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Abstract: English Romanticism, albeit extensively studied by scholars, has not been entirely explored with a gendered perspective: this is why Anne Bannerman has been excluded from the canon of literature. This paper explores, through a feminist perspective, three poems from her two collections of poetry. As a result, a proto-feminist intention can be seen. In these three poems a desire of change for the condition of women can be seen, and it is expressed by using different Gothic figures, which can be included in the 'femme fatale' archetype. This feminist Gothicism is enhanced with the use of symbols and uncanny appearances with the productive goal of denouncing the pervasive patriarchy of the society she lived in. Although further research about Anne Bannerman's writings should be done to get a deeper knowledge of the early feminist manifestations, in this paper her writing proves to be rich enough to be introduced in later studies of 19th century poetry, Gothicism, and proto-feminism.

Keywords: Anne Bannerman, proto-feminism, gothic, romanticism, Scottish literature, femme fatale.

Marta PARRONDO GONZÁLEZ

Dark figures of female liberation. The mermaid, the nun, and the spectre in Anne Bannerman's poetry.

"Miss Anne Bannerman likewise should not be forgotten.
If it be the purpose of this kind of ballad poetry powerfully to excite the imagination,
few persons have succeeded better than this gifted lady."

—Walter Scott, *Essays on Imitations of the Ancient Ballads* (1830)

0. Introduction

The largely unknown poetry of Anne Bannerman is the subject of research in this paper. Bannerman was a Scottish Romantic poet who used Gothic elements that nowadays can be read and analysed through a feminist scope and allow the conclusion that her poems were written with a proto-feminist intention in mind. To support this hypothesis, this paper explores the following poems: *The Perjured Nun* and *The Dark Ladie*, included in her first collection, *Tales of Superstition and Chivalry* (1802), and *The Mermaid,* which was published in the collection *Poems* (1806), her second and last published work. While these poems are all different from one another, they all have one thing in common: their powerful main characters are women.

As a Romantic poet, Bannerman uses very peculiar methods of writing: she mostly wrote following the tradition of the ballad, which connects her to the Scottish literary tradition and distances her from her British Romantic contemporaries. Her poetry can be seen as a tool through which she denounces the social injustices of her time. The most striking feature of Bannerman's poetry are her avenging women, characters who longed to right the wrongs that men had inflicted upon them. She writes these murderous women in a way that subverts the prototypical femme fatales that inhabited English literature at the time. Bannerman uses symbols like the veil to distinguish between female and male social spheres, emphasizing forms of otherness that society placed upon women. Within her poetry, the reader can find women with courage to act according to their own desires.

It is worth noting that even though it is impossible for Anne Bannerman to have written the poems with the feminist concepts that will be used in this paper to uncover the protofeminist ideals that might have been unconsciously in her mind. Julia Kristeva points out that such unconscious desires might be present in writing by means of elements like rhythm and symbolism of which the author might not have been completely aware of, and these elements can show the real intentions of the speaker (Sadehi 1491). Even though these concepts and terminology were not available at the end of the 18th century, the thought might be present long before the concept was coined and first used by scholars, which opens the door to feminist interpretations of texts that belong to a time in which feminism was not yet a movement such as the one it is today. Women have looked for emancipation for centuries, and Bannerman is a perfect example of doing so by using poetry as a tool.

1. Anne Bannerman's background: Scottish Romanticism, Gothic poetry, and proto-feminism

Taking into consideration aspects of her writing style and the timeframe in which she wrote, Anne Bannerman can be included in the Romantic Scottish tradition. Although very little is known about her personal life, the approximate dates of her birth and death have recently been published: she was born in Edinburgh in 1765 and died in Portugal in 1829 (Craciun 156). She belonged to the Scottish Literary Circle of Edinburgh, through which she was able to work side by side with figures as important as Walter Scott. It was precisely through the letters of the members of this circle that her presence can be known, as no other trace remains (Heilman xvi). Bannerman got critical acclaim through her collection of Gothic poems Tales of Superstition and Chivalry (1802), which is a compilation of ballads with Gothic themes set mostly in medieval times. This recognition was really short lived, as Poems (1806), her second and last published work was not as well received. With the failure of Poems, Bannerman fell into oblivion and ended up having to work as an apprentice (Heilman xv).

Even though Scottish Romanticism is a fairly new field of study, some scholars have already differentiated it from the English Romantic period. With exclusively Scottish features, such as the use of balladry to compose the poems, the usage of tropes so as to create a glorious Scottish past, and the usage of Scottish dialectal features in their writings (Pittock 4), it is clear that the internationally acclaimed and recognised English Romanticism had a Scottish counterpart. It is also worth noting that this Scottish Romantic period coincided with the so-called Scottish Enlightenment, with some of the greatest intellectuals working towards great achievements in their fields. It is in this prolific period that writers like Robert Burns, Joanna Baillie, and of course Anne Bannerman, started publishing their work and conformed the most influential literary circles in Edinburgh.

Anne Bannerman belonged to the literary tradition of Romanticism, but she did not write like her contemporaries. Unlike Wordsworth or Scott, she wrote mostly about female characters who were seeking revenge or liberation in a Gothic setting. It should be noted that even though Romanticism as a literary movement has been widely studied throughout the centuries, the Romantic field has been lacking a gendered perspective (Craciun 7). Thus, many female romantics have been ignored and left out of the canon of English literature.

The Gothic has been an important genre in literature ever since it arose in the English literary tradition, and it is a genre that Romantics embraced in their writings. However, the literary establishment marginalised it —it was considered a feminine literary form, and thus it did not deserve proper recognition (Davison 204). Although the Gothic genre was frowned upon and disregarded, it is worth noting that many writers still created Gothic literature, and many of them were women. Ellen Moers coined the term Female Gothic in an article in 1974, and it has been repeatedly used to analyse and categorise women's Gothic writing. Moers referred to the kind of writing that conveyed the fears and regrets that women had regarding sexuality and childbirth, mostly around the 18th century (Davison 205). While it is a very influential term that can be applied to a vast number of literary works, it is a denomination that falls short when it comes to the great scope of female writers who partook in the Gothic genre. Anne Bannerman's poems do not contain elements about childbirth of sexuality, but

she does cover topics regarding female oppression and male supremacy. Thus, her poetry should be classified as female gothic as well, because she wrote from a feminine perspective and explored how women navigated through life in the late 18th century and early 19th century. Anne Bannerman's poems were set in the distant medieval past, and she directly addressed contemporary problems (Heilman xcix).

18th and 19th century Gothic is now a major source that scholars can lean on to find proto-feminism in texts written by female authors. The term feminism was not coined until the second half of the 19th century, and it only started being used extensively at the end of the century (Offen 126), but this does not mean that the idea of female emancipation was not already present some centuries earlier. Different scholars are still debating what texts and authors can get into the so-called proto-feminist category. However, they agree that all these writers have one thing in common: a critique of the inferior social status of women compared to men can be found throughout their texts. Oftentimes there is also the ambition to improve their situation (Offen 132).

Bannerman takes the figure of the woman, especially within the 'femme fatale' archetype, as her wicked main character, while other writers use different mythical creatures to compose their Gothicism. Although these female characters are very violent, committing repeated murders or haunting people, especially men that had wronged them, the violence that Bannerman writes in her ballads had a productive meaning - her intention might have been to criticise patriarchal injustice and highlight female powerlessness (Craciun 180). The setting is not only important for the Gothic atmosphere that was inherently created through distant past, castles, and ruins. In her ballads, Bannerman criticises the chivalric system that was in place at the time, exposing the corruption, selfishness, and greed at its core, emphasizing that these knights are not protectors, but abusers (Long 99). By locating the narrative poems in ancient time, she was able to freely criticise what she saw as contemporary problems of the society she lived in, especially those of women. It is also worth noting that this temporal setting enhances the Gothic elements of the poem, creating a further sense of discomfort.

Even though some writers did emphasize on the darkness of the medieval times (war, feudal oppression, oppressive religions…), most of them still celebrated the early civilisations that inhabited the island: Saxons, Britons, and Norsemen (Chandler 319). Anne Bannerman acknowledges these past, glorious warriors, although she subverts their role. Through her female speakers in Tales of Chivalry and Superstition, the reader can get to see the other side of the stories and manage to feel the fear that women felt at the time, a fear which is enhanced by the gothic setting. If her contemporaries reached to medieval times looking for the foundations of their civilisation, Bannerman denounces that female oppression has been in our societies since the start, and that 19th century's systematic sexism stems from this very same chivalric system (Chandler 326). The understructures that can be found in her poetry are not so much those of civilisation but, rather, those from which the oppression against women stem from.

What is unsettling about her poetry is not only the settings or the murderous female characters, but also the depiction of unfair social forces, so strong and pervasive that they are deemed as having supernatural power and life of their own (Davison 206). In most of her

Gothic ballads, the readers are forced to question whether the role of women in society is to be the property of men (Long 98). As stated by Williams, "the patriarchal position of women is inherently uncanny; […] their very narrowness is a symptom of the fear they arouse" (95). Women were in a position of obedience towards men, and this affected their entire life. The otherness of these characters was a factor that contributed to the fear that they arose.

Bannerman enhances her texts through intertextuality, referencing other texts from both contemporary romantic writers and other authors that were already established in the canon of British literature. This provides evidence of her great level of knowledge acquired through her self-education, as many poems from her two collections contain scholarly notes (Heilman xlvi). Moreover, it is also an antecedent of what would come in the following centuries regarding social and egalitarian movements in western cultures. The oppressed, the othered, will be able to write back and deconstruct myths and stories that have been passed through generations, which had the intent of damaging women's position in society. By responding and rewriting these contemporary and early texts, women were effectively rewriting their place in history, adding their own points of view which had previously been erased. Gothic balladry and poems are the tools that Bannerman uses in order to provide the feminine perspective of injustice that was pervasive in mediaeval and 18th century British society.

2. Textual Analysis

In order to elaborate on the hypothesis that Anne Bannerman's texts contain proto-feminist themes through the usage of Gothic and balladry, and considering the reduced length of this essay, most of her poems need to be disregarded. The most useful ones to prove this point are taken from Tales of Chivalry and Superstition; in particular, the paper explores The Perjured Nun and The Dark Ladie. While both are Gothic in nature, they also have significant differences that make them stand out on their own. Most of this collection, as its name implies, contains Gothic elements as well as female characters. However, this is not an isolated case in Bannerman's work. In her second collection, Poems (1806), her poetry includes a larger variety of themes, but Gothic proto-feminism can still be found. The best example of this appears in the poem The Mermaid.

Even though she did write some sonnets, Bannerman's poems are mostly long narrative poems with a very irregular structure and rhyme pattern. The one that has received the most critical attention is The Dark Ladie, but the rest of her works are equally as salient in this respect. One feature of her poetry that has captured scholar attention since her poems were rediscovered has been this irregularity. The lack of linearity present in many of her poems can be said to create a disruptive effect, highlighting the proto-feminist characteristics and the transgressive nature of the poem (Williams 91).

As Adriana Craciun states in Fatal Women of Romanticism, "femme fatale figures are legion in the poems of Anne Bannerman" (18). It is inconceivable to analyse Bannerman's poetry through a feminist lens if these avenging characters are not taken into consideration. However, the topics of revengeful women are not the only features that support the proto-feminist approach that the reader can unveil in Bannerman's work: one of the most relevant aspects of The Perjured Nun is not so much the presence of a vindictive woman but a woman

who starts to develop a sense of free will, an idea displayed by means of the apparition of a female spectre. Moreover, although the concept of social spheres had not yet been used, Bannerman uses symbolism to try to separate her vindictive women from the domestic sphere, showing how these characters protected their space so as not to have it polluted by men and their subsequent oppression. These points are further developed in the following sections of this essay. Although they might seem different approaches to the main thesis, they all point in the same direction: the usage of Gothic poetry by Bannerman to vindicate injustices towards women.

2.1 The 'femme fatale' and Bannerman's avenging women

The 'femme fatale' is a pervasive archetype in English literature who began to appear with the rise of Gothic literature and reached its zenith during the Victorian era. Many renowned authors wrote about these murderous women. One of the best-known examples in Romantic poetry is John Keats' La Belle Dame Sans Merci. 'Femme fatales' were also very present in Gothic narrative, for instance in novels by Mary Elizabeth Braddon. Bannerman used the archetype liberally in her writings.

The figure of the femme fatale has been discussed for a very long time in literary criticism as it was one of the first representations of femininity in Western literature (Luczynska 1). The definition has been changing as new approaches to literary criticism appeared, contesting and redefining the archetype, which initially was a beautiful and seductive woman who was, at the same time, destructive. (Allen 4, as cited by Luczynska 5). Nowadays it is more precise to refer to the 'femme fatale' not as a single archetype, but as an umbrella term that embraces all types of 'femme fatales': from Keats' La Belle Dame to Bannerman's revengeful nuns and spectres. It is, then, a heavily politicised way of depicting women in literature, much like the other female archetypes that arose at the same time.

The prototypical femme fatale is usually a hyper feminine woman, who is aligned with fantasies of powerful but submissive women in a heteropatriarchal society (Craciun 15). The easiest way to exemplify what Craciun stated in Fatal Women of Romanticism is by looking at the description of La Belle Dame Sans Merci: "I met a lady in the Meads / full beautiful, a faery's child / her hair was long, her foot was light" (Keats 353). Keats created a woman that, although she was killing soldiers, she was also tender, a perfect singer, and even made love to the male poetic voice first. In stark contrast with the prototypical 'femme fatale' are the women that Anne Bannerman writes in her poetry collections. They are cold-blooded killers, women seeking revenge, effectively overthrowing the idea that women have to be passive and docile (Craciun 15), and, most importantly, are not sexualised by the speaker or the characters present in the scenes. It is worth noting that most of these revengeful plots originate from the wrongdoing of a man who oftentimes tried to get control over women's lives and decisions.

In the collection Tales of Chivalry and Superstition many characters embody the prototype of 'femme fatale' that sought for revenge, but the focus will be on The Dark Ladie, as it contains the character that exemplifies Bannerman's peculiar Femme Fatales the best. In her other collection, Poems, this figure is more diluted, but to prove the thesis that Bannerman

created this type of character consciously and with a pragmatic aim, the 'femme fatale' that is present in The Mermaid will also be discussed.

2.1.1 Revenge and haunting in The Dark Ladie.

In The Dark Ladie the reader meets a female presence who haunts Sir Guyon's soldiers. She appears to them in order to carry out her revenge. These soldiers had previously killed her husband and separated her from her child. By having an innocent woman who has been wronged by a man and later seeks retaliation, Bannerman signals the imbalances of power that existed in the patriarchal society of her time (Heilman c). Haunting and threatening these soldiers is not in the Dark Ladie's nature, as her desperate situation and her anger drive her to vengeance.

Like many other poems and narratives, especially in Gothic literature, The Dark Ladie is set in mediaeval times. The lady preys on the chivalric institutions, as the very title of the volume indicates (Craciun 178). This spectral woman first appears once Sir Guyon arrives in his castle and is getting ready for a feast together with his soldiers. Walter Scott created a medievalist trend in 18th century Scotland, in which he considered the people of the time to be noble savages (Chandler 317). In Bannerman's poetry, the equivalent to chivalric culture in 18th century society would be paternalism (Chandler 326), or the ongoing control of women's lives by men that can be traced to medieval times. It can be said, then, that Bannerman criticises the ideas that Scott was implementing by welcoming medievalism into an already patriarchal society.

The Dark Lady does not merely appear in front of them, but rather "pass'd them by, with measur'd step, and took the upper seat [at the table]" (Bannerman 5). By taking this prominent position, which is usually reserved for people with a high social status either in society or within an aristocratic family, the woman is defying the very root of the chivalric and paternalist system that would otherwise not allow her to have such a position, albeit completely symbolic. She disrupts their feast, a situation in which all of the knights eat at the same time, symbolising a homogeneous, equal society (Chandler 326). The woman emphasises her differences towards these chivalric characters, which both frightens them and empower her. This avenging woman becomes a force which Sir Guyon and his soldiers will not be able to fight. "They gaz'd upon the steps of stone / they gaz'd… but she was gone!" (Bannerman 7). Her ability to disappear and the soldiers' inability to find her is crucial: she does not allow them to fight back or run away from her. From the very first apparition of the Dark Ladie, this group of men begin to suffer the consequences: lack of sleep, hallucinations, and a state of shock during which they can not utter a word.

Bannerman does not provide a tale of female victimisation but one of revenge (Craciun 165). It is only towards the end of the poem that it is revealed why this woman is haunting the castle. In the first reading of The Dark Ladie, the reader is left in awe, just like the inhabitants of the castle. In a sort of epiphanic moment, one of the soldiers reveals the truth and what had happened to the poetic voice, which he will reproduce by saying "he told me that, at last, he heard / some story, how this poor Ladie / had left, alas! Her husband's home" (Bannerman 14). Only at this point the reader gets to see this woman as an entity with feelings,

with specific motivations and a past that influences her present actions. Even the speaker feels sympathy towards her, as she at first is referred to as the Dark Ladie, and later on as "this poor Ladie" (Bannerman 14).

What is significant about this character, then, is that the reader gets to sympathise with what, at first sight, seems to be the evil character. She is trying to right the actions perpetrated by Sir Guyon. While she is also haunting Sir Guyon's soldiers, she is not targeting innocent people - this chivalric order were direct accomplices: they partook in the raids that murdered her husband and separated her from her son. As stated by the speaker in the very first line of the poem, "the knights returned from Holy Land" (Bannerman 3), which leads the reader to assume that Sir Guyon was accompanied by his knights in the quest in which they stumbled upon the formerly alive Dark Ladie, killed her partner and her child, and convinced her to go with them. This woman is both a tormenting presence and an entity that is actively being haunted by the patriarchal society that created her (Smith 147), which only reinforces the hurt and desire for revenge. This can be read as Bannerman's critique to both the lack of justice in the chivalric system and the religious institutions' gender inequality.

The Dark Ladie is a woman who cannot be exterminated, as even when she has left the room and her whereabouts are unknown her haunting effects are present: "when every weary knight was led, / after what they had seen and heard / what wonder! Slumber fled" (Bannerman 8). This spectral presence is psychologically torturing her victims, which makes her more powerful than any other; she is untouchable while at the same time she can debilitate and potentially murder others as she pleases. She is uncontrollable and wild, and no political system is able to control her effects and effectively tame her revenge (Long 98), not even one as old and prestigious as the chivalric mediaeval system.

This conscious act of revenge is not the only aspect that separates Bannerman's The Dark Ladie from other femme fatales within the literary tradition, as she is also not depicted as a beautiful, feminine woman but rather a fusion of feminine and masculine traits which coexist in the same character (Williams 98). She is described as having a very deep voice, "the sound, the tone,… no human voice / could ever reach that echo, deep; / and, ever as they turn'd to rest, it roused them from sleep!" (Bannerman 9). Her body, which would be seen by the other knights, is completely covered, as she is covered by two different veils that do not allow the spectator to discern her figure. She is a wicked woman because she is not feminine nor masculine, something frowned upon in 18th century society. This mysterious marginalises her, but is one of the most powerful tools that she has in order to get revenge.

2.1.1.1 Veiled women in Bannerman's poetry: the case of The Dark Ladie

Female presences who appear wearing a veil or some other sort of non-revealing piece of clothing are very common in Bannerman's poetry, and these veils are one of her strongest symbols, especially in Tales of Chivalry and Superstition. The most salient of Bannerman's veiled characters is the spectre that appears in The Dark Ladie, which will be discussed in detail, but other characters from different poems, like The Prophetess of Seam or The Nun, are also relevant veiled characters.

The spectral figure in The Dark Ladie wears a double veil: black and white. According to tradition, white represents purity and innocence, while black is a colour that has been usually connected to death. This dark colour is another element that makes her a Gothic character, as she can only be seen as darkness, especially in the face. By being related to the dark, her otherness which was previously culturally repressed is brought to the centre of the narration (Cavallaro 48). In an initial, albeit more superficial, reading of the veil as a symbol in the poem, the reader might arrive to the conclusion that these veils are worn so that the Dark Ladie is not perceived as completely feminine. This would tie in with the aforementioned idea that these women were neither masculine nor feminine, which only accentuated their otherness and differentiated them from other more prototypical feme fatales. While it would be a correct interpretation of the symbol, a much deeper and revolutionary layer of meaning can be found, that of the veil as a weapon to separate herself from the social spheres that oppressed women and that men benefited from.

This woman starts showcasing supernatural behaviour, such as "and when he turn'd to look again, / the Ladie was not near!" (Bannerman 13), which turns her into a threat. By disappearing from her assorted place in the castle, a microcosm of mediaeval society that reflected contemporary England, she was getting out of her sphere and invading a space that was not designated for her. Women were brought up to be quasi servants of men in patriarchal society (Carrol 197), but this Dark Ladie will subvert this role and become more powerful than the men in the castle. This Dark Ladie only exists in the soldier's minds as a veiled woman, she is even called directly "the Ladie in the veil" (Bannerman 6). She can be seen, but not entirely – this black veil a perfect representation of what Showalter called "the wild zone".

When separating in spheres the different areas of society, it should be understood that women know everything about male culture, as it is dominating and pervasive, whereas men hardly get to know a portion of the female sphere, which is the wild zone (Showalter 200). While the dark lady was alive, she was kept in a tower of the castle, physically fulfilling the separation of the spheres by constraining her. She was only a rumour to the knights, who had never actually seen her. This is encompassed by the two veils that the Dark Ladie is wearing throughout the entire poem: the white veil is the one that tells her story, her former marriage, even her condition as a woman if the relation between women and innocence or purity is made. This veil narrates a story that everyone can understand. The black veil, on the other hand, not only represents her mourning state because of the death of her husband, it is also an element of suspense, of the unknown. In fact, the white veil is only mentioned once in the poem, when the Ladie is first described, and then the only one that is considered is the black cloth that covers her all around her body, except for her eyes.

Throughout different moments of the poem, some of the soldiers – including Guyon himself – try to remove the veil. "And many a time, he said, he tried / that ne'er-uncover'd face to see" (Bannerman 12), which can be read not only as a violation of her own desire to stay covered but also as an attempt to perceive her as a complete woman, to uncover the wild zone that is haunting the knights with its overbearing presence, a presence that had been previously unknown to them. Thanks to this veil, the Dark Ladie is not described regarding what she is but rather what she is not: as it was previously mentioned, she is not overly feminine, nor her clothes reveal her shape. Her power comes from exploiting her presence in

the wild zone, from remaining a question to all these knights so that she cannot be analysed. Although most of the knights will end up sympathising with her, they would not have done so if she had not appeared and haunted them, which leads to the conclusion that in dominant spaces, the situation of the dominated is not disclosed nor discussed and is just ignored.

2.1.2 "The Mermaid", a villain by choice

As the title of the poem implies, the protagonist is a 'femme fatale' because she is a mermaid, a monster characterised by having a human upper body (mostly female) which is combined with the lower body of a sea creature; sirens are portrayed in myths as both seductive and murderous. These characters have been present for centuries in different myths throughout Western Culture, as their uncanny relies on the fact that they have a very similar body to that of the audience, and thus the fear they generate is based on the similarities that the reader and the monster share when it comes to their body (Cavaallaro 191).

This mermaid is one of the few supernatural main characters that appear in Poems and, unlike in The Dark Ladie, the narrator is a very intimate first-person voice (Heilman 1), with no distance between the reader and the mermaid's thoughts. This allows the reader to get to know the mermaid's motivation to get revenge. In the very first stanza of the poem, the scene is set in a very aggressive ambience, "blow on, ye death-fraught whirlwinds! Blow, / around the rocks, and rifted caves;" (Bannerman 61). With this tempestuous atmosphere, the reader starts inferring that the protagonist is in some sort of emotional distress, more so as this is a Romantic poem and the use of nature as a reflection of the feelings of the speaker was very characteristic of the period. This anguish is elevated when reading the epigraph: Bannerman quotes The Rambler, a periodical published by Samuel D. Johnson between 1750 and 1752 (Heilman 50). The passage that she quotes is the one in which Johnson retrieved the myth of Ajut and Aningait. In this myth, Anningait had to go to sea, and he never returned. Ajut, his lover, went looking for Anningait in a boat of her own and disappeared. The ending remains open, and Ajut becoming a mermaid is only one hypothesis; the general consensus is that "they are both in that part of the land of souls where the sun never sets, where oil is always fresh, and provisions always warm" (Johnson 226).

In The Mermaid, however, the myth of Aningait and Ajut is adjusted. Bannerman takes the ending of the myth that contemplates that she becomes a mermaid, as it is mentioned "Ajut was formed into a mermaid, and still continues to seek her lover in the desserts of the sea" (Johnson 226). The death of her lover is confirmed in the second stanza of Bannerman's poem, "Eternal world of waters, hail! Within thy caves my lover lies" (Bannerman 62), and Bannerman focuses solely on the distress that Ajut felt when looking for him. Throughout Bannerman's poem, it is not disclosed whether Ajut finds Anningait or his sailing partners. It is also very striking that the narrator progressively mentions Anningait less as the poem advances, leaving her devoid of any motivation to behave as aggressively as she does once the reader reaches the end. The cave in which the corpse lies is mentioned, but not the love they shared which is what made her go into the sea to look for him in the first place.

This peculiar femme fatale does not get empowered through the righting of the wrongs she has had to go through, but rather through pure, raw power that she obtains by killing mercilessly. "My soul, within this icy sea, / fulfils her fearful destiny / thro time's long ages I

shall wait / to lead the victims to their fate" (Bannerman 65). While at first she was acting powered by her broken heart, the poetic voice now considers the killings as her own destiny. The mermaid conceives herself as a hybrid monster whose sole purpose is to kill men. Even nature warns the reader and the sailors of her presence so they can be spared; this warning is carried out through hostile weather and natural phenomena. She is compared with violent natural occurrences such as volcanoes, storms, or polar skies; and the world she inhabits is subsequently a "sad earth and stormy sea" (Bannerman 64). She is never seen as a graceful mermaid that creates beautiful songs but, rather, as a merciless monster that has become so powerful that every living creature fears her.

Ajut did not choose the life she has right now, that of being a monster whose only purpose is to lure sailors to their death: she did walk into the ocean, but without the intention of harming others. While she is trapped in the water and becomes a mermaid, she embraces her decision and the consequences of her actions and starts acting as a murderous creature. The speaker of the poem even recognises that "my heart, my soul / retain no more their former glow" (Bannerman 62), implying that this whole process has completely changed her, and she cannot go back to being as she once was. While this character's story is certainly tragic, the reader is unable to sympathise entirely with her because she becomes a cold-blooded murderer by using the characteristic siren songs (Craciun 177). This female character has had volition and acted according to her desire, which was to find her drowned lover. Ajut escapes the position of the bereaved wife and creates an identity based on her own actions and not on her position in society, which usually was according to her relation to men (DuBois 64).

If the main character of The Dark Ladie is looking for justice and revenge, this mermaid is only aiming for the extermination of every sailor that crosses paths with her. The mermaid differs from the other femme fatales that have been discussed in this essay, as she is not trying to fulfil an act of revenge but, rather, thriving off of undiscriminated chaos, rage, and hatred (Heilman xciv). Unlike in The Dark Ladie, this 'femme fatale' is not looking for justice. The usual tenderness and desire found in female characters is completely erased in the mermaid of this poem, and she completely transforms into a merciless character that kills men. This siren can be read as Bannerman's criticism of the original myth, as Ajut had to endure despair when looking for her lover, and considering that he most likely drowned, they could not be in a better place (Johnson 226), as Johnson's recollection of the myth narrates. Bannerman is focusing on the suffering of Ajut and how that leads to her transformation.

2.2 The Perjured Nun: Enlightening Spectral Apparitions

The Perjured Nun is a narrative poem with Gothic themes that was first published in the collection Tales of Chivalry and Superstition (1802). It contains two female characters: Geraldine, who follows the Gothic archetype of the damsel in distress, and the nun, who is said to have been haunting the castle for centuries. Geraldine lives with Lord Henrie, who very clearly exemplifies the hero who is keeping the damsel safe by not letting her go to the opposite aisle of the castle, even though in the very first lines of the poem Geraldine tells him that she wants to explore what she is not allowed to see: "O take me to the aisle of the tower, and my fears you shall not see" (Bannerman 39). Geraldine will end up building courage in order to

visit the far side of the castle; she decides on her own and without the permission of the man she lives with whether she can face the supposed threat that haunts their manor.

Suspense is built around the apparition of this spectral nun figure, as most of the lines of the poem involve her apparition -or lack thereof- and the fear that both silence and noise provoke in Geraldine. One of the tools Bannerman uses to build suspense is light: when Geraldine and Lord Henrie are together, the candles in her aisle of the castle are lit, providing a somewhat constant sense of safety. It is Henrie who warns Geraldine about darkness, as he says "if the tapers burn / And the lamp on the marble stair; / You will know by them if I living am" (Bannerman 42). Not only the figure of the male hero is supposed to be reassuring for Geraldine, also the presence of light. Darkness is one of the main elements present in Gothic literature, and it has been washed with negative undertones: it is seen as a sign of disorder and conveys strong ancestral fear (Cavallaro 21).

Although Lord Henrie warns Geraldine about his death if the candles are not lit, when the clock rings one o'clock at night, the lamps do not exactly go off: instead, they turn blue. Geraldine is not in complete darkness, which is what Lord Henrie had predicted, but she was already conditioned to fear dim lightning. Blue-coloured candles do represent a bad omen, mostly death approaching (Heilman X). This leads the reader to think about the presence of the nun. The nun is a presence so ingrained in Geraldine that she thinks of her as a supernatural element of destiny that cannot be avoided: "But the hour is to come that seals her doom" (Bannerman 44). The nun seems, at this point in the poem, inevitable.

It is worth stopping the analysis of the poem in order to reflect on the nature of the spectre, who also gives the title to the poem: she is a perjured nun, meaning that she is a person who devoted her life to God in a convent but behaves impurely, or partook in sinful activities. The fact that this nun is going after Lord Henrie can only imply that it was a relationship with him what made her be labelled as a perjured nun, and it is confirmed once she says "For him! For him, I resign'd my vows, / and the guilt is on my head." (Bannerman 47). The guilt she is feeling after leaving the convent is very significant, as she left her life behind to seek the patriarchal figure of Lord Henrie.

Nuns were very frowned upon at the time, as they were not dependent on men and, thus, many accusations of sins like prostitution were thrown at them; they were considered loose women (Raymond 73). Not only cloistered nuns but nuns in general were seen as a threat to the patriarchal system that made every woman dependent on men to be able to survive. Many women who sought their own liberation and freedom from this system turned to convents, as that was the place that not only freed them from the tyranny of the patriarchal society, but also it was one of the only places where they could receive a proper education and behave on their own accord (Raymond 75). Although cloisters were far from being a feminist utopia among the patriarchy that ruled 18th century England, they provided opportunities that women could not obtain otherwise.

Geraldine ends up disregarding her role in society as a damsel that has to be saved and protected by Lord Henrie. Once she decides that she will go outside, the nun does not take long to make her appearance clear by making noises that confirm that she is there. The nun is heavily dehumanised, with references to her like "it comes! It comes! […]" (Bannerman 45). Both by her condition as a woman and by being in the darkness, which is considered to be the

other in the relational identity that is created between darkness and light, she is othered. Geraldine hesitates to open the door that separates her from the noise that the nun is making to mark her presence, both by fear and indecision, but in the poem the reader can clearly see when Geraldine gains agency and decides to start acting according to her wishes: "The blood rush'd back to her clay-cold feet, / and her heart took courage then" (Bannerman 46).

Once Geraldine opens the door, she finds that the other part of the castle was completely in the dark. However, she is the one who, unknowingly, has been given the light, as per the line "The pulse leaps now thro' her burning brow" (Bannerman 44). The wing of the castle she was allowed to go to can be considered the female, domestic sphere, while the rest of the castle can be said to be the public, male-dominated sphere. By going out into the 'outer world', she is able to experience by herself and without the assistance of a man what it is like to transcend her roles in the patriarchal society. However, the nun is an obstacle to her free will, for she is deemed as dangerous. What is most striking about the poem is that, after all the suspense build-up, the nun is caring with Geraldine.

The nun not only warns her not to visit the aisle which she haunts so as not to be scared, but also "Let your soul be at peace, and your watching cease / for this faithless heart is cold!" (Bannerman 48). While the spectre does admit to having killed Lord Henrie, the way in which she articulates it makes Geraldine not so afraid of her. In convents, women formed very strong bonds with other women, so much so that they were still carried out outside the monastery (Raymond 2001). The nun eases her worries and leads her towards the path of female empowerment. Arguably, the burning brow Geraldine has in the aforementioned passage of the poem is a symbol of her own liberation: she is burning with desire for a better, fairer life outside her current, domestic realm.

The nun is both protecting Geraldine from Lord Henrie, as he is the one who destroyed her life, while also igniting her desire to step outside social boundaries. The woman that defies the patriarchy in this poem is not so much the nun, who is effectively carrying out her vengeance towards Lord Henrie, but Geraldine – it is implied that this encounter with the nun is a very significant part of Geraldine's life, following a process of self-discovery that involves aiming towards that which is surrounding her and that had previously been negated to her just for being a woman (Heilman cxxxiii).

3. Conclusion

Anne Bannerman, who was part of the Edinburgh Literary Circle and wrote during the Romantic Scottish literary period, is one of the several female writers that have been left out of the canon and are being progressively brought back by scholars in recent years. Bannerman's writings are clear examples of Gothicism used with a political purpose. In both *Tales of Superstition and Chivalry* and *Poems*, she exploited the genre, along with the Romantic tradition, to vindicate women's rights.

While feminism at the beginning of the 19th century was not yet a reality, Bannerman's poetry can be read through a feminist lens as the discomfort caused by the patriarchal institutions was already present. In her poems, Anne Bannerman tackled different issues, like the private, domestic sphere in which women were left to live their lives while men had a very

public, social life. Bannerman also tackled how women were taught and expected to be passive entities in society and wrote tales about women becoming active and acting according to their own volition. She created disruptive female characters that became cold-blooded assassins looking for revenge and justice, which directly confronted the archetype of the femme fatale that was being used pervasively at the time.

Even though this is a study of Bannerman's most relevant and acclaimed poems, she still can be further investigated. This poet wrote in a very short period of time a large amount of poetry, so analysing her literary career only through a feminist lens would be completely unfair to her. Different scopes need to be taken so that Bannerman can be included in the canon along with her contemporaries like Walter Scott, and more of her poems need to be considered by critics and scholars alike. Including Bannerman in the canon of literature would not only benefit her work which would be known by more people but, also, the definitions of romanticism and Gothicism would become wider and more inclusive over time.

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