

# *Folkloric Coastlines in Traditional Gothic Literature*

## *Costas Folclóricas en la literatura gótica tradicional*

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### **Resumen**

La costa es un espacio que se presta a descripciones del mundo mágico y misterioso del folclore. Siendo una frontera ecotonal entre dos espacios distintos, la costa está repleta de implicaciones fantásticas. En este artículo, se analizarán tres ejemplos distintos de fusión entre el folclore y la costa en la literatura gótica tradicional. La primera sección se centrará en el arquetipo de Barba Azul presente en *El castillo de Otranto* (1764) de Horace Walpole, y la manera en que la yuxtaposición de la costa y el castillo sirve para enfatizar los males de una sociedad patriarcal. La segunda sección demostrará el antropomorfismo en *El monje* (1796) de Matthew Lewis, además de crear una metáfora del consumo canibalístico y los matrimonios desequilibrados. La sección final aborda los poemas de Ann Radcliffe en *El romance del bosque* (1791). Radcliffe presenta la costa como un espacio repleto de criaturas fantásticas, las cuales contribuyen a una representación del espacio como un lugar de escapismo y cumplimiento de deseos. Cada sección demuestra la manera en que se utiliza la costa para criticar a la sociedad. La costa provee tanto una alternativa preferible a las estructuras hechas por el hombre como una condena por sus defectos.

**Palabras clave:** folclore, costa, literatura gótica, cuento de hadas, ecocrítica.

### **Abstract**

The shore is a space which lends itself to depictions of the magical and mysterious world of folklore. As an ecotonal boundary between disparate spaces, the coast abounds with fantastical suggestion, prompting the appearance of beings who reside between fantasy and reality. In this article, I will focus on three different examples of how folklore and the coast intermingle in traditional Gothic literature. The first section will focus on the Bluebeard archetype present in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), and how the juxtaposition between coast

and castle serves to emphasise the evils of patriarchal society. Section two will show the coast encountering folkloric and mythic anthropomorphism in Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* (1796), as well as creating a metaphor for cannibalistic consumption and unbalanced marriages. The final section discusses Ann Radcliffe's poems in *The Romance of the Forest* (1791). Radcliffe portrays the coast as an area abounding with fantastical creatures, all of whom contribute to a portrayal of the space as an area of escapism and wish-fulfilment. Each of these sections demonstrates the way the coast is used to criticise society. The coast provides both a preferable alternative to man-made structures, and a condemnation of their flaws.

**Keywords:** Folklore, coast, Gothic literature, fairy-tale, ecocriticism.

**E**cocriticism is an increasingly important method of reading literature. It analyses natural spaces, focusing on their importance both to the texts themselves and to the society in which the text was placed. By reading Gothic literature with this perspective, it is possible to further analyse the power of these texts over the imagination. Nature, both in the eighteenth century and currently, is a largely mysterious and unknown force. It exists beyond our full comprehension, shirking understanding, and can often wield a life-threatening power over us. Gothic literature can frighten and shock readers by exploiting these natural features and augmenting them, often by using the environment in an unexpected way.

The coast, in particular, is the site at which many of these uncanny occurrences take place. The geography of the coast is in large part responsible for such an abundance of imagery. It is ecotonal, meaning that it is a natural transition point between two distinct biological communities – namely, land and sea. The coast is interstitial, locked between two very different environments, encompassing the characteristics of both, as well as having its own unique significance. The coast's natural features are what attracts Gothic writers to it. The space abounds with fantastical possibilities, as well as invoking the association of boundaries between one realm and another. The coast's metaphorical significance is deeply rooted, then, in its natural significance. Gothic writers have formed their narratives around what already exists in nature and have used this to amplify the fictional worlds they create. Ecocriticism focuses on natural spaces and gives them the due credit that they deserve, revealing their importance and highlighting their various significances. This paper, therefore, analyses the Gothic from an ecocritical perspective<sup>1</sup>, focusing specifically on interstitial coasts and their relationship with the fairy-tale.

<sup>1</sup> See Harold FROMM, *The Nature of Being Human: From Environmentalism to Consciousness*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009; Nasrullah MAMBROL, «Ecocriticism: An Essay», *Literary Theory and Criticism*, in <https://literariness.org/2016/11/27/ecocriticism/>, 27<sup>th</sup> November, 2016 (accessed 23/11/21) or Courtney Nicole LECHMANN, *Water, Prestige and Christianity: An Ecocritical Look at Medieval Literature*, MA Thesis, Las Vegas: University of Nevada, 2016.

Folklore tales are frequently violent and frightening. They feature fantastical «monsters and dragons, evil stepparents» and «false brides» with «severed limbs»<sup>2</sup>. Joseph Abbruscato reasons that these elements are «important tools to teach children about themselves and the world around them»<sup>3</sup>. These Gothic horror elements serve more of a role than just entertainment, bolstering readers against the dangers of reality, preparing them to become «productive members of their societies, cultures, and families, and able to maturely handle the crises and situations which arise in the course of their lives»<sup>4</sup>. Abbruscato inadvertently describes an important function of Gothic novels here - representation and critique of reality. Both folkloric and Gothic texts are similarly motivated. Kate Bernheimer, too, shows how folklore tales use Gothic motifs to depict the real world: «it is violent; and yes, there is loss. There is murder, incest, famine and rape – all of these haunt the stories, as they haunt us. The [folklore] world is the real world»<sup>5</sup>. Without frightening elements, then, the message of myth would be unheard, and the true intention of folklore, to protect rather than to mollify, would not be achieved. Folklore relies on Gothic motifs to deliver its effect. Gothic texts, in their turn, have come to adopt mythological motifs in a similar fashion. The coast in Gothic literature is an example of where folkloric imagery has been adopted. It is a space where, often, the fantastical and real worlds mix, becoming a supernatural hybrid of the two paradigms. As well as being an ecotonal boundary between land and sea, it can also be interpreted as a boundary between the real and the imagined. This dual-ness is unsettling and often dark, emphasising a character's sense of isolation from the civilised world.

Folklore's role in ending childhood innocence, by using childish tropes and images to introduce adult concepts like poverty (*Cinderella*) or murder (*Little Red Riding Hood*), makes it a good way to investigate the relevance of the coast to the Gothic genre. Through looking at the way that folkloric stories have been used by Gothic writers to access the pain and suffering of reality, researchers can better understand why the coast is an important place for Gothic protest. The Gothic is a genre which often criticises society. To achieve this critique, the Gothic depicts the coast as a space which is separated from society, where traditional rules and norms do not apply. The interstitial coast has an ethereal, sublime quality, resembling supernatural folklore. «Interstitial» refers to the coast's existence between two different spaces. The monsters and fairies depicted at the shore are good and bad conjurations of features of the terrestrial world. Society's villains are represented by supernatural aquatic monsters. Fairies are magical and beautiful conceptual figures,

<sup>2</sup> J. ABBRUSCATO, «Introduction: The State of Modern Fairy Tales», *The Gothic Fairy Tale in Young Adult Literature*, ed. by J. ABBRUSCATO and T. JONES, Jefferson, MacFarland and Company, 2014, pp. 1-10, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> ABBRUSCATO, «Introduction: The State of Modern Fairy Tales».

<sup>4</sup> ABBRUSCATO, «Introduction: The State of Modern Fairy Tales».

<sup>5</sup> K. BERNHEIMER, «Introduction» in *My Mother She Killed Me, My Father He Ate Me: Forty New Fairy Tales*, London, Penguin Group, 2010, pp. 8-12, p. 12.

depicting ideas like freedom and the natural. Folkloric motifs are depicted at the Gothic coast to shock, to imagine a better world.

Both folklore and the Gothic occupy a borderline between the real and the unreal. In this regard, the genres behave in a coastal, interspatial fashion. Manuel Aguirre describes this borderline: «The nature of the other in Gothic hinges on its lack of definition: we cannot further its boundaries, as it is often to be identified less with a distinct locus than with unfamiliar traits developed by familiar space»<sup>6</sup>. Although Aguirre does not describe the coast as this «familiar space», the shore is often the site at which the «unfamiliar» or mysterious is encountered in the Gothic. The coast's natural ambiguity incites a sense of terror and uncertainty. This effect is amplified when mythic or folkloric figures appear – the binary between the real and the unreal is challenged. Aguirre suggests that in the Gothic «we cannot quite tell the other from our own world: it is part of and yet profoundly alien to the human realm»<sup>7</sup>. This ambiguity between known and unknown links folklore, Gothic and the coast. As Aguirre comments, the boundary is disturbed, and reader's perceptions of reality are challenged. Gothic texts achieve this through their inclusion of the familiar (coastal) and the non-familiar (mythical elements). As the two features coincide, the distinction between real and imagined becomes blurred, and the two intermingle, just as the coast is a mixture of land and sea, but also a unique territory. Through investigating the representation of this setting, we are further able to understand the nuances of this hybrid, and how it functions to exacerbate the effects of Gothic texts.

## 1. HORACE WALPOLE AND BLUEBEARD

Both folklore and the Gothic use the theme of entrapment to depict protagonists and villains in their respective roles. Protagonists are the trapped party, and villains are the trappers. Protagonists are trapped by the villains, such as Bluebeard, who often hold the key to forbidden bedrooms and dungeons within arcane and grandiose edifices. The Bluebeard archetype, then, is important to the coast because it serves as a point of total contrast. Bluebeard is associated with castles, palaces and dungeons hidden in large, cavernous mansions. Anne Williams astutely describes the castle as an element of patriarchal seduction, essential to Bluebeard's power and influence<sup>8</sup>. For the Bluebeard archetype, the castle is not merely setting, but a source of details from which to portray reality: «it “realizes”, makes

<sup>6</sup> M. AGUIRRE, «Mary Robinson's “The Haunted Beach” and the Grammar of the Gothic», *Neophilologus*, vol. 98, 2014, p. 496.

<sup>7</sup> AGUIRRE, «Mary Robinson's ... », p. 496.

<sup>8</sup> A. WILLIAMS, *The Art of Darkness*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 42.

concrete, the structure of power that engenders the action within this social world»<sup>9</sup>. Bluebeard's power is physically manifested by the grandiose edifice that he uses to trap his victims, which is, therefore, an extension of his character. The fact that this is a distinctly man-made setting, too, is vital to establishing effect. «As “monsters” often do, the “unnatural” Bluebeard [exists within] [...] the “unnatural” state we call culture»<sup>10</sup>. Williams compares Bluebeard's castle to the underground caves of Hades, in order to emphasise that the man-made quality of the castle is what ties Bluebeard to notions of warped patriarchy, featuring «haunting» families and their legacies<sup>11</sup>. The house wraps characters in the claustrophobic notion of inescapable cultural values which de-humanise individuals. Bluebeard, then, provides a motif for the unnatural control and scope of patriarchy and the horrifying ways in which it can isolate the powerless. In this sense, ecocriticism reveals the extent to which nature can be used to achieve political ends. As Courtney Nicole Lechmann comments, «Ecocriticism is a political mode of analysis»<sup>12</sup>. It is iconoclastic, challenging notions of patriarchy and ownership. Where Bluebeard and the coast coincide in the Gothic, a juxtaposition emerges between two disparate spaces. The coast offers caves and rock features which, although providing protection from the outside world as the castle does, do not come with any implication of suffocating loss of agency. Rather, at the coast, characters are empowered, freed from the overbearing Bluebeard characters which can only dominate narratives within their respective castles. Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) provides an example of this contrast between Bluebeard's castle and the ownerless coast.

*The Castle of Otranto* contains one main Bluebeard archetype – the patriarch and king Manfred. Walpole also provides comparative father and patriarchal figures, offering both exaggeration of Manfred's dislikeable character and an example of what a successful male authority figure can be like. Manfred himself, however, is violent, wealthy and powerful, and attempts to trap and manipulate women into fulfilling his own lusts. Manfred tries to trap Isabella in the castle, despite sharing the space with Hippolita, his wife. Hippolita is forgotten by Manfred, who behaves as if she does not exist. She is comparable to the bodies of Bluebeard's dismembered and used wives, which he keeps trapped in the castle like trophies for his new wives to find. Hippolita's presence is haunting for Isabella. She is a constant reminder of Manfred's lack of respect for women, and his motivation to consume and discard all that they have to offer. Matilda and Theodore's relationship contrasts Manfred and Hippolita's in its ease and naturalness. The coastal setting, in comparison to Manfred's castle, depicts their relationship as a good one. Chapter three shows the two relationships, and the two spaces, as in juxtaposition with one another.

<sup>9</sup> WILLIAMS, *The Art of Darkness*, p. 41.

<sup>10</sup> WILLIAMS, *The Art of Darkness*, p. 41.

<sup>11</sup> WILLIAMS, *The Art of Darkness*, p. 44.

<sup>12</sup> LECHMANN, *Water, Prestige and Christianity*, p. 2.

Not against *thy* father; indeed I dare not, said Theodore: excuse me, lady; I had forgotten - but could I gaze on thee, and remember thou art sprung from the tyrant Manfred? -But he is thy father, and from this moment my injuries are buried in oblivion. A deep and hollow groan, which seem to come from above, startled the Princess and Theodore. Good heaven! We are overheard! said the Princess. They listened; but perceiving no farther noise, they both concluded it the effect of pent-up vapours: on the Princess, proceeding Theodore softly, carried him to her father's armoury; where equipping him with a complete suit, he was conducted by Matilda to the posterngate. Avoid the town, said the Princess, and all the western side of the castle: 'tis there the search must be making by Manfred and the strangers: but hie thee to the opposite quarter. Yonder, behind that forest to the east is a chain of rocks, hollowed into a labyrinth of caverns that reach the seacoast. There thou mayst lie concealed, till thou canst make signs to some vessel to put on shore and take thee off. Go! Heaven be thy guide!<sup>13</sup>

In this scene, Matilda, Manfred's daughter, is helping Theodore escape from Manfred's prison, where he is trapped until he will be killed. Manfred has sentenced Theodore to death for helping Isabella escape. In the quoted passage, the romance between Matilda and Theodore is just beginning, but its origin is contextualised in Bluebeard. Manfred and his tyrannical evil make it impossible for Theodore to comprehend fully that Matilda could be his offspring. The pair are discernibly anxious, blaming their paranoia on «pent-up vapours». The level of anxiety that the prison generates is a comment on the urgency of their situation. There is also a vaguely comical anti-climax to this, as the noise is just vapours. Walpole possibly pastiches here elements of Romantic literature to bathetic, comic effect. Theodore and Matilda also seem to believe that Manfred is omnipresent within the castle walls. The «deep and hollow groan» above them in the prison emphasises their underground location, as well as their entrapment. The groans from above, mysterious in origin, emphasise Manfred's evilness. They also render Theodore's entrapment in the prison akin to being in hell. Theodore and Matilda are paranoid that they are being listened to, the possibility that they may be «overheard» extends Manfred's power to even influence what they can say and do when they are alone. This mirrors the folkloric Bluebeard's control over his wives. If the wives get blood on the keys he gives them, they are fated to die, extending the power of Bluebeard beyond that which he can extend in person. The Bluebeard archetype, then, is supernatural, even demonic, since he seems to have nonhuman powers to make others miserable, even when he is not present. The horror of Theodore's entrapment in the castle emphasises the freedom that the seacoast on the other side of the caverns represents – it is a place of total and perfect liberation, contrasting Manfred's hellish and Bluebeard-esque castle.

The underground space contrasts the coast. The former is a prison while the latter offers salvation. The rocks and caverns which lead to the coast are purgatorial. It is the route which

<sup>13</sup> H. WALPOLE, *The Castle of Otranto*, ed. by Michael Gamer, London, Penguin, 2001, pp. 65-66.

Theodore must take in order to reach freedom (or the «end» of his journey). The coast is essential for this salvation. The coastal caverns offer both concealment and the possibility of escape over the sea, indicating that the coast is a space of true liberation away from the hellishness of Manfred's prison. The groans, the underground setting and the tense anxiety link to depict a hellish scene, controlled by a demonic patriarchal despot. The coast, in contrast, is explicitly linked to heaven. Whilst escaping, Matilda says, «Heaven be thy guide». This line suggests that the coastline is a safe and Godly space, infused with salvation and Christian values. The comparison of these two settings depicts the natural world as superior to the stifling entrapment of Manfred's castle, as well as criticising Manfred himself. Maria Tatar comments that «both myth and fairy tale take up powerful questions about innocence and predatory behaviour through the optic of the nature/culture divide»<sup>14</sup>. As Tatar observes, the nature/culture divide is present here – it is through nature that the protagonists and villains are framed. The coast has an important role in dividing nature from culture, and therefore good from bad. As the prison is betrayed as a hellish space, then Manfred, who condemned Theodore to die there, is a sort of Satan. Here, there are clear comparisons to be made between Manfred and Bluebeard. Manfred is a binary evil character, forming a familiar and a common enemy who unites almost every other character against him. He unites others to the extent that Matilda and Theodore fall in love with each other because of their joint plight against him. He is so bad and so dislikeable as to make his own daughter want to betray him and to even love someone who has grossly insulted Manfred's authority. The fact that the coast is a significant setting for Theodore's escape from Manfred highlights its importance as a representation of freedom and goodness, especially in its juxtaposition with Manfred's prison. The connection of the coast with goodness is also made in Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance*, where a coastal lighthouse represents respected Christian and family values, in contrast with other non-coastal spaces.

Theodore's father, the once wealthy monk Jerome, provides a comparative father figure to Manfred, emphasising Manfred's Bluebeard-like tendencies and offering a softer version of patriarchy as an alternative. Chapter four presents the pair as contrasting patriarchs, whilst holding court in Manfred's castle.

Rise, said he; thy life is not my present purpose. -But tell me thy history, and how thou camest connected with this old traitor here. My lord! Said Jerome eagerly. -Peace, impostor! Said Manfred; I will not have him prompted. My lord, said Theodore, I want no assistance; my story is very brief. I was carried at five years of age to Algiers with my mother, who had been taken by corsairs from the coast of Sicily. She died of grief in less than a twelvemonth. - The tears gushed from Jerome's eyes, on whose countenance a thousand anxious passions stood expressed. [...]

<sup>14</sup> M. TATAR, «Introduction», *The Cambridge Companion to Fairy Tales*, ed. M. TATAR, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 1-10, p. 5.

-It is most true, said Jerome; I am that wretched father. [...] I remained in slavery, said Theodore, until within these two years, when attending on my master in his cruises, I was delivered by a Christian vessel, which overpowered the pirate; and restoring myself to the captain, he generously put me on the shore in Sicily. But alas! Finding a father, I learned that his estate, which was situated on the coast, and during his absence laid in waste by the rover who had carried my mother and me into captivity: that his castle had been burnt to the ground: and that my father on his return had sold what remained, and was retired into religion in the kingdom of Naples, where, no man could inform me<sup>15</sup>.

Coastal imagery is used to separate Manfred's character from Jerome's. While Manfred is situated in imposing edifices, Jerome is depicted living in modest coastal properties, which Theodore was due to inherit. The inclusion of the coastal setting makes both Jerome's and Theodore's characters seem nobler and more sympathetic. Jerome's sensitivity and empathy contrasts with Manfred's arrogant forcefulness. While Jerome cries and implores Manfred to be more sympathetic, calling himself «wretched», Manfred openly says he does not care about Theodore's life, arrogantly orders everyone to listen to him, and holds power over everyone in the room. Jerome is proffered as a preferable father figure to Manfred. He clearly loves and cares for his son, he regrets what has happened even though it was not his fault, and he is portrayed as a deeply religious and moral character, which would have been regarded sympathetically by readers at the time of publishing. For Theodore, the coast represents both fond childhood memories and his escape from pirates at sea. The shore underpins major events in Theodore's life, making it a formative influence on his personality. Jerome's and Theodore's good characters are linked with, and perhaps come from, the coast.

The coast is established in this scene as a pure, life-giving space. Theodore's mother dies after being taken away from the coast in Sicily, the memory of which hurts Jerome so deeply that it provokes tears. When Theodore is liberated from slavery and pirates, he is brought to the coast. Jerome's estate, which has been destroyed by bandits, is depicted as being once «situated on the coast». Naples, importantly, is a coastal city: Jerome's entire life has been lived on coastlines. For Theodore, coastlines have meant freedom; Matilda frees him from prison and takes him to the coast; before he and his mother are kidnapped his whole childhood is at the coast; when he is liberated from slavery he is taken to the coast. For both men, coastal spaces offer salvation and liberation. The space establishes Jerome as a good father and man, in direct contrast with Manfred who lives exclusively in the confines of his castle and away from the coast and nature in general. The patriarch, then, is criticised without being absolutely rejected. Manfred, as a depiction of the Bluebeard archetype, shows the extent to which patriarchy and male power can be malevolent, whilst

<sup>15</sup> WALPOLE, *The Castle of Otranto*, pp. 74-75.



Jerome shows an alternative, positive father figure. Manfred's character, when compared to Jerome's, redeems the general principle of patriarchy whilst criticising the power within it. The coast is the main agent through which Walpole delivers his criticism of uncontrolled patriarchal power, since it both contrasts with Manfred and provides the setting to depict an alternative.

## 2. MATTHEW LEWIS AND THE WATER-KING

Matthew Lewis also takes inspiration from folklore to write his novel *The Monk* (1796). «The Water-King», originally a Danish folktale which Lewis features in his novel, discusses the dangers for a woman intending to get married in the eighteenth century<sup>16</sup>. It also deals with issues of cannibalism, deceit, and xenophobia. Theodore, Raymond's servant, tells the tale of the Water-King to a group of nuns in the monastery. Theodore is in the monastery disguised as a beggar in order to avenge the murder of Agnes on Raymond's behalf, whilst also trying to warn the nuns against the dangers of men. Whilst building excitement among the nuns, Theodore establishes the tale as enmeshed in mythical magic.

But before I begin», said he, «it is necessary to inform you, ladies, this same Denmark is terribly infested by sorcerers, witches, and evil spirits. Every element possesses its appropriate daemons. The woods are haunted by malignant power, call the Erl-or Oak-King: he it is who blights the trees, spoils the harvest, and commands the imps and goblins: he appears in the form of an old man of majestic figure, with a golden crown and long white beard: his principal amusement is to entice young children from their parents, and as soon as he gets them into his cave, he tears them into a thousand pieces - the rivers are governed by another fiend, called the Water-King: his province is to agitate the deep, occasion shipwrecks, and drag the drowning sailors beneath the waves: he wears the appearance of a warrior, and employs himself in luring young virgins into his snare: what he does to them, when he catches them in the water, reverend ladies, I leave for you to imagine –<sup>17</sup>.

These dark and magical themes are examples of what makes folklore so attractive. As Abbruscato points out, «The dark landscape, inappropriate lusts, and ravenous villains correspond to the dangerous impulses and aggressions [that readers] actually experience as part of their own mental topographies, and fairy tales offer narratives that put those

<sup>16</sup> L. MØLLER, «Travelling Ballads: The Disseminations of Danish Medieval Ballads in Germany and Britain, 1760s to 1830s», *Danish Literature as World Literature*, ed. by D. RINGAARD and M. ROSENDAHL THOMSEN, London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017, pp. 32-52, p. 43.

<sup>17</sup> M. LEWIS, *The Monk*, ed. D. Stuart Davies, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1980, p. 222.

scary appetites in their proper places»<sup>18</sup>. As Abbruscato indicates, fantastical creatures with even more unbelievable desires act as an outlet for readers. The unreality of the character allows readers to enjoy disgusted interest in their crimes without having to feel any kind of legitimate outrage as their fantastical context facilitates a level of detachment. The animalistic, hedonistic amorality of the fairy-tale characters Theodore lists before singing the ballad introduces a folklore Gothic hybrid in the scene. Immoral impulses in readers, who are both drawn in and repelled by Theodore's narrative, help to tie folklore to Gothic: «Gothic plots build on a deed (whether physical, intellectual or moral) that opens up the human to the other»<sup>19</sup>. Through this anthropomorphism, Lewis is able to connect the human to the supernatural in a way that is both uncanny and archetypally Gothic. Landscape, however, is an important part of this transformation. Lewis' Theodore identifies the «province» of the Water-King being to enact coastal and aquatic misdeeds – this sense of purpose is essential for his existence. The mythic figure cannot exist simply for the benefit of the reader's self-realisation, but also must exist in a fully realised world of its own. There must be a connection between reality and fantasy within the text for a convincing anthropomorphism to be made. One way in which the human is linked to the other in the Water-King ballad is through mythic transformation.

the witch she gave him armour white;  
 he formed him like a gallant knight;  
 of water clear next made her hand  
 a steed, whose housings were of sand<sup>20</sup>.

After seeing the maid on the shore, the Water-King asks his mother to transform him into a human so he can trick the maid into coming back into the ocean with him. Through her magic, she is able to turn him into a traditional mediaeval knight with white armour, a symbol of purity and innocence which, as the rest of the ballad shows, is deceitful. His mother uses the water and sand as transformative matter, making a horse and stable respectively for the Water-King or knight. Here, the coast becomes a scene of magic and possibility. The witch's magic is so powerful that she is able to persuade everyone around the maid that the Water-King is a good, attractive and trustworthy husband. The metamorphosis the Water-King undergoes makes him seem to be an archetypal folkloric knight eager to whisk a young, innocent virgin off her feet and into a traditional happy ending. Holly Hirst explains that transformation is an important technique to folklore, and usually takes place in three different ways.

<sup>18</sup> ABRUSCATO, «Introduction: The State of Modern Fairy Tales», p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> AGUIRRE, «Mary Robinson's ... », p. 696.

<sup>20</sup> LEWIS, *The Monk*, p. 223.

The first is that of a shape-changer, a trait illustrated by the mythic figure of Zeus who takes on many different animal and non-animate forms in order to seduce [...] half of the female population of ancient Greece. The second variant is that of the definitive change to a form that «more fully expresses them and perfects them than their first form»<sup>21</sup>.

The third variant «is that of the temporary change prompted by outside force as punishment or impediment»<sup>22</sup>. The type of transformation that occurs here mirrors the seduction transformation of Zeus. The Water-King is transformed into an attractive and appealing character in order to manipulate women into trusting him.

This transformation motif occurs frequently in both folklore and Gothic literature. Water is a particularly apt place for these transformations to occur. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, various aquatic transformations are mentioned during the tale of Arachne.

Arachne shows Europa cheated by  
the bull's disguise, a real bull you'd think  
And real sea. The girl was gazing at  
the shore she'd left and calling to her friends,  
Seeming to dread the leaping billows touch,  
Shrinking and drawing up her feet in fear  
[...]  
She wove, and pictured Leda as she lay  
Under the white swan's wings<sup>23</sup>.

Arachne weaves the «Europa and the Bull» myth, which depicts Zeus, disguised as a bull, kidnapping Europa and swimming across the sea with her from Lebanon to Crete in order to rape her. Ovid depicts her as a lonely victim of the God's abuse, «gazing» longingly at the coast which comes to represent the distance between her and her old life, and the full extent of what Zeus has taken away from her. Duplicity on Zeus' part is also implied, «a real bull you'd think», referring to Europa's innocent mistaking of the bull for another one of her father's cattle. She comes to fear the coastal waters «leaping» towards her, as if the waters themselves represent her rapist. The coast, being the place at which she is attacked, is anthropomorphised as a conspirator, complicit in her misery. Arachne also weaves the myth of «Leda and the Swan», which also references aquatic transformation. As with «Europa and the Bull», Zeus transforms into an animal in order to trick women into letting their guard down. Although Leda's rape is not directly coastal, the myth does

<sup>21</sup> H. HIRST «Gothic Fairy-tales and Deleuzian Desire», *Palgrave Communications*, vol. 4, 2018, pp. 51-59, p. 55.

<sup>22</sup> HIRST, «Gothic Fairy-tales and Deleuzian Desire», p. 55.

<sup>23</sup> OVID, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by A. D. Melville, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 75.

take place in shallow waters. The swan is also a shallow water animal. Classical literature sets a precedent for the Gothic development of this myth. Shallow and coastal waters can be depicted as Gothic, predatory forces, looking out for vulnerable young women to trick and then consume. The unpredictability of coastal waters mirrors the behaviour of transformed mythological characters – at one moment, they appear to be calm, benign and gentle. Their terrifying and rapid change from innocent to dangerous, however, puts those unsuspecting women on the shore at risk.

The transformation in the Water-King is both a mythological and a Gothic metamorphosis because the lines between the human and the other are blurred. As Hirst observes, «In the tales of Gothic transformation, the key focus is not completed transformation but a process, a confusion of forms and identities or a mutation – a “becoming”. [...] the differentiation between human and animal is increasingly blurred, not only in terms of physical appearance, but in terms of internal psychology too»<sup>24</sup>. The Water-King is never human or animal, but an uncanny hybrid. He is animalistic in his desire to obtain and consume the maid, but he is also distinctly human in the way he goes about it, with clever and manipulative flair. He is a hybrid between sea creature and man, making him an ecotonal figure. He looks human for most of the ballad, despite the fact that he is not. There is never really a distinction between the Water-King and the knight he becomes. This ambiguity suggests that external appearances are misleading and can hide the character’s flaws. Appearances have the power to mislead, which makes them dangerous. The women in this tale decide to trust the Water-King based on his appearance and forfeit the maid’s life as a result. Unlike the Bluebeard tale, then, the Water-King warns readers that an appearance can never show the depth of reality behind a character. Just like the coast, a seemingly calm shore can mask a strong storm coming. White foam at the shore can mask a strong and deadly current. Attractive and convincing appearances can deceive, and potentially be deadly in their deception.

Although the Water-King behaves somewhat like a generic human man in attempt to obtain the maid, Lewis also describes his demonic characteristics.

the water-fiend’s malignant eye  
 along the banks beheld her hie;  
 Straight to his mother-witch he sped  
 and thus in suppliant accents said:  
 «oh! Mother! Mother! Now advise,  
 how I may yonder maid surprise:  
 oh! Mother! Mother! Now explain,  
 how I may yonder maid obtain»<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> HIRST, «Gothic Fairy-tales ... », p. 55.

<sup>25</sup> LEWIS, *The Monk*, p. 223.

He watches her walk along the shore in a way that is relatively normal and human-like, but with the additional detail of a «malignant eye». This description identifies him as untrustworthy and dangerous. Thus, the «suppliant accent» he uses to talk to his mother becomes sinister since his predatory intentions have been revealed by the description of his «eye». The shoreline is portrayed ambiguously in the tale, featuring description of both a river («banks», «streamlet») and a coastline («sand», «billows»). The ambiguity between the spaces is perhaps used to add a level of confusion, where neither the reader nor the maid is fully aware of what is happening. Equally, however, it might also be because Lewis himself was not a geographer. The mixed register emphasises the extent to which both a riverbank and a shoreline might be seen as an ecotonal space capable of provoking similar effects. As stated earlier, metamorphoses in classic literature often occur in spaces of shallow water, whether coastal or on a river. Rivers, in their function of feeding into oceans, share ecotonal similarities and feed into one another. The Gothic potential of the coast, then, overlaps that of the river.

The Water-King also talks about obtaining a woman in a way that is partisan and objectifying, focusing on individual body parts, rather than her character or appearance as a whole. She is discussed as both an animal and an object to be acquired, thereby developing the general theme of cannibalistic consumption which folklore brings to the Gothic. When she is consumed by the Water-King, the consumption is ecstatic for the Water-King and deathly for the maid.

she shrieks, but shrieks in vain; for high  
the wild winds rising dull the cry;  
the fiend exults; the billows dash,  
and o'er their hapless victim wash<sup>26</sup>.

The Water-King «exults»: in the context of newly-weds, this creates a double entendre. The language insinuates sexuality, whilst also describing the horrible reality. The shrieks and cries the maid makes are clearly in pain, referencing what might be traditionally acceptable on a wedding night. She is both sexually and physically consumed by water: her death is both by cannibalism and by rape. It is cannibalistic in that she is swallowed up by the water, as a mouth would swallow food, and that her corpse then stays within it to rot and decay, providing food for the inhabitants of the coastal sea, perhaps even the Water-King and his mother. Carolyn Daniel suggests that the importance of cannibalism and sexual consumption to folklore cannot be understated. «Stories about monsters who threatened to consume [...] continue to be the mainstay of much grotesque horror fiction aimed at both

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<sup>26</sup> LEWIS, *The Monk*, p. 225.

children and adults. Monsters such as these act outside cultural and social prohibitions and represent the antithesis of civilised humanity»<sup>27</sup>. Although Daniel correctly emphasises the importance of the trope, the idea that it is antithetical to society perhaps overgeneralises. The idea of a husband who treats a wife's body as a consumable object, for example, is well within the realm of cultural norms. So too is a mother-in-law who would like to slaughter or dispose of her son's new spouse. The relationship that endures in this tale is that of the Water-King and his mother – the one who suffers to strengthen it is the wife. This is an idea which is ingrained in society, and is especially relevant in folklore<sup>28</sup>. The coast fulfils the witches' desires, obeying her commands, and forming to suit her wishes. Just as the new bride enters the unfamiliar family home of her new spouse, the maid enters the coastal seas and finds herself out of her depth. It is important to note that the coastal location of this tale, in some ways, plays a part in the breaking of the cultural and social prohibitions Daniel identifies. Because it is an interstitial space, it facilitates a tone of uncertainty and ambiguity. It does not adhere to moral or social norms. The coast assists the Water-King in the narrative, being moulded into any shape necessary, and providing the proximity to reach the maid easily. The coast is the border between the realm of the maid and the realm of the Water-King. In this instance, the shore aids and abets the Water-King, showing the natural and feral, bestial and amoral. The space does not impart ethical or spiritual messages in *The Monk*, as it does for Radcliffe. Furthermore, it is important to also note that the water continually erodes and consumes the land. The water encroaches upon the space humanity has. Thus, it also consumes and overcomes human agency, as the Water-King does.

Abbruscato also rightly suggests that the threat of being consumed is linked with the terror of personal nonexistence. «With the ever-present potential of cannibalisation and the subsequent lack of being, these hero and protagonist identities become merged with the consumer, completely altering him and his own story. [...] This fear of victimisation by cannibalism is the fate of losing human identity, shape or existence»<sup>29</sup>. For the maid, both her body and her personality are totally and utterly consumed by the Water-King. Her body is an allegory for the consumption involved between husband-and-wife. The husband consumes the woman in that she is owned by him. He has control over her financially, legally and sexually; she becomes an object within marriage. Consumption, then, has many different meanings in the Gothic. One can be consumed sexually, through rape, consumed gustatorily, through cannibalism, or be consumed spiritually, through stolen

<sup>27</sup> ABBRUSCATO, «Introduction ...», p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> See M. HOURIHAN, *Deconstructing the Hero: Literary Theory and Children's Literature*, London, Routledge, 1997, especially: «The women in the hero's story are rarely shown as involved in any kind of relationship with each other, and where a relationship between women, especially between mother and daughter [in-in law], is featured it is almost invariably hostile and destructive», p. 200.

<sup>29</sup> ABBRUSCATO, «Introduction ...», p. 8.

personal identity. Powerlessness, vulnerability and loss of agency are all tied to the concept of the body consumed, as with the maid who sinks beneath the waves. The coast, from this perspective, is a barrier to the literal consumption the maid endures in the sea – the further she walks away from it, the more agency she loses, and the more she is engulfed by the water. The sea, perhaps, is a metaphor for the worst of what can happen for women in patriarchy, while the coast represents the golden safety of childhood before marriage. Crossing the boundary from childhood to marriage entails sexual consummation. Here, the maid's sinking into the waves of pain and loss signifies her lost virginity. Her childhood, though always in her sight in the form of the shore, is now unreachable. Lewis emphasises this warning and threat of consumption within marriage in the final verse of the Water-King ballad:

Warned by this tale, ye damsels fair,  
to whom you give your love beware!  
Believe not every handsome knight,  
and dance not with the water-sprite!<sup>30</sup>

Here, the coast represents the point at which fantasy and reality mix. In myth and folklore, characters can transform into a shape that is completely different from the original. In reality, although the change is not as conspicuous, people can use their attractive appearance to win social aplomb or to manipulate people in to doing what they want them to do. People can appear to be trustworthy when they are not, just as coastal waters can seem calm before a storm. As long as society attaches notions of goodness and virtue to physical attractiveness, people misjudge others. In the context of a society where men can hold complete control over women in marriage and relationships, this warning holds a dark significance. It is not so simple as misjudging someone: if one chooses one's partner for looks alone, they risk their safety in the long term. Lewis warns women not to believe every handsome young man they come across. In this sense, Theodore's use of the coast is a deliberate attempt to influence his audience. As Narullah Mambrol observes, «there is a deliberate link between nature and culture, where the *literary* treatment, representation and “thematization” of land and nature influence *actions* on land»<sup>31</sup>. From an ecocritical perspective, he self-consciously uses environmental imagery understanding it's capacity to influence the actions of others, and potentially to change a culture that he disagrees with. Since the coast is an interspatial boundary between the mysterious and the familiar, the setting illustrates how fantastical transformations overlap with the reality of eighteenth-century courtship and its dangers for women. Like coastal waters, people are treacherous and unpredictable.

<sup>30</sup> LEWIS, *The Monk*, p. 223.

<sup>31</sup> MAMBROL, «Ecocriticism: An Essay», (accessed 23/11/21).

The Water-King is a Gothic and a mythic character. Aguirre proposes that a flawed hero is an essential part of a Gothic narrative. The ballad describes the Water-King as a hero: «At present I have no business with any of them except the fiend of the waters. He is the hero of my ballad»<sup>32</sup>. The Water-King is both a villain and the hero. Aguirre observes that «flawed hero–villains are not simply legion in Gothic: they are the rule»<sup>33</sup>. The Water-King is a hero in certain respects: he is eponymous and his looks prior to his transformation are not described, so we are only presented with his stereotypically heroic horse and white coat of armour. Aguirre adds,

It is the fashion of Gothic narrative to centre upon the flawed type rather than upon the paradigmatic hero of traditional narrative. This creates equivocal, liminal figures – peripheral yet central, evil yet appealing, ineffectual yet burdened with the responsibility of heroes. [...] Gothic tells the «other» story of fairytale, the narrative of the failed hero.<sup>34</sup>

This analysis can be easily applied to Lewis's Gothic representation of folklore. The Water-King is the alter ego of the traditional mediaeval knight from myth and legend. He looks for a maiden in the same way, he relies on magic in the same way, and, he exists within a romantic setting – the coast. *The Monk* demonstrates an example of a coast which is complicit in destruction, rather than protection. The Water-King provides an anti-folkloric hero. He is the Gothic other within a mythic paradigm.

### 3. RADCLIFFE'S POEMS AND THE FANTASTICAL

Ann Radcliffe's use of folkloric imagery in her Gothic novels differs from both Walpole and Lewis. Instead of establishing frightening moral characters inspired by myth, Radcliffe uses the fantastical elements from folklore to create a mood of ethereality. Folkloric images emerge within poems in the narrative rather than in her novels' prose. By creating a mystical atmosphere in these poems, she is able to illustrate her character's escapism, both psychological and literal. This section focuses on how the poems within Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* use the coast and folklore to achieve this sense of release. The coast, for Radcliffe, is a place far removed from the society of land, allowing it to be both mystical and distant. The section will deal with two forms of escapism: escape from society (castles, patriarchy and cultural attitudes), and psychological escape from the wonted world into the fantastical.

<sup>32</sup> LEWIS, *The Monk*, p. 211.

<sup>33</sup> AGUIRRE, «Mary Robinson's», p. 618.

<sup>34</sup> AGUIRRE, «Mary Robinson's», p. 698.



First, *The Romance of the Forest* uses mythic imagery as protest against society. As Gerry Turcotte indicates, «For the Gothacist, the castle is the symbol, *par excellence*, of society's attendant dangers, a paradigmatic representation of sexual, personal and cultural entrapment. Although the castle is a particularly convenient metonym for such territory, it is always an equally alienated/alienating landscape»<sup>35</sup>. The coast is the exact opposite of the castle that Turcotte describes, providing liberation in contrast with the castle's alienation. Characters trapped in the edifices he describes are forced into positions of isolation from both society and their true psychological nature, something that the coast helps them to realise. Adeline struggles within the setting of the arcane and intimidating abbey, where the Marquis traps her, coerces her ally (Monsieur La Motte) and repeatedly threatens her with forced marriage. Within this context, Radcliffe places «The Song of a Spirit». Despite the song's being played in the presence of the Marquis at a banquet intended to coerce her into «compliance with his proposal», Adeline is able to «withdraw her mind from the present scene and enchant it in sweet delirium»<sup>36</sup>. In other words, she is able to escape from the physical confines of the abbey into the folkloric world of the coastal spirit whose narrative informs the lyrics. The experience of the spirit is much like her own, connecting the spirit's mythic world with Adeline's reality. The spirit is trapped and dreams of escape.

In the sightless air I dwell,  
On the sloping sun-beams play;  
Delve the cavern's inmost cell,  
Where never yet did day-light stray.

Dive beneath the green-sea waves,  
And gambol in the briny deeps;  
Skim every shore that Neptune laves,  
From Lapland's plains to India's steeps<sup>37</sup>.

In these lines, the spirit fantasises about her freedom: something which is represented by shorelines. The shores here are a link to the rest of the world in its entirety, the route to fantastical possibilities, whilst the internal «cavern» of the first stanza is a prison «cell», without light or colour. The dramatic «green» waves invoke optimism and fantasy, as well as mythical excitement in the references to «Neptune». The sea is a space of the fairy sprite and a place of myth, both representing liberation. Turcotte suggests that the use of fantastical natural scenes in Radcliffian Gothic are aspects of her social and political critiques.

<sup>35</sup> G. TURCOTTE, *Peripheral Fear: Transformations of the Gothic in Canadian and Australian Fiction*, Brussels, P. I. E. Peter Lang, 2009, p. 58.

<sup>36</sup> A. RADCLIFFE, *The Romance of the Forest*, ed. C. Chard, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 129.

<sup>37</sup> A. RADCLIFFE, *The Romance of the Forest*, p. 130.

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Ann Radcliffe uses the wilds of the Apennines as a metonym for society in decay. Wildness, anarchy and violence are endemic in barbaric walls, and are symptoms of a civilisation in decline. Radcliffe uses this «external» landscape to measure the limits and weakness of her own «civilised» world<sup>38</sup>.

*The Romance of the Forest* offers similar social critique to *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in that it utilises nature to criticise society. By focusing on the coast, Radcliffe offers a better, more natural alternative to society's edifices. The spirit also plays a role in exposing the «weakness» of the terrestrial world by highlighting the man-made quality of the cell in which she is trapped away from «sun-beams».

Having nature as an agent of «retribution» or complaint rather than the character themselves is key to maintaining a sense of morality that is removed from the character's own experience. Rather than Adeline herself, it is nature and fairy-tale creatures at the coast which expose the unfairness of her situation. She is not the mouthpiece through which dissatisfaction is voiced. She is able to remain relatively impartial and to enjoy a typical folkloric ending. The fact that Radcliffe's characters never fully dissent from patriarchal systems makes it less awkward when they do go back to them at the end of the novel – Adeline does return to the abbey as a married woman, this time under her own terms (with Theodore as her husband and the Marquis dead). Allen W. Grove adds, «It is the Gothic castle where the hero and/or heroine is imprisoned and endangered, and it is from the oppressive castle the hero and heroine must escape before they can marry. It is also the castle that becomes the site of heterosexual union, reproduction and family»<sup>39</sup>. As Grove observes, the castle is a site of heterosexual and patriarchal limitation, yet these are both concepts Radcliffe is reluctant to completely reject. Regardless, however, it is always the castle which is blamed. The castle is repeatedly the site at which these values are at their most vicious and alienating. The ruined tower is associated with ancient lineage and medieval times, and as a result is embodied with the gory scenes of violence, war and suppression that the period encompassed. The castle and entrapment are inextricably linked. The shore, on the other hand, signifies both mysticism and freedom. The song of the spirit illustrates this.

Or hie me to some ruin'd tow'r,  
Faintly shewn by moon-light gleam,  
Where the lone wand'rer owns my pow'r  
In shadows dire that substance seem  
[...]

<sup>38</sup> TURCOTTE, *Peripheral Fear*, p. 58.

<sup>39</sup> A. W. GROVE, «Coming Out of the Castle: Sexuality and the Limits of Language», *Historical Reflections*, vol. 26, 2000, 429-446, p. 446.

Unseen I move---unknown am fear'd!  
 Fancy's wildest dreams I weave;  
 And oft by bards my voice is heard  
 To die along the gales of eve<sup>40</sup>.

The spirit's song of entrapment emerges from «some ruin'd tow'r» but continues through the music of «bards». The spirit's unnerving freedom is as a ghost who has died whilst trapped, and only knows freedom through the supernatural. The spirit's ambiguity pertains to what Tatar calls «raw» stories<sup>41</sup>. They describe the acting out of primal desires, childhood dreams and fantasies, but do not often venture into exact motivations for their actions. The spirit's motivations, the nature of its entrapment and its powers to escape it are all left deliberately unclear and fantastical. What is emphasised instead, however, is Radcliffe's attention towards greater questions of philosophy – where is it more natural for a person to be? How should a person live? The spirit clearly indicates that a life away from the freedom and exploration that the coast exhibits is one of unfortunate misery. The coast is timeless in contrast to the castle which is rooted firmly in the past. In this way, the primality of a natural, coastal life, is championed above the life of civilisation.

This is made all the more unsettling knowing that the heroine always makes an uncanny return to this setting. Turcotte observes, «Radcliffe's heroines [...] journey out of the comfortable “country” [or coastline] of home into the “uncomfortable” nightmare of elsewhere»<sup>42</sup>. The movement from a castle to the freedom of nature, however, is nearly always followed by a swift return. The heroine always «returns to the former order where those values are spuriously and unconvincingly reaffirmed. The familiar, which is offered up to the reader through the character, is no longer untainted by doubt; it has been rendered cripplingly problematic»<sup>43</sup>. This criticism, followed by return, cements the macabre Gothic notions of the spirit in the song. I would argue, however, that the use of the coast and other natural spaces renders the return of her characters less «problematic», making them seem as if they are merely returning to a more natural, virtuous life. The contrast of coastal spaces and the castles and monasteries which trap women in the novels is always made explicit, highlighting the serenity that the shoreline offers. After the heroine has been able to explore herself fully within nature, her return to civilisation is made in her own terms. She has been able to experience the psychological fulfilment that the coast offers. The spirit song emphasises that the edifice she is trapped in is inferior to the liberation of the coast, but it never suggests that she will live there permanently, or that the effect of the space is

<sup>40</sup> RADCLIFFE, *The Romance of the Forest*, p. 130.

<sup>41</sup> TATAR, «Introduction», p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> TURCOTTE, *Peripheral Fear*, p. 66.

<sup>43</sup> TURCOTTE, *Peripheral Fear*, p. 66.

limited only to when a character is there. The freedom to experience nature and the coast is the desired object, rather than permanent communion with it. The spirit is aware that her story will «die among the gales of eve» – the natural, mythical message will be unheeded, and the cycle of repression will continue. The «gales» she refers to are distinctly coastal, suggesting that her voice will be heard at the shore and carried over the seas.

Radcliffe also uses her poems to depict the significance of folklore to psychological escapism, or «desire fulfilment»<sup>44</sup>. The poem «Titania to Her Love» takes place whilst Adeline waits for Theodore to be released from prison and for her fortune to be restored. She is safely away from the abbey, staying with La Luc and his daughter Clara. As she waits, the folklore allows her to explore her unarticulated desires. The coast, again, is central to her fantasies. In this scene, she has «retired to the terrace of the garden, which overlooked the sea», the «tranquil splendour of the setting sun» «reflected on the polished surface of the waves»<sup>45</sup>. She also cites «Shakespeare's genius» and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as chief inspirations for her song, introducing the presence of the fantastical before the poem even begins<sup>46</sup>.

O! fly with me through distant air  
To isles that gem the western deep!  
For laughing Summer revels there,  
And hangs her wreath on every steep<sup>47</sup>.

The emphasis on the waves of the coast references freedom. «Fly with me», asks the speaker, invoking suggestions of free and frivolous travel. The characters are not limited to human restrictions. The tone of this song is less melancholic than «The Song of a Spirit», but the fact that both repeatedly refer to coastal spaces suggest that their significance to Radcliffe's conception of freedom is important. For the spirit, the coast is a space to be literally and physically free from bondage. In this instance, it represents a lighter, psychological freedom, where wishes are fulfilled and desires merely frivolous, as human inadequacies and restrictions do not apply.

For oft upon their margin sands,  
When twilight leads the fresh'ning hours,  
I come with all my jocund bands  
To charm them from their sea-green bow'rs.

<sup>44</sup> HIRST, «Gothic Fairy Tales ... », p. 57.

<sup>45</sup> RADCLIFFE, *The Romance of the Forest*, p. 150.

<sup>46</sup> RADCLIFFE, *The Romance of the Forest*, p. 150.

<sup>47</sup> RADCLIFFE, *The Romance of the Forest*, p. 150.

And well they love our sports to view,  
 And on the Ocean's breast to lave;  
 And oft as we the dance renew,  
 They call up music from the wave.  
 [ ... ]  
 There myrtle bow'rs, and citron grove,  
 O'er canopy our airy dance;  
 And there the sea-breeze loves to rove,  
 When trembles day's departing glance<sup>48</sup>.

In these lines, the coast is a space of dancing, music, reverie and colour. A sensory assault of beautiful «citron» smells, sea-breezes and «fresh[ness]» depicts the scene as one of complete bliss. The speaker is transported to a place without worry or human limitation. She becomes a folkloric creature herself. It is a space of renewal and re-invention. The speaker's sense of joy and renewal in nature, from an ecocritical perspective, shows how nature is part of the deeply craved but often withheld identity. As Harold Fromm indicates, «the environment, already "us", ultimately becomes human consciousness – for good or ill»<sup>49</sup>. By being trapped away from nature, we are suppressing a part of our selves. When we are reunited with this part of our consciousness, we are complete again. The setting seems to reference a more blissful version of *The Tempest*, perhaps insinuated by her reference to Shakespeare before the poem begins.

Patrick Bridgewater identifies this technique of psychological fulfilment as a Gothic one. He uses Kafka's work as an example. Like Gothic novelists, Kafka sees literature as an expression of his inner reality as a means to explore his own psychical life. Kafka's «novels are about his feelings of guilt, inadequacy and non-entity as he sought, first, to explore and express his own inner life in the form of his dreams» and to communicate «"truth" or "spiritual reality". [ ... ] He eventually found both in perspective, style, and symbolical language of dreams, myth and fairy tale, the archetypal symbolism which is present in the Gothic»<sup>50</sup>.

Although this is a critique of Kafka, it also applies to Gothic texts. Adeline also ventures into dreams to express her desires. This poem is indeed dreamlike, calling on many folkloric conventions to create an atmosphere of ethereality. Here, it seems Adeline is expressing her «dreamlike inner life» and desire for perfection. It is somewhat childish in its lack of grasp on reality, as well as fascinating and magnetic. Radcliffe, perhaps, represents Adeline's folkloric fantasies in *The Romance of the Forest* to suggest that fantasy and dreams are an easier way to express deep psychological issues and truths. The coast is key to unlocking mental freedom, allowing characters to express and explore their true selves. Reiteration

<sup>48</sup> RADCLIFFE, *The Romance of the Forest*, p. 151.

<sup>49</sup> FROMM, *The Nature of Being Human: From Environmentalism to Consciousness*, p. 4.

<sup>50</sup> P. BRIDGEWATER, *Kafka, Gothic and Fairy-tale*, Amsterdam, Editions Rodopi B.V., 2003, p. 29.

of the space in Radcliffe ties it to this sense of freedom and rejuvenation, opposed to the stifling edifices which trap characters, both literally and spiritually.

Folklore can be represented as an escape into a dreamlike world away from conscious responsibility. It can also help us to criticise the world around us and the problems we see within it. Regardless, folklore provides a safety net to hide behind. The coast is a common site where the mythic and reality mix, because it is an ecotonal borderline between mystery and familiarity, water and land, fantasy and reality. It is a space which encourages easy movement between concepts. Beaches allow disparate concepts to intermingle, creating an unsettling and Gothic tone. Reality as characters know it is questioned at the shore, and fantasy takes on a new relevance. This ecotonal mixture of fantasy and reality creates a tone of horror and of security. There is comfort in delving into the fantastical and unreal, a shelter from the wild storm of reality. As the Gothic is a genre which capitalises on protest, it makes sense that folklore should appear here. Without it, the authors are faced with the grim realities of their novels as a reflection of life. Issues of isolation and alienation would be seen as having no escape, no possibility of an ending. The mingling of fantasy and reality adds a level of detachment for the reader, making the issues discussed seem more abstract and less relevant. It also effectively dramatizes them, using extreme characters and mythical beings to breed excitement. The horror of Gothic, then, takes on a new, enchanting relevance at the coast. In the castles and monasteries which also abound in the genre, the shore comes as a welcome relief, and a promise of a reality altered.

**Recibido el 18 de octubre de 2021. Versión revisada aceptada el 26 de octubre de 2021.**

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