

Topping, Jane (2022) The Man Who Fell to Millom. Gothic Nature, 3 (Spring). pp. 471-474.

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GOTHIC NATURE



GOTHIC NATURE III: HAUNTED SHORES

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All articles that appear in the *Gothic Nature* journal have been peer reviewed through a fully anonymised process.

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COVER CREDIT:

Title: Balmoral dawn no. 7972 (2019)

Artist: Angie Contini

Medium: In-capture digital photography using material filters and macro lens

Location: Balmoral Beach, Sydney at dawn

Model: Stephanie Di Giacomo

FOUNDING EDITOR:

Elizabeth Parker

EDITORS IN CHIEF:

Elizabeth Parker, Michelle Poland, Harriet Stilley

GUEST EDITORS FOR HAUNTED SHORES:

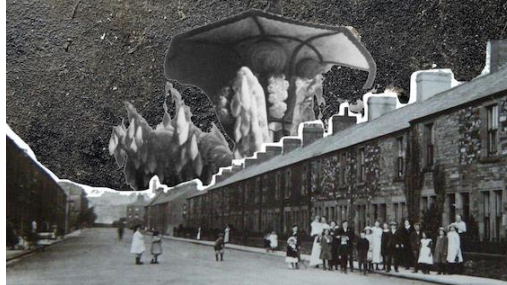
Emily Alder, Jimmy Packham, Joan Passey

WEB DESIGNER:

Michael Belcher

The Man Who Fell to Millom
(Single channel video, 14 minutes, 2018)

Jane Topping



Screen Shot, *The Man Who Fell to Millom*. Image Credit: J. Topping

Watch *The Man Who Fell to Millom* [here](#).

Critical accompaniment

The Man Who Fell to Millom (2018) is an atmospheric video which uses cut-up and collage techniques to suggest an alternative SF narrative for the Cumbrian coastal town of Millom. The work engages with the notion of a ‘haunted shore’ by examining and then re-framing the post-industrial present of a once thriving community. *The Man Who Fell to Millom* gathers textures of the Cumbrian landscape, memories of its people and the contradictory sounds of nature and technology, of geology and the digital.

Beginning on a calm shoreline, the film tells the absurd tale of a creature—perhaps awakened by iron ore mining works or perhaps deliberately hewn from the stone beneath Millom—and the humanoid that opposes it. The viewer follows in the footsteps of a hooded figure, literally a man who fell to Earth (David Bowie in Nicolas Roeg’s 1975 film), as ‘he’ walks a rocky coastal landscape and navigates a towering slagheap, pursuing the ominous presence which seems to threaten the past inhabitants of Millom.

In 2018 I was commissioned by Irene Rogan (Director of the *Moving Mountains Festival*) to make a film inspired by the town of Millom—its rich industrial past, post-industrial

present and residents. As a Glasgow-based artist commissioned to make a film set in Cumbria, I was acutely aware of my outsider status. Working with sound-artist Mark Vernon, my approach was to imagine discovering Millom—its rich industrial past and its people—as if I were an alien, sifting through and weaving together audio and images that I found in the ether. Using a collage technique, I worked to Vernon’s original soundscape, piecing together a science fiction narrative for the town of Millom, haunted by the poetry of Millom resident Norman Nicholson (1914-1987).

The Man Who Fell to Millom is atmospheric rather than mimetic and its Cthulhu-like creature might embody the Cumbrian industrial past or nuclear present. Paying homage to Roeg’s directing style, the film plays with notions of time and is more concerned with creating an experience of the post-industrial nuclear coast than a linear narrative. Within in the film, a fragment of Nicholson’s poem *Shingle* (1981) offers layers of texture—of grey waves, of stone and of, perhaps surprisingly, butterbeans. The result is an alternative SF narrative for the town, woven from digital fragments yet concerned with the geological foundations of time, industry, and poetry.

BIOGRAPHY

Dr Jane Topping is a Scottish artist and academic, currently Lecturer on the MLitt Fine Art Practice programme at the Glasgow School of Art and formally Associate Professor of Fine Art at the University of Cumbria Institute of Arts. Her interdisciplinary practice draws from subjects including sci-fi, feminism, the archive, intertextuality and the life and works of writer Naomi Mitchison.

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