The Gothic Coast and Theology

La costa gótica y la teología

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Abstract

The coast can be a space from which either the land or the sea is viewed and contemplated, but it also forms a borderline between them both. It is a physical boundary as well as a metaphorical one. Traditional Gothic writers frequently use the space to represent the junction between the known and unknown, for example, as this is essentially the reality the shoreline exhibits - humans cannot know or comprehend the true depths of the sea, whilst they are familiar with day-to-day life on land. The coast provides an opportunity to consider the depths of the ocean, without experiencing the risks of exploring it first-hand. This article expands on the way the beach can be represented as a space between the spiritual and the physical, and in the final chapter is conceived as a boundary between sound and meaning, and a liminal (or transitional) state between life and death. The shoreline's geographical, ecotonal, dividing role makes it a rich repository of metaphor to demonstrate these mysterious rifts. This article offers an interpretation of Gothic theology at the shore. Although the Gothic is most frequently associated with Christianity, this article also considers depictions of Judaism and Islam.
Keywords: Coast, Gothic, Christianity, Judaism, Islam.

Resumen

La costa puede ser un espacio desde el que se observa y contempla tanto la tierra como el mar, pero también constituye una frontera entre ambos. Es una frontera física y metafórica. Los escritores góticos tradicionales suelen utilizar este espacio para representar la unión entre lo conocido y lo desconocido, ya que, en esencia, esta es la realidad que muestra la costa: los seres humanos no pueden conocer ni comprender las verdaderas profundidades del mar, mientras que están familiarizados con la vida cotidiana en tierra firme. La costa ofrece la oportunidad de contemplar las profundidades del océano sin correr los riesgos de explorarlo en primera persona. Este artículo profundiza en la forma en que la playa puede representarse como un espacio entre lo espiritual y lo físico. El papel geográfico, ecotonal y divisorio de la costa la convierte en un rico repositorio de metáforas para demostrar estas misteriosas fisuras. Este artículo ofrece una interpretación de la teología gótica en la costa. Aunque el gótico se asocia con mayor frecuencia al cristianismo, este artículo también considera las representaciones del judaísmo y el islam.
Palabras Clave: Costa, gótico, cristianismo, judaísmo, islam.

1. INTRODUCTION

Religious institutions and organisations are critiqued by many Gothic writers, whilst God Himself can be treated as a presence most easily found and connected with in nature, often, at the shore. Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797) portrays issues relating to Catholicism and natural theology, manifesting itself as a debate between terrestrial abbeys and the spiritual implications of the coastline. Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) features Judaism's relationship to the littoral, especially in relation to 'the Wandering Jew', frequently depicted on shorelines of the Red Sea. William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786) illustrates traditional Gothic conceptions of Islam at the coastline of the metaphorical «Sea of Blood».

There is a great deal of criticism on the theological aspects of Gothic fiction. Gothic coastlines as theological spaces, however, have been overlooked. Some recent examples of criticism of religion in the Gothic include Alison Milbank's *God and the Gothic* (2018), Simon Marsden's *The Theological Turn in Contemporary Gothic Fiction* (2018), and Carol Davidson's *Anti-Semitism in British Gothic Literature* (2004). These texts demonstrate the importance of religion to the Gothic mode, as well as highlighting how varied theology in Gothic texts can be. Gothic theological imagery may be Jewish, Hindu or Muslim, as this chapter also investigates. Gothic novels often use religion as both a way to voice outrage against society and as something to protest about in itself. For example, Gothic literature often targets Catholic abbeys and their grandiosity, as in the decadent facades of the Marquis' abbey in Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) or the corrupt cloisters in Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* (1796). Gothic coastlines proffer a humble, stripped back alternative to these imposing edifices, yet are depicted as equally capable of inspiring devotion or demonstrating the power of God. These beaches bring the necessity of grand churches into question.

This article will discuss three different aspects of theological imagery and Gothic coastlines. The first section will discuss Ann Radcliffe's use of natural theology in both *The Italian* (1797) and *A Sicilian Romance* (1790). In these texts, she depicts the coast as having an omnipotent Godlike power to influence the emotions and actions of characters in the narrative. This effect is primarily a positive one. It pictures a more natural and alternative form of worship. In the second section, I focus on Matthew Lewis's and Charles Maturin's portrayals of the Red Sea in *The Monk* and *Melmoth the Wanderer*. They also depict the coast as a space of God's omnipotence, but to a darker end. Lewis depicts a coastline where a fearsome, Old Testament God enacts his wrath against sinners. Maturin portrays God's omniscience through the coastline, representing it as a space of eternal remembrance through God. The dark, fearsome power of the Red Sea's coastline condemns the actions of those who disobey religious principles, insinuating that no sin goes unremembered or unpunished. The final section also focuses on the coast's role as God-like punisher. William

Beckford's *Vathek* (1786) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) depict a sea of blood – an image which encapsulates the collective sin of Mankind and condemns humanity. The fearsome power of the coast is represented through its inspiration of awe and fear. Each of these sections proves the coast's role as an enforcer of divine power in Gothic literature. It condemns and punishes society on God's behalf. The righteous, by way of contrast, are rewarded and protected on the coast.

Before the Gothic period, coastlines were not treated as places for contemplation or relaxation. Alain Corbin identifies a change in approach that started just before the peak of the traditional Gothic period. «The changing attitude that made a new outlook possible began as early as the seventeenth century. Between 1660 and 1675, the oceans became less mysterious with the progress made by oceanography. In the same period, Satan began to disappear from the Western intellect»[1]. Corbin's observations predict the conditions of many Gothic texts – vanishing conceptions of Satan and further understanding of the sea and coast helped to change attitudes towards what the coast was capable of signifying. Before developments in oceanography had been made, the mysteries of the space were tied to Satanism and the occult. After the shift Corbin describes, the shore's enigma remained intact, while its most frightening mysteries began to fade. Growing in reputation away from being a «demonic», «Satanic» and «angry» place, the beach took on a less sinister role[2]. Corbin adds, «The exploration of the seashore became a part of a way of experiencing nature that conformed with the lifestyle of a social elite seeking renewal and refreshment»[3]. The coast, and nature more generally, then, came to have a role similar to that of the church. Believers used natural spaces to help them understand more thoroughly the «mysterious correspondences between the physical world and the spiritual one, between the human and the divine, between man, the microcosm, and the universe, the macrocosm»[4]. The coast offered spiritual and contemplative opportunities that the church could not provide. The coast provided an insight into God's creation, and its workings, which did not involve a denial of Christian worship, but rather, a reimagining of what worship could entail. As Corbin observes, «the beauty of nature bore witness to the power and bounty of the Creator. God regulated the spectacle, through both the laws that He had established in his infinite wisdom and his immediate, providential interventions»[5]. Nature's beauty established an obvious and appealing connection with God, as well as an immediacy which manmade churches could not necessarily replicate.

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1 Alain Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea,* California, University of California Press, 1994, p. 18.
2 Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea,* p. 7.
3 Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea,* p. 21.
4 Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea,* p. 23.
5 Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea,* p. 23.

The central focus of this article is Christianity, as that is the most prevalent religion described within English Gothic texts in this period; there are extensive connections between the spiritual and the coastal in these works. As George Adam Smith wrote in 1901, «In the Psalms the straight coast serves to illustrate the irremovable limits which the Almighty has set between sea and land»[6]. The coastal space has served as a Christian allegory or God's power and his authority for hundreds of years. The coast was vital for the spread of the early church, being the main landscape for the evangelisation of the gospel as it spread through Europe. Acts details the different places Peter and Paul travelled to proselytise, the majority of which were coastal or port towns. The Bible depicts the shore as a place of both growth and easy withdrawal. Peter was shipwrecked on the island of Malta, highlighting the significance of an island-scape for the progression of early Christianity. The island offered the seclusion and protection of geographical isolation, which emphasised the potential function of the coast for deep spiritual thought and grand theological purpose.

Gothic novels often depict the shores of lakes and rivers in a similar way to the coast and sea. They are all ecotonal spaces, highlighting the significance of boundaries and their transgression. The intermingling of these spaces may be a deliberate attempt by the authors to demonstrate the similarities between these areas and their effects – their connection emphasises the way that all cultures, countries, communities and religions are tied by their waterways. It may equally be accidental, the product of the authors themselves not being familiar with a specific set of definitions or geographical terms which apply to a coastal analysis. In this chapter I will focus on the significance of what seems to be an ecotonal and coast-like space in the narrative, although the exact nuances of what the shore itself may border can often be ambiguous. Intermingling ambiguity and uncertainty, however, are all concepts which the coast is used to provoke in the Gothic. In the context of theology, this interspatial uncertainty highlights broader ontological ambiguities which religion attempts to address.

2. RADCLIFFE'S NATURAL THEOLOGY

Ann Radcliffe's personal religious beliefs are difficult to pinpoint, and the uncertainty around her religious affiliations contributes to the mystery of the Christian imagery in her novels. The depictions of faith may well have little or nothing in common with her own beliefs, although her descriptions of coastlines as a space in which God can be found seems to indicate that she herself might have advocated an association between coast and Christ. Radcliffe left few traces of her personal life. She did not keep a diary (apart from some

[6] George Adam SMITH, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land,* London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1901, p. 132.

travel journals) or records of her opinions7. Her work and the little we do know about Radcliffe, however, seem to indicate that she was a Protestant writer, albeit with a few Catholic sympathies. Rictor Norton establishes this in the introduction of his biography of Radcliffe, The Mistress of Udolpho, «My own aim will be to clearly establish the Dissenting – especially Unitarian – background to Radcliffe's life and work»8. In general, as the Gothic is often defined as an anti-Catholic genre written by Protestants, readers should expect a general dislike for Catholicism and an overall bias toward Protestantism9. As Radcliffe was also an English woman, it might be expected that her views reflected the majority religious view at the time of writing10. Her sympathies towards Catholicism, its aesthetic grandeur (within churches, iconography and masses themselves) and its tradition, especially in Europe, add a level of complexity to her use of religious imagery. It also contrasts with her use of coastlines.

Radcliffe's writing is influenced by natural theology, as demonstrated by her depiction of nature and God as intertwined entities. As Alison Milbank suggests, for Radcliffe, «the natural world itself is the source of devotion to God, without any recourse to revelation»[11]. Milbank rightly observes that nature can be a place of worship in Radcliffe's novels – the coast is an important setting for this devotion. Radcliffe's connections to natural theology differ greatly from her Catholic and Protestant ones. Natural theology, unlike other branches of Christianity, attempts to prove the existence of God and divinity through observation of nature, science and human reason, without reliance on scripture or doctrine. William Paley's *Natural Theology* (1802) sets out the argument that creation informs belief, suggesting that the intricacies of mechanical structures in animals and humans, such as joints, are undeniably the work of an intelligent creator. Anne Chandler suggests that this approach appealed to Radcliffe because of its rationalism and reliance on independent and scientific thought: «natural theology offered at once a justification for, and a spur to, scientific enquiry»[12]. Chandler believes Radcliffe «is especially drawn to the plenitude-and-variety emphasis of natural theology, and broadly applied, almost existential optimism it fostered»[13]. In this regard, Chandler identifies Radcliffe's nonconformist theological attitudes as a justification for the rest of her worldview. Believing strongly in the value of scientific pursuits and the

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[7] Rictor Norton, *Mistress of Udolpho,* Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1999, p. I.X.

[8] Norton, *Mistress of Udolpho,* p. I.X.

[9] Jarlath Killeen, *Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction,* Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2014, p. 51. See specifically «the Gothic is essentially a Protestant genre».

[10] Angela Wright, *Gothic Fiction,* Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 83. See specifically «Protestant British nation» with a «Protestant monarch».

[11] Wright, *Gothic Fiction,* p. 83.

[12] Anne Chandler, «Ann Radcliffe and Natural Theology», *Studies in the Novel,* 38 (2006), pp. 133-153, p. 135.

[13] Chandler, «Ann Radcliffe and Natural Theology», p. 141.

benevolence of God, natural theology offers Radcliffe an alternative to inflexible Catholic doctrine and to heavily scriptural Protestant teachings. Despite this, however, Chandler aligns Radcliffe with John Ray, who believed that nature did not supplant scripture:

> Radcliffe's concept of spiritual sublime is always lexically mediated – arising, that is, not only from a «book» of nature, but the psalmic naming of its «great Author». By this I mean the organic, ecstatic experience of Burkean sublimity is usually tempered by a sense of [...] commonly held meaning (veritably, «common prayer»)[14].

Although Chandler correctly identifies Radcliffe's reference to the written word, and to an Author God, she mistakes these details for foundational theological aspects. Radcliffe never ventures into scripture in great depth or detail, focusing instead on landscape descriptions and devotional comments inspired by these scenes. Radcliffe's focus on natural theology is a movement away from scripture and toward nature, a perspective which significantly departs from conventional Protestantism. For Radcliffe, the coast contains the essence of divinity more acutely than scripture, as this is where her characters most frequently encounter God.

Radcliffe capitalises on this movement toward the natural and the spiritual by focusing on the shoreline as an area capable of provoking spiritual reflection. This is particularly prevalent in *The Italian.* Romanticism colours her Gothic style without overwhelming its outlook – the shore is still a macabre and mysterious place, with powers beyond the understanding of human onlookers. The beach, looking towards the depth of the sea, becomes a place of humbling spiritual reflection. It often creates a space to escape from the secular influences of the land beyond the coast, forcing characters to confront their insignificance when faced with the grandeur of nature, and providing a chance to converse with God. The ocean, demonstrating the potential wrath of God in its destruction and terrifying size, is tempered in its proximity to the shore. The coast's rugged geographical features eroded by violent waves (caves, cliffs, rock formations) emphasise both the sea's power and the coast's endurance against it. The coast is a space for characters to look outward, to touch the surface of the majesty of God and nature, but from the safety of the shoreline. Much like church, the space provides a chance for characters to listen and to ask for help. The awful and extreme power of nature is present in Radcliffe's writing.

The shore takes on a magical and sublime role in *The Italian.* Representing much more than just an organic space to the characters, it becomes otherworldly. The coast forms a brink between the ethereal, magical ocean, and the civilised society on land. Radcliffe represents the sea in a highly dynamic way in order to illustrate the enchanting effect of the

[14] Chandler, «Ann Radcliffe and Natural Theology», p. 141.

ocean. She features the sublimity of nature to emphasise the developing romance between Ellena and Vivaldi, whom she describes meeting one another in nature.

> These excursions sometimes led them to Pozzuoli, Baiae, or the woody cliffs of Pausilippo; and as, on their return, they glided along the moon-light bay, the melody of the Italian strains seemed to give enchantment to the sea shore. [...] Frequently as they glided round a promontory, whose shaggy masses impended far over the sea, such magic scenes of beauty unfolded, adorned by these dancing groups on the bay beyond, as no pencil could do justice to[15].

The shore here provides «enchantment» for onlookers, bestowing it with a certain power and influence above an earthly realm or expectation. Its description, also, as a «magical scene» reinforces this sense of unearthly beauty. Radcliffe's descriptions of the coast here fit in with what Edmund Burke described as the «sublime». Burke, writing in 1757, describes the sublime as a scene which «paralyzed [...] thought» and inspired the «strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling»[16]. He also includes magnitude and obscurity as prerequisites for a sublime scene. According to Burke, «natural objects affect us» because of psychological «laws of connection» which we cannot control[17]. Words are capable of affecting us in the same way, having «as considerable a share in exciting ideas of beauty and of the sublime» as natural scenes themselves[18]. For Radcliffe, this definition encompasses Gothic significance. In her essay «On The Supernatural in Poetry» (1826), Radcliffe distinguishes between terror and horror by suggesting that «the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them»[19]. For Radcliffe, terror and awe are psychological. The seashore she describes is so awe-inspiring that it cannot be replicated, and transcends the abilities that humans have to communicate and codify that experience. In this way, she shows how the coast possesses power beyond human understanding. The fact that the sublime cannot be replicated in words is something which Radcliffe knowingly capitalises on to heighten the tension of her depictions of the coast.

Gazing on the ocean from the coastline, then, is to experience the full terror of the inadequacy of human understanding. The prospect of the shore belittles and humbles the viewer. The coastlines which Radcliffe describes frequently exhibit this kind of sublimity, being a scene above which the mind can represent accurately through «pencil' - either

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[15] Ann Radcliffe, *The Italian* (ed. Robert Miles), London, Penguin Books Ltd., 2000, p. 46.

[16] Edmund Burke, quoted by Chandler, «Ann Radcliffe and Natural Theology», p. 89.

[17] Manuel Aguirre, «Mary Robinson's "The Haunted Beach" and the Grammar of the Gothic», *Neophilologus,* 98 (2014), pp. 690-704, p. 690.

[18] Aguirre, «Mary Robinson's "The Haunted Beach" and the Grammar of the Gothic», p. 690.

[19] Ann Radcliffe, «On the Supernatural in Poetry», in *New Monthly Magazine,* 16 (1826), pp.145-152, p. 150.

referring self-consciously to her own writing or to the work of pictorial artists who might want to try and capture the vast emotional response coastline scenes can evoke.

Despite describing her attempts as unable to bring «justice» to the coast, Radcliffe tries to represent the sublime and magical quality of the scene through use of auditory, visual, tactile and kinetic imagery. By doing so, she gives an immersive feel to her descriptions. This technique establishes the scene as both a sentimental and a Gothic episode in its extended focus on small details. The «moon-light» creates a sense of romantic mysticism from the reduced vision in darkness, drawing attention to the «bay» which is the focal centre of the sublime. Auditory imagery follows, using the «melody of the Italian strains» to reinforce the romantic mood. This, combined with the tactile imagery of the «woody» and «shaggy» trees dipping into the water, including the repetition of the word «gliding» to describe their movement across the bay, creates a total sensual immersion. Radcliffe uses these sensuous images to include the audience in the sublime environment and to attempt to replicate the otherworldly influence the bay has on the characters.

There is also an erotic implication provided by the rocking boat, bobbing on the «waves» of a «trembling' sea»[20]. Allen W. Grove convincingly argues that Radcliffe's use of insinuation allows her to fully capitalise on the Gothic legacy.

> The trained reader comes to expect sexual transgression and violation whether they actually happen or not. The conventions of the genre created by Walpole and his successors allow Ann Radcliffe to emerge in the 1790s as the Queen of Romance because she could write about sex without talking about sex[21].

Although Radcliffe is not explicit here, she heightens the sublime natural with the erotic allusions she knows her readership expects. She shows without telling, creating a disconnection between realism and fantasy. Radcliffe uses ambiguous sexuality to blur the line between the subjective and objective. Readers are unable to determine exactly which sensation is «real» and which is subjective to Vivaldi's impressions in Radcliffe's narration, adding to a sense of the magical. Without the clearly factual, the boundary between reality and fantasy is blurred. The shore, then, becomes an unsteady borderline between the realism and logic associated with the land, and the depth of mystery and magic associated with the sea.

Notably, Radcliffe provides little information in *The Italian* about how divinity manifests itself at the coast. Radcliffe's descriptions of the beach focus mainly on the experiences of her heroines, with little contextualisation. We are not told exactly why Radcliffe's heroines

[20] RADCLIFFE, *The Italian,* p. 46.

[21] Allen W. GROVE, «Coming Out of the Castle: Sexuality and the Limits of Language», *Historical Reflections*, 26 (2000), 429-446, p. 438.

have spiritual experiences at the coast, only that they do take place. Stephen Greenblatt comments:

> Shakespeare found he could immeasurably deepen the effect of his plays, that he could provoke in the audience and in himself a peculiarly passionate intensity of response, if he took out a key explanatory element, thereby occluding the rationale, motivation, or ethical principle that accounted for the action that was to unfold[22].

Radcliffe is influenced by Shakespeare in her use of this technique. Just as the elements in *The Tempest* are under Prospero's control, the coast in Radcliffe is controlled by God. Not totally understanding the motivations of Prospero or God heightens the drama of the narratives: essential information is withheld from the reader, intensifying the mystery the coast represents.

Radcliffe establishes the shore's constant observation by opening a chapter with a quote from John Milton's «The Hymn»: «The lonely mountains o'er, And the resounding shore, / A voice of weeping heard, and loud lament!»[23]. Radcliffe's use of Milton here serves two purposes; first, as Milbank observes, for the eighteenth century, Milton «was the national and above all Protestant poet», and his use in this context affirms Radcliffe's point of view as a Protestant writer[24]. Secondly, the quotation introduces a melancholic note to the sublime in Radcliffe's writing. Milbank expands on the importance of Miltonic melancholy for Radcliffe's Gothic.

> It is Milton who thus offers the Gothic authors of the eighteenth century a way of appropriating the hermit's contemplation and the aesthetic appeal of the Catholic liturgy and architecture as an instructive mode of spiritual education. […] Milton shows how to link Catholic «ecstasies» to Protestant contemplation through his ordering and directing through melancholy[25].

«The Hymn» is an example of how melancholy facilitates a Catholic aesthetic in Protestant narrative. The lonely, isolated speaker mirrors a Catholic hermit, whilst the natural surroundings, away from the traditional cloister, takes influence from Paley's natural theology. The overall sense of melancholy is 'loud' and exclamatory, imbuing the shore with an uncanny, spiritual power. The shore, melancholic and God-like, seems to be capable of providing warnings - amounting to either striking beauty or ferocious waves.

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[22] Stephen Greenblatt, «Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare», London, Pimlico, 2004, p. 323.

[23] Radcliffe, *The Italian,* p. 209.

[24] Alison Milbank, *God and the Gothic: Religion and Reality in the English Literary Tradition*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 52.

[25] Milbank, *God and the Gothic*, p. 54.

> The scene appeared to sympathise with the spirits of Ellena. It was a gloomy evening, and the lake, which broke in dark waves upon the shore, mingled its hollow sounds with those of the wind, that bowed the lofty pines, and swept gusts among the rocks. She observed with alarm the heavy thunder clouds, that rolled along the sides of the mountains, and the birds circling swiftly over the waters, and scudding away to their nests among the cliffs; and she noticed to Vivaldi, that, as a storm seemed approaching, she wished to avoid crossing the lake[26].

The water appears to mirror Ellena's sense of perturbation after her tumultuous escape. The «dark waves» and gloom create a sense of dwelling evil and unrest. The «hollow sounds» of the wind, «heavy thunder clouds» and frantically «circling» «birds» are similarly mysterious. The coast, holding many of these unsettling warnings, communicates with Ellena, persuading her to avoid taking a boat and facing the ocean's wrath. The sea, which seemed to be assisting Ellena and Vivaldi earlier in the text, now seems to be hindering their safe passage. Despite appearing to favour Ellena, this passage makes clear that the ocean is beyond human comprehension, with properties that are controlled purely by a higher power. The fickle nature of the water establishes the coastline as an essential boundary between safety and unpredictability, and the only reliable communicator between the two spaces.

Whilst the sea's role in *The Italian* is deliberately ambiguous, *A Sicilian Romance* (1790) uses the coast as a means of reuniting Ferdinand with his friends and his mother. The coast, in this instance, seems to be acting to fulfil the will of God.

> The flame continued to direct his course; and on a nearer approach, he perceived, by the red reflection of its fires, streaming a long radiance upon the waters beneath—a lighthouse situated upon a point of rock which overhung the sea. He knocked for admittance, and the door was opened by an old man, who bade him welcome. Within appeared a cheerful blazing fire, round which were seated several persons, who seemed like himself to have sought shelter from the tempest of the night. The sight of the fire cheered him, and he advanced towards it, when a sudden scream seized his attention; the company rose up in confusion, and in the same instant he discovered Julia and Hippolitus. The joy of that moment is not to be described, but his attention was quickly called off from his own situation to that of a lady, who during the general transport had fainted. [...] «My son!' said she, in a languid voice, as she pressed him to her heart. «Great God, I am recompensed! Surely this moment may repay a life of misery!»[27].

Here, the light falls upon the water in an arrow towards Ferdinand's family. Ferdinand is greeted by all those he had believed he had lost, including his mother,

[26] RADCLIFFE, *The Italian*, p. 214.

[27] Ann RADCLIFFE, *A Sicilian Romance* (ed. Alison Milbank), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 196-97.

who attributes the event to God's repaying «a life of misery». The lighthouse appears to be the literal beacon of salvation. It casts a long stream of light through the darkness and confusion of the scene, both literally and metaphorically illuminating Ferdinand's journey. The light from the lighthouse is both external and internal: within the building his family are seated around a «cheerful» fire, adding both illumination and warmth. The lighthouse seems to be portrayed as a place from which edifying Christian values may be emitted. This perfect resolution at the end of the texts seems to suggest that the difficulties which preceded this idyllic scene are merely part of a larger spiritual plan over which we have no control. Nature, of course, has a large part in this scheme, but only in its relationship with God. Without the reflection of the waves pointing Ferdinand in this direction, he would not have found his friends or happy ending. The shore, in this scene, is an important agent to both resolve the narrative and explain the suffering of the characters: they were merely being led to this exultant, spiritual happiness. The oppressed and alienated characters are able to achieve happiness only through the work of God in nature. Nature, however, has no agency of its own – it only acts as directed by divine powers. The coast exemplifies this pure and good version of nature.

The lighthouse is a common coastal motif. Samuel Taylor Coleridge also portrays the lighthouse as a beacon for goodness, hope and Christianity. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) begins, optimistically and cheerfully, on a shore with a lighthouse.

> The ship was cheered, the harbour cleared,
> Merrily did we drop
> Below the kirk, below the hill,
> Below the lighthouse top.
>
> The Sun came up upon the left,
> Out of the sea came he!
> And he shone bright, and on the right
> Went down into the sea[28].

The lighthouse establishes the hopeful tone of the first part of the poem. At the lighthouse, the sailors are filled with hope for a successful and peaceful voyage. When they are faced with storms, the albatross that visits them is viewed as a sign from God that they are blessed and that they will be protected. As a result, they say vespers with the albatross, and the scene itself is focused on looking for signs of God in nature. For example, the

[28] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, «The Rime of the Ancient Mariner», *Lyrical Ballads: 1798 and 1802* (ed. Fiona Stafford), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 5-25, p. 6.

albatross is described as a «Christian soul», and the terrifying prospect of an iceberg is as beautiful as an «emerald» because of the bird's soothing influence[29]. The light emitted from the lighthouse seems to inform their voyage. In these early stages, they are hopeful, and the light of the «Sun» seems to protect them. As with *A Sicilian Romance*, the light and hope cast by the lighthouse seem to extend beyond the building itself and venture for a small distance into the sea. Without this light, the influence of Christianity seems to fade, culminating in the Mariner's shooting of the albatross. The lighthouse and the coast are a motif for the Christian values that abound in Gothic coastal spaces. Beyond the coastal lighthouse and the extent of its literal and metaphorical illumination, characters lose sight of these moral dictates.

Radcliffe's view of the coast as a space where God can be present is a point of view inspired by natural theology. Its modernity and unorthodoxy associate it with progress and distaste for tradition. As Robert Mighall argues,

> Such troubling reminders of the «dark ages» as the worship of relics, belief in miracles, the persistence of the inquisition [...] occur in the historical and topographical accounts, contemporary with the emergence of Gothic fiction. Such accounts help to reinforce Protestant identity, but also evoke the [...] confrontation that structures the narrative and dramatic effects of Gothic fiction[30].

This confrontation between new and old understandings of God and worship divide approaches to the coastline. Ann Radcliffe's approach is influenced by natural theology. She prioritises the coast over the man-made church. The uncanny presence of the inflexible Catholic church in *The Italian* isolates the spiritual and theological appeal of the coast, whilst *A Sicilian Romance* depicts God's use of the coast as an agent of His will. The alluring tides are an entity which provoke the curiosity and praise of Gothic onlookers. As Pluce and Dulard suggest, «The movement of the tides [...] is part of this great design: the waves obligingly withdraw, inviting man to collect the creatures that the sea has left behind for him on the shore»[31]. Radcliffe's writing embodies this philosophy. The coast's physical properties invite the onlooker in, eliciting interest. As we shall see, however, the coast as an inviting symbol of natural theology is a motif which separates Radcliffe from her contemporaries, who view the spiritual implications of the sea as much more threatening.

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[29] Coleridge, «The Rime of the Ancient Mariner», p. 6.

[30] Robert Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History's Nightmares*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 6.

[31] Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea*, quoting Pulce and Dulard, p. 29.

3. THE RED SEA

The Red Sea's presence in traditional British Gothic texts is common, owing to the range of connotations the area holds for writers in its theological tradition. Calling on centuries of both historical and theological relevance, the Red Sea's coast has implications for Christians, Jews and older Greek and Egyptian faiths. The space may have different relevance to each faith, but they are united in seeing its coastline as a preserver of the history. The sea itself separates Africa from Asia, encompassing a mixture of these coastal cultures. The sea space in this instance often occupies a similar ecotonal significance to the coast, in that it is a combination of both its surrounding countries and an entity in its own right. The coastlines around it, then, are markers of this interstitial quality, revealing the competing influence of other shores. During the era of the traditional Gothic, the Red Sea coast's influence spread over both Occident and Orient, uniting a diverse group of people in its geography.

The reason for the sea's dramatic name, and its consequent Gothic associations, is disputed. Originally called «the Great Green» by the Ancient Egyptians, it was also referred to as «yam suph» by Hebrew Scholars, «suph» referring to the woolly seaweed it produced[32]. Maurice Copisarow writes about the bizarre nature of the mixing cultures around the sea. «It is perhaps a paradox that the *Great Green* of Ancient Egypt should have become the *Red Sea* of the Greeks, but it is stranger still that the *yam suph,* the border sea of the desert, should have been entangled in the swamps of the Nile»[33]. The space has an air of the fantastical in its mix of Hebrew, Egyptian and Greek mythologies. The first recorded instance of the name «Red Sea» came from the Greek translation of Hebrew texts. Contested theories as to the origin of the name include that it might have been named after the Erythraens, or the «red people», that it might have been from the red coral in the sea, or from the red appearance the water can have owing to certain zoophytes present in the water. It has also been suggested that there may be a link between «Red Sea» and *yam suph,* taking into consideration the plant life that the name suggests. Copisarow believes that this linguistic link is unlikely. «[T]he attempt to derive the name Red Sea from Reed Sea (reedy sea – Schilfmeer) seems to be erroneous»[34]. The other macabre reason for its name is suggested by Carl Jung: «The Red Sea is the water of death»[35]. Milton describes the Red Sea as «A gulf profound, as that Serbonian bog [...] where whole armies have sunk»[36]. These «armies» could be an allusion to Artaxerxes, King

[32] Maurice Copisarow, «The Ancient Egyptian, Greek and Hebrew Concept of the Red Sea», *Vestus Testamentum,* 12, (1962), pp. 1-13, p. 1.

[33] Copisarow, «The Ancient Egyptian, Greek and Hebrew Concept of the Red Sea», p. 5.

[34] Copisarow, «The Ancient Egyptian, Greek and Hebrew Concept of the Red Sea», pp. 10-11.

[35] Carl Jung, *Mysterium Conjunctionis,* Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1963, p. 141.

[36] John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (eds. Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 8.

of Persia, whose army was believed to have drowned in the Red Sea in 350 BCE, or the Egyptian army which was swallowed by the ocean when in pursuit of the Israelites[37]. It seems reasonable, then, to imagine that the «Red' name of the sea could refer to the blood in and around it. The idea of the Red Sea as an aquatic communal grave, lapping onto the shores that surround it and infecting the rivers which feed into it, inspires many Gothic motifs.

The Red Sea's coastline is frequently associated with bloodshed. The use of the Red Sea image in the Gothic recalls the many tragedies of these faiths. Thomas Bjerre comments on the Gothic's ability to revive stories untold: «region's historical realities take concrete forms in the shape of ghosts that highlight all that has been unsaid in the official version of history»[38]. While the area's official history has been written, and much of its bloodshed is publicly visible, what makes an uncanny return is not the events themselves, but the legacies of individuals who lost their lives in bloodshed and war as Bjerre observes. Ghosts haunt the coastline and reveal the power of the hidden and unsaid histories which people have forgotten. The Red Sea motif revives the mysteries and ghosts attached to each of these faiths, allowing them to reveal their significance. As a multicultural space of blood and death, the coast is infused with an uncanny appeal, both familiar and unfamiliar to audiences.

Traditional Gothic literature has been associated with protesting the love «English men seem' to have of «Popery», viewing Catholicism as the extreme enemy of progress[39]. As Mighall says,

> Such troubling reminders of the «dark ages» as the worship of relics, belief in miracles, the persistence of the Inquisition or the power of the Pope, occur in both historical and topographical accounts, contemporary with the emergence of Gothic fiction. Such accounts help to reinforce Protestant identity, but also evoke the fission of confrontation that structures the narrative and dramatic effects of Gothic fiction[40].

The Red Sea image perfectly exemplifies the anachronistic presence of the Old Testament God which is frequently tied to Catholicism. The Red Sea's role as a space of Christian protest occurs in Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* (1796). *The Monk,* set in a dark and mysterious monastery, focuses on this sense of Catholic horror. The Red Sea is frequently

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[37] For more information on the Red Sea and military history, see Joust CROUWEL, «Studying the Six Chariots from the Tom of Tutankhamun – An Update», *Chasing Chariots: Proceedings of the First International Chariot Conference* (ed. André J. VEDLMEIJER & Salima IKRAM), Cairo, Sidestone Press, 2013, p. 74.

[38] Thomas Ærvold BJERRE, «Southern Gothic Literature», *Oxford Research Encyclopaedias Online*, 2017, <https://oxfordre.com/literature/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-304> [accessed 3 September 2019]

[39] MIGHALL, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction*, p. 5.

[40] MIGHALL, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction*, p. 6.

mentioned as something in which a spirit or apparition may be laid or drowned. Lewis uses this allusion when referring to the emergence of Elvira's ghost in her old chamber.

> And so, your Reverence, upon hearing the shriek, I put away my work, and away posted I to Donna Antonia's chamber. […] However, in I went, and sure enough, there lay the young Lady at full length upon the floor, as cold as a stone, and as white as a sheet. I was surprised at this, as your Holiness may well suppose; but Oh me! how I shook when I saw a great tall figure at my elbow whose head touched the ceiling! The face was Donna Elvira's, I must confess; but out of its mouth came clouds of fire, its arms were loaded with heavy chains which it rattled piteously, and every hair on its head was a Serpent as big as my arm! At this I was frightened enough, and began to say my Ave-Maria: but the Ghost interrupting me uttered three loud groans, and roared out in a terrible voice, «Oh! That Chicken's wing! My poor soul suffers for it!» As soon as She had said this, the Ground opened, the Spectre sank down, I heard a clap of thunder, and the room was filled with a smell of brimstone. When I recovered from my fright […] it directly came into my head, that if anyone had power to quiet this Spectre, it must be your Reverence. So hither I came in all diligence, to beg that you will sprinkle my House with holy water, and lay the Apparition in the Red Sea[41].

Lewis' choice to make Jacintha, the old landlady, relate the awful haunting and apparition of Elvira adds a level of humour to the narrative. Jacintha is the only character in the text who mentions the Red Sea directly. Her «rambling» and «prosing» draws attention away from the horror of the context and lightly mocks her old-fashioned and Catholic sensibilities[42]. Her insistence on sycophantically (and ironically, considering his indiscretions throughout the text) calling Ambrosio «your Reverence», for example, shows her ignorance of his character. «She had conceived a great opinion of his piety and virtue; and supposing him to have much influence over the Devil, thought it must be an easy matter for him to lay Elvira's ghost in the Red Sea»[43]. She fawns over his greatness and abilities to work through God despite his interruptions, lack of «patience» and his «threat» that if «she did not immediately tell her story and have done with it, He should quit the parlour, and leave her to get out of her difficulties herself»[44]. This creates a sense of ironic humour as well as commenting on a perceived weakness within the Catholic Church; its followers are not encouraged to ask many questions. It also paints Jacintha as a character willing to believe any religious doctrine she is told. Her preoccupation with the Red Sea, illustrates her militant belief that the space is an area from which punishment is sent, and that all who inhabit its coastlines are vulnerable to God's wrath. The coastline of the Red Sea expands beyond its literal shore and out to the Madrid abbey Jacintha inhabits. The power

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41 Matthew Lewis, *The Monk* (ed. David Stuart Davies), London, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2009, p. 238.
42 Lewis, *The Monk*, p. 237
43 Lewis, *The Monk*, p. 235
44 Lewis, *The Monk*, p. 237

of the space is so pervasive to Jacintha that its influence extends far beyond the coastal communities affected by it in the Old Testament: everywhere is the shore of the Red Sea, and everywhere is vulnerable to its wrath.

The description of Elvira's ghost is decidedly hellish. Her apparition is associated with both ghosts and Satan himself. She goes from at once appearing as a meek, innocent, albeit ghostly figure «white as a sheet» and «cold as stone» to a «great tall figure» of vengeance and fear. Her terrifying return represents the repression of her story, the lack of openness about her death. Her innocence becomes her revenge as she re-emerges, powerful and terrifying. Despite her ostensible innocence in the narrative, her appearance suggests she has come from hell to enact her revenge. She spits «clouds of fire» from her mouth, has a head loaded with serpents «as big as my arm», similar to the occult figure of the Ancient Greek Medusa, and fills the room with «a smell of brimstone» whilst descending, presumably to hell. Jacintha, however, believes the apparition has not left, and equates its return to damnation with the Red Sea – «you will sprinkle my House with holy water, and lay the Apparition in the Red Sea». The Red Sea here functions as a form of eternal punishment and exile, perhaps a place even worse than hell, from which the being has apparently come. Alain Corbin describes the ocean as once being seen as a «primordial substance' from which all things were created[45]. Being the matter which makes life, the material for creation, to be returned to that would be to be returned to nothingness, and one's spiritual life removed to give way to a purely physical collection of matter. Jacintha's allusion to «lay[ing]» into the Red Sea references God's bringing the locusts from the Red Sea in Exodus to plague the Egyptians and then «laying' them there once they had finished His demands. The allusion to the Red Sea as a place to create and unmake matter reflects on Jacintha's view of the Red Sea as a hub of God's creational power. The coast, as I will explore in the next chapter, is the place where repressed ghosts and histories re-emerge to haunt the living, as Elvira does here. All things, good and bad, either emerge on the coast or are brought back there.

The role of the Red Sea's coast is equally as prevalent in Judaism as in Christianity. Charles Maturin examines the Red Sea's coast in *Melmoth the Wanderer* from a Jewish perspective through Andonijah; he is a Jewish man avoiding the persecution of the Spanish Inquisition. Alonzo narrates his experience with Andonijah:

> As I turned over the leaves with a trembling hand, the towering form of Adonijah seemed dilated with preternatural emotion. «And what dost thou tremble at, child of the dust?» he exclaimed, «if thou hast been tempted, so have they—if thou hast resisted, so have they—if they are at rest, so shalt thou be. There is not a pang of soul or body thou hast undergone, or canst undergo, that they have not suffered before thy birth was dreamt of. Boy, thy hand trembles over

[45] Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea*, p. 2.

> pages it is unworthy to touch, yet still I must employ thee, for I need thee. Miserable link of necessity, that binds together minds so uncongenial! I would that the ocean were my ink, and the rock my page, and mine arm, even mine, the pen that should write thereon letters that should last like those on the written mountains for ever and ever—even the mount of Sinai, and those that still bear the record, "Israel hath passed the flood"»[46].

Adonijah's focus on preserving history frames the tale-within-a-tale structure of the text. His insistence that Alonzo must write out his manuscripts, despite that they will most likely be destroyed by the inquisition, demonstrates a distinctly Jewish sense of perseverance and attachment. As Carol Davidson observes, «the Wandering Jew could function as a dreaded reminder of a benighted, superstitious past or a harbinger of technological advancement, mass literacy, hyper-rationalism, and dreaded, unstoppable change»[47]. Jewish people represent both preservation of the past and intellectualisation of the future – this is coloured by «the Gothic» that «is thrust upon Jews»[48]. *The Tale of the Indians, The Tale of the Guzman Family* and *The Lovers Tale* are all told because of Adonijah and remembered by him. This desire to keep records and witness is reflected in his reference to the Red Sea coast. A rock on the shore of the Red Sea is said to have once borne the inscription, «Israel hath passed the flood», or the Israelites have crossed the Red Sea. The story of the Red Sea coast is indicative of the Jews' great struggle over adversity. Despite escaping the persecution of Pharaoh and the Egyptian people, they still had to endure a long and difficult journey to freedom. Edward Edinger comments that «It is quite interesting that in the Biblical account, the first stop after the Red Sea was a place called Marah. Marah means bitterness. Not only was the water bitter there, but it was also a place where bitter grumblings took place»[49]. The coast witnessed their trial and reflected their emotions, being «bitter» with them both in name and in nature.

A part of Andonijah's Jewishness is to remember this sense of bitterness experienced by his ancestors through the Red Sea, documented on the mountains eternally. The Israelites' - and Andonijah's - journey has been a perpetual struggle with little respite. Their only comfort is the assurance that people to come will remember what they have been through. Despite his dislike for Alonzo, he views his employment writing out the manuscripts as a «miserable link of necessity» – his role in preserving the written document of history is more important than his own personal discomfort. Andonijah's

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[46] Charles Maturin, *Melmoth the Wanderer* (ed. Douglas Grant), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 271.

[47] Carol Margret Davison, *Anti-Semitism and British Gothic Literature,* Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. 23.

[48] Davison, *Anti-Semitism and British Gothic Literature,* p. 23

[49] Jung, *Mysterium Conjunctionis*, p. 141.

animosity towards Alonzo may also be because of Alonzo's Spanish heritage. Spain famously expelled the Jews from their country in 1492, leading to the folklore myth of the «Wandering Jew»: «The infamous, transgressive antichrist, associated with what Edgar Rosenberg has called "the Ur-crime of the Crucifixion", was cursed to immortality until the millennium for mocking Christ as he carried his cross to Calvary»[50]. The Jews, in their rejection of Christ, have often been falsely depicted as evil by anti-Semites. Holding many similarities to Melmoth, the Wandering Jew in the novel is often turned into a figure of areligious depravity rather than of Jewishness. Andonijah's representation shows his isolation from society, depicting the Jewish people as persecuted rather than persecutors. The Catholic church is responsible for alienating him from society, meaning he is condemned to «wander» on the outskirts of society. Rather than being evil or demonic, he is burdened by his bitterness. The Wandering Jew, then, is associated closely with the coast. He is a figure on the outside of society, without a country and perpetually escaping discrimination. The coast echoes this sense of alienation, being without one specific country and perpetually on the edge of society.

The coast also unifies the Jewish people as one continued race, gathering their collective knowledge, and awaiting salvation. They remember each other's struggles through the written record and adopt the strife of their forefathers as their own. While the Jewish people in Exodus reached the Promised Land eventually, they still await the arrival of their saviour. The journey to their Promised Land is a long, isolating struggle, as the pilgrimage after the Red Sea had been. After the initial excitement of the miracle of their escape from Egypt, and their crossing, they had to endure the long and painful struggle to reach Israel, in which time they became disillusioned with God. Those rescued originally died, and it was only their children who reached the Promised Land. This struggle is passed on within the race, and their frustration in waiting for their saviour, isolates the Jewish people. Hence, Adonijah calls Alonzo «unworthy» to touch the pages he has collected. Alonzo's Christianity has freed him from the Jewish pain of waiting and wandering. The Red Sea's coast, the site of such wanderings and bitter moaning, holds both witness and literal proof of their hardship, despite the attempts of society, or the Spanish Inquisition, to erase it.

The coast as witness is an important trope within *Melmoth the Wanderer.* Melmoth, while investigating the mysterious Melmoth Senior, finds a manuscript left by a distant relative called Stanton. Stanton himself tries to investigate Melmoth Senior, however, his search is deemed to be madness and he is sent to a lunatic asylum. In the asylum, Stanton's fellow inmate reiterates how the coast never forgets.

«The Lord is a man of war», he shouted. – «Look to Marston Moor! – Look to the city, the proud city, full of pride and sin! – Look to the waves of the Severn, as red with blood as

[50] Davison, *Anti-Semitism and British Gothic Literature*, p. 2.

the waves of the Red Sea!»[51]. The blood-red waters described here, and their relationship to the Red Sea, links the Severn to the river Nile. The Nile is associated with innocent deaths, as it was where the first-born children of the Israelites were drowned by the Pharaoh. The Nile, also, literally turned red in the Bible. Exodus documents the Nile's dramatic colour change. «Moses and Aaron did as the Lord commanded. In the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants he lifted up the staff and struck the water in the Nile, and all the water in the Nile turned into blood»[52]. The Nile as blood is an important image, both for the Red Sea's coast and for exegetical interpretations of the Old Testament God. The image fuels the association of the Red Sea coast with blood, death and literal redness, while emphasising the Old Testament God's role as a violent enforcer of punishment.

The bloody coastal waters are not just a punishment for the ostensible wrongdoer, Pharaoh, but for all of the people of Egypt. «And the Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, their canals, and their ponds, and all their pools of water, so that they may become blood, and there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, even in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone'"»[53]. A deliberate double allusion occurs here with the mixing of blood and water. All of the water in Egypt turns to blood, making it impossible for people to drink and wash. Every person reliant on water is reliant on its source, the Nile, and its creator, God. The total change of the water to blood emphasises that the water is of God just as the blood is of God, and demands that the Egyptian people stop taking the river for granted. The water is the life blood of the city, just as blood is of the body. God provides life as easily as he takes it away. After turning the Nile to blood, God says to Moses, «The fish in the Nile shall die, and the Nile will stink, and the Egyptians will grow weary of drinking water from the Nile»[54]. The passage goes on to record that «The fish in the Nile died, and the river smelled so bad that the Egyptians could not drink its water. Blood was everywhere in Egypt»[55]. In the Bible, then, the Red Sea and its coasts are flooded with the blood of punishment and death from the Nile. Not only are wrongdoers punished, but all people who do not worship Him. These lines also distinguish the Egyptians from the Israelites, highlighting them as «chosen» by God for protection. In Exodus, all Egyptians are punished, regardless of their potential to recognise the Abrahamic God. Egypt's coast is drenched in blood. This is a punishment which seeps out of the Red Sea and infects coastlines, travelling through rivers like the Severn and the Nile. Stanton's fellow inmate suggests that flowing water brings contagion, and that sin can spread from coastline to coastline and throughout countries via bodies of water.

[51] Maturin, *Melmoth the Wanderer,* p. 51.
[52] Exodus 7:20.
[53] Exodus 14:21.
[54] Exodus 7:17.
[55] Exodus 7:21.

The cadence in these lines equates the biblical quote «the Lord is a man of war» (Exodus 15:3) with «Marston Moor», a Civil War battle ground. Marston Moor seems here to be a version of Sodom and Gomorrah. The rhyme equates the character of God with bloodshed and violence familiar to the English reader, establishing the immediate relevance of the quote. It may also reference a sermon of Maturin's during his career as a preacher. The weaver's outburst emphasises the land's role in remembering the «blood» and «sin» contained within the sea. The Red Sea coast, exemplifying a space of violent coastal memory, spills into and infects the other waters and coastlines it touches. The terrible nature of the Red Sea, and the idea of God as «a man of war», relates back to Pentateuchal depictions of a vengeful deity. There has been no baptism which cleanses the sins that the Red Sea records, and so its awfulness still seeps onto those who choose not to beg for forgiveness. The only agents invulnerable to this infection are the physical elements of the coastlines themselves; the rocks, the sand, the water. Despite what has happened on or around them, they are not guilty or infected. Adonijah emphasises their purity and innocence in wishing that they could hold his stories – «that the ocean were my ink, and the rock my page». Robert Mighall ties geography to cultural memory, suggesting a fission between Adonijah's mode of remembrance and Alonzo's. «Maturin equates character with environment», saying that «*The Italian character*» set «apart in a psychological and "historical" realm of its own»[56]. As much as the «Italian character» is informed by geography, the Jewish character is also structured by its attachment to certain geographical features and landmarks. The coastline of the Red Sea is a witness and a documenter, influencing Adonijah's desire to preserve the memory of the struggles of those who have gone before him.

4. THE SEA OF BLOOD

William Beckford's *Vathek* also explores the significance of the coast to theology. Instead of focusing directly on one coastline, however, Beckford describes a macabre sea of blood. The sea he describes is geographically ambiguous, and not obviously either a metaphor or a literal ocean of blood. The coastline that surrounds it, then, is soaked with the blood of the sea, as are the people who occupy the space. This ambiguity adds a further uncanny note to the narrative, and emphasises the fragile spirituality of the space, which defies definition. *Vathek,* as Gerry Turcotte observes, is largely inspired by a societal move towards the oriental as a source of mysterious intrigue and fascination. As Turcotte points out, «D. J. Enright calls the turn towards orientalism and *chinoiserie*

[56] Mighall *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction*, p. 20.

a "romantic phenomenon", with "fairy-tale exoticism and allegoricism, an escape from the 'age of reason'"»[57]. The oriental mysteries that *Vathek* offers can be related loosely to its interpretations of Islam, a religion which was known but mysterious and exotic in England at the time. The sea of blood that Beckford describes, then, is associated with Islam and the East from the perspective of the white British imagination. The East was a victim of what Edward Said calls «Orientalism», or «a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient»[58]. He posits that «the late eighteenth century' was a starting point for this cultural interpretation, which viewed the East from a Eurocentric perspective[59]. Beckford's writing connects this oriental nature with the coast.

> Vathek, depressed with fear, was on the point of prostrating himself at the feet of the shepherd, whom he perceived to be of a nature superior to man, but his pride prevailing, he audaciously lifted his head, and glancing at him one of his terrible looks, said: «Whoever thou art, withhold thy useless admonitions. Thou wouldst either delude me, or art thyself deceived. If what I have done be so criminal as thou pretendest, there remains not for me a moment of grace. I have traversed a sea of blood, to acquire a power which will make thy equals tremble; deem not that I shall retire when in view of the port; or that I will relinquish her who is dearer to me than either my life or thy mercy. Let the sun appear! Let him illumine my career! It matters not where it may end»[60].

The Red Sea's relationship with Islam is a close one. The coast of the sea forms the west coast of Arabia for 1,400 miles. In *Vathek*, this deep relationship is represented. The genie, appearing as a shepherd, warns Vathek and his cohort that he is coming by turning «the waters of two little lakes, that were naturally clearer than chrystal», into «a colour like blood»[61]. This anticipates Vathek's later remark that he has «traversed a sea of blood», relating the two bodies of water. This relationship shows Vathek's arrogance as well as tying the coast to a transcendent mysticism. Although the Red Sea coast itself is not directly named, the area is directly implicated in this description. The «sea of blood» is not limited to its geographical constraints but has power and applications far abroad. The shepherd's ability to bring the bloody water to the lakes highlights the sea's holiness, and its application as a deterrent from sin. It also shows, as aforementioned, the sea's lapping on to all shores equally, uniting all countries through their coastlines.

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[57] Gerry Turcotte, *Peripheral Fear: Transformations of the Gothic in Canadian and Australian Fiction*, Brussels, P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2009, p. 33.

[58] Edward Said, *Orientalism,* London, Penguin Group, 1995, p. 3.

[59] Said, *Orientalism,* p. 3.

[60] William Beckford, *Vathek* (ed. Thomas Keymer), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 133.

[61] Beckford, *Vathek*, p. 131.

Vathek abandons Islam in order to gain supernatural powers. In this scene, a genie adopts the role of a shepherd to attempt to save Vathek from damnation. His appearance is important, as many of the major Islamic prophets are shepherds. Vathek's urge to prostrate «himself at the feet of the shepherd» shows his inner division and attachment to Islam. From his appearance, he judges him to be «of a nature of a superior man». Despite his attraction to the occult, his initial reaction is to «fear» the shepherd and to humble himself before him. His respect for Islam emphasises his break away from it, showing the Gothic implications of his self-imposed isolation. However, in his shunning of Islam, he turns directly to Greek mythology for support. Vathek's mother, Carathis, is Greek, versed in science, astrology and occult magic. She pushes him towards mythology and attainment of supernatural powers rather than his Islamic faith. He personifies the sun as «him». When he beseeches the sun to «illumine my career», he alludes to the Greek sun God, Apollo. Apollo's appearance here is important as he is the patron saint of shepherds, and a prolific lover. Vathek invokes him in order to attempt to control the genie, as well as highlighting his obsession with his own sexuality. Vathek's dichotomous personality is contextualised through his view of the «port» or the coast – «deem not that I shall retire when in view» shows his intrinsic sense of respect for his country, its coastline and its traditions, signified by his suggestion that he might relax when he saw it. The fact that he doesn't want to, however («deem not»), shows he is rebelling against his natural sense of respect for the coast and his normal life, trying instead to be supernatural and to transcend the humbling limits of the space.

Vathek's arrogance towards the shepherd, and his continual pursuit of knowledge above his station, is also reminiscent of Greek mythology. Menelaus' attempt to gain excessive knowledge in Homer's *The Odyssey* mirrors Vathek's. Menelaus' ship becomes drawn into a cosmic whirlwind near the Red Sea, where he meets a shapeshifting oceanic figure from Greek mythology, Proteus, a sea god. Proteus guards Poseidon's seal flock on an island by shapeshifting to overcome any attackers. Menelaus wants to capture Proteus, who is also a prophet, in order to learn about his future and to find a route home. He eventually manages to capture Proteus, despite his shapeshifting, who tells Menelaus that he needs to «give a sacrifice to the gods» in the Nile if he wants to go home again[62]. Menelaus is deeply disturbed by this prophecy. A similar conceptual figure to Proteus, the Goddess «Great Green», also appears in Ancient Egyptian mythology[63]. Menelaus, like Vathek, attempts to gain supernatural knowledge beyond his power. The Red Sea coast occurs in each story as an ecotonal barrier between the supernatural and reality – it is an entity possessing great strength and knowledge, but its depths should not be accessed. Its mysteries are deliberately

[62] Gesa Mackenthun, «Chartless Voyages and Protean Geographies» in *Sea Changes: Historicising the Ocean* (eds. Bernhard Klein and Gesa Mackenthun), New York, Routledge, 2004, pp. 131-148, p. 133.

[63] Copisarow, «The Ancient Egyptian, Greek and Hebrew Concept of the Red Sea», p. 1.

beyond human conception. Should its barriers be breached, the human who is culpable faces death, as with Menelaus, or damnation, as with Vathek. The final lines of *Vathek* warn against this.

> Such was, and should be, the punishment of unrestrained passion and atrocious deeds! Such shall be the chastisement of that blind curiosity, which would transgress those bounds the wisdom the Creator has prescribed to human knowledge; and such the dreadful disappointment of that restless ambition, which, aiming at discoveries reserved for beings of a supernatural order, perceives not, through its infatuated pride, that the condition of man upon earth is to be – humble and ignorant[64].

Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,* like Beckford, depicts a sea of blood to instil a sense of fear in readers. In Part Three, the Mariner is in the grips of madness. His fellow seamen have all died, and their decaying corpses surround him. Looking out into the bleak and uncompromising ocean, the water appears red and blood like.

> Her beams bemocked the sultry main,
> Like April hoar-frost spread;
> But where the ship's huge shadow lay,
> The charmèd water burnt alway
> A still and awful red.[65]

The redness cast by the boat seems to reference the bloodshed and death which have come from it and are carried by it. The fact that the water is «charmed» suggests that a mystical alchemy is taking place – nature has joined with fantastical and magical forces to emphasise its condemnation of the Mariner's original murder, where the innocent albatross was shot. The sea of blood is both a reference to witchcraft and magic, and a reference to the death and murder which have come about because of the Mariner's actions. In this sense, the sea is a magical place in that it has the power to change its own form and colour to condemn and possibly to madden its victim. Especially considering the ending of the poem, where the Mariner's salvation takes place after the death and gore of the sea is swallowed up by a whirlpool and his salvation is restored, the sea and coast are contrasted with one another. The coast is unsullied by this blood and the hermit is able to redeem him. The coast, then, despite being ecotonal, only inherits certain characteristics from the sea – the sea itself, also, is an indefinite place, with the power to change its characteristics to suit its moralistic purpose. The coast doesn't change, however: it is a space of salvation and redemption, pure

[64] Beckford, *Vathek*, p. 91.
[65] Coleridge, «The Rime of the Ancient Mariner», p. 450.

and unsullied, in contrast to the sea's role as punisher. Coleridge's description of this blood red sea becomes increasingly fantastical.

> Within the shadow of the ship
> I watched their rich attire:
> Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,
> They coiled and swam; and every track
> Was a flash of golden fire.
>
> O happy living things! no tongue
> Their beauty might declare:
> A spring of love gushed from my heart,
> And I blessed them unaware:
> Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
> And I blessed them unaware.[66]

The inclusion of water snakes here has a few different effects. The first and most obvious one is that water snakes do not live in the middle of the ocean – no species of water snake (that we know of) can survive in water that deep. These water snakes, then, are imaginative, and we can interpret it as a reference to the hope that the coast provides. The man responds in turn, blessing them, interpreting them as a sign that God has not given up on him. The Christian blessing emphasises the theological tone of these snakes. The fact that «love» gushes in his heart like a «spring» is another clear coastal reference. The Mariner is taking hope from the idea of shallow, coastal waters, and picturing the abundance of life and hope that the coast offers. The snakes are «happy» and «living», contrasting his experience of the ocean in this part: his shipmates are dead, and he is surrounded by a sea of their blood. These coastal creatures serve to reinforce the idea of the coast as a space of safety, where the atrocities which happen in a sea which is literally and metaphorically full of blood, may not permanently haunt the Mariner.

In this part of the poem, the Mariner wishes for death. He badly wants his penance to be over and believes that he has condemned himself by killing the albatross. Perhaps the «saint» that takes pity on him, he believes, has killed him. The image Coleridge depicts both shows the awful significance of the blood red sea, which literally reflects the blood which is spilled within it, as well as demonstrating that God may use nature to enact the punishments of hell. The effect of this image is to reinforce the terrifying mysteries of the sea, portraying the coast as a space of relative safety and salvation, and, perhaps, where mankind should stay.

[66] Coleridge, «The Rime of the Ancient Mariner», pp. 450-451.

5. CONCLUSION

The Gothic coast is a space which encounters spirituality in many different forms. Religion, magic and mystery intertwine in Gothic coastlines, creating a tone of the supernatural. Exodus ties the space to alchemy and supernatural magic in the Bible. Just as Moses and Aaron change the Nile to blood, the Egyptian holy men are able to do the same using alchemy. «But the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts, and Pharaoh's heart became hard; he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said»[67]. The inclusion of this line in Exodus draws attention to the power of alchemy and «occult» forces in the space. The Christian narrative encourages believers to be wary of the power of the demonic to distract and dissuade away from God. In this instance, the holy men's ability to use alchemy and «magic» to change the waters red hardens the Pharaoh's resolve against the Israelites, which leads to his eventual defeat. Although Pharaoh is given opportunities to respect God, he allows himself to be distracted by alchemy and magic and is therefore punished. The presence and the power of the Ancient Egyptian religion in Exodus, however, is not to be undermined. The occult force of the holy men informs a sense of the macabre around the Red Sea's coast.

As each section in this article has shown, the coast for Christians, Jews, Muslims and mythological faiths is a space representing the great power of the spiritual. Sections two and three emphasise that the coast can have a terrible power, capable of taking many lives and causing devastation; section one, however, shows that it is also represented as a force capable of cleansing and healing. The difference between Radcliffe's approach and the approach of Lewis, Maturin, Beckford and Coleridge is worth emphasising. Radcliffe's outlook is less gory and violent, not featuring blood, damnation or death. As a result, her depiction of theological coastlines seems to represent severe punishment for sinners. The focus is on upholding the outcast, rather than condemning the sinner. The message, however, is similar in all of the texts discussed – the coast is a space where God's power judges the living and the dead. Society is protested, and the pious individual, who behaves differently from others in the text, is rewarded.

Gothic depictions of the coast use a mixture of Christian imagery and the occult to heighten supernatural effect. The water's likeness to blood draws attention to God's power to begin and end human life, as well as to the ghostly presence of the Gothic undead in the sea. Waves of their memory lap on to the shore, infecting the land with their presence. These undead inhabitants emerge onto the shore, confronting characters with their repressed memories and anxieties. The coast is often portrayed as a place of re-emerging repressions, magic and death. Leading on from the fairy-tale, where the coast is a space of fantastical

[67] Exodus 7:22.

magic and escape, this chapter has shown how theological references at the coast emphasise supernatural elements, tying them to a grander spiritual realm.

The coast looks onward into the sea, showing the lack of human ability to comprehend fully its limits. The fact that the coast occurs so frequently as a religious and Gothic image, illustrates the extent to which it is a macabre space for the spiritual. It is a place worthy of respect, which it is unwise to disrespect or sully. It records, remembers, and it can condemn. The Red Sea in particular, bordering so many disparate cultures, embodies the infection of sin among humans. Its eerie history is fuelled by its omnipresence in so many religious records as an entity bestowed with an incomprehensible Godlike power, one which should not be tampered with.

Gothic interpretations of theology focus on those who are segregated. This article explored how many Gothic novels protest against hegemonic religious belief and practice, highlighting the way religious groups can often exclude people. The coast emerges as a principal setting for spiritual imagery, especially for Radcliffe, who explores Christianity from a «natural theology» perspective. Churches, scriptures and preachers are criticised in her fiction with the view that a preferable relationship with God can be struck at the coast, when immersed in nature. Discussion of the Red Sea imagery in Gothic narratives such as Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) reveals the coast's reputation as an agent of spiritual justice for the oppressed Israelites, as well as an eternal preserver of history, an unquestioned proponent of justice. The space creates horror and is capable of acting as an agent of divine will. The «sea of blood» imagery, similarly, reveals how the coast can both protect and attack the oppressed. However, in this interpretation, we can see the sea as the oppressor – punishing evil and wrongdoing in characters – whilst the coast acts as a salvation space which promises protection from the sea. The spiritual imagery presented in the texts demonstrate how the isolated «other» can be protected at the coastline by a super-natural force beyond our understanding. This can mean condemnation as well as retribution.

Gothic novels portray moments of great psychological turmoil at the coast, because it is where truth surfaces. These truths offer information about the characters themselves, but also about the society from which they have come. The coast offers criticisms of hegemonic religious practice. The coast is a space which provokes both fear and contemplation of greater unknowns. Although the coast in general is used to achieve many different things, its persistent recurrence and relevance proves its uncanny credentials. Although the coast can provoke dread and uncertainty, it also shows that the purity of nature is Godly, and that to infringe upon its boundaries is evil and akin to tampering with God's creation. Gothic novels use beautiful natural scenery, including coastlines, to emphasise that Eden-like scenes of natural bliss are impossible when combined with the sin of mankind. Humanity corrupts absolutely: hence why the coast in Gothic texts is flooded by uncanny visions of the

character's sins. There are no scenes of the coast which are totally separate from humanity, and no scenes where the coast is totally blissful. This highlights the extent to which the coast is influenced by humanity, informing its uncanniness.

The coast's relationship with humanity has been variously defined through its connection to the mythical, the theological and the historical. William Hughes expands this idea, suggesting that mankind's responsibility for nature falls into roughly two categories in the Gothic: «humanity […] may be scripted variously as the privileged and unabashed holder of an enduring Old Testament dominion; the uneasy, guilt-ridden and unworthy steward of a fragile environment; or a co-equal and knowing participant in its mysteries and cycles»[68]. Gothic imagery around the coast comes either from humanity being knowledgeable of its failure to care for the earth fully, or from humanity's removal from what is supposed to be our natural environment. With both propositions, humanity has wavered from its natural place and exceeded the boundaries of what is acceptable. Nature, God's Eden, has been defiled by humanity's contact. The coast also represents this. Within this comes the inherent implication that mankind is evil, a destructive force, against God and creation. Perhaps the references to spirituality which abound at the Gothic shoreline are supposed to reinforce this transgression – myth recognises the level of fantasy and detachment which humans indulge in to deny this reality, and voices which abound at the coast attempt to call us back to what we have repressed: original sin. The experience of Adam and Eve lives on in Gothic texts, represented in a perpetual state of denial in human characters, and the uncompromising yet alluring bliss offered by natural settings. Gothic writers call attention to inherited guilt around natural spaces, specifically the coast, in order to underline how unnatural terrestrial life is. Marital and religious institutions deviate from the relaxed, unforced and innocent order of life established in Eden, and are therefore unnatural, and surrounded by guilt and unease. By examining the space's relationship to theology, it is possible to understand the perspective of alienated, isolated and contemplative British Gothic writers who looked outward from an island surrounded by coastlines.

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[68] William Hughes, «"A Strange Kind of Evil": Superficial Paganism and False Ecology in *The Wicker Man*», in *EcoGothic*, 2013, pp. 58-71, p. 58.

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