

LITERARY FORM AND COASTAL SUBLIMITY IN ANN RADCLIFFE'S *THE ROMANCE OF THE FOREST*¹

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Abstract: This article explores Ann Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) and the eighteenth-century EcoGothic through her construction of the littoral space. Radcliffe's early and middle romances combine prose with "interspersed" poetry and play with fictive European topographies. While Radcliffe's landscape description has received significant attention in scholarly research, much less has been done to consider how her writing might contribute to understanding ecocritical concerns and values in eighteenth-century literature. This article focuses on the coastal Gothic in *The Romance of the Forest*, which invites new understandings of the relationship between humans and the natural world and responds to calls from the Blue Humanities to reread the aquatic space.

Keywords: EcoGothic, Ann Radcliffe, Green Romanticism, form, littoral Gothic, sublimity

Ann Radcliffe's novels grow out of a tradition of nature writing as she draws on familiar eighteenth-century aesthetic cues: sublimity, the picturesque, and spirituality through the landscape.² Christopher Hitt suggests that eighteenth-century texts "demonstrate a double gesture of both deference and mastery before nature."³ As will be shown in this article, the balance between "deference" and

¹ The author would like to acknowledge that at the time of developing this article she was supported by a PhD tuition scholarship from Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU).

² James Kirwan, "Vicarious Edification: Radcliffe and the Sublime," in *The Greening of Literary Scholarship: Literature, Theory, and the Environment*, ed. Steven Rosendale (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002) 225 and 240; Christopher Hitt, "Ecocriticism and the Long Eighteenth Century," *College Literature* 31, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 123-25.

³ Hitt, "Ecocriticism and the Long Eighteenth Century" 132.

“mastery” appears in Radcliffe’s use and construction of the littoral space through contrasting forms: poetry and prose. Scholars such as Jane Stabler have repositioned Radcliffe as a stylistic pioneer in the Romantic mode who “created the taste by which she was depreciated.”⁴ Comparing Radcliffe’s and Keats’ poetry, Stabler points to the ways in which Radcliffe’s motifs “haunted the so-called second generation of Romantic poets.”⁵ Across her first four novels, Radcliffe combined forms and genres as the stories are “interspersed with some pieces of poetry.”⁶ Ingrid Horrocks points out that these verses are deliberately placed, considering “thematic as well as generic issues at stake,” to connect literary and sympathetic experiences.⁷ Many of the poems in *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) explore the coastal environment in contrast to the titular setting of the novel. The poems reinforce the narrative that they have momentarily paused and invite different aesthetic experiences into the novel.

In geographical terms, *The Romance of the Forest* is one of Radcliffe’s most ambitious novels as she (re)constructs several different topographies. For example, the main plot follows Adeline’s escapes across France and Savoy, and her eventual re-inheritance in Paris. Over the course of the story, she encounters a forest and ruins, ambiguous sites which are at once nurturing and facilitate the concealment of historic crimes; the sublime Alps; and the coasts of southern France, which I will explore in this article. Hester Blume has argued that the aquatic provides often overlooked “geophysical, historical, and imaginative properties.”⁸ The “geophysical” qualities of the coast (the movement and sound of the water itself) and the “imaginative” potential of the sea allow Radcliffe to explore new sites of sublimity and experiment with the structure of her narrative. By investigating the relationship between poetry, prose, and thematic setting, I will address how Radcliffe imagined the interruptions of the natural world through shifts in form. The first section of this article will consider how ecocritical approaches to Romantic texts might be applied to Radcliffe’s novels. Given this

⁴ Jane Stabler, “Ann Radcliffe’s Poetry: The Poetics of Refrain and Inventory,” in *Ann Radcliffe, Romanticism and the Gothic*, ed. Angela Wright and Dale Townshend (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 201.

⁵ Stabler, “Ann Radcliffe’s Poetry” 201

⁶ Ann Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest*, ed. Chloe Chard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) n.p., original titlepage.

⁷ Ingrid Horrocks, “Her Ideas Arranged Themselves: Re-memembering Poetry in Radcliffe,” *Studies in Romanticism* 47, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 508; see also Serena Baiesi, “The Power of the Lute and the Genius of the Language: Ann Radcliffe’s Poetic Tune,” *Questione Romantica* (2017): 109.

⁸ Hester Blum, “Introduction: Oceanic Studies,” *Atlantic Studies* 10, no. 2 (2013): 151.

scholarly foundation, in the second section I bring a new spatial setting to the fore: the coast and clifftops in *The Romance of the Forest*. The final section of the article explores the relationship between terror, sublimity, and the aquatic space, with a close reading of the poem “Song of a Spirit.”

Radcliffe and Green Romanticism

Much of Radcliffe’s corpus was published following the 1789 French Revolution, a context she shares with Romantics such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and unsurprisingly, her novels evidence what might now be considered a Romantic engagement with nature.⁹ In *Romantic Ecology*, Jonathan Bate proposed a shift to ecocritical engagement with Romantic writing by suggesting that

if one historicizes the idea of an ecological viewpoint – a respect for the earth and a scepticism as to the orthodoxy that economic growth and material production are the be-all and end-all of human society – one finds oneself squarely in the Romantic tradition [...].¹⁰

Bate argues that ecological relationships are at the heart of Wordsworth’s poetry.¹¹ Reading Radcliffe’s texts through a similar ecocritical lens demonstrates the importance of her landscape-oriented poetry and prose to the Gothic. For example, Lisa Kröger uses “Green Romanticism” as a basis to demonstrate that forests are essential Gothic settings in Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forest* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) among other texts.¹²

Since the late twentieth century, scholars have connected Romantic thought with ecocritical agendas. However, this approach has come under increasing scrutiny due to its Eurocentrism and the problematic association between Romanticism and colonialism.¹³ While these issues must be acknowledged,

⁹ George Dekker, *The Fictions of Romantic Tourism: Radcliffe, Scott, and Mary Shelley* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005) 93-94.

¹⁰ Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2013) 9.

¹¹ Bate, *Romantic Ecology* 7-8.

¹² Lisa Kröger, “Panic, Paranoia and Pathos: Ecocriticism in the Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel,” in *Ecogothic*, ed. Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013) 15-27.

¹³ Graham Huggan, “Postcolonial Ecocriticism and the Limits of Green Romanticism,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 45, no. 1 (2009): 3-6.

Romantic texts remain valuable case studies on literary engagements with nature since the late eighteenth century. For example, Alison Milbank highlights the proto-Romantic characteristics of Radcliffe's earliest publications through the "visionary perspective" of her heroines.¹⁴ Milbank suggests that natural spaces in *A Sicilian Romance* (1790) are ethically inflected and draw a parallel with Wordsworthian thought. However, while Radcliffe's poetry in response to landscape facilitates a "meditative distantiation that is necessary for the engendering of an ethical gaze," it is built upon a separation "between the mind and the natural world" that is ultimately incompatible with Romanticism.¹⁵ Arguably, by examining *The Romance of the Forest*, published just one year later, one can find a union between nature and the mind.

Radcliffe played a defining role in shaping Gothic spaces such as ruins. However, Kröger points out that "[w]hile much is made about the Gothic edifices, such as the ancient estate or the crumbling castle, the environment, most often seen in the Gothic forest, plays just as integral a role in these novels."¹⁶ The forest promises "solace, renewal, [and] protection."¹⁷ In *The Romance of the Forest*, Pierre La Motte, the ambiguous character at the centre of the subplot, is reformed and re-educated on his familial, legal, and ethical obligations through self-reflection in Fontainville forest. Furthermore, Adeline is consoled by "frequent[] ramble[s] into the forest, where the river, winding through a glade, diffused coolness, and with its murmuring accents, invited repose."¹⁸ However, like heroines in Radcliffe's later publications, Adeline finds more than "solace" in nature, as she encounters the sublime.¹⁹ George Dekker has pointed to the ways Radcliffe engages with the

¹⁴ Alison Milbank, "Ways of Seeing in Ann Radcliffe's Early Fiction: *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789) and *A Sicilian Romance* (1790)," in *Ann Radcliffe, Romanticism and the Gothic*, ed. Angela Wright and Dale Townshend (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 86.

¹⁵ Milbank, "Ways of Seeing in Ann Radcliffe's Early Fiction" 86.

¹⁶ Kröger, "Panic, Paranoia and Pathos: Ecocriticism in the Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel" 16.

¹⁷ Kröger, "Panic, Paranoia and Pathos: Ecocriticism in the Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel" 17. Indeed, when *The Romance of the Forest* was adapted for the stage by James Boaden in 1794, he called the play *Fontainville Forest* and omitted settings such as the Alps and coasts found in the novel, indicating the essential role of the forest.

¹⁸ Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest* 34-35.

¹⁹ Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and Ellena in *The Italian*. With each publication Radcliffe deepened the ethical dimension of natural space, so that it became a place through which divinity is tangible. Kröger, "Panic, Paranoia and Pathos: Ecocriticism in the Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel" 17-18. For more on the ways Radcliffe expresses faith through landscape, and her interest in "what Wordsworth would later call 'natural

forest space as “more an enveloping and labyrinthine presence than a place that could be accurately visualised and mapped.”²⁰ In other words, beyond the comprehension and control of the human.

Robert Miles suggests that in *The Romance of the Forest*, Radcliffe establishes a “Romantic ‘topography of the self,’ a nexus of subjectivity, nature and language.”²¹ In other words, nature affords knowledge of the self, and this is captured in Adeline’s poetry. The forest (among other locales) is integral to how the heroine expresses and manages her emotions. In the last two lines of a sonnet, “To the Visions of Fancy,” which Adeline uses to “commemorate” a walk in Fontainville, she calls out: “O! still--ye shadowy forms! attend my lonely hours, / still chase my real cares with your illusive powers!”²² The forest is animated by the “shadowy” figments of Adeline’s imagination, which can “chase” away the “real cares” of the human world. In nature, Adeline is brought further from the pressures of her socio-economic status (as “orphan, subsisting on the bounty of others”)²³ and closer to a sense of herself as an imaginative being. Writing on the inspiration of Italian performance poetry in Radcliffe’s writing, Serena Baiesi suggests the heroines “are naturally endowed with musical and poetical skills, gifts they use to fuse themselves to the natural world.”²⁴ Adeline’s compositions are spontaneous due to their irregular placement in the novel, and yet inherently predictable in the sense that they are tied to accessing the self through nature.²⁵

A View from the Clifftops in *The Romance of the Forest*

While a forest populates the first two volumes of the novel, by the third, Adeline has found relative safety and is no longer forced to escape the betrayals and schemes of men such as the Marquis de Montalt and La Motte. It is in this part of the novel, Radcliffe shifts topographies. The heroine’s passage through the Alps, from Savoy (Switzerland) to Nice, and later around the coast by boat, accompanying her ailing adoptive father Arnaud La Luc and new sister Clara,

piety,” see Anne Chandler, “Ann Radcliffe and Natural Theology,” *Studies in the Novel* 38, no. 2 (2006): 138.

²⁰ Dekker, *The Fictions of Romantic Tourism* 104.

²¹ Robert Miles, *Ann Radcliffe: The Great Enchantress* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) 15.

²² Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest* 35.

²³ Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest* 346.

²⁴ Baiesi, “The Power of the Lute and the Genius of the Language” 116.

²⁵ Horrocks suggests that there is a “self-consciousness with which Radcliffe uses quotations and poems.” Horrocks, “Her Ideas Arranged Themselves” 508.

offer several examples of Radcliffe's sublime in prose and poetry. For example, from a clifftop Adeline and Clara watch the sunrise:

"Heaven, earth, ocean, smil'd!"

They sat down on a point of rock, overshadowed by lofty palm-trees, to contemplate at leisure the magnificent scene. The sun was just emerged from the sea, over which his rays shed a flood of light, and darted a thousand brilliant tints on the vapours that ascended the horizon, and floated there in light clouds, leaving the bosom of the waters below clear as chrystal, except where the white surges were seen to beat upon the rocks; and discovering the distant sails of the fishing boats, and the far distant highlands of Corsica, tinted with ætherial blue.²⁶

Radcliffe borrows the phrase "Heaven, earth, ocean, smil'd!" from James Beattie's *The Minstrel* perhaps to signal her divinely and emotionally charged landscape.²⁷ This prospect inspires Clara to draw, but she soon throws her pencil "aside in despair" while Adeline remains "absorbed" in quiet "contemplation."²⁸ Jakub Lipski compellingly argues for Radcliffe's engagement with the "sister arts, as well as the indiscernible (at times) boundary between nature and art."²⁹ Through painting, music, and poetry, Radcliffe offers an "[e]xpression, rather than representation" of the natural world.³⁰ Radcliffe uses the scattered light ("a thousand brilliant tints") to redirect the eye from the perfected azure surface of the water, to the frayed edges of the waves breaking on the rockface, to the "distant" boats and landforms. Importantly, the "magnificent scene" is transitional and under the spell of the "sun," such that the role of the human is only to be first an observer and appreciator of the natural space. The sublimity of the scenery to some extent precludes (immediate) artistic expression, as Clara's attempt to draw is frustrated. Displays of responsive "genius" from Radcliffe's heroines are ecologically informed, usually not found in reason but inspired by beauty, and more potently, as in the scene quoted above, through sublimity. It is

²⁶ Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest* 281-82.

²⁷ Chloe Chard, "Introduction and Notes," in Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest*, 395.

²⁸ Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest* 282.

²⁹ Jakub Lipski, "Ann Radcliffe and the Sister Arts Ideal," in *The Enchantress of Words, Sounds and Images: Anniversary Essays on Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823)*, ed. Jakub Lipski and Jacek Mydla (Palo Alto, CA: Academica Press, LLC, 2015) 7.

³⁰ Lipski, "Ann Radcliffe and the Sister Arts Ideal" 9. The "genius" behind artistic expression is also noted by Serena Baiesi and Robert Miles.

on the path descending the cliff, that Adeline attempts her artistic rendering of the sunrise through a poem.³¹

In "Sunrise: A Sonnet," Adeline seems to respond not so much to the sun, described extensively in prose, but to the lyrical *I*'s movements through the natural space. The poem includes a series of verbs to "wander," "catch," "rest," "climb," and "watch" the sunrise, which "floated on [the heroine's] memory, only in softened colours."³² It seems that some of the sublimity is lost in the process of recollection, but it is only by considering the "softened colours" that one might capture it. Indeed, the sublime should be so elevating and all-encompassing that humans should be unable to separate themselves sufficiently from the space. As Pierre Dubois asserts, "sublime scenery works in two different ways: it is both frightening and reassuring, both awful and awesome, both an intimation of impending danger and a promise of salvation."³³ The clifftop described above exemplifies the latter, as the sunlight and "white surges" of the sea are a reminder of heaven imprinted on Adeline's memory. Miles suggests that in the Radcliffean sublime, "monuments of nature glorify the hand of the divine maker," which to some extent "imposes a hierarchical structure of self-abasement."³⁴ Indeed, the two women on the clifftop, Clara and Adeline, fade into the background in favour of landscape description in prose, subsequently revisited in poetry.

"Sunrise: A Sonnet" also allowed Radcliffe to evoke another eighteenth-century poet, William Collins, and his "Ode to Evening."³⁵ In Collins's poem, the "bright-haired sun / sits in yon western tent, whose cloudy, skirts, / with brede ethereal wove / o'erhang his wavy bed [...]."³⁶ In Radcliffe's exploration of daybreak, it is the "waving woods" rather than obscure clouds that "o'erhung" "the cool vale."³⁷ Radcliffe explicitly uses similar terms to Collins and attempts to reproduce his sense of obscurity, building a sense of the sublime through the growing light of day rather than the darkness of the evening.³⁸ Radcliffe's

³¹ Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest* 282.

³² Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest* 282.

³³ Pierre Dubois, "Music and the Feminine Sublime in Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*," *Études anglaises* 67, no. 4 (2014): 458.

³⁴ Miles, *The Great Enchantress* 125-26.

³⁵ Chard, "Introduction and Notes" xxi-xxiii and 375.

³⁶ William Collins, "Ode to Evening," in *Eighteenth-Century Poetry: An Annotated Anthology* (3rd ed.), ed. David Fairer and Christine Gerrard (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015) 440, lines 5-8.

³⁷ Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest* 282.

³⁸ Radcliffe also writes a significant number of poems on the theme of evening. Alison Milbank, "Milton, Melancholy and the Sublime in the 'Female' Gothic from Radcliffe to Le Fanu," *Women's Writing* 1, no. 2 (1994): 145-48.

appreciation for Collins' poetry speaks to a shared interest with Wordsworth and Coleridge. Sandro Jung observes that for Wordsworth, Collins was a poet of "sensibility," adept at landscape description, and for Coleridge, a poet of "sublimity" in the Burkean sense.³⁹ Both of these characteristics are present in Radcliffe's mutually informed prose and poetry.

Adeline and Clara cannot distance themselves from the emotional registers of the view in order to draw or recite poetry while watching the sunrise. Instead, they are held "at once humbled before nature and exalted over it."⁴⁰ In her discussion of "colour" in Radcliffe's novels, Jayne Lewis notes "relentlessly visible atmospheres – the clouds, fogs, vapors, and hazes [... – that] tend to smooth transitions from one sanctioned aesthetic register (the sublime, say) to another (for example, the beautiful)."⁴¹ The sunrise is just such an atmosphere, Radcliffe's prose centres on the "brillian[cy]" of the sunlight on the "vapours" on the colour of the waves, and on the "shady" position from which Adeline and Clara overlook the sea. It is in the beautiful "romantic glen," rather than on the sublime precipice, where Adeline begins to shape her verse.⁴² For Radcliffe, artistic composition is entangled with philosophical values and ecologically informed responses. If ecocriticism is about attending to more than the human, Radcliffe built her Gothic around not only the limitations of the human but also the ways the environment could shape the individual and their art.⁴³

Littoral Poetry: From Green Romanticism to the Blue Humanities

Although much of the action in *The Romance of the Forest* occurs in distinctly land-based settings (Fontainville forest, Savoy, and Paris), many poems allude to oceanic and aquatic spaces. As demonstrated above, in the novel's third volume, the coast is a site of sublime recovery with the highest concentration of poetry. Therefore, the littoral space becomes intimately connected with the "interspersions" of verse form in Radcliffe's writing. Miles states that for Radcliffe's "readership, landscape has become spectral (their minds are 'haunted' by it); moreover, their readerly dreams are fed, not by fantasies of connection, of

³⁹ Sandro Jung, "Wordsworth and Collins," *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews* 22, no. 1 (2009): 23.

⁴⁰ Hitt, "Ecocriticism and the Long Eighteenth Century" 129.

⁴¹ Jayne Lewis, "'No Colour of Language': Radcliffe's Aesthetic Unbound," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39, no. 3 (Spring 2006): 379.

⁴² Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest* 282.

⁴³ Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* 39-40.

romantic love and the social, but by reveries of isolation.”⁴⁴ The coast is a haunting and isolated environment, not least because of the quality of the water itself, spectral in its unfixed form: able to move, flow, and change shape. The poetics of the coast “feeds” the fantasies of Radcliffe’s heroine.

While sailing between Nice and Languedoc, the “waste of waters”⁴⁵ renders Adeline vulnerable and uncertain:

[... She] gazed with an emotion the most sublime, on the boundless expanse of waters that spread on all sides: she seemed as if launched into a new world; the grandeur and immensity of the view astonished and overpowered her: for a moment she doubted the truth of the compass, and believed it to be almost impossible for the vessel to find its way over the pathless waters to any shore. And when she considered that a plank alone separated her from death, a sensation of unmixed terror superceded that of sublimity, and she hastily turned her eyes from the prospect, and her thoughts from the subject.⁴⁶

Moving across this aquatic surface and terrified by its depth, Radcliffe suggests that the heroine doubts the “truth of the compass.” The empirical and scientific are subordinate to the “pathless waters.” Adeline finds the reality of her position on the ocean, of her proximity, separated “from death” by a thin piece of wood, initially sublime and progressively terrifying. It is a “prospect” she cannot attend to. Accompanying a deep sense of solitude and self-reflection inspired by proximity to the sea is a reminder that natural spaces are not always a source of “smiling” recovery, as the clifftop scene might have suggested. Embedded in the seascape itself, Adeline cannot bear the intensity of a natural space that challenges the stability of the land (“shore”).

There are several possible reasons for Radcliffe’s employment of littoral tropes. Firstly, the author’s connection to and knowledge of the coasts of England as a tourist.⁴⁷ Secondly, an interest in intertextual referencing, as Radcliffe’s construction of the sea functions as a response to Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*.⁴⁸ Finally, an acute

⁴⁴ Miles, *The Great Enchantress* 127.

⁴⁵ Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest* 292.

⁴⁶ Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest* 293.

⁴⁷ Rictor Norton, *Mistress of Udolpho: The Life of Ann Radcliffe* (London: Leicester University Press, 1998): 176-78; and Marek Błaszak, “Ann Radcliffe’s Gothic Romances and the Sea,” *Explorations: A Journal of Language and Literature* 9 (2021): 30-32.

⁴⁸ Rictor Norton, “Ann Radcliffe, The Shakespeare of Romance Writers,” in *Shakespearean Gothic*, ed. Christy Desmet and Anne Williams (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009) 45.

appreciation for an environment outside of human control, which commands the emotional cues of her heroine Adeline. Toni Wein points out that the use of littoral poems such as “Song of a Spirit” and “Titania to Her Love” also charge natural spaces with a narrative of the British Empire as Radcliffe mentions products traded on “the world’s markets,” which Britain profited from through territorial expansion and naval power, once again a context she shares with the Romantics.⁴⁹

In Radcliffe’s novels, the (female) poet is associated with natural spaces and poetry with an inherently creative liminality.⁵⁰ Littoral poetry contrasts with Radcliffe’s land-oriented prose across most of *The Romance of the Forest*. However, the coast in “Song of a Spirit” troubles the novel’s literary form and setting. In the second volume and long before her expedition to Nice, Adeline is captured by the Marquis de Montalt during an attempted escape from the forest and ruin. The heroine is brought to his villa, where “Song of a Spirit” is performed to distract and seduce as the Marquis attempts to force her into marriage. Like the heroine, the poem is contained in the patriarchal Gothic space of the villa. Yet, the (female) lyrical I immediately draws its listeners outside the walls of the building: “In the sightless air I dwell, / on the sloping sun-beams play; / delve the cavern’s inmost cell, / where never yet did day-light stray.”⁵¹ The twelve stanzas examine movement and audibility, such as the limitations of freedom and agency. Joan Passey observes that “[t]he ambiguity of sound – nebulous, unfixed (in both temporal and spatial terms) – lends itself to the uncanniness of the Gothic, and the obscurity of terror.”⁵² While Passey discusses background sound, silence, music, and dialogue, arguably, poetry offers the most abrupt change in sound in Radcliffe’s novels. “Interspersed” verses create new auditory rhythms in contrast to the pattern of the prose. Littoral poems carry with them oceanic soundscapes. For example, the use of sibilance in the opening three lines quoted above and towards the close of “Song of a Spirit” imitate the wash of waves, and sounds of the coast are associated with mortality: “In thrilling sounds that murmur woe, / and pausing silence makes more dread; / in music breathing from below / sad, solemn strains, that wake the dead.”⁵³

“Song of a Spirit” plays with boundaries of land, prose, movement, death, and time. The poem references the sea and the moonlight, bringing a tidal ebb and

⁴⁹ Toni Wein, *British Identities, Heroic Nationalisms, and the Gothic Novel, 1764-1824* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) 115-17.

⁵⁰ Stabler, “Ann Radcliffe’s Poetry: The Poetics of Refrain and Inventory” 185.

⁵¹ Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest* 161.

⁵² Joan Passey, “Sound and Silence: The Aesthetics of the Auditory in the Novels of Ann Radcliffe,” *Horror Studies* 7, no. 2 (2016): 190.

⁵³ Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest* 162.

flow to Radcliffe's nature poetry. The spirit "delves," "dives," and "skims" through "caverns and briny" deeps, employing verbs associated with swimming and flight. The sea nymphs hail a moment of "rapture" and the lyrical I imagines being transported to a "ruined tower" in the moonlight: "Or hie me to some ruin'd tow'r, / faintly shewn by moon-light gleam, / where the lone wand'rer owns my pow'r / in shadows dire that substance seem."⁵⁴ This moment is sublime, as the Gothic aesthetic of ruins interacts with the moonlight and offers a dark counterpoint to the "airy clift."⁵⁵ In an overt allusion to Milton, Radcliffe uses the clifftops to establish vulnerability, uncertain boundaries and power.⁵⁶ Once again, the natural world is sublime, and after conjuring fanciful dreams, the voice of the lyrical I is subsumed by the coastal "gales of eve."⁵⁷ Stabler describes the poem as invoking "the movement of an invisible agency that is not quite disembodied, possessing an 'ear' and the ability to 'gambol' and 'sit.'" For Stabler, the spirit is just out of reach, and this lyric provides Adeline with the "means of propulsion" to escape the villain.⁵⁸ Poetry permeates the whispered sexual and violent exchange in the Marquis' Hall, prompting escape and bringing us to the boundary of what is knowable (a patriarchal Gothic villa) and imaginary (the dreams of the spirit and the coast).

From the forest in volumes one and two, to "Song of a Spirit" in de Montalt's villa to the clifftops of Nice and Languedoc, Radcliffe uses poetry to signal her appreciation of nature. Given the ways artistic production and the sublime are mutually informed in these scenes, "exaltation," as Hitt puts it, might be a better description of the presence of the natural world in Radcliffe's novels.⁵⁹ In *The Romance of the Forest*, prose and poetry are ecologically engaged and generated by or for a frequently isolated heroine. Furthermore, the aquatic space and verse form destabilise the prose narrative by pushing the land-Gothic outside the frame. References to the coast and the sea feel tidal. They become a sublime interruption that breaks the rhythm of Radcliffe's writing and constitute an irresistible characteristic of her Gothic.

⁵⁴ Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest* 161-62.

⁵⁵ Wordsworth also employed Gothic aesthetics in his poetry, see Gamer's comments on "Elegiac Stanzas, suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle, in a Storm, painted by Sir George Beaumont" in Michael Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception, and Canon Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 14-18.

⁵⁶ For more on Radcliffe's employment of Miltonic imagery see Milbank, "Milton, Melancholy and the Sublime in the 'Female' Gothic from Radcliffe to Le Fanu."

⁵⁷ Perhaps another reference to Collins' "Ode to Evening," see 1.4. See also Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest* 162.

⁵⁸ Stabler, "Ann Radcliffe's Poetry: The Poetics of Refrain and Inventory" 192.

⁵⁹ Hitt, "Ecocriticism and the Long Eighteenth Century" 129.

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