

GOTHIC SPACES, LIMINAL PLACES  
(excerpt)\*

By

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In differentiating myths from folk tales or legends, Joseph Campbell explained to journalist Bill Moyers that the average person—“ordinary folks”—cannot create myths because “the folk tale is for entertainment. The myth is for spiritual instruction” (Campbell, 59). This seems to be a very limited perspective; however, a particular kind of folk tale—the story of haunted places—may have entertainment as one of its purposes, something it shares with its cousin, Gothic fiction. In her Master’s thesis, “The use of Space in Gothic Fiction,” Veronika Majlingova cites Edmund Burke in *An Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), who observed: “the feeling of pleasure derived from things that should be depressing or terrifying, such as ruins of buildings or steep cliffs.’ He famously wrote that pain and danger ‘are delightful when we have an idea of pain and danger, without being actually in such circumstances. . . . Whatever excites this delight, I call *sublime*’” (Majlingova). Majlingova points out that the Gothic literary genre arose in eighteenth century England, parallel to the revival of the Gothic architectural style, as a reaction to the orderly predictability inherent in the Age of Reason: “Underneath the uncompromising trust in all that is rational there slumbered the need for unrestrained imagination and emotions” (Majlingova). Accentuating the feeling of “pain and danger” for the reader are the variety of settings known as Gothic spaces, that, Majlingova argues, often act as “a character of its own, sometimes more important than some of the main characters” (Majlingova). As with the Gothic architectural style, Gothic fiction seems to be comprised of opposites—rational and emotional, visible and hidden, truth and illusion, light and dark—but perhaps even more important are its “liminal” places, the “area between spaces” (Aguirre). Similar recurring motifs are also found in legends such as the anonymously written account of a haunted house, “Dear Linda Degh,” and the accounts of ghostly sightings in a Dixville Notch, New Hampshire resort hotel.

\*A full, unedited copy of this work is available for purchase! Please click on [Store](#).

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