

GOTHIC BOURNES

THE HAUNTED BEACH

by Mary Robinson

(1800)

TRANSCRIPTION BY

Manuel Aguirre

EDITING GOTHIC TEXTS
TWELFTH SERIES, 2025
Nº 1

LYRICAL TALES,

BY

MRS. MARY ROBINSON.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR T. N. LONGMAN AND O. REES, PATERNOSTER-ROW,
BY BIGGS AND CO. BRISTOL.

1800

Source text:

[Lyrical tales, by Mrs. Mary Robinson. 1800 : Robinson, Mary : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#), pp. 72-76.

The Haunted Beach

(Mary Robinson)

1. Upon a lonely desert Beach,
 Where the white foam was scatter'd,
A little shed uprear'd its head
 Though lofty Barks were shatter'd.
The Sea-weeds gath'ring near the door,
 A sombre path display'd;
And, all around, the deaf'ning roar,
Re-echo'd on the chalky shore,
 By the green billows made.

2. Above, a jutting cliff was seen
 Where Sea-Birds hover'd, craving;
And all around, the craggs were bound
 With weeds—for ever waving.
And here and there, a cavern wide
 Its shad'wy jaws display'd;
And near the sands, at ebb of tide,
A shiver'd mast was seen to ride
 Where the green billows stray'd.

3. And often, while the moaning wind
 Stole o'er the Summer Ocean;
The moonlight scene, was all serene,
 The waters scarce in motion:
Then, while the smoothly slanting sand
 The tall cliff wrapp'd in shade,
The Fisherman beheld a band
Of Spectres, gliding hand in hand—
 Where the green billows play'd.

4. And pale their faces were, as snow,
 And sullenly they wander'd:
And to the skies with hollow eyes
 They look'd as though they ponder'd.
And sometimes, from their hammock shroud,
 They dismal howlings made,
And while the blast blew strong and loud
The clear moon mark'd the ghastly croud,
 Where the green billows play'd!

5. And then, above the haunted hut
 The Curlews screaming hover'd;
And the low door with furious roar
 The frothy breakers cover'd.
For, in the Fisherman's lone shed
 A MURDER'D MAN was laid,
With ten wide gashes in his head
And deep was made his sandy bed
 Where the green billows play'd.

6. A Shipwreck'd Mariner was he,
 Doom'd from his home to sever;
Who swore to be thro' wind and sea
 Firm and undaunted ever!
And when the wave resistless roll'd,
 About his arm he made
A packet rich of Spanish gold,
And, like a British sailor, bold,
 Plung'd where the billows play'd!

7. The Spectre band, his messmates brave
 Sunk in the yawning ocean,
While to the mast he lash'd him fast
 And brav'd the storm's commotion.
The winter moon, upon the sand
 A silv'ry carpet made,
And mark'd the Sailor reach the land,
And mark'd his murd'rer wash his hand
 Where the green billows play'd.

8. And since that hour the Fisherman
Has toil'd and toil'd in vain!
For all the night, the moony light
Gleams on the specter'd main!
And when the skies are veil'd in gloom,
The Murd'rer's liquid way
Bounds o'er the deeply yawning tomb,
And flashing fires the sands illumine,
Where the green billows play!

9. Full thirty years his task has been,
Day after day more weary;
For Heav'n design'd, his guilty mind
Should dwell on prospects dreary.
Bound by a strong and mystic chain,
He has not pow'r to stray;
But, destin'd mis'ry to sustain,
He wastes, in Solitude and Pain—
A loathsome life away.

Editor's notes.

The punctuation is at times erratic, which may be the result of editorial negligence. Word contractions are numerous, and seem designed to ensure a proper syllable count. The meter is consistently iambic (tetrameter and trimeter) except for the last line of each stanza, which plays anapaestic variations on the refrain (the final line is exceptional; it is iambic and dispenses with the refrain). Stanzas consist of two quatrains with an extra line in penultimate position. The form is clearly built on the ballad model; the poem is a literary ballad of the type that became popular in the late eighteenth century.

The poem recounts a story of greed, murder and divine punishment. Its Gothic quality is unmistakable in that it adheres to Gothic 'rules':¹ a fisherman slaughtered a shipwrecked mariner for his gold, and is now doomed to ply his trade unsuccessfully for decades (if not for ever)—a reduced version of the figure of Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew, in Lewis' *The Monk* (later recapped in the figure of Melmoth the Wanderer in Maturin's novel of that title). We find all the appropriate tropes and forms: an imprisoning space—the beach from which the fisherman cannot escape—functions as liminal ground, inhabited by the fisherman, haunted by the spectres of the sailors who perished in the wreck (echoes of the Ancient Mariner's shipmates). We thus have the conventional thematic set-up: a liminal space, a haunting presence, a victim.

As befits liminal regions, the description of the place is characterised by deprivation. Emptiness, vacuity, solitude prevail; there is no colour, with the sole exception of the playful green billows, which stand in contrast to the black-and-white landscape; marks of poverty, dereliction or destruction abound, with the shed a minor avatar of the haunted castle popular in Gothic; and the fisherman 'wastes a loathsome life away.'

Nature is presented animistically, as an agent of divine vengeance; hints of engulfment or devoration (the 'jaws' of the cavern, the 'yawning tomb' of the sea), the watchful moon, that 'mystic chain' that binds him to the beach, the reference to gloom and 'flashing fires'—all conspire to propose a reduced image of hell. Again as happens in so much Gothic, the external landscape operates metonymically to render visible his inner self—'his guilty mind.'²

¹ On the rules of Gothic, see my

² For an in-depth analysis of the poem, see my 'Mary Robinson's "The Haunted Beach" and the Grammar of Gothic,' in *Neophilologus* 98:4 (1914), pp. 689-704.