

**THE DEMONIC TRANSFORMATION OF SYMBOLIC IMAGES IN ART AND  
LITERATURE**

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**Annotation:** This study examines the demonic transformation of symbolic images in literature and art, highlighting how symbols evolve from neutral or positive representations into manifestations of evil, chaos, and moral decay. The article explores the aesthetic and psychological functions of demonization, focusing on key literary works such as Goethe's Faust and Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray, as well as visual art examples by Hieronymus Bosch and Francisco Goya. It analyzes the symbolic depiction of characters, objects, and settings, emphasizing their role in illustrating internal conflict, societal critique, and moral degeneration. The research demonstrates that demonic symbolism serves as a powerful tool for expressing human fears, desires, and ethical dilemmas across historical and cultural contexts.

**Key Words:** Demonic transformation, symbolic images, literature, art, Faust, Dorian Gray, Bosch, Goya, Gothic, moral decline, symbolism, internal conflict, supernatural, aesthetic expression

In literary and artistic works, the demonic transformation of symbolic images is interpreted by scholars as a complex aesthetic phenomenon that reflects the supernatural and dark dimensions of human imagination. Throughout history, creators have employed symbolic representations to convey events ranging from the divine to the profane to subsequent generations. These symbols often assume demonic or satanic forms, reflecting the artist's interpretation of evil, their intention to evoke emotional responses, and their challenge to conventional beliefs. A notable example of this transformation is Hieronymus Bosch's The Garden of Earthly Delights, where grotesque and fantastical figures populate a surreal and unsettling scene. The central panel depicts various figures engaged in hedonistic behaviors, illustrating indulgence and disorder, while animals and human forms transform into demonic figures symbolizing madness and damnation.

Francisco Goya's works, particularly his series Los Caprichos, provide another example of demonic symbolism<sup>1</sup>. Goya employs symbolic imagery to critique social corruption while simultaneously exploring the allure of the supernatural. Similarly, artists such as Zdzisław Beksiński and H. R. Giger merge elements of horror, science fiction, and fantasy to create extraordinary and otherworldly images designed to provoke anxiety and fear.

In literature, the demonization of symbolic images often functions to challenge or subvert traditional norms and values, especially in the representation of marginalized groups. For instance, American literary scholars and feminists Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in The Madwoman in the Attic, highlight that nineteenth-century literature frequently demonized female

<sup>1</sup> <https://book.oxu.uz/web/kitoblar/152371402.pdf> [19.10.2024]

characters to reinforce patriarchal structures. This depiction presents women as irrational, dangerous, or morally corrupt, thereby justifying social control and restrictions.<sup>2</sup>

The concept of demonic transformation in literature is closely linked to the symbolic representation of characters, objects, and settings, which often convey meanings beyond their literal interpretation. Symbols, whether characters, objects, or environments, frequently embody abstract ideas or concepts. Within the framework of demonic transformation, such symbols gradually shift from their initial, often neutral or positive connotations to represent the darker and malevolent aspects of human experience.

The use of symbolic imagery in literature dates back to antiquity, appearing in mythological texts, religious writings, and classical works. Over time, symbolism evolved, and diverse literary movements and cultural contexts significantly shaped the interpretation and deployment of symbols. For example, Romantic and Gothic literature extensively employed symbolic images, often enriching them with supernatural, mysterious, or demonic elements. As Carl Jung notes, symbols act as a medium through which the unconscious communicates with consciousness. In the context of demonic transformation, symbolic images often reveal repressed fears, desires, or hidden aspects of the psyche, gradually exposing the inner complexity of characters and narrative structures.

One of the most prominent manifestations of demonic transformation is the moral and psychological decline of characters. A protagonist initially depicted as virtuous or noble may encounter temptations or challenges that precipitate moral corruption. These changes are frequently expressed through alterations in appearance, behavior, and environment. For example, in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian's portrait symbolically reflects his inner demonic transformation, growing increasingly grotesque as he indulges in immorality<sup>3</sup>.

Demonic transformation often occurs through supernatural intervention, with such forces symbolizing disorder, evil, or the unknown, inevitably leading characters toward ruin. In Goethe's *Faust*, the protagonist experiences a demonic transformation through a pact with Mephistopheles, with symbolic elements such as blood-sealed contracts and depictions of ultimate damnation illustrating Faust's gradual moral and spiritual decline.<sup>4</sup>

Internal conflict plays a crucial role in these transformations. Struggles between good and evil, reason and passion, or self-restraint and indulgence frequently manifest in symbolic choices or actions that propel characters toward demonic states. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the protagonist's inner turmoil is symbolized by the vision of a blood-stained dagger prior to committing regicide, reflecting his guilt and desires while driving him toward moral degradation and demonic embodiment.<sup>5</sup>

This study also examines *Faust* and *Dorian Gray* as exemplary cases. Goethe's *Faust* and Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* serve as key texts for exploring human nature, moral decay, and the aesthetic dimensions of demonic influence. Both characters pursue boundless possibilities but ultimately confront profound ethical crises: Faust achieves intellectual and philosophical mastery through a pact with the devil, whereas Dorian Gray's obsession with

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<sup>2</sup> Gilbert S. Gubar, S. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. – Yale: Yale University Press, 1979. – P.314

<sup>3</sup> Wilde O. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. – London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, 1890.

<sup>4</sup> Goethe J. W. *Faust*. – Stuttgart: Cotta'scher Verlag, 1808. – P. 636.

<sup>5</sup> Shakespeare W. (1606). *Macbeth*. – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. – P. 97.

eternal youth and beauty leads to his moral degeneration, with his portrait embodying his inner demonic state.

In literature, objects often carry symbolic significance, and their demonic transformation functions as a powerful narrative device. Such transformations frequently illustrate environmental corruption or the tangible effects of evil. The notion of cursed or enchanted objects is central to Gothic and horror literature, often imbued with dark histories or occult associations that mirror characters' moral decline. Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* depicts a house symbolizing the Pincheon family's cursed legacy, illustrating the consequences of greed and desire through a demonic setting.<sup>6</sup> In J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, the One Ring evolves from a tool of power to a symbol of demonic influence, gradually corrupting its bearers. Similarly, in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart*, the heart beneath the floorboards, though inanimate, becomes a demonic presence compelling the narrator toward confession.

The demonic transformation of settings is another potent symbolic strategy, often reflecting characters' psychological states or thematic concerns. The motif of "fall" typically accompanies these transformations, marking shifts from order to chaos, light to darkness, or safety to danger. Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* exemplifies this process, as traversal through the nine circles of Hell symbolizes a descent into the most corrupt and demonic aspects of human nature. Likewise, in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, an island initially depicted as paradisiacal gradually transforms into a nightmarish environment as the children succumb to savagery, symbolizing the loss of innocence and the emergence of malevolence.

The demonic transformation of symbolic images in art and literature serves as a powerful lens through which creators explore the darker dimensions of human experience. From ancient mythological texts to modern Gothic and psychological narratives, symbols evolve from neutral or positive representations into manifestations of evil, chaos, and moral decay. This transformation not only reflects the moral and psychological struggles of characters but also critiques societal norms, exposes hidden fears and desires, and engages with complex philosophical and aesthetic questions. By examining works such as *Faust*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and key visual art pieces by Bosch and Goya, it becomes evident that demonic symbolism provides a versatile and enduring method to depict the interplay between good and evil, the known and the unknown, and the conscious and unconscious aspects of human nature. Ultimately, the study of demonic transformation reveals the enduring human fascination with darkness and the symbolic strategies through which literature and art grapple with ethical, psychological, and existential dilemmas.

**Used literatures:**

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3. Goethe J. W. *Faust*. – Stuttgart: Cotta'scher Verlag, 1808. – P. 636.
4. Shakespeare W. (1606). *Macbeth*. – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. – P. 97
5. Hawthorne N. *The House of the Seven Gables*. – Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1851. – P. 209.

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<sup>6</sup> Hawthorne N. *The House of the Seven Gables*. – Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1851. – P. 209.