

## **Scottish Shores: Gothic Coastal Environments**

### **Workshop I: Valuing Dark Shores, 23 May 2022**

#### **Project Leader's Introduction**

Morning everyone, I'm going to give a short introduction to why we're all here. Firstly thank you so much for coming – I know it's quite a journey for a lot of you and I hope you'll find it worthwhile.

This project arose out of the Haunted Shores network, which we set up about a year ago, which sets out explore Gothic representations of coasts. We had intended to run one small conference last March - but the level of interest in this topic amongst other scholars we discovered to be much, much bigger than we had expected. So, we ended up with a network, that continues to run events, produce publications - and generate allied research projects such as this one: Scottish Shores.

I've got a few words to say about why Gothic, why shores, and why Scotland. I don't want to labour these points given the sessions we've got coming up today, but briefly – shores and coasts are interesting from a Gothic perspective because they have unique qualities as environments that ask for a rethinking of some of what we thought we knew about the Gothic. Tidal shorelines do strange things to time, for example. They ask us to rethink notions of boundaries and their transgression, they have their own ways of concealing and returning secrets and pasts.

The motivations for this project are partly environmental - Scotland has a wealth of literary and ecological opportunity but is barely touched as eco-Gothic, particularly not through its waters and shores. Coasts and coastal communities often feel the brunt of effects of climate change and environmental degradation. Coasts are ecologically important, but also politically – coastal communities may be remote from political and economic centres – overlooked, marginalised, expendable.

So the project is also about the dark politics that sometimes go with coasts – for example, how is Scotland's position within the Union related to how its coasts are used and represented. I'm thinking here of things like the expendable way Gruinard Island was seen suitable for anthrax testing, or the location of Trident on the Clyde.

In terms of scope of texts, when planning the project I was thinking partly about the legends and folktales of the coast and islands – their ghost stories but also their historical accounts and events. It was partly about attention to the shore in canonical Scottish Gothic – but also in contemporary fiction. What do we do, for example, with the coastal settings of Alan Warner's novels, where some very difficult things happen, the night-swimming scene in *Morven Callar*, or the kelp-gathering in Graeme Macrae Burnet's *His Bloody Project*. Or what do we do with a crime drama like *Vigil* and the competing tensions of civil law and military secrets, set either on a

strikingly sinister Clyde coast and the claustrophobic space of a submarine. I don't have answers to this question, but I hope we will ultimately come up with some possibilities.

The last thing I want to say is I suppose about interdisciplinarity – basically that environmental humanities scholars and Gothic scholars don't talk to each other enough and we may not know enough about each other's theorising. For example, we have noticed that ecocritics do often use gothic ideas or language but they generally don't call it that – and more significantly they don't engage with the scholarship. At best, these uses are apt and deft – Tsing et al's 'Ghosts of the Anthropocene' Val Plumwood's 'Shadow-places and the politics of dwelling' – but it appears to go unnoticed that there is a body of scholarship to support ideas about doubling, haunting, guilt, complicity and so on that are relevant to climate crisis anxieties and sustainability problems as well as to the Gothic. I would like this to change.

So, to sum up about today – today is about getting us as a group to a position where we all have a better understanding of the three parts of the project – Scottish and Gothic and Shores – and then to make some decisions about what we do next. My provisional intention for the second workshop is that we would hear from some of you about some of your specific research, from which we can devise frameworks to take forward – we'll talk about that at the end of the day. The later events which are both online will widen our work out to involve a much greater range of scholars and other interested people. We will discuss all that in due course.

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