

GOTHIC BOURNES

**THE INVISIBLE WORLD
(1827)**

TRANSCRIPTION BY
Verónica Frejo Marañón

EDITING GOTHIC TEXTS
NINTH SERIES, 2022
Nº 3

THE
LONDON AND PARIS OBSERVER ;

OR

Weekly Chronicle of News, Science, Literature and the Fine Arts.

VOL. III.

PARIS

PUBLISHED BY A. AND W. GALIGNANI,

At the English, French, Italian, German, and Spanish Library,

No. 18, RUE VIVIENNE.

1827.

Source text:

<https://books.google.es/books?id=PI1NAAAaAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q=>

(pp. 452-53)

THE INVISIBLE WORLD

(From the *London Literary Gazette*.)

[“The very first sounds that attract the ears of childhood are tales of another life—foolishly are they called tales of superstition; for, however disguised by the vulgarity of the narration and the distortion of fiction, they tell him of those whom he is hastening from the threshold of life to join, with whom he must soon be, and be forever.”—MATURIN.]¹

The story which I am about to relate has reference to a subject often discussed and little understood—the connexion which exists between this shifting scene and the world of spirits. It is of little import to the reader whether I am a sceptic or a convert to the theory. It may be more material for him to be assured that he is troubled with the details on the authority of one whose fortitude I have often witnessed, and for whose veracity I could pledge my own. I give the story, as nearly as I can recollect, in her own words.

“You know the Mannerings, of Cheshire, and remember their seat, Ashley Park. It was when I had just left school that I accompanied my intimate friend, Miss Mannering, on a visit to her mother at Ashley. Mrs. Mannering was a widow, blessed with an ample fortune and great animal spirits, who laughed—and ate—and talked—and played the kind hostess—and delighted in seeing every body happy about her;—who thanked God she had ‘not a nerve in her body;’ and hoped she should die as she had lived ‘comfortably.’ The house was crowded with company: and Mrs. M. made an apology for being obliged to assign me, as my bed-chamber, the ‘Cedar Room.’ It was a large, fine, old apartment—wainscotted with cedar—and, from their [*sic*] being a door at each end of it, which led to different parts of the house, had, on high days and holidays, been used as an antichamber. There were no old pictures—no Gothic furniture—no tapestry—to predispose the imagination to superstitious feelings, or to foster in the mind melancholy forebodings.

“The windows were sashed—the fire-place good, but neither Gothic nor over large—and the room itself, though of unusual dimensions, had the appearance of antiquity, unaccompanied by anything sombre. We had been dancing, and I went to bed in high spirits. It was between two and three in the morning, when I awoke with a start, and saw distinctly a female figure passing through my room. I inquired, without fear, who was there? There was no answer. The figure proceeded slowly onwards, and disappeared at the door. It struck me as being singular: but knowing the house to be filled with company, and that the greater part were strangers to the endless labyrinth of staircase and anti-room which over-run the mansion, I concluded some heedless guest had mistaken my chamber—or that one of the servants, forgetting the circumstance of its being inhabited, had literally put it to its old use—a passage room. At all events, thought I, it will be cleared up at breakfast; and without feeling any alarm, or attaching

¹ Quote from Charles Robert Maturin’s 1819 *Sermons*.

any importance to the incident, I struck the hour by my watch, and fell asleep. The next morning I was somewhat startled by finding both the doors locked on the inside, and by recollecting with what care I had turned the key on the preceding evening.—The breakfast bell, however, disturbed the train of my ruminations. I hurried hastily down stairs, and thought no more on the subject. In the course of conversation, my kind hostess inquired how I had slept. ‘Very soundly,’ said I; ‘except that I was rather surprised by some one who, no doubt by mistake, passed through my room at two this morning.’ Mrs. Mannering looked earnestly at me—seemed on the point of asking me a question—checked herself, and turned away.

“The next night I went to bed earlier, and, at nearly the same hour, the figure appeared. But there was no doubt *now* upon my mind. On this occasion, I saw the face. Its pale countenance—its large, melancholy, black eyes—its step noiseless, as it glided over the naked floor, gave me a sensation that I can never forget. Terrified as I was, I fixed my eyes on it. It stood before me—then slowly receded: when it reached the middle of the room, stopped—and while I looked at it, *was not*. I own it affected me strangely. Sleep for the remainder of the night was impossible. And though I endeavoured to fortify my mind, by recollecting all I had heard and read against the theory—to persuade myself that it was illusion, and that I should see no more of it—I half determined to conclude my visit at once, or, at all events, to change my room immediately. Morning came—bright sunny morning—and the race ball of the morrow, and a dread of the ridicule which would follow my determination, overpowered my resolution. I was silent, and—I stayed.

“The third night came. I confess, as the evening drew in, I shuddered at the idea of going to bed. I made excuses—I talked over the events of the day—I played—I sung—I frittered away minute after minute—and so well did my stratagem succeed, that two, the dreaded hour, was past long ere I entered my room. I admit that had I retired to rest, on the first evening of my visit at Ashley, with the impressions that, in spite of myself, forced themselves upon me on *this*, imagination might then have claimed a part in what I witnessed. But the feelings were wholly distinct. On the first night, I had seen nothing—knew nothing. On this, I was steeling my mind against the worst.

“After a determined and minute investigation of the room—after a thorough examination of every closet and corner—after barring and bolting each door with a beating heart—a woman’s fears (shall I confess it?)² stole over me; and hastily flinging myself on the bed, I muffled up my face entirely in the clothes. After lying in this manner for two hours in a state of agony that baffles all description, I ventured to cast a hurried glance round the room. It must be, I thought, near day-break. It was so; but by my side stood the figure—her form bent over me—her face so close to mine, that I could have touched it—her white drapery leaning over me, so that my slightest motion would have discomposed it: I looked again to convince myself that it was no deception, and have no recollection of any thing further.

² Initial bracket added by me, since it seems to be faded or missing in the original text.

“When I came to myself it was nearly noon. The servants and Mrs. Mannering herself had repeatedly knocked at the door; but receiving no answer were unwilling to disturb me. My kind hostess was alone in the breakfast-room when I entered, and was preparing to rally me on my early hours, when, evidently struck by my appearance, she inquired if I was well? ‘Not particularly,’ said I, faintly: ‘and, if you will allow me, I return home this morning.’ She looked at me in silence for some moments, and then said, with emphasis, ‘Have you any particular reason? Nay, I am sure you have,’ she continued, as her keen penetrating eye detected an involuntary tremor. ‘I have no concealments,’ was my reply; and immediately detailed the whole transaction. She heard me gravely, without interruption, or expressing any surprise. I am grieved beyond measure, my dear young friend, for the event; I certainly have heard strange and unaccountable stories about that room; but I always treated them as idle tales, quite unworthy of credit. This is the first time for years it has been occupied, and I shall never cease to reproach myself for having tried the experiment. But, for God’s sake,’ she added, ‘don’t mention it; assure me, promise me, you will not breathe a syllable of the subject to any living being. If among these ignorant and superstitious people, this inexplicable occurrence should once get wind, not a servant would stay with me.’ I assented; and on all her offers of a different room, pressing entreaties to remain, and promises of fresh arrangements, I put a decided negative. Home I returned that morning.

“A long interval elapsed before I again visited Ashley. Miss Mannering, my kind and warm-hearted friend, had sunk into an early grave: and I had had in the interim³ to stem the torrent of affliction, and buffet⁴ with its waves. At length a most pressing and personal invitation brought me under Mrs. Mannering’s roof.—There I found her sister, who, with her three young children, were revelling away their Christmas. Lady Pierrepont was one of those fortunate women, who, by dint of undaunted assurance,⁵ and, as poor Sir Richard informed his friends, ‘an unparalleled tongue,’ had contrived to have her own way through life. Her first exploit, on coming to Ashley, was to fix upon the cedar-room for the children. In vain poor Mrs. Mannering pointed out its faults. She ‘was afraid they would find it cold.’ Her ladyship ‘wished them to be hardy.’ ‘It was out of the way.’ ‘So much the better: their noise would not be troublesome.’ ‘I fear,’ went on Mrs. Mannering—‘Don’t know what it is,’ said Lady Pierrepont.—‘In short,’ she continued, with her imperturbable face, ‘this room or none: and Mrs. Mannering, not daring to avow the real cause of her fears, yet feeling that further contest was useless, saw, with feelings of horror, the little cribs and rocking-horses, nurses and nine-pins, formally established in the dreaded apartment.

“Things went on very smoothly for a fortnight; no complaints of the cedar-room transpired; and Mrs. Mannering was congratulating herself on the happy turn affairs had taken, when one day, on our going into the nursery, she saw her little nephews busily engaged in packing up their playthings. ‘What! are you tired of Ashley, and going to leave me?’ ‘Oh, no, Aunt,’ they shouted one and all: ‘Oh, no; but we are going to hide away

³ In the meantime, meanwhile.

⁴ Be knocked about.

⁵ By strokes of unabashed confidence.

our toys from the White Lady; she came last night, and Sunday night, and she'd such large black eyes—and she passed close to our cribs—just here, Aunt. Who is she, do you know? for Fred.⁶ says she never speaks. What does she do here, and what does she want?'

“‘What a wretched, miserable woman I am!’ cried the panic-struck Mrs. Mannering. ‘Every hope that I entertained of this abominable room is dashed to the ground for ever; and if, by any chance, Lady Pierrepont should discover——Oh, they must be moved directly. Ring the bell. Where’s the housekeeper? I’ll give no reason—I’ll have no reason. Oh, my dear, departed Mannering, to what sorrows have you not exposed your disconsolate widow!’ In spite of all inquiries, interrogatories, and surmises,—moved the little Pierreponts were that evening. Our precautions, however, were all but defeated; for one of the little magpies began after dinner,—‘Mama, I’ve something to tell you about the White Lady.’ He was instantly crammed almost to suffocation with sweetmeats. The rest were very soon trundled out of the room, choaking with *bonbons*. And I shall never forget the piteous expression of Mrs. Mannering’s countenance, as she passed me with her party, or her declaration,—‘God forgive me; but I see very clearly this White Lady will put me in my grave.’

“The room was then shut up for some years; and I can give no account of what passed at Ashley in the interim. The last time I was there was the day on which young Mannering came of age.—His mother had been receiving the loud and rustic, but not on that account the less sincere, congratulations of the tenants on the lawn, when she was told her more courtly visitors were awaiting her in the drawing-room. On this occasion the sins of the cedar-room were forgiven, and it was once more used as an anti-chamber. To enter it, throw off her shawl and bonnet, and run to a large swing-glass which stood near the window, was the work of an instant. She was hastily adjusting her dress, when she started, for she saw—reflected at full length in the glass beside her—THE FIGURE OF THE WHITE LADY!!

“It was days before the brain fever, which her fright and her fall brought on, would allow her to give any connected account of what till then appeared an inexplicable occurrence. Her reason and recollection gradually returned, but her health—never.—A few weeks afterwards she quitted Ashley Park for the grave!

“——— College, Cambridge, June 16, 1827.”

⁶ The use of a full stop here seems to be a misprint in the original text.

Editor's notes:

There are several peculiarities in the text's diction. Namely, "every body," "any thing" and "some one" appear as separate words. Also, "wainscotted" and "antichamber" differ from their current spellings, "wainscoted" and "antechamber." Furthermore, there appears to be an inconsistent use of spacing around the m-dash. I have opted for leaving no spaces between them and words, like subsequent editions of the story do. In the same vein, the word "import" in the first paragraph was illegible, so I have also followed the same route we find in later versions of the story, which use this word.

First, we can find the story in *The New Casket: Containing Gems of Amusement and General Instruction: with Original and Select Poetry; Reviews of Books, Music, and Prints; Notices of Fine Arts, the Drama &c.* (third and last volume), which was published in London in 1834 by W. Strange and G. Cowie. The most significant difference in this version is the omission of the date at the end. This collection can be accessed through the following link (pp. 297-300):

<https://books.google.es/books?id=qCs4kLKkSkcC&pg=PA299&lpg=PA299&dq=#v=onepage&q&f=false>

Secondly, T. Ottway included the story in his later *News from the Invisible World: A Collection of Remarkable Narratives on the Certainty of Supernatural Visitations from the Dead to the Living* (pp. 251-257), published in London in 1843. This version remains faithful to the original in everything except the title, which in this case is "The White Lady." It can be accessed here:

<https://books.google.es/books?id=qMrRLREYLNUC&lpg=PA251&ots=YtMFFwjVT&dq=>

The latest version of the text was published in 1869 in Boston, Massachusetts. It appeared in the first page of the newspaper titled *Banner of Light. An Exponent of the Spiritual Philosophy of the Nineteenth Century*, by W.M. White & Co. Ottway's title "The White Lady" is retained here. Also in this case, curiously, the story is attributed to the unknown author Marian Carruthers and the initial Maturin quote is absent along with the final date and place of signature. The full text can be accessed through this link:

http://iapsop.com/archive/materials/banner_of_light/banner_of_light_v25_n23_21_aug_1869.pdf

The story seems to be based on real events; at least, inspired on an actual place and family. In *Altrincham & Bowdon: with Historical Reminiscences of Ashton-on-Mersey, Sale, and Surrounding Townships*, published in London in 1896 by Alfred Ingham, Ashely Hall is linked with "the spectre of the 'White Lady'" (page 288; 326 digitally). Furthermore, John H. Ingram states in his 1897 book *The Haunted Homes and Family Traditions of Great Britain* that "Ashley Park would appear to be identical with Ashley Hall, and the 'Mannerings' [...] but another name for the Merediths, whose country seat the Hall once was" (pp. 326-334; 366-374 digitally). The full texts can be accessed here:

<https://ia802606.us.archive.org/16/items/altrinchambowdon00ingh/altrinchambowdon00ingh.pdf>

<https://ia802705.us.archive.org/26/items/hauntedhomesfami00ingr/hauntedhomesfami00ingr.pdf>