance of coping with enforced confinement and the paranoid fear it generates.'<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, by drawing on the generic features of the two novels, it becomes evident, not only that each novel contains traces of the other's genre, but also that both works share a preoccupation with the subordinate and oppressive condition of women in the nineteenth century. Gothic fiction, in the words of Susanne Becker, 'because of its instant popularity with women both as writers and as readers, [...] was early on seen as part of female culture

<sup>8</sup> See Brantlinger; and Markman Ellis, 'What is Gothic about the Gothic Novel?', in *The History of Gothic Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 17–24.

<sup>9</sup> As the close reading of the female characters in the second section will disclose, both Victoria and Rosamond exercise their transgression in an excessive way. The notions of 'excess' and 'transgression', as theorised by Susanne Becker in *Gothic Forms of Feminine Fictions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 21–40, effectively delineates their fictional development.

<sup>10</sup> Pykett, *The Nineteenth-Century Sensation Novel: Second Edition* (Devon: Northcote British Council, 2011), p. 69, quoting from Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (Routledge: New York, 2008), p. 11.

and as a “women’s genre”.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Sensation fiction, as Pykett has remarked, ‘was perceived as a *feminine phenomenon* [...], another symptom of the creeping feminization of literature and culture which [...] became more pronounced (and more hysterically denounced) as the nineteenth century went on’ (emphasis added).<sup>12</sup> Although it was received as a spontaneous phenomenon by its contemporaries, ‘a new kind of fiction which appeared from nowhere’, the Sensation novel was in fact the result of a long evolutionary process, a reworking of themes approached by the gothic and other genres in which women engaged their writing.<sup>13</sup> It is certainly not a coincidence that both Dacre and Alcott used a pseudonym to sign their own works: Dacre resorted to ‘Rosa Matilda’, a sort of tribute to her literary source of inspiration, the femme fatale of Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk*; Alcott submitted, but never published, her novel under the name ‘A. M. Barnard’, a *nom de plume* which she had used to sign her previous gothic thrillers. The widespread stratagem of publishing anonymously or under a pseudonym allowed these and many other nineteenth-century women writers to give vent to their creative imagination, without succumbing to the anger of a male critic, who may have subjected them to censorship and public disapproval.

In spite of their anonymity, however, Dacre and Alcott were not exempted from this exposure. In 1806, Dacre was at the heart of a minor scandal that was stirring in the literary world of the time, following the publication of *Zofloya*, which critics called ‘an exhibition of wantonness of harlotry’.<sup>14</sup> Sixty years later, in 1866, on the other side of the Atlantic, Alcott’s editor rejected *Chase* and prevented it from being published, ‘because it was too long & too sensational’.<sup>15</sup> Alcott wrote this novel two years before the publication of her most renowned literary accomplishment, *Little Women* (1868), revealing her double identity as a writer. However, *Chase* did not meet the same good fortune as her masterpiece, and it did not make its appearance on the literary scene until 1995.

*Zofloya*, a gothic novel set in fifteenth-century Italy, narrates the story of Victoria, a duplicitous and transgressive woman, and charts her inner corruption, in a gradual escalation towards the darkest transgression of all, a pact with the Devil — here masked as Zofloya, a ‘Moorish’ servant — which leads to her final annihilation. *Chase* revolves around the relationship between Rosamond, an ambitious girl who lives on a remote island in England

<sup>11</sup> Susanne Becker, *Gothic Forms of Feminine Fictions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Pykett, *The Nineteenth-Century Sensation Novel: Second Edition*, p. 67.

<sup>13</sup> Pykett, *The Nineteenth-Century Sensation Novel: Second Edition*, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Adriana Craciun, Appendix B of Charlotte Dacre, *Zofloya; or The Moor: A Romance of the Fifteenth Century* (1806), ed. by Adriana Craciun (Quebec: Broadview Literary Texts, 1997), pp. 261–67 (p. 262).

<sup>15</sup> Kent Bicknell, ‘The Genesis of *A Long Fatal Love Chase*’, in Louisa May Alcott, *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, ed. by Kent Bicknell (New York: Dell, 1997), pp. 347–51 (p. 349).

with her grandfather, and Tempest, a wicked man who closely resembles Mephistopheles himself, who deceives her and then chases her across Europe, a chase which will end only with Rosamond's death. The connection between these two works is reinforced by the presence of common extra- and intra-textual elements, which provide further evidence of the bond between the genres within which the writers worked. Both Dacre's and Alcott's novels dealt with sensational themes, which, as previously mentioned, in Dacre's case provoked a literary controversy, while in Alcott's case it determined the novel's rejection, which remained unpublished in her time. Moreover, both narratives partake of gothic excesses, especially in relation to the vicissitudes of their atypical female characters; and both their novels are haunted by demon lovers, wicked male figures who subjugate, manipulate, and ultimately destroy their female victims.

Undeniably, in *Zofloya* and in *Chase*, love involves what is quite literally a pact with the Devil. Alcott, an admirer of Goethe, explores the theme of the demonisation of love, sharing with Dacre the interest in representing evil in its shape-shifting forms, in such a blatant way that she has been characterised as 'a Mephistopheles sensation writer' and *Zofloya* as a 'dark Faustian romance'.<sup>16</sup> In *Chase*, Tempest materialises out of nowhere after the resounding utterance of Rosamond's 'most intense desire': 'I'd gladly sell my soul to Satan for a year of freedom.'<sup>17</sup> From the very beginning of their infatuation, Tempest simultaneously acts as the saviour of Rosamond, freeing her from her 'dreary' enclosure, and as her oppressor, becoming himself her 'cage'.<sup>18</sup> Tempest is initially depicted as 'a man past thirty, tall and powerful, with peculiar eyes and a scar across the forehead'.<sup>19</sup> His face is 'menacing' and 'inscrutable', his eyes 'magnificent', and his 'mouth [...] betray[s] a ruthless nature'.<sup>20</sup> This physical description aims to enhance the darkness that surrounds this character, who, very curiously, 'in the fitful light of the dusky hall', so closely resembles the portrait of Mephistopheles that, by pure chance, hangs on a wall.<sup>21</sup> The references to his diabolical nature recur throughout the novel: not only does he bear a most striking resemblance to Mephistopheles, but he is often addressed (and even addresses himself) as the

---

<sup>16</sup> Holly Blackford, 'Chasing Amy: Mephistopheles, the Laurence Boy, and Louisa May Alcott's Punishment of Female Ambition', *A Journal of Women Studies*, 32.3 (2011), 1–40 (p. 12); and Carol M. Davison, 'Getting Their Knickers in a Twist: Contesting the "Female Gothic" in Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*', *Gothic Studies*, 11.1 (2009), 32–45 (p. 39).

<sup>17</sup> Alcott, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Alcott, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Alcott, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Alcott, pp. 5, 12.

<sup>21</sup> Alcott, p. 5.

‘Evil One’, ‘Satan’, a wicked creature that ‘lead[s] the life of the Wandering Jew’.<sup>22</sup> The writer charges Tempest with further gothic and supernatural overtones, prolonging her efforts to imbue Tempest’s figure with mystery. As Stephen King has commented, ‘Tempest is reticent about his past; he is magnetic and moody by turns, in the best Heathcliff tradition. He’s also a liar, but Rose is too fascinated — and too sexually attracted, Alcott hints — to care.’<sup>23</sup>

Tempest shares with Dacre’s Zofloya the ability to manipulate and ‘passively’ cause death and destruction, a trait that is central to both novels and fatal to both heroines. Curiously, Tempest has the ability to appear every time Rosamond thinks about him, even ‘behind the grating’ of the confessional in the convent where she has taken refuge.<sup>24</sup> Yet, rather than extending these ominous and startling appearances into the realm of the supernatural, Alcott always provides a plausible explanation for them, referring to the real vicissitudes that lead Tempest to make those fortuitous appearances. In other words, despite Alcott’s constant allusions to Tempest’s manipulative, sinister, wicked nature, she ultimately presents the ‘Faustian motif’ by suggestion only. In the end, unlike Dacre’s Zofloya, her anti-hero remains ‘simply a man without conscience’.<sup>25</sup> On the one hand, this difference corresponds to a restriction put in place by the Sensation novel, set as it is in contemporary times, which consequently precludes a full triumph of the imagination, in contrast with the detached gothic novel set in the fifteenth century, where anything can happen. On the other hand, this limitation imposed upon the supernatural in the novel inevitably recalls the Radcliffian tradition of the ‘supernatural explained’, conventionally employed by women writing gothic fiction, in order to make their works less transgressive and more acceptable.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, Zofloya seems to have the power to read Victoria’s thoughts. However, unlike Alcott, Dacre stresses Zofloya’s supernatural ability: ‘your very thoughts have power to attract me’, says Zofloya to Victoria.<sup>27</sup> Alcott’s timid diabolical allusions to Tempest’s diabolical nature do not stand comparison with the Moor, whose full satanic transformation is explicitly rendered within the plot by Dacre. Zofloya makes his first appearance in Victoria’s dreams, and not until the second half of the novel which bears his name, a title which

---

<sup>22</sup> Alcott, p. 13.

<sup>23</sup> Stephen King, ‘Blood and Thunder in Concord’ (Review of *A Long Fatal Love Chase* by Louisa May Alcott), *The New York Times* (10 September 1995), <<http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/04/13/nnp/18425.html>> [accessed 6 January 2015].

<sup>24</sup> Alcott, p. 169.

<sup>25</sup> Alcott, p. 87.

<sup>26</sup> See E. J. Clery, ‘The Supernatural Explained’, in *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 106–14.

<sup>27</sup> Dacre, p. 181.

certainly aims to underline the importance of this character and creates expectation in the reader. His startling entrance in an oneiric dimension is an indication of the novel's refusal to shy away from supernatural effects. His Moorish nature is immediately hyperbolised, with a strong emphasis on his 'noble and majestic form'.<sup>28</sup> As such, Zofloya's exotic features, if compared with those of Tempest, configure themselves as part of his more *outré*, less easily explained characterisation. The orientalist 'commanding' figure of the extravagant Moor attracts Victoria's curiosity: she is overtaken by this princely figure, unable to differentiate her excitement from fear, terror, and passion.

*Zofloya*, challenging the common perception of the female author as oriented toward a sense of virtue and morality, rejects the passivity of Ann Radcliffe's heroines, opting for an active, ruthless female protagonist, who, as the novel progresses, becomes as diabolical as her demoniac counterpart, a mirror image of her demon lover. Zofloya and Victoria were tailored for each other: she needed him to accomplish her malicious deeds and he needed her, her soul, and her submission as a wife in hell. Zofloya is the perfect element to balance her nymphomaniacal 'furor of conflicting passions'.<sup>29</sup> She becomes his property precisely because she allowed herself to be manipulated by him: 'yet hast thou permitted thyself to be led along! — thou hast damned thy soul with unnumbered crimes, rendering thyself, by each, more fully mine.'<sup>30</sup>

Victoria personifies the denial of domesticity and family values. In Hoeveler's words, she 'embodies the earlier, uncivilized, aristocratic woman — vain, lustful, libidinosly aggressive, actively and openly sexual and violent'.<sup>31</sup> She strives to control, dominate, and exert her influence through sexuality and guile, in such an extreme way that her portrayal has been seen to be anti-feminist by modern critics. Indeed, as Carol M. Davison points out, 'because of its unique and highly controversial nature', *Zofloya* has always provoked 'diametrically opposed claims', with responses oscillating between considering it a proto-feminist novel on the one hand, and a misogynist work on the other.<sup>32</sup> However, it may be more fruitful momentarily to set the gender issues to one side, or at least to consider this novel as remote from the Radcliffian tradition as possible, for to restrain it within Ellen Moers's female-gothic model would be paradoxical and unrewarding.<sup>33</sup> However,

<sup>28</sup> Dacre, p. 145.

<sup>29</sup> Dacre, p. 144.

<sup>30</sup> Dacre, p. 254.

<sup>31</sup> Diane Long Hoeveler, 'Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*: A Case Study in Miscegenation as Sexual and Racial Nausea', *European Romantic Review*, 8.2 (1997), 185–99 (p. 188).

<sup>32</sup> Davison, p. 34.

<sup>33</sup> Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (London: The Women's Press Limited, 1986).

disregarding Dacre's status as a female author would deny the novel's importance for its documentation of the struggle against patriarchal, preconceived notions of female sexuality. Instead, it is necessary to rethink the concept of female gothic, and to consider it as versatile — in other words, to rethink *Zofloya* as an unconventional, indeed Sensational, hybrid novel written by a woman, about the incompatibility between different forms of sexuality and a male-oriented society.

It is imperative, however, to clarify what is meant by the presence of elements of the Sensation genre in *Zofloya*, a novel which evidently precedes the advent of the genre by several decades. One of the main intents of the Sensation novel is to produce a sense of wonder, simultaneously to shock and amaze, to provoke its readers with transgressions against social, political, and religious values. 'Stand[ing] midway between romanticism and realism, Gothic "mysteries" and modern mysteries', the Sensation novel brings crimes to the foreground in detailed, journalistic descriptions;<sup>34</sup> morality is questioned, while virtue dangerously vacillates towards the questionable path of vice; the concept of love is reformulated, as various combinations of bigamous, adulterous, homosexual relationships replace earlier models of courtly love. As Brantlinger observes, '[e]ven in those sensation novels whose plots do not hinge upon bigamy, there is a strong interest in sexual irregularities, adultery, forced marriages, and marriages formed under false pretenses',<sup>35</sup> in a literary fashion that reflected the rapidly changing patterns of Victorian society.<sup>36</sup> The term 'Sensational' itself conveys the genre's overt excessiveness. It is within these borders, and not within the paradigm of female gothic, that Dacre placed her novel *Zofloya*. Although it has been agreed that the novel may be seen as a reworking of Lewis's *The Monk* — to the extent that contemporary reviews mention Lewis's novel as the better effort<sup>37</sup> — it should be noted that it is in *Zofloya* that one witnesses depravation as sensational. Indeed, depravation works as a mechanism aimed to disturb and, at the same time, to move the reader to a paroxysm of wonder, an ecstasy of emotions characteristic of a genre that was witnessing its first steps in the literary scene. The role played by writers like Lewis, or even de Sade, in the nineteenth-century literary craze for the shocking Sensational cannot be denied, since both writers most certainly contributed to this process of genre transformation. Yet, it is in *Zofloya*

---

<sup>34</sup> Brantlinger, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Brantlinger, p. 6.

<sup>36</sup> Jeanne Fahnestock links the conspicuous presence of the bigamy literary motif in Sensation fiction to the Yelverton bigamy-divorce trial in 1861, one of the many sensational law cases which followed the Matrimonial Cause Act in 1857. See Jeanne Fahnestock, 'Bigamy: The Rise and Fall of a Convention', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 36.1 (1981), 47–71.

<sup>37</sup> See Appendix B in Charlotte Dacre, *Zofloya; or The Moor*, p. 262.

that the metamorphosis from the gothic to the Sensational starts to emerge fully, since the author uses the Sensational as a mechanism to manipulate plot and language in a ‘bombastic’ manner, turning the narrative into a ‘sensational tale of passion, jealousy and murder’.<sup>38</sup>

It does not seem preposterous or exaggerated to affirm that the label of female gothic can more rightly be applied to *Chase* than to *Zofloya*. Understandably categorised as a ‘Sensation novel’ and, eventually, as ‘crime fiction’, Alcott’s *Chase* clearly configures itself, however, as a homage to British gothic literature.<sup>39</sup> Like her protagonist Rosamond on the boat named ‘Circe’, drifting towards the unknown with her heart full of expectations, in 1866 Alcott set out for a journey in Europe as a companion for an infirm American lady. In her *Chase*, Alcott revisits her own voyage to Europe, an endless source of inspiration, even a sort of fictional Grand Tour, and her coming back from the old continent with new life experiences, of which autobiographical references can be easily found in *Chase*. Indeed, so important was Europe to her vision for the novel that Alcott barely explored any theme connected with her American nationality in *Chase*.

Elaine Showalter stated that nineteenth-century ‘American women’s writing was influenced by the English tradition, but it also transformed and expanded that tradition in terms of its own historical, cultural and racial contexts.’<sup>40</sup> However, when it comes to the peculiar case of *Chase*, it is difficult to find traces of any textual reference to an American ‘historical, cultural and racial context.’<sup>41</sup> One of Alcott’s dearest and most strongly American themes, the Civil War, which ended one year before the book’s composition, finds no place in here. The book is set in Europe, featuring European characters enacting their fates within a non-American mind-set. As a matter of fact, *Chase* follows a conventionally ‘European’ plot, and an overtly gothic marriage intrigue. The text’s American origins are hinted at only in the depiction of Phillip Tempest, who, reminiscent of Charlotte Brontë’s Rochester in *Jane Eyre* (1847), is the quintessence of the ideals of freedom and individual independence, brought to their maximum excess. Tempest’s motto, ‘obey no law but one’s will’,<sup>42</sup> implies that he embodies the concept of the self-made man, which was, at the time of the writing of *Chase*,

<sup>38</sup> Craciun, Introduction to Charlotte Dacre, *Zofloya; or The Moor*, pp. 9–32 (p. 22); and Angela Wright, *Gothic Fiction: A Reader’s Guide to Essential Criticism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 144.

<sup>39</sup> For a discussion of the novel as ‘crime fiction’, see Kate Watson, *Women Writing Crime Fiction, 1860–1880: Fourteen American, British and Australian Authors* (North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2012), p. 85.

<sup>40</sup> Elaine Showalter, Introduction to *Scribbling Women: Short Stories by 19th-Century American Women*, ed. by Elaine Showalter, Catherine Saint Louis, and Stuart Burrows (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), pp. xxv–xlii (p. xxxviii).

<sup>41</sup> Showalter, Introduction to *Scribbling Women*, p. xxxviii.

<sup>42</sup> Alcott, p. 8.

already present in the American collective consciousness.<sup>43</sup> Being a self-made man was synonymous with the ideals of absolute independence and resourcefulness, albeit intended in a very positive sense. Undoubtedly, Tempest is an independent spirit who won riches and glory through hard work and perseverance. Yet, in *Chase*, Alcott goes beyond the simplistic portrayal of a self-made man. Tempest is also deeply sceptical and believes that '[t]here is very little real liberty in the world'.<sup>44</sup> His position is ambivalent, and, on many occasions, it can also be considered as representative of misanthropy, cynicism, and pessimism. His scepticism originates in the combination of two different conceptions of the masculine figure: in his fictional dimension, the character of the Englishman Tempest is the unacknowledged mixture of the American self-made man and the British Byronic hero. As such, the hybrid features that pervade the novel's genre are reflected in the fictional development of its antagonist, whose resourceful spirit is undermined by his markedly gothic traits.

Tempest's characterisation is just one example of Alcott's usage of gothic literary tropes. Alcott's fascination with the gothic has been cursorily pointed out by recent criticism, especially after the discovery of her double identity as a writer, half-devoted to the portrayal of morally edifying tales for children and girls, while secretly indulging in tales filled with mysterious settings, exoticism, and gothic trickeries. Rostenberg and Stern have affirmed that 'Alcott might have become the American Mrs. Radcliffe had she not at length been diverted from her gory, gruesome and fascinating course.'<sup>45</sup> In *Chase*, the 'sentimental mode' which marked *Little Women* is distorted by the presence of gothic motifs and atmospheres, resulting in a hybrid mode which bears the distinctive features of the gothic.<sup>46</sup> The setting is reminiscent of Ann Radcliffe's isolated landscapes, more Romantic in nature than something from its age. *Chase* begins and ends on an island, remote and removed from the English countryside. This detached setting is one of the reasons why Rosamond feels entrapped by her grandfather, and can also be seen as the reflection of her own fears regarding his dominant nature. The setting is clearly an inter-textual reference to the island where Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is set, an allusion which is reinforced by the eloquent choice of

---

<sup>43</sup> In 1858, Charles Seymour compiled a 'collection of sixty profiles' called *Self-Made Men* (see Jim Cullen, 'Problems and Promises of the Self-Made Myth', *The Hedgehog Review*, 15.2 (2013), 8–22 (p. 12)). At that time, the concept of the self-made man was also a recurrent theme in the most famous lectures by the African-American writer Frederick Douglass, of whom Alcott's father 'was a sincere admirer' (see John Matteson, *Eden's Outcasts: A Biography of Louisa May Alcott and her Father* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), p. 90).

<sup>44</sup> Alcott, p. 8.

<sup>45</sup> Leona Rostenberg and Madeleine B. Stern, 'Five Letters that Changed an Image', in *Louisa May Alcott: From Blood and Thunder to Heart and Home*, ed. by Madeleine B. Stern (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), pp. 83–92 (p. 132).

<sup>46</sup> Watson, p. 84.

name for Phillip Tempest. This is a primarily gothic location, mysterious and distant from the Massachusetts landscape which was more familiar to Alcott. The atmosphere around the island is equally awe-inspiring. From the outset the island is surrounded by a gathering storm, the sky described as 'red', with whispers of wind and flashes of lightning completing the picture.<sup>47</sup>

Further on in the novel an element of gothic mystery is added. Rosamond finds a grave which she initially believes to be the grave of Ippolito, the disguised son of Tempest. Alcott's style suddenly becomes contrived, suspenseful:

Till midnight she remained quiet, then, anxious to profit by the moon, she nerved herself to the task and like a shadow crept through the silent house, glided along the dusky paths and struck away toward the distant olive grove. [...] Nothing was stirring but the bats, no sound broke the hush but a late nightingale mourning musically from the rosy coverts of Valrosa.<sup>48</sup>

In the moment leading to the grave's discovery, Rosamond plays the female-gothic heroine by feeling like 'a hunted deer' in a place described as 'shadowy and still', in a manner similar to the stereotypical 'damsel in distress', threatened by a male figure who should represent her shelter but, instead, symbolises her oppression.<sup>49</sup> This theme recalls the treatment of the female figure in gothic classics like *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). Furthermore, Rosamond's discovery of the grave is made possible by the light of the moon, which cuts 'through the swaying branches' and illuminates it.<sup>50</sup> The moon here acts as a curtain which, when opened, reveals the ghastly presence of an uncanny, mysterious element in the novel, a 'low mound' which is, in fact, a 'new-made grave'.<sup>51</sup> Finally, Rosamond releases a 'cry of *terror*' and experiences a 'moment of *horror*' (emphasis added), fully re-enacting the typical actions of a female-gothic heroine.<sup>52</sup> As this suggests, location is central to the gothicisation of the protagonist. The delineation of the character in relation to the setting of the novel which has been examined so far ultimately contributes to the argument that Alcott borrows

---

<sup>47</sup> Alcott, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> Alcott, p. 107.

<sup>49</sup> Alcott, p. 107. The full quotation reads: 'Shadowy and still was the place as with a beating heart she passed through it, looking keenly about her. A sudden sound of footsteps made her start and spring away into the thick undergrowth, there to crouch like a hunted deer.'

<sup>50</sup> Alcott, p. 108.

<sup>51</sup> Alcott, p. 108.

<sup>52</sup> Alcott, p. 109. In this passage, Alcott is clearly hinting at the distinction between 'terror' and 'horror' drawn by Edmund Burke in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

from the gothic tradition, both in terms of literary tropes, writing style, and gender representation, an aspect which will be further explored in the next section.

### **From ‘hunted deers’ to ‘slumbering lions’: Portraits of Atypical Female Characters**

As previously mentioned, the interchangeability of gothic and Sensational as genres in Dacre and Alcott’s works can be identified just as effectively through a close reading of their atypical female characters. Dacre’s Victoria and Alcott’s Rosamond both challenge classical representations of women: the Romantic ideal of the guiltless virginal maid, which includes the stereotype of the female-gothic ‘damsel in distress’, and the Victorian ideal of the ‘angel in the house’, the embodiment of an ‘innocent and unchallenging womanhood’.<sup>53</sup> In *Chase*, the woman becomes the ground upon which the male figures, who are naturally predisposed to be deceitful, persecuting, and aggressive, exert their thirst for power. In *Zofloya*, the perspective is reversed: it is actually the female thirst for power that is depicted as predisposed to deception, persecution, and aggression. Yet both Rosamond and Victoria’s natures and behaviour can be defined as transgressive, if one considers Becker’s ‘twofold notion of “transgression”’:

On the one hand, [transgression] refers to going beyond the norm — thus drawing attention to its limitations. On the other, it refers to an unknown world beyond these limitations, often referred to in (pejorative) ‘feminine’ terms like chaos, fantasy and dream.<sup>54</sup>

Rosamond faces the limitations of the norm, due to her substantially fragile and virtuous nature, and partially due to a certain restriction imposed by the Sensation genre, while Victoria explores the ‘world beyond these limitations’.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, Victoria is an active character who behaves transgressively, stepping outside the realm of the believable, partially because *Zofloya*, as a gothic novel set in the fifteenth century, indulges in certain liberties (two examples being the novel’s historical distancing and the fantastical events which occur in it) that would be implausible in a more realistic genre. It makes perfect sense, then, that the scope of transgression in *Zofloya*, particularly in the case of Victoria, goes beyond the border, regarding limitations as mere obstacles to a full triumph of the imagination. Its detached setting both in time and place allows for a transposition of the unreal into the real, a

---

<sup>53</sup> Brantlinger, p. 12.

<sup>54</sup> Becker, p. 39.

<sup>55</sup> Becker, p. 39.

projection of ‘chaos, fantasy and dream’ into a world that is unfamiliar to the reader.<sup>56</sup> Thus, the presence of the supernatural in the novel is entirely justified, acting as a transgression in a transgressive text itself. On the contrary, *Chase* does not require a historical detachment from the reader’s reality, since it is set in contemporary times. The supernatural in a familiar world would be too unbelievable, which is why in *Chase* its presence is dimmed, reduced to an afterimage, an insinuation that is never made fully concrete. As a result, the scope of transgression is lessened, leading Rosamond to break or bend the ‘norm’, but only within specific boundaries. Indeed, in attempting to run away from Tempest, she becomes a disheartened shadow of herself. Her condition reveals an unhealthy dependence on her oppressor, in a twisted game of attractions which culminates with her own death.

If Victoria’s transgression is unquestionable, and undoubtedly related to Becker’s latter notion of the term, Rosamond’s, although it fits under the former definition, is slightly less clear and needs to be located in its intra-textual context. As previously indicated, in several passages of the novel, Rosamond resembles a conventional female-gothic heroine, the stereotypical ‘hunted deer’.<sup>57</sup> As Stern notes, it is clear that Alcott ‘dipped from time to time in the gore of the Gothic novel, whose ruined abbeys and frowning castles provided her with background touches, [...] and whose unholy themes introduced her to pacts with the devil’.<sup>58</sup> Rosamond mistakenly, and fatally, misinterprets Tempest as the way to release herself from a sad and lonely life, while unconsciously rushing towards her own death. Between this fatal meeting and her tragic end, a relentless sequence of adventures occupies the variegated scenes of the novel, which makes perfectly understandable why Stephen King defined it as ‘a wonderful entertainment’ and Christine Doyle as ‘an unabashed page-turner’.<sup>59</sup> Rosamond’s adventures can be rightly linked to the ‘traveling heroinism’ that Moers theorises about Radcliffe’s heroines, through which ‘the Gothic novel became a feminine substitute for the *picaresque*, where heroines could enjoy all the adventures and alarms that masculine heroes had long experienced, far from home, in fiction’ (emphasis added).<sup>60</sup> Indeed, *Chase* becomes ‘picaresque’ in the succession of events that repeat themselves *ad infinitum*, in this ‘cat and mouse’ chase: she hides and disguises herself, he finds her, she runs away; she cloaks herself

---

<sup>56</sup> Becker, p. 39.

<sup>57</sup> Alcott, p. 107.

<sup>58</sup> Rostenberg and Stern, p. 96.

<sup>59</sup> King, ‘Blood and Thunder in Concord’; and Christine Doyle, ‘Louisa May Alcott: New Texts and Contexts’, *Children’s Literature*, 27 (1999), 211–17 (p. 216).

<sup>60</sup> Ellen Moers, ‘Traveling Heroism: Gothic for Heroines’, in *Literary Women* (London: The Women’s Press Limited, 1986), pp. 122–40 (p. 126).

again under a different identity, he tracks her down once more; and so on, until the catastrophic conclusion of her final attempt to escape.

From the very first pages, this ending has been prepared for, in that Rosamond is portrayed as a naive and melodramatic figure: often addressed as a child throughout the novel, she is an orphan who lives with her heartless and uncaring grandfather. While Emily in Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* can always rely on the memory of her father's benevolent and helpful guidance, Rosamond differs from her in that she lacks a positive role model. The absence of a family structure renders Rosamond the perfect prey of the 'hunting' instincts of Tempest. Like the overtly ironic depiction of the heroine of Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818), she often indulges in readings in which 'the sinners are always more interesting than the saints'.<sup>61</sup> Her ideas, as she will later explain, all come 'out of books', since she has 'nothing to do but read'.<sup>62</sup> As a result, she is well disposed to see in Tempest that 'new hero who had come to play a part in the romance of her life'.<sup>63</sup> Unfortunately, her expectations of a life marked by pleasures and happiness will be disappointed, as soon as she discovers the deceitful plan of Tempest: in a typical bigamous twist, which often recurs in the Sensation novels by Braddon and Collins, it is revealed that he already has a wife and a son.<sup>64</sup> His marriage with Rosamond was, in fact, false and consequently their potential love story flows into a much darker, gothic plot.

Rosamond might, therefore, seem to be a weak and vulnerable woman, victim of doomed circumstances and of her own ingenuity. Yet her perseverance in escaping from Tempest, once she becomes aware of his treachery, and her ability to take advantage of the situations she will consecutively face, disguising herself in the most improbable costumes, complicate this simplistic judgement. As Blackford comments,

The narrator's representation of Rosamond results in an uneasy paradox. Rose is simultaneously a swashbuckling woman of the world, donning various disguises and even faking her own death, and a whiny child pleading for protection from various characters.<sup>65</sup>

The textual, generic transgression, and the ensuing hybrid dimension of the novel, corresponds to the transgression of its female protagonist, as the former is intrinsically related

---

<sup>61</sup> Alcott, p. 9.

<sup>62</sup> Alcott, p. 14.

<sup>63</sup> Alcott, p. 17.

<sup>64</sup> See Maia McAleavey, *The Bigamy Plot: Sensation and Convention in the Victorian Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>65</sup> Blackford, p. 5.

to the fictional development of the latter. As such, Rosamond is a hybrid character, a mixture of gothic and Sensational heroine. The crucial moments of this ‘love chase’ demonstrate that she is a tenacious, strong-willed woman, ready to fight for her own freedom. If, on the one hand, it is true that she is ‘a circulated object [...] gambled away in a vicious game of patriarchal exchange’,<sup>66</sup> on the other, it cannot be denied that she plays the part of an ‘active heroine [who] takes daring walks on parapets, climbs across rooftops, cuts her hair and disguises herself as a boy, all to escape her pursuer’.<sup>67</sup> Yet her outbursts of independence are undermined by her feelings for Tempest, feelings which she is ultimately unable to repress.

The demon lover’s humanised nature allows for a pathological distortion of love: Rosamond’s submission is counterbalanced by Phillip’s obsession. Despite the fact that Rosamond is completely aware of his ‘strong influence [and] unprincipled nature’,<sup>68</sup> she cannot but love him. It then makes perfect sense to interpret her, as Blackford does, as ‘a prime example of the masochistic impulse that Michelle Massé traces in Gothic literature’.<sup>69</sup> However, Massé states that, ‘[s]ealed within her enclosed space, [the subordinated heroine] nonetheless wants to act, speak, and be recognized as a subject.’<sup>70</sup> Interestingly, Rosamond is able to be ‘recognized as a subject’ only when she performs a part, when she becomes someone else, in a paradoxical split of identities, which includes, in one of Alcott’s most comical touches, a nun.<sup>71</sup> Rosamond’s escape from her enclosure, the island where she lives with her grandfather, will eventually lead her to another, even worse ‘enclosed space’, a madhouse, a literary inter-textual reference to Brontë’s Bertha Mason. Tempest allows Rosamond to leave the asylum only on the condition that she will re-join him for the rest of her existence. She is unable to stand the obligatory tension between madness and submission. Her imprisonment in the asylum precedes the ultimate stage of the demonisation of love: in the end Tempest kills Rosamond, though unintentionally, during the last of her many attempts to flee from him. ‘Like a fallen spirit shut out from eternal life’, Tempest, once he has realised his mistake, departs from his miserable earthly life, committing suicide and pronouncing the final resounding words, while holding his dead Rosa: ‘Mine first — mine last — mine even in the grave!’<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> Blackford, p. 21.

<sup>67</sup> Doyle, p. 216.

<sup>68</sup> Alcott, p. 182.

<sup>69</sup> Blackford, p. 5.

<sup>70</sup> Michelle A. Massé, *In the Name of Love. Women, Masochism, and the Gothic* (Michigan: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 94.

<sup>71</sup> These controversial strategies of disguise are fairly typical of Alcott. Her novella *Behind a Mask, or Woman’s Power*, also published in 1866 under the pseudonym of A. M. Barnard, revolves around this theme.

<sup>72</sup> Alcott, p. 346.

Rosamond's death might be interpreted as the conclusive element in the 'process of liberation' that covers the entire novel. In the act of dying, she is finally freeing herself from Tempest's obsessed pursuit. Her death is also, inadvertently, an act of destruction: by dying, she kills her demon lover, whose existence is meaningless without her. Yet, examining the novel as a whole, and reflecting specifically on the novel's beginning, Rosamond's death can also be considered part of an inevitable 'process of imprisonment' that began with her first encounter with Tempest and ended with her melodramatic demise. She is punished for repudiating her virtue and accepting vice: death is connected with her shameful original wish, acting both as a liberating and punishing force.

Gorsky, reflecting on the social function of the woman in the nineteenth century, affirms that 'the archetypal good woman starts as a virtuous, obedient daughter and ends as a submissive wife and nurturing mother'.<sup>73</sup> Rosamond, as an orphan and as the ward of an unsympathetic, older man, is not able to play the first role, and refuses to play the second, by acting as a transgressive character. Her transgression, though, is purer and nobler than Victoria's. It is not a transgression for transgression's sake, but it rather configures itself as the ultimate effort to survive against the continuous attempts at subjugation carried out by Tempest.

The evident contrast between Alcott's Rosamond and Dacre's Victoria fortifies the idea that, in the gothic heroine, or anti-heroine, duplicity is a way for the woman to fight against her socially prescribed roles, a way that may be used as a defence mechanism or, indeed, as a weapon. Victoria, being 'sexually promiscuous, passionately aggressive, openly adulterous', proves that a female-gothic anti-heroine can assume the stage as the main character and overcome, and even murder, the stereotypical heroine, symbolised by her 'domesticated' double, Lilla.<sup>74</sup> Admittedly, this opposition between the good heroine and her evil counterpart already existed in gothic literary classics such as Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, where 'an allegorical presentation of the good and evil impulses of the soul by means of separate characters' can be found.<sup>75</sup> However, as Adriana Craciun states in her introduction to the novel, typically, the evil counterparts were nothing but 'secondary characters, dark doubles of the central heroines'.<sup>76</sup> In *Zofloya*, by contrast, the classical heroine/villainess dichotomy is reversed. The novel's female

<sup>73</sup> Susan R. Gorsky, *Femininity to Feminism: Women and Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), p. 3.

<sup>74</sup> Hoeveler, 'Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*', p. 198.

<sup>75</sup> DeLamotte, p. 108.

<sup>76</sup> Craciun, p. 11.

protagonist manipulates, cheats, disguises herself as a pure, virginal maid, murders, and lies. Her behaviour contrasts with that of the ‘embattled heroine’ that Craciun mentions as characteristic of Radcliffe, for it suggests an alternative view of the concept of woman.<sup>77</sup> Lilla, with her ‘angelic countenance, slightly suffused with the palest hue of the virgin rose’, is both an acknowledgement of the stereotyped Radcliffian female-gothic heroine and a denial of the necessity of such a figure, since it proves that there are other models of behaviour open to fictional heroines.<sup>78</sup> Her death therefore has a double meaning: on the one hand, Victoria murders Lilla because she represents what Victoria herself *cannot* be, that is, a subservient, virginal, womanly heroine; on the other hand, Victoria murders her because Lilla represents what she *must not* be, which is ‘the ultrafeminine ideal’, a mere object at the hands of men.<sup>79</sup>

While Victoria is an anti-heroine in the gothic mode, she is, at the same time, therefore, a Sensational heroine, because she does not conform to an existence as a helpless woman, although her upbringing was dedicated to the nurturing of this idea. After her mother Laurina abandoned him to pursue her adulterous passion with Count Ardolph, her father, the Marchese, created in Victoria the virginal image of an idol. Even though he recognises ‘the wrong bias of her character’, the Marchese places Victoria on a pedestal and worships her, convincing himself that the problem will be fixed with time.<sup>80</sup> This self-persuasion allows for the failure in Victoria’s education to reach its highest point, while this idolisation is essential to the birth of evil in her heart. In fact, Victoria sees, in the Marchese’s idolisation, something to disobey, something to disagree with; something, in sum, to transgress. She becomes the opposite of an idol as the story proceeds, and her gradual descent into the demoniacal world of transgression moulds her into an androgynous figure. In this metamorphosis from ‘beautiful and accomplished as an angel’ to one who is ‘proud, haughty [...], of a wild, ardent and irrepressible spirit’ can be noticed not only the ‘language of excess, extravagant, ornate, embellished, [that] knew no bounds’ that would be attributed, in the mid-nineteenth century, to Sensation novels, but also a treatment of the female body that is, in itself, excessive.<sup>81</sup>

As Craciun observes in her discourse on ‘corporeal deformation’ in *Fatal Women of Romanticism*, Victoria’s body suffers mutations throughout the novel: at fifteen, she is described as a woman of angelic beauty; years later, she becomes more masculine, and

<sup>77</sup> Craciun, p. 11.

<sup>78</sup> Dacre, p. 144.

<sup>79</sup> Diane Long Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998), p. 152.

<sup>80</sup> Dacre, p. 48.

<sup>81</sup> Dacre, p. 40; and Pykett, *The Nineteenth-Century Sensation Novel: Second Edition*, p. 70.

conforms less closely to the stereotyped ideal of the female body.<sup>82</sup> It is implied that she cannot conform physically to the shape of a feminine woman, if she indulges in a behaviour that is anything but feminine. And the more transgressive Victoria grows, the less feminine is the gothic mode, and the closer it resembles the male gothic of Lewis. In this process of transgression and transformation, the female gothic disappears, abandoning the narrative entirely by the end of the novel, where the succession of murders, suicides, and deceptions becomes too great to be contained within it.

Victoria, as a character, also surpasses gender expectations, in that she refuses to be controlled or, indeed, to control a single subject. The process of transgression as a result of the need to overcome idolisation continues in Victoria's relationship with Conte Berenza, albeit reframed. Their relationship begins with Victoria as the 'oppressed' and Berenza as the 'oppressor'. His dominant 'fierté' is joined by an impulsive need to discipline Victoria's faults. Yet his intent is revealed to be counter-productive.<sup>83</sup> To subdue this oppression, Victoria has to reconsider her instruments of power. Once she becomes in control of the relationship, she starts regarding Berenza as a mere source of gratification: she lets herself be courted, willingly becoming the object of his attention. Moreover, her feelings are described in a symbolically masculine way. She rejects the emotions conventionally attributed to women: what Berenza arouses in her is not love, but 'envy' and 'ardent, consuming desire'.<sup>84</sup> She is compared, not to a lioness, but to a 'slumbering lion', a sign of masculine, and not feminine, power.<sup>85</sup>

It can be concluded, then, that the duplicity that Rosamond is depicted as employing is similar to and yet simultaneously different from Victoria's. They both engage in deceptive behaviour in order to work out their roles in relation to their male counterparts. However, while in Rosamond's case this duplicity acts as a means to escape dominance, duplicity in Victoria becomes a weapon, not a shield. By portraying a woman like Victoria, Dacre offers to her readership a new model of transgressive, manipulative, relentless femininity. Correspondingly, Alcott, through her strong-willed heroine Rosamond, makes her readers dream about the possibility of freedom. In her Foreword to Gorsky's *Femininity to Feminism*, referring to nineteenth-century fiction in England and America, Nancy Walker states that 'the stories of female characters in nineteenth-century fiction', in which *Zofloya* and *Chase* can be included,

<sup>82</sup> Adriana Craciun, *Fatal Women of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 116.

<sup>83</sup> Dacre, p. 58.

<sup>84</sup> Dacre, pp. 59–60.

<sup>85</sup> Dacre, p. 59.

reveal the anxieties [...] of a rapidly changing social order in which the cultural ideology looked to women to provide domestic stability even as a growing number of women protested against the status quo and gradually won for themselves a more significant voice in the public life of England and America.<sup>86</sup>

With this in mind, a critique of the role that nineteenth-century society imposed on women can be identified between the lines of both novels, especially considering the writers' treatment of gender roles and their duplicitous characters' reactions to love. Both writers foregrounded their anxieties regarding imposed social roles, though in distinct ways. To do so, they introduced the demon lover, a gothic embodiment of aggressive male dominance. This demoniacal presence, common to both works, is thus an extension of the gender anxieties mentioned by Walker and it is through its use that both authors scrutinise the duplicitous, the masochistic, the nymphomaniac, in one word the transgressive elements of their female characters. As such, these diabolical crossings demonstrate not only the flexibility of the demon-lover trope, but also its relevance in a gender-based reflection.

The female protagonists and their demon lovers, though differently presented in the novels and to divergent purposes, ultimately solidify the argument that genre is impure—here, a mixture of gothic and Sensational. As the novels do not fit a rigid categorisation, in the same way, their main characters resist being enclosed in a single frame. The crossing and mixing of genre rules and gender roles have demonstrated that *Zofloya* works as a literary antecedent of Sensation fiction, while *Chase* exploits the female-gothic genre. The triumph of 'sensations', the perversity of crime, and the defeat of morality are prominent in both novels, proving the similarity between *Zofloya* and *Chase* and their generic transitions. In the end, the act of categorising is an act of restriction. In this sense, both Charlotte Dacre and Louisa May Alcott, by stripping their novels of easily classifiable elements, defied and transgressed not just genre and gender categorisations, but also the interpretive frontiers between morality and immorality, virtue and vice, freedom and enslavement.

---

<sup>86</sup> Nancy A. Walker, Foreword to *Femininity to Feminism: Women and Literature in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Susan R. Gorsky (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), pp. vii–xi.