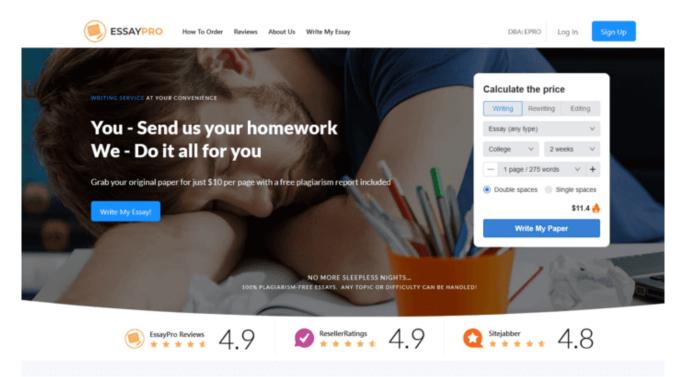
Mary Robinson's The Haunted Beach



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Mary Robinson's The Haunted Beach

Mary Robinson's "The Haunted Beach" tells a tale of a murder surrounded by mysterious supernatural activity, which ultimately culminates in a decisive, though equally intangible, moral judgment sentenced from above. The poem, characterized by juxtaposed contrasting images, unfolds neatly and rhythmically, as if determined by the hand of Fate herself. Like the "sea-birds hover'd craving" the reader fervently reads on, seeking some illumination on the "strong and mystic chain" which binds both men and nature's actions which is never fully revealed. For all its semblance of order, the poem is marked by ambiguity and vagueness; pronouns have no clear antecedents, shadowy light covers the scene, and the events themselves are told in reverse order. Yet still Robinson strives to conclude with order and meaning, bringing together the strange mesh of seemingly opposed forces. Ultimately order does surface as unseen, intangible forces pass down a ruling, binding the fishermen to a slavish punishment.

For a poem "veil'd in gloom," Robinson's structure and rhyme scheme is oddly calculated and regular. The poem contains nine stanzas, each consisting of nine lines. The rhyme scheme of each stanza is also the same: ABCBDEDDE. The rhythmic regularity

lends the poem the feeling of being controlled by an outside force, we if the hand of Fate guides the actors along their predestined path. Robinson constructs the poem in the past tense, save for the last two stanzas, further reinforces this sentiment, as we are led to a known outcome. The rhythm also lends itself to the powerful ocean imagery; the crashing waves and jutting cliffs mirror the inexplicable forces which unravel the story. The ordered stanzas co...

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...effectively mystifies the reader, imparting some sense of meaning and order behind the otherwise inexplicable events. Yet ultimately, even the order that is restored leaves the reader with probing questions about motivation, the circumstances surrounding the murder and to what degree non-human powers guided the events. Robinson's poem strives to project meaning and order onto these happenings that are otherwise unknowable to the human eye. Her inability to ultimately assign reason to all happenings manifests in the contrasting imagery of order and disorder, natural and supernatural forces, passive humans and active nature. Just as Robinson reverses the transmission of her story, so she reverses the forces in the poem-world; the human beings attempt to control all facets of their lives and others, but cannot break out of the "strong and mystic chain" that binds them.

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