

GOTHIC NATURE



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The Haunted Seas of British Television: Nation, Environment and Horror

Mark Fryers

ABSTRACT

Historically, the sea holds symbolic power within British culture, a space of imperial triumph and mastery over nature. The British coastline, similarly, has served as both a secure defence and a space of freedom and abandonment. However, since the decline of both the empire and the maritime industries, these certainties have eroded, along with the physical coastline itself. Subsequently, these spaces have become haunted, returning them somewhat to more primal conceptions of the natural world. This article examines how television, as the cultural exponent of choice in Britain during the same period, has provided the perfect medium to explore the gothic seas: an environment of terror and unease, fear and uncertainty. From Jonathan Miller's *Whistle and I'll Come to You* (1968) to *Remember Me* (2014), this article details how the appearance of the gothic sea in British culture hastens a broader examination of national myth, virtues and values.

The Philosopher Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu (1952) opined that the character and history of a nation can be explained by its climate. The weather patterns enforced on the British Isles by its proximity to the North Sea dominate the spirit, culture and identity of the nation, providing an almost discretely British conception of the gothic and supernatural as bound to water in its various manifestations.

For Britain, the sea has historically represented the site of imperial triumph—the space in which Britain's imperious navies presided over martial, economic and colonial dominance. Similarly, the British seaside holiday was established as a national institution, and the seaside itself has acquired a reputation for frivolity, freedom and excess: a place where the fruits of imperial endeavour can be savoured. Such was the importance of seafaring to notions of British national

identity and collective experience, the ship often serves as a metaphor for the nation in miniature, the carefully stratified hierarchy of position, rules and command acting as a shorthand for the organisation of British political and social economies. As Elias Canetti writes, ‘every Englishman is prone to see himself as the Captain of a ship at sea’, whilst Conrad noted that ‘salt is in the blood of the English’ (in Raban, 2002: p. 7). The ship therefore takes on extra significance within British culture and if lost, represents a symbolic loss of nationhood (Rayner, 2007). When these carefully ordered rules are threatened, a similar disruption threatens the very core of nationhood. It is unsurprising therefore that aquatic spaces lend themselves naturally to a gothic treatment, whereby the fracturing of the natural or unnatural order of things provides a dramatic collision. British television, with its long association with supernatural, gothic and horror content, has consistently offered water and the maritime environment as a conduit for the repressed. When spirits manifest in the spaces of imperial triumph, freedom and levity, they offer an opportunity for self-examination. Indeed, the appearance of water in its many forms in British supernatural television presents an opportunity to reflect and interrogate some of the potent and foundational myths of British society, and their relationship with the natural environment.

As this article will explore, television’s domestic context of spectatorship renders it an ideal medium to offer a re-imagining of national myth through the supernatural and gothic form. From *Whistle and I’ll Come to You* (BBC, 1968) to *Remember Me* (BBC, 2014), the horrific and ‘return of the repressed’ is manifested through seawater: either at sea or on the periphery of maritime experience, sometimes as a trickle, sometimes as a flood, in instances of both littoral and liminal terror.

This article will consider the inverse treatment of these bodies of water in a British national context through a number of indicative examples, whereby human interaction with these spaces often represents the binary opposite of the Imperial oceans: terror instead of triumph, confinement instead of freedom, fragility instead of strength, death instead of life and in all instances, a secure identity is displaced. This article will balance textual and contextual analysis of British televisual environmental terror with a historiographical overview of sea horror within British cultural history.

Britain and the Dark Seas

Following the defeat of the Spanish Armada, the British Navy became increasingly associated with notions of national identity, while the Merchant Navy was seen to bring prosperity through its mercantile networks. Over time, the maritime sphere became a shorthand for all that was good, fine and British, arguably reaching its apotheosis during the Victorian era and the ‘cult of the navy’ (see Cynthia Behrman, 1997 and Victoria Carolan, 2012). The antithesis of this was a conception of the sea as a place of death and catastrophe. Sailing was a hazardous profession, the ‘here be monsters’ tradition of cartography attests to this, and with a reliable way of plotting longitude not established until the late eighteenth century, shipwreck and drownings came to be a daily threat to those who sailed in ships, most of whom could not swim. As Foulke states, ‘death, and the fear of it, is a constant shipmate in most voyage literature, real or imaginary’ (in Jonathan Peck, 2001: p. 13).

It is during the Enlightenment period in which the sea is enshrined as a space of doom within British art, and gothic literature, especially, has a long association with the sea which positions the ocean and sea journeys as brooding and oppressive. As Joseph Conrad, who claimed that the sea was the proper venue for British masculine virility to thrive, also asserted, ‘the writer who goes to sea finds himself confronting a disturbed reflection of his own age, personality and preoccupations’ (in Raban, 1992: p. 3). Ann Radcliffe’s gothic tales were peppered with descriptions of the sea, and it is a terrible, dark and destructive tempest—while it is a ‘devouring monster’ in which Count Dracula is borne unto the shores of Whitby from the Black Sea in Bram Stoker’s novel. The ‘roaring and devouring’ sea and seascapes of Whitby, become the spaces of death (Stoker, 1996: p.76). Similarly, Stoker’s *The Mystery of the Sea* (1902) also features ghostly echoes of both Britain’s naval legacy, and those whose fates were sealed by the brine.

In Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), the doomed scientist escapes his horrifying creation to the North Pole where he encounters a British Sea Captain intent on finding a passage through the frozen Arctic waters. On hearing Frankenstein’s tale, he decides to turn back, convinced that the hubris of man in the face of terrifying nature can only lead to death and destruction (chillingly foreshadowing the fate of both John Franklin’s 1845 Arctic Expedition and Ernest Shackleton’s equally doomed Antarctic journey in 1911). The romantic poet, Samuel

Taylor Coleridge, also created an intensely gothic vision of the sea in his poem, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798), in which the sailor is cursed to sail alone with the skeletons of the crew he doomed when he slayed the albatross, giving cultural expression to another mariners fear, and linking the sea to superstitious beliefs (1991: pp. 9-35). Having never ventured out to sea, Coleridge conjured the gothic maritime from mariner's tales and imagination, clearly influenced by Judeo-Christian conceptions of the sea (especially Jonah and Noah). In John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), when the angel Lucifer is expelled from heaven he is plunged into the depths of the abyss—the leviathan was imbricated as a space of devilry. For Coleridge though, it was also a space of redemption. Thus, the sea was marked by a tension between opposing forces and conceptions.

It was the sea and ocean that also provided the Romantics with a space of the 'sublime'. According to Raban (1992), Lord Byron 'takes credit for mostly inventing the nineteenth-century sea in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*' whilst in Edmund Burke's 'On the Sublime and Beautiful' from 1757, he 'created for the ocean a philosophical space in the very centre of things...and partly legitimised the sea as a great subject' (pp. 9-14). It was depth as well as height that also inspired J. M. W. Turner in his sea paintings, espousing Edmund Burke's conception of the term as both plumbing the depths as well as scaling the heights: terrifying and redemptive by turns and 'associated with feelings of terror most powerful' (Smith, 2006: p.6). The gothic is associated with the dark, labyrinthine, subterranean spaces of castle dungeons and other areas, and the ocean, likewise, is a natural site of sub-marine darkness.

In many ways, there is always more than one 'sea'. It is mutable and undulating by nature, existing in wildly differing depths, shapes, colours and contexts. Indeed, it is precisely this mutability that suffuses water with a gothic quality. In a more practical sense, the space where the sea meets the land, tributaries and estuaries, coastlines, beaches and human-made resorts are separate spaces, and all offer different visions of the sea. In all these cases however, the sea is a social construct as well as a natural environment. If myths of nationhood mobilise the seas as a mythical frontier and the British countryside (the 'green and pleasant land') as its sacred spaces, the gothic sea manifests as an irrepressible energy that strips these bare. This is especially tangible in moments of national self-examination. As Valdine Clemens observed of the gothic form,

‘A national brand of gothic fiction seems to proliferate whenever the political and economic dominance that a given country has acquired appears to be passing its peak and about to decline...’ (1999, p.5).

The rise in popularity of television in Britain, between the 1950s and 1970s, coincided with the rapid decline of the British empire after the Second World War. Gothic and supernatural television thus helped to give expression to this sudden absence. Television became the foremost cultural form in Britain in this era, and thus its output is of particular value to cultural historians. Many of the examples discussed here were produced by the BBC, which had its own remit in promoting a form of national identity, during a concomitant period of decline (e.g. Jean Seaton, 2009). The BBC had a remit to ‘inform, educate and entertain’ and the affectionate nickname ‘aunty Beeb’ suggested that the institution was part of the family, at home in the corner of the living room, (a position also occupied by commercial networks when they were introduced in the 1950s). It also meant that gothic programming occupied the same exalted position, inviting phantoms into the epicentre of domestic existence.

British film has a history of nautical horror. Haunted ships appear sporadically in films such as *The Mystery of the Marie Celeste* (1935) and *The Ghost Ship* (1952) and the Anglo-Canadian *Death Ship* (1980), the seaside resort has been imbricated as the space of death in *Byzantium* (2012) and the sea and coastal spaces (including islands) marked as deathly in *The Wicker Man* (1973), *Neither the Sea Nor the Sand* (1972) and *Wake Wood* (2009). Many of these share common aesthetic features with the televisual examples discussed here; however, television offers a more sustained and consistent evocation of maritime fear, more interior and more insular in their context of domestic reception. As Stacey Abbott and Lorna Jowett (2014) point out, they allow a space to explore the ‘spectacle of the supernatural’ (p. 12). In British culture, the spectacle on display has frequently been the sea.

For Paul Wells (2000), ‘the domestic space has become the locality for the worst of horror’ (p. 18). This offers scope to analyse these texts as examples of the gothic being a largely domestic genre. As Helen Wheatley (2007) observes of gothic television: ‘These programmes demonstrated

a clear consciousness of their domestic reception context' (p. 28). Also emanating from a national broadcasting context, these texts are infused with a 'Britishness' that may set them apart from, for example, films intended for an international audience.

Haunted Seas

The wide, open seas are those often romanticised within British culture as a masculine frontier, the place in which dominance of the seas brought Empire and wealth- prosperity and security. As discussed, the sea vessel commands a very specific position within British history and culture. They evoke both the romance of the age of sail and echoes of an Empire protected by the Royal and merchant navies. As such, the nautical journey motif is engrained within British culture as a venerating myth of masculine potency and onward progress, from Sir Francis Drake and Captain Cook to Ernest Shackleton and Sir Francis Chichester. Interstitial sailing sequences in audio-visual texts depicting the sea are characterised by a form of 'nautical panacea' (Fryers, 2014), seductive images of romantic sailing that help buffet against the more unsavoury aspects of maritime warfare and expansion.

Filming at sea is especially difficult, dangerous and expensive, as waterproof equipment is required, weather is unpredictable and seascapes and horizons constantly shift, which may explain why there are less 'open sea' gothic texts. A show such as *The Onedin Line* (BBC, 1971-80), as a lavishly mounted costume drama, was a rare example that was granted a sufficient budget to do so. It celebrated the age of sail and the construction of Empire through merchant shipping, conflating the romance of sailing with onward national capitalist progress. It did so at a time of industrial and economic decline, offering nostalgia for a time of national strength and virility and equally for a time when the 'English were inclined to regard the seas of the world as their exclusive colonial possession' (Raban, 1992: p.21).

Elsewhere in British televisual evocations of sailing and inland waters, the gaiety, frivolity, and overt symbolism of the journey evident in classic literature, such as the novels of Arthur Ransome or Jerome K Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat* (1889), are questioned in gothic, supernatural or other dramatic renditions, that provide an eruption of the psychic energy of the past and offer a

‘counter-narrative’ to the ‘progress of modernity’ (Frank Botting, 1999: p.1). Prominent amongst these is the BBC’s adaptation of Alan Ayckbourn’s play *Way Upstream* (1987). Ayckbourn’s allegorical drama plays with traditional British notions of inland sailing tranquillity and naval traditions as two couples on a river cruise experience tyranny and nightmares when they allow a mysterious stranger aboard, before ultimately finding salvation. Similarly, ‘Three Miles Up’, an episode of the BBC series *Ghosts* (1995) features two brothers sailing on a canal barge as they try to deal with the tragic fact that their mother drowned in the cellar. Their journey ultimately leads to disaster.

Thus, the main examples discussed here are instances where the sea meets the land and not the other way around. From the perspective of the land, the sea is separate space—somewhat ‘othered’ as an environment. Paul Gilroy (1993) theorised that the Black Atlantic, the route of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century slave trade, can be recalibrated and conceived as a post-modern space whereby traditional colonial notions of nationality and territory no longer apply: a *tabula rasa* for subjective, de-centred and de-stabilised identity. It is a place that therefore displaces the security of the land. Indeed, the ghosts of colonial and mercantile activity haunt a number of televisual texts, including *The Sailor’s Return* (1978), *Jamaica Inn* (1983, 2014), *Wide Sargasso Sea* (2006) and *A Respectable Trade* (1998).

However, a couple of important examples are the exception that prove the rule. *Ghostboat*, produced by ITV in 2006 (based on a novel by George F. Simpson and Neal R. Burger) represents a very masculinised British conception of the sea, but offers a different journey, not of triumph, but of self-immolation. *Ghostboat* ran for three episodes in 2006 and centres around actor David Jason as Professor Jack Hardy, a former Navigation Officer aboard the submarine HMS Scorpion, which was lost in the Baltic on 17th December 1943, during World War Two and which mysteriously resurfaces in 1981, at the height of the Cold War. Hardy is asked to crew the ship again, and, possessed by its former inhabitants, the ship proceeds to lead them towards starting world war three.

Ghostboat creates an all-male environment by supplanting the present day for World War II, thus engaging with absence as well as presence. By excising any female presence in the story,

it ironically focuses on the excess of masculinity devoid of feminine influence (e.g. Doane, 1987). There is also an added resonance in the linking of the supernatural here and World War Two. Since 1945, Britain has fostered for itself the myth of this war as being Britain's 'finest hour'. Yet this mythology works to veil the death and suffering of the conflict. Lucie Armitt (2012) suggests that in the twentieth century, the world wars replace the 'imagined horrors' of the supernatural gothic (p. 2). Here they are sutured together, providing an obverse to the triumphant mythology of heroism and bravery. There are metaphorical references to this obsession with nostalgia within the drama, with such lines as 'the past is breaking through', 'we seem to be slipping into the past' and 'every rivet, everything seems to be resonating at the 1943 pitch'. Here, history is a vortex or a portal through which martial horrors are birthed. The largely working-class crew also serve as a reminder that the depths of the sea are a graveyard for the poor or subaltern.

In this sense, *Ghostboat* is an unusual text, an inversion of the glorious myths of World War II still routinely perpetuated in twenty-first century Britain, not least through television.¹ The vessel here, is 'uncanny', and not the vessel of nautical victory, but one which highlights the dangerous myopia of masculine, martial endeavour. A similar effect can be seen within the BBC's 2005 adaptation of William Golding's Booker prize-winning trilogy *To the Ends of the Earth*, which turns the grand and triumphant image of the sail-rigged ship of Nelson's Navy into a leaking, creaking, dark and gothic floating asylum populated by criminals, drunkards, death and defilement, similarly turning the heroic and romantic notion of the voyage askew (Fryers, 2018). Misfortune seems to follow the crew following the slaying of an albatross, as in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, recalling how the sea is also a place of dark superstition. The journey, therefore, which historically stands as a site of national triumph, is here represented as god forsaken. The gothic provides a corrective: an insidious reverse of the national story of masculine triumph.

Haunted Coastlines

¹ This is particularly evident in documentary or docu-drama programming, often fronted by male presenters. See for example *The Other Side of Dunkirk* (BBC, 2004), *Jeremy Clarkson: Greatest Raid of All Time* (BBC, 2007), *Little Ships* (BBC, 2010) and *D-Day: The Last Heroes* (BBC, 2013) among numerous others.

The British coastline, especially the southern coast and the white cliffs of Dover, have served in British film and television, and in British culture generally, as a synecdoche for stability and security. The coastlines and the sea around the British Isles are the secure drawbridge against invasion and the last line of defence—the liminal boundary in which Churchill mobilised the British people to fight for their liberty in World War Two. Indeed, in recent years, the visual language of television has given specific privilege to coastal spaces—the new technology of high-definition filming and drones offering a view of clarity and power, manifested in documentary television such as *Coast* (2005–) and numerous BBC and commercial idents (Wheatley, 2016). But, again, these spaces have a cultural doppelgänger, their darkness exacerbated by their inverse positioning to such configurations of power and security. In the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries, coastlines have somewhat abandoned their role as secure protector and instead served as a sinister index both for the effects of coastal erosion and rising sea levels, and the despoliation of the natural environment through pollution. A sea that reflects back the folly and arrogance of humanity, alongside also the threat of the sea returning to reclaim the land, are constant preoccupations within contemporary society. This serves somewhat to challenge or de-stabilise secure notions of national identity based on landscape and topography.

Perhaps as a result, and for more deep-rooted cultural associations outlined, coastlines have featured as a significant environment of fear within British television. Several episodes of the long-running BBC fantasy series *Doctor Who* (1963–), for example, feature a maritime ‘return of the repressed’ emanating from the sea at the point at which it meets the land, in particular the episodes ‘The Sea Devils’ (1972) and ‘The Curse of Fenric’ (1989).

Jonathan Miller’s 1968 *Omnibus* adaptation of M. R. James’ short story ‘Oh Whistle and I’ll Come to You my Lad’ (foreshortened to *Whistle and I’ll Come to You*) is perhaps the most famous example of maritime horror on British television. Indeed, Armitt (2016) posits that James’ original story, alongside *A Warning to the Curious* (1972), discussed below, offer shape and contours to the abstract fear of coastal erosion in the Eastern coast of England where they are set, with the sea manifesting as a ‘predatory form of supernatural agency’ (p. 97).

Miller's adaptation was filmed in North Norfolk and starred Michael Hordern as a socially aloof Cambridge professor holidaying in a coastal guest house who discovers an old whistle near a grave in the sand dunes, which bears the inscription 'who is this who is coming for you?' Having blown the whistle, Parkin is plagued in his dreams and on his daily constitutional along the seafront by a ghostly manifestation, an eruption of what Clemens would describe as 'subconscious psychic energies' (1999: p.9).

The story was re-worked by the BBC in 2010 and starred John Hurt as the professor who is plagued by visions. On this occasion the manifestation is a female form and more specifically, that of his Alzheimer's-stricken wife whom he places into a care home before taking his holiday, and the conduit for terror a ring discovered among the dunes. The coastal break, often an excursion that engenders tranquillity and freedom, is invested with dread in these instances.

In these examples, the liminal spaces of the seaside are a place of death and terror. The incessant sound of the sea—an aural backdrop to the psychological effects of the supernatural and a generally bleak and unforgiving place—treats human interlopers as unwelcome outsiders. Peter Hutchings famously wrote about the 'uncanny landscapes' of British film and television, whereby the bucolic landscapes so beloved of British natural identity (and heritage film and TV) conceal sinister forces below the surface, which wreak havoc on those who encounter or disturb them. Hutchings (2004) posits *Quatermass* (1955) as the archetypal example. Hutchings, alongside Wheatley (2007), argues that these are the dark underbelly of the British heritage and costume drama. The spiritual cousin of these uncanny landscapes in British television are the haunted and isolated seascapes which invert Shakespeare's 'precious jewel set within a silver sea' into cruel, dangerous and remote liminal spaces which hint at the fragility of the human condition in comparison to the cruel and arbitrary forces of both nature and history.

A similar effect is created in *A Warning to the Curious* (1972), another M. R. James adaptation which was also filmed on the forbidding North Norfolk coast. This was one of the first in the BBC's annual 'Ghost Stories for Christmas' strand, written, directed and produced by Lawrence Gordon Clark and a staple seasonal televisual ritual in the 1970s (shadowed by entries from the commercial networks). The drama opens, like the original *Whistle and I'll Come to You*,

with a long, lingering, shot of the beach. The mysterious figure of Agar appears and murders an interloper who had located the ancient crown of the Britons amongst the firs and sand dunes. A similar fate appears to await lead protagonist Mr Paxton (Peter Vaughn), an antiquarian who similarly uncovers a crown whilst digging in the sandy pines by the sea. It is said to be the last of three crowns that protected East Anglia from foreign invasion, a constant pre-occupation within British history which hints at the fragility of the nation state. That the crown should be buried in the liminal realm of the isolated coastline, with one stolen and melted down, another succumbed to the sea, again hints at the fragile state of the coastline and national security.

Paxton is stalked and chased on the beach by the terrifying figure of Agar, an incarnation of an ancient protector of the crown's resting place. Paxton is characterised as insignificant within the landscape and engulfed by the seascapes, especially the expansive beach at Holkham, emphasising the power these spaces hold over him. The manner in which this nautical landscape can distort human experience is emphasised by the text in the way in which it elides established boundaries of perception: 'You can't tell where the beach ends and the sky begins' opines Dr Black (Clive Swift) as he sits behind a canvas. Indeed, the environment functions as a powerful character in its own right. This was no coincidence, as the locations were carefully selected, composed and utilised for their epic scale. As Lawrence Gordon Clark (2012) pointed out, once the locations are chosen, the script can be written to incorporate their scope, therefore Paxton is haunted not by claustrophobia, but by wide expanses. Similarly, the 2010 remake of *Whistle* unusually employs the cinematic aspect ratio of 2:35:1 to emphasise the maritime spaces. Expansive landscapes are more commonly associated with the 'masculine' spaces of the cinema (perhaps as they attune to the virility inherent in expansive genres such the western), but here, further tension is provided by their containment within the 'feminine' domestic televisual form (e.g. Sue Thornham and Tony Purvis, 2004).

In these utterances, the place of the beach takes on significance as a representational space between life and death, or as Greg Denning (2004) describes beaches as 'in-between places, where every present moment is suffused with the double past of both sides of the beach and complicated by the creative cultures that this mixture makes' (p. 13). The duality of the spaces of the beach as both in-between spaces and spaces of death are made explicit in a number of these texts by the

proximity of graveyards and tombstones to the sea. Parkin comes across his whistle by a tombstone in the dunes, Paxton seeks out a graveyard in a church overlooking the sea in *A Warning*. The same location is visited by the protagonists in *Do Not Disturb* (1991), as they seek to uncover the grave of an elusive writer, a mystery it transpires they should leave uncovered. *Do Not Disturb*, part of the drama BBC anthology series *Screen Two* (1991), similarly warned that the past, once disturbed, would return to disrupt the equilibrium of the present. Again, this warning and its execution is played out in the fog and tidal tyranny of dangerous maritime spaces.

In other texts, the cumulative negative energy of the past is irresistible, and similarly, the irrepressible forces of the maritime provide the theatre of menace. In the film adaptation of *The Woman in Black* (1989), Arthur Kidd (Adrian Rawlins) first encounters the vengeful, wraithlike Alice Drablow (Pauline Moran) in the graveyard adjacent to Eel Marsh House, a location cut off by a tidal causeway (as with the beach in the 2010 version of *Whistle*), again emphasising the otherworldliness of these locations and the horrific nature of seascapes. Similarly, the BBC adaptation of *Dracula* (1977), utilises the coastal graveyard at Whitby. *The Shades of Darkness* entry *Bewitched* (1983), adapted from the Edith Wharton short story of the same name (by Alan Plater), is set in a small coastal village with a maritime church and graveyard as the centre-piece, and features both funerals and exhumation. This tale of superstitious villagers seeking to purge the restless spirit of a recently buried young woman, who is thought to be a witch and still having mortal relations with a married man, was originally set in the harsh winters of New England. Mysterious footprints in the snow test the resolve of the villagers. Here, this is transposed to the isolated maritime community and the footprints manifested in the sand. *Bewitched* is framed, literally, by coastal gravestones and the supposed spirit is seen dancing and frolicking at the water's edge, linking the undulating shoreline with the creature that transgresses states of living and death, as well as invoking patriarchal fears of independent and strident females. These are both instances (snow in the original tale and water here) whereby liminal maritime environments or extreme weather patterns both supplant the certainties of human civilisation or provide confusion as to recognised limits or boundaries. This elision or transgression of comfortable or accepted boundaries is at the heart of the horror genre, and thus, environmental boundary transgression, as emphasised in these instances whereby the marine environment functions as the conduit for terror, is at the heart of the environmental gothic.

A similar recurring motif within nautical terror is the figure that returns to the land from the sea, changed beyond recognition as though returning to the world of living from the land of the dead or from the depths of hell itself (as the sea often represents). The *Westcountry Tales* entry *The Visitor* (1982) purports to tell the true story of a woman, Kelly (Kelly Arkless), who moves to a cottage near the sea with her young daughter, Janis (Janis Winters). A mysterious visitor, Fran (Joanna Foster), inveigles herself into their lives and forms a bond with Janis, over which Kelly becomes increasingly maternally envious. In a climactic sequence, Fran appears inexplicably by the shoreline as Kelly and Janis stand on the cliffs, before disappearing. Janis is drawn to the sea and Kelly has to rescue her before she runs off the cliff-edge to her doom. An explanation is offered, in that the coastal area is renowned for ships wrecking on the jagged rocks. The story is related that, on one occasion, a woman was swept ashore with her infant who she placed on a rocky ledge before being swept out again. The woman is subsequently rescued but her child lost. The viewer is invited to speculate that Fran is the incarnation of this woman, set on claiming any child to replace hers. If Fran is the woman returned from the sea, she is altered—having the appearance of a human but transgressing the states of life and death, with malevolent intent. The sea breeds monsters, halfway between life and death, who haunt the interstitial spaces between the sea and the land (Fryers, 2019).

Sound is a vital index of environment in these texts. The auralty of the sea, marine noises and other horrific sounds are in part the necessity of television, with budgetary restrictions placing an emphasis on sound to convey horror and atmosphere. But they are also in part an aesthetic choice, of creating an austere atmosphere to utilise sonic terror to compliment the visual and create a landscape which positions the environment as a functioning protagonist/antagonist. In these instances, the mundane sounds of the sea lapping, the screeching of seagulls and other maritime noises, culturally associated with the peace and escapism of the coast, are turned into conduits of evil. *Whistle and I'll Come to You* (1968) is a symphony of mundane, gently probing everyday sounds, punctuated by eruptions of disturbing sound energy. The proximity between the screech of a gull and the sound of a baby crying as a sound that unsettles boundaries of recognition is explicitly referenced in two of the examples discussed. *The Visitor* posits that 'gulls can sound extraordinarily human at times', suggesting that the sea can confuse one species for another. In

The Woman in Black, the phenomenon is offered as an example of the trickery and unreliability of sound to match vision and experience, as Sam Toovey attempts to console Arthur Kidd after he thinks he hears the accident that claimed the lives of Mrs Drablow's children on the causeway many years ago. Again, the manner in which the maritime sphere can blur distinctions is a manifestation of the horrific.

***Remember Me* (2014) and The Haunted Seaside Resort**

The BBC's three-part supernatural drama *Remember Me* was screened in the run-up to Christmas 2014. In this mini-series, written by Gwyneth Hughes and directed by Ashley Pearce, Michael Palin stars as Tom Parfitt, a man whose recent arrival at a nursing home prefigures the mysterious death of one of the care workers and triggers an eerie mystery that draws in police detective Rob Fairholme (Mark Addy) and care worker Hannah Ward (Jodie Comer). It transpires that the ghost of Tom's former nanny, Isha (Mayuri Boonham) an Indian woman who died after the ship that was taking her back to India was torpedoed off the coast of North Yorkshire during the First World War, has plagued Parfitt for years. She cannot let go of her former charge and brings a curse upon any person who she deems to come between them.

The opening shots of *Remember Me* invoke the sea and shorelines as ominous. Shots of the sea and a mysterious figure washed on the shore are inserted into the opening coda, mixed with equally moody and gothic images of the Yorkshire landscape. Water surrounds and penetrates and is linked to the appearance of the supernatural. Taps drip ominously or overflow. Water appears where it should not; through light fittings, dripping on a corpse on a mortician's slab, in the lungs of a victim who died falling out of a window. Water, and more specifically seawater, signifies death and is furthermore associated with the appearance of the 'monstrous feminine' in the form of Isha. Alongside this, the attendant unexplained manifestation of seashells inverts their association from beach holidays, childhood and frivolity to something unexplained and sinister. The synchronicity between the malevolent spirit in this supernatural tale and the seaside resort is suggestive of the earlier examples, as a sinister agency is unleashed from Britain's past. The choice of Scarborough as a seaside resort is also instructive as it is Britain's oldest resort town (Braggs and Harris, 2006). Isha represents a symbolic loss of control within this arena of vitality, and by

extension serves as a reminder of the death of a particular British way of life. The seaside spa resort, once the symbol of leisure and the playground for prosperous Britain, suffered a vertiginous decline, paralleled by the fatal contraction of the British Empire. The spa as a site of health and rejuvenation is here inverted as a place of disease and death. The crumbling edifices and bleak and deserted seaside towns stand as a continual reminder of decline, in the spaces once so closely linked to prosperity. The phantoms of Empire and decline are thus evoked and the text functions as what David Punter describes of the gothic: ‘Gothic fiction becomes a process of cultural self-analysis’ (in Clemens, 1999: p .6) and for Armitt, ‘Gothic, then, has become a means of reading culture, not just a cultural phenomenon to read’ (p. 10).

The haunted seaside also resonates within contemporary British culture as a space in which secure parameters have been disrupted, or what Theano S. Terkenli (2004) describes as a ‘cultural battleground’. The southern seaside resorts and ports at places such as Dover, Hastings and Margate are visible places in which immigrants have been housed in large numbers, a fact seized upon by sections of the British press and politicians as examples of an uncontrollable ‘flood’ of immigration attendant with their bleak economic prospects following the decline of maritime industries and coastal tourism (see for example BBC, 1999; Gillan, 1999; Barrow, 2013). These resorts therefore vividly indicate a loss of a certain traditional white ‘Britishness’ and enact a fear of invasion and contamination. The Indian Isha therefore offers a triple threat to secure notions of patriarchal Britishness (as a female who originates from a place Britain no longer controls and haunts a place no longer representative of colonial success).

Remember Me, alongside the previous examples, also recalls Alain Corbin’s (1994) conception of the seaside as a site that signals a return to animality: ‘Near the strand, that indeterminate place of biological transitions, the links connecting mankind with the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms can be seen with remarkable clarity’ (p. 223). Corbin and Habermann (2002) both indicate that this animalistic urge can be seen in literature that focuses on the practice of deliberate shipwrecking: the arena of the ‘wrecker’ who entice ships to dash on the rocks and forfeit their cargo. This was a theme of Daphne Du Maurier’s *Jamaica Inn*, adapted for ITV in 1983 and the BBC in 2014, both adaptations suffused with gothic imagery and eruptions of violence and a Manichean sense of the individual—‘two images of the human coexist, one the

shadow of the other, in a precarious and uncanny equilibrium' (Habermann, p. 112). This 'animality' is also linked to the appearance of the 'monstrous feminine'. The motif of monstrous female associated with the sea and perpetuating a deadly curse also links thematically with *The Woman in Black* (1989), *Bewitched* (1983), *The Visitor* (1982) and the 2010 version of *Whistle and I'll Come to You*, as well as the ghostly first Mrs De Winter, personified as the sea in Du Maurier's *Rebecca* (BBC 1979, 1997). They all position the gothic 'return of the repressed' in the form of an aquatic iteration of Barbara Creed's 'monstrous feminine' (2011). In *The Woman in Black*, the titular woman in black haunts the central character as he visits Eel Marsh house, a site only accessible across a narrow causeway, which is entirely engulfed by the sea on a daily basis. Michel Foucault (2001) suggests that the sea is often personified as female, particularly in western culture, as it is seen as irrational and un-tameable compared with the relative stability of the land. The maritime monstrous females, in their irrational hatred and inability to slake their thirst for revenge exemplify this. In this regard, Isha, being Indian, may be viewed as the expression of repressed colonial guilt: an unhappy past, which cannot be denied, which returns to haunt the present. Barbara Creed (invoking both Freud and Kristeva, 2011) discusses the 'monstrous feminine' as an enactment of the abject which transgresses borders, and here the border is once again the liminal space between the sea and the land, between sleeping and waking life. That which is encountered at the place where the sea meets the land, or returns from the depths of the sea, is not human, determinable, clean, whole or properly functioning.

The effect of horrific repetition is also apparent in these texts in the form of dream sequences and repeated images, often involving hauntings and apparitions along the seashore. In both versions of *Whistle*, the beach visited during daylight hours provides the material for nocturnal nightmares, as the protagonist is chased and terrified by an unknown apparition. In the 2010 version of *Whistle*, the chasing figure has a certain clarity, alluded to be a female, alike to be the protagonist's wife (and a manifestation of both grief and guilt). In the 1968 version, it is entirely indistinct, and characterised by unsettling and jarring, animalistic sounds, perhaps closer to the both Conrad's dark doppelganger and Habermann's uncanny equilibrium. In *the Woman in Black* (1989) the central character, Arthur Kidd, is haunted by an aural reminder of a tragedy in which the eponymous woman's child drowns at high tide. The tragedy is re-enacted on a daily basis with the regularity of the tide, linking the natural diurnal maritime with the horrific. Similarly, in

Remember Me, Hannah has recurring dreams where Isha plagues her, with the recurrent images of seashore, turbulent sea, lighthouse, drowning and the black and white tiles of Scarborough seafront. On each occasion the dream is curtailed with Isha turning her face towards the camera and a short, sharp terrifying noise (in the same manner as the Professor's dream in the 1968 *Whistle*). If the space between the sea and the land provides an in-between space, and the dream provides a site in-between the sleeping and waking life, then dreams about the beach may be said to offer a form of hyper-liminality: an excessive disconnect to the 'known', the rational and the tangible.

Conclusion

Aided by the insular and intimate nature of British television as well as its propensity to history and nostalgia, British supernatural drama has been punctuated by numerous gothic conceptions of water. The maritime sphere has been integral within British culture as a site of national triumph and success, and ships, sailing and attendant maritime activities have all contributed to a sense of national identity, character and spirit. Yet, as the examples discussed here testify, the aquatic also gives birth to monsters and monstrous fear, providing an antithesis to these myths of national triumph. Beaches, seafronts, seas, rivers, lakes and other sources of the aquatic all harbour the possibility of the eruption of an unwanted past. Water in these claustrophobic televisual texts, whilst occasionally baptismal, is not characteristically sustaining or rejuvenating, but dangerous and liminal: it echoes the misdeeds of personal and colonial history, of hubris, warfare and of patriarchy. If the ship is a ship of state, and the sea journey a source of linear national triumph, these examples offer a nation veering dangerously off-course, and rife for self-destruction. In a twenty-first century climate of comfortable nostalgia for an imagined British past, these examples offer the opposite: the sea washes up a fearful and uncomfortable history. With the concomitant loss of empire and influence, and the decline of coastal towns and industries, these spaces have a ghostly resonance, a return to an older, even biblical, conception of a ravenous and punishing sea. The environment is a deathly echo of humanity's sins.

The sea is haunted and dangerous, and the place where the sea meets the land is equally the place of death. In a Britain where coastal areas do not always have the happy and carefree

associations they once had, where the sea is no longer a place of national prosperity, and where rising sea levels and coastal erosion highlight the vulnerability and fragility of the British Isles, a line uttered regarding the appearance of Isha in *Remember Me*, ‘There’s always water - water that shouldn’t be there’, takes on a deeper and eerie significance.

BIOGRAPHY

Mark Fryers has published numerous articles and chapters on film and television scholarship, including in the *Journal of Popular Television*, and on topics such as the British costume drama, British maritime film and television, the sound aesthetics of British horror television and on *Jaws* and the nautical spaces of death. He has also contributed chapters on global folklore and animated films, constructions of identity in British children’s maritime television and the British costume drama to edited collections. His principal research interest is in the intersection between environment and identity. He is currently Visiting Lecturer in Film, Television and Media at Greenwich University and previously at UEA and NYU London.

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