

MMES
MADRID MASTERS IN ENGLISH STUDIES
UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE MADRID

GOTHIC BOURNES

**THE PILGRIM'S
STORY**

by Mary Robinson

(1805)

TRANSCRIPTION BY

Natalia del Viso Domenech

**EDITING GOTHIC TEXTS
TENTH SERIES, 2023
Nº 8**

THE
GLEANER
OR
ENTERTAINMENT
FOR THE
FIRE-SIDE

Consisting of
TALES MORAL AND HUMOUROUS
Histories, Narratives, Adventures, Anecdotes
&c. &c.
Vol. II

Source text:

https://books.google.es/books?id=BrAIAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA331&lpg=PA331&dq=%22the+dr ead+arbiters+of+life+and+death%22&source=bl&ots=lnHsUaH0BH&sig=2RazKbMrMkSZkzGxZmGjs_8j6dg&hl=en&sa=X&ei=GLISUJvnK6n80QXmIYHADQ&sqi=2&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=%22the%20pilgrim's%20story%22&f=false.

(Pages 60-65)

THE PILGRIM'S STORY.

BY MRS. ROBINSON

“My eyes first opened to the vicissitudes of life, in the city of Avignon. My father was a general in the French service; and, my mother, the only offspring of her noble, but indigent parents. They were united by disinterested affection, and as their happiness centered in each other, they were above the envy, or the malice of mankind. My father’s fortune, though not competent to procure the luxuries of the world, was, by my mother’s æconomy¹ and exemplary prudence, sufficient for the enjoyment of every comfort.²

“I was the only fruit of their unsullied attachment. My amiable mother only survived a few minutes after she gave me being. She embraced me, and clasping me to her bosom, resigned her gentle soul to endless happiness.

“My father, whose profession called him from Avignon when I was scarcely³ three years old, committed the care of my education to the Abbe de Versac, a distant relation of my mother. He was a man celebrated⁴ for his profound erudition and brilliant talents; he instructed my young mind in all the elegant acquirements of a scholar and a gentleman. The labours of his anxious hours were repaid by my close application to the precepts he wished to inculcate.

“At the age of seventeen I had acquired a competent knowledge of the classics, and had already composed many successful pieces in imitation of the Greek and Latin poets. The rocks of Vancluse, consecrated by the inspiration of the muses, had often echoed with my matin song, and the celestial form of the immortal Laura, frequently blessed in visionary dreams the slumbers of the evening!

“I felt rapt, inspired, as I traversed the deep valley, or mused beneath the laurel’d bower, dedicated to love and virtue! I wandered on the margin of the shallow rivulets that were once dear to the faithful Petrarch, their murmurs soothed my pensive heart; and, as I dropped a tear upon their bubbling surface, I felt the conscious delight of having paid the tender tribute due to his memory and his sorrows! Often did I cast my listless form upon the sod, made sacred by the foot-steps of the wandering lovers. These were my happy moments—transient indeed they were, for they now almost appear to have been the phantoms of a bewildered fancy. The subduing hand of misery has nearly erased the very shadows of my early hours; the bright delusions of youths [sic] glowing day are sunk in cold oblivion, as the glorious sun sets in the border of the dark and troubled ocean [sic]!

“Filled with romantic inspiration, my mind was softened like the tempered wax, and ready to receive the tenderest impressions.

¹ A common spelling of “economy” at the time (page 60, line 7).

² Some spacing aspects, which are consistent throughout the text, have been edited in the present document. In the original text, a space was inserted before every colon (page 61, line 6), semicolon (page 60, line 2), and exclamation point (page 60, line 25). Furthermore, there seems to be a double spacing after every full stop (page 60, line 3).

³ Reconstructed word, the original print was barely legible due to lack of ink (page 60, line 14).

⁴ See note 3 (page 60, line 16).

“In the vicinity of Avignon, beneath the shades of an embowering [61] wood, devotion had long performed her sacred orisons at the monastery of Saint Terese;⁵ the lofty walls were inaccessible, except on the fifteenth of June, when at the celebration of the Fete de Dieu, the gates were thrown open, and every eye was permitted to view the solemn ceremony of the high mass.

“Curiosity, more than zeal, led me to be a spectator: the holy sisters, arranged in the chapel of the convent, sung their choral anthems, replete with seraphic harmony; the vaulted arches repeated the thrilling sounds, while the fumes of heavenly incense curled around a thousand quivering tapers. Among the vestals, my every sense was fascinated by one, whose beauty far surpassed all I had yet conceived of mortal woman! A sweet melancholy gave inexpressible softness to features exquisitely regular, and the meek blush of unaffected modesty heightened a complexion beauteous and glowing as the rays of the morning. Her age pronounced her but newly initiated in holy duties, and her every look declared she was secluded, in the deep and cheerless gloom of monastic apathy. I gazed upon her with a devotion more warm, more chaste, than even piety itself could have suggested. Her eye encountered mine—I fancied a thousand childish things;—my earnest attention seemed to perplex her; the crucifix fell from her trembling hand, she rose, and left the chapel.

“I returned to Avignon. The image of this peerless angel never forsook me; I beheld her in my midnight slumbers, her voice vibrated on my enraptured ear, and awoke me to all the agonies of dire despair. Often did I wander, when the sun sunk⁶ beneath the horizon, to catch its last beam that illumined the vanes of her lonely habitation. Often did I listen whole hours beneath the hated walls that enclosed the treasure of my soul, to catch the distant and imperfect sound of the holy evening song. I fancied I could distinguish her voice from every other, and my heart panted sadly responsive to every swelling note.

“I remained several months in this state of perfect wretchedness, when an accident opened to my distracted mind a gleam of transitory comfort. The Abbe de Versac, having embraced the most rigid state of bondage, was frequently employed in the pious office of confessor to the Nuns of Saint Terese. A sudden indisposition preventing his usual attendance, I availed myself of the opportunity that presented itself, and, in the habit of a monk, bore to the abbess of the convent a spacious recommendation of myself, deputing me as worthy of the sacred confidence. I was readily admitted into the cell of ghostly admonition, and fortune directed the heavenly Louisa to the footstool of contrition!

“The purity of her life scarcely left her a single error to acknowledge; my penance was gentle, as her soul was spotless: I requested her to peruse a lesson I had written, and to abide by the injunctions it contained; she thanked me, then, with the voice of meekness and humility, implored my benediction, and departed.

“My safety required that I should instantly withdraw from the sacred walls, lest the imposition should be detected, and at once destroy my reputation and my hopes. The transaction was soon made public, and I frequently heard eternal vengeance denounced

⁵ “Terese” is normally written as “Thérèse”. The text could be referring to Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, in which case the spelling of the Saint’s name could have been misspelled from the original French (page 61, line 2). This also happens with other French words such as “Fête” and “Abbé”, written as “Fete” and “Abbe” (page 61, lines 3 and 33, respectively).

⁶ Here, “sunk” is being used as a simple past.

against the perpetrator of so vile a fraud. The abbess offered an immense reward for apprehending the sacrilegious hypocrite, and every tongue united to condemn me. My letter acquainted her of my name, quality, and fortune; which, by my father's death, was not inconsiderable; I implored her [62] compassion for my sufferings, and earnestly requested a decisive answer. I told her, in the language of despair, that nothing should induce me to survive her resentment, and concluded my frantic prayer by informing her, that I should watch for ten successive nights beneath the walls that immured her, to receive the fiat of my irrevocable destiny.

“At the twilight hour of the seventh day, when every breeze was hushed, and nature seemed to pause in melancholy silence, musing beneath the trees that encircled the prison of my idol, my ear was suddenly enchanted by the melody of a female voice. I drew near the spot from whence the sound proceeded, and distinctly heard the words of her complaint: they pierced my very heart—attuning every chord to sympathetic pity.”

Elvira hinted a wish that he would endeavour to recollect them; he complied with her desire, and thus began.⁷

“Within the drear and silent gloom,
The lost Louisa pines, unknown;
Fate shrouds her in a living tomb,
And Heav'n relentless hears her groan:
Yet 'midst the murky shades of woe,
The tear of fond regret shall flow.

Yon lofty wall, that mocks my grief,
Still echoes with my ev'ning pray'r;
The gale that fans the trembling leaf
Shall waft it through the realms of air;
'Till prostrate at the throne of heav'n,
Unpity'd love shall be forgiv'n!

Or, if to endless sorrow born---
If doom'd to fade a victim here;
Still pining, friendless, and forlorn,
Ah! let religion drop one tear:⁸
Like holy incense shall it prove,
To heal the wounds of hopeless love.

Ye black'ning clouds that sail along,
Oh, hide me in your shade profound;

⁷ This paragraph is one of two that do not begin or end with a quotation mark. Additionally, “Elvira” is mentioned here for the first and last time. The truth is that “The Pilgrim's Story” is an extract from Mary Robinson's first novel titled *Vancenza; Or, The Dangers of Credulity*, where Elvira is the protagonist and, at one point in the novel, she asks the Pilgrim to tell her his story (page 62, lines 13-4).

⁸ There is an irregularity that happens a few times, as there is no capitalisation after the exclamation mark (page 62, line 30).

Ye whisp'ring breezes catch my song,
And bear it to the woods around,
Perchance some hapless Petrarch's feet
May wander near this dread retreat.

Ah! tell him love's delicious strain
No rapture yields, no joy inspires,
Where cold religion's icy chain
Has long subdu'd its quiv'ring fires;
No ray of comfort gilds the gloom,
That marks the hopeless vestal's tomb!

The ruby gem within my breast,
Now faintly glows with vital heat;
Each warring passion sinks to rest:
My freezing pulses slowly beat.
Soon shall these languid eye-lids close,
And death's stern mandate seal my woes.

[63] Then when the virgin's matin song
Shall 'midst the vaulted roof resound,
Haply the tuneful seraph throng
Shall whisper gentle pity round;
While VIRTUE, sighing o'er my bier,
Shall drop unseen---A SAINTED TEAR!"

"From that moment I determined to release the beautiful Louisa, or perish beneath the flinty confines of her prison; the difficulties attending such an undertaking, and the dreadful punishments that would be inflicted on the perpetrators of such a crime, rendered every precaution necessary to ensure success.

"Chance, however, completed what years of indefatigable industry might not have accomplished: the abbess of Saint Terese was suddenly seized with an alarming indisposition, her life was supposed to be in extreme danger, and as the lady Louisa was of the highest rank among the holy sisterhood, she was entrusted with the entire government of the convent, and unlimited possession of the rights of a superior. It was not difficult under these circumstances, to accomplish her wish; my letters were delivered without creating the smallest suspicion, and the rapturous hour was appointed for her escape from misery.

"Her heart was susceptible of the finest passions; she relied on my honour, and I never deceived her. She had long considered herself as a victim doomed to eternal solitude; the extraordinary change my propositions presented, the prospect of happiness that opened to her soul, gave energy to hope, and strength to resolution! I provided horses and a convenient disguise. Heaven smiled upon the deed, and gave to my fond arms the beautiful Louisa.

We traversed the wood for some miles, and taking the route to Marseilles in three days reached that port in safety.⁹

“There we were united in holy bands. The mistress of my affections became the wife of my bosom! and I——became the proud possessor of a treasure worlds could not have purchased!

“Having procured a vessel we set sail for Florence; the winds were propitious, we arrived unmolested at Leghorn, and from thence proceeded to the most beautiful city in the universe!

“My adored Louisa, whose early days had been devoted to religious duties, evinced not the smallest desire to relinquish the delights of retirement; her mind unaccustomed¹⁰ to an uninterrupted scene of tranquility, dreaded to engage in the tumultuous bustle of the busy world. We hired a beautiful little villa in the vicinity of Florence, and, blest in the full possession of all that mutual affection and mental gratification could afford, looked down with pity on the proudest distinctions in the power of any earthly monarch to bestow!

“Three delicious years of perfect happiness cemented the bonds of undeviating attachment, when a ragatta [sic], in celebration of the Pope’s accession, awoke the attention, and excited the curiosity of all ranks of people.

“My Louisa was tempted to partake of the amusement; and in the midst of delightful festivity, when every heart bounded with rapture——*mine* alone received the dreadful fiat of eternal anguish!¹¹

[64]“The ARNO was beautifully serene; the silvery surface reflecting, as in a gently moving mirror, the verdant banks sloping to the margin, enamelled with flowers, and crowded with spectators. Thousands of little boats, decorated with variegated¹² streamers, were seen skimming along the lucid current; some containing the most dulcet harmony, and others lightly shading with their silken awnings, the sparkling eyes and roseate blushes of enchanting beauty!

“My Louisa was charmed with this new and facinating [sic] *spectacle*. Our *barchetta*, which was decorated with festoons of myrtle, was gently rowed by youths dressed in the habits of Arcadian shepherds. The mind, charmed to repose by the enchanting scene, sunk into that sweet indolence, which, like the slumber of wearied and exhausted nature, replenishes its faculties, and awakens its perfections to renovated lustre! My Louisa reclined her gentle form upon a mattress of yellow taffata;¹³ the warmth of the evening heightened the glow upon her lovely cheek, and threw a delicious languor on her eyes, that rendered her the object of universal admiration!

“My heart was full of rapture——I beheld my precious treasure with more delight than language can describe. The universe had nothing to bestow, beyond what I

⁹ Here there is an irregularity again, as there are no inverted commas at the beginning of the paragraph (page 63, line 28).

¹⁰ This sounds inconsistent with the context. Louisa, having lived in a convent for many years, should be *accustomed* to tranquillity instead of “*unaccustomed*” (page 63, line 38). This seems to be an error, as in the source text (*Vincenza; Or, The Dangers of Credulity*) it says “*accustomed*” (Robinson, *Vincenza* 210).

¹¹ The full stop after the long hyphen must have been a printing error (page 63, line 49).

¹² Probably “*variegated*”, as I have not been able to find “*varigated*” in any dictionary. It could have been another printing error (page 64, line 4).

¹³ Probably a misspelling of “*taffeta*”, a type of fabric (page 64, line 14).

possessed, and my enchanted senses could scarcely conceive any thing more divine, even in the regions of celestial happiness!

“We arrested our oars, to gratify the soul with the exquisite harmony proceeding from a magnificent barge moored near the margin of the river; when, on a sudden, a young man, of athletic form and noble mien, darted forward, and seizing my beloved Louisa, was bearing her in his arms to a boat along side [sic] of us.

“Every nerve that quivered round my heart, throbbled at this unexpected outrage; the stranger committed his prize to the care of his companions, then advancing towards me, drew a stiletto from his sleeve, and aimed a stroke at my unguarded breast. I warded off the blow, and turned his distard weapon on himself.¹⁴—The point entered his heart—he sunk breathless at my feet.

“Louisa opened her beauteous eyes to all the horrors of despair and death! She had only time to exclaim, “*My brother!*” when the lifeblood rushing from her convulsive lip—she hid her icy cheek in my distracted bosom—and instantly *expired*.

“Frenzy now seizing on my tortured brain, suggested the foul crime of self-annihilation; but justice, like a pitying cherubim, snatched the dire weapon, reeking with kindred blood, from my assassin hand. I was torn from the lifeless victims of impatience, and thrown into the dungeon of horror and repentance.....The Count de Clairville, the brother of my murdered angel, was the only relation relentless fate had left her; her *name* is now extinct.....but her *virtues* are immortal! She had been compelled to take the veil from a base and little pride, which too frequently sacrifices the younger female branches of illustrious, but indigent families, to a shameful and perpetual imprisonment.

“The unfortunate de Clairville was returning from his travels; destined to a military life, he had lately received a commission, and was hastening to join his regiment, then at Lyons.

“He had long given up the fruitless search after his adored sister---*Fate* brought her to his view---then closed his eyes for ever.

[65]“The count having given the first assault;¹⁵ my punishment was mitigated; my doom ten years imprisonment; and afterwards perpetual banishment from a country, whose laws I had violated, and whose annals I had stained with blood.¹⁶ The former part of my sentence expired in days of weeping, and in nights of anguish---‘till the excess of grief produced a sullen stupor, that rendered me insensible to every calamity.

“Time gave again to my sad eyes the cheerful light of heaven, and with it, all the pangs of fatal recollection! Driven from society, an alien to my native country---an outcast from every hope of future happiness---alone, unfriended, lost, forgotten---I knew not whither to direct my course, one half of my little fortune was forfeited to the state, and meagre poverty stretched forth her icy fangs to seal my destiny. By perseverance through a long and painful journey, I arrived in Spain, a wanderer, and unknown, labouring under all the agonies of conscious misery.

“I have from that hour resided among the mountains in the vicinity of Madrid. My hovel was too obscure to excite curiosity, and its solitary tenant too poor to dread interruption. Poverty and sorrow are the strongest securities against the intrusions of

¹⁴ A variation on “dastard”: Cowardly, malicious, base, vile (page 64, line 32).

¹⁵ This would normally be a comma.

¹⁶ The use of punctuation, such as commas and semicolons, is notably different from its use nowadays all throughout the text. The most evident effect is the interruption of sentences, which slows the reading pace.

mankind; let adversity guard your threshold, and you may enjoy an uninterrupted life of mournful seclusion.

“Yet I do not presume to repine, for alas! every hour convinces me that prayers and tears are not sufficient to expiate my crimes. The penance I have imposed upon myself, is a pilgrimage to Loretto, and the first instance I experience of divine benignity, is the benevolent hospitality I now enjoy in the forest of Vancenza.”

Works Cited

- Potter, Liz. "Word of the day: Ocean." *MacMillan Dictionary Blog*, www.macmillandictionaryblog.com/ocean. Accessed 7 March 2023.
- Johnson, Samuel. *A Dictionary of the English Language*. 1755, 1773. Edited by Beth Rapp Young, Jack Lynch, William Dorner, Amy Larner Giroux, Carmen Faye Mathes, and Abigail Moreshead. 2021. <https://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com>.
- Mrs. Robinson. "The Pilgrim's Story." *The Gleaner, or, Entertainment for the Fireside: Consisting of Tales, Moral and Humourous, Histories, Narratives, Adventures, Anecdotes, &c., &c.*, edited by James Watson, vol. 2. Salford, Printed for the Proprietors by W. Cowdroy, 1805, pp. 60–65, https://books.google.es/books?id=BrAIAAAQAAJ&pg=PA331&lpg=PA331&dq=%22the+dread+arbiters+of+life+and+death%22&source=bl&ots=lnHsUaHOBH&sig=2RazKbMrMkSZkzGxZmGjs_8j6dg&hl=en&sa=X&ei=GLISUJvnK6n80QXmlyHADQ&sqi=2&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=%22the%20pilgrim's%20story%22&f=false. Accessed 9 Mar. 2023.
- Robinson, Mary. *Vancenza; Or, the Dangers of Credulity*. Dublin, 1792. https://www.google.es/books/edition/Vancenza_Or_the_Dangers_of_Credulity/5utA8AsMzpkC?hl=es&gbpv=0. Accessed 29 Apr. 2023.