'Arising from the state of intellectual sickliness and lethargy':

A Re-evaluation of Percy Shelley's Gothic Fiction

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Abstract

This dissertation seeks to realign and re-evaluate Shelley's sense of authorship and how this has largely been uncritically absorbed in literary criticism. By locating Shelley's Gothic fiction in the contexts of its production and literary influences, I aim to demonstrate that Shelley's poetic personhood has always been fragmentary and illusory. The Gothic is a perfect analogy for Shelley's literary identity: fragmented, stitched together, and influenced by science and philosophy, both the Gothic genre and Shelley's authorial voice are incoherent. This pragmatic approach to the generic content of Shelley's early fiction rehabilitates texts that have formerly been considered ridiculous, substandard, and second-rate.

I argue that *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* are melodramatically excessive yet complex works. I contend that the novellas demonstrate Shelley's experimentation with language, form, and genre, his interest in science and philosophy, and the fragmentation of his literary identity. I locate *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*—and indeed Shelley's other Gothic works—in the context of their intellectual production and literary environment. I therefore aim to restate the significance of Shelley's Gothic fiction. Although the Shelley canon is undergoing an expansion, a critical rehabilitation of his neglected works is still necessary. Indeed, Shelley the man is an enigma: at once radical and conservative, atheistic, and agnostic, sole literary genius, and collaborative author, identifying and recognising the enigma of Shelley as a man and as a writer can help enlighten us as to why he was so intrigued by the Gothic while he simultaneously dismissed it as a form of 'intellectual sickliness'.

Abbreviations

Z and *SI* – *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*, ed. Stephen C. Behrendt, 2002.

CP1 and *CP2* – *Complete Poetry by Percy Bysshe Shelley*, eds. Donald H. Reiman & Neil Fraistat, in two volumes, 1999-.

LPBS1 – *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Volume I: Shelley in England*, ed. Frederick L. Jones, 1964. Citations are referenced with letter number followed by page number.

SPPBS – *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Selected Poems and Prose*, eds. Jack Donovan & Cian Duffy, 2016.

SLJK – *John Keats: Selected Letters*, eds. Robert Gittings & Jon Mee, 2002.

RA – *Romanticism: An Anthology*, ed. Duncan Wu, 2012.

NS – *The Norton Shakespeare*, eds. Stephen Greenblatt et al, 1997.

Contents

Introduction

Unbinding Percy Shelley's Gothic Authorship

This dissertation analyses Percy Shelley's Gothic novellas *Zastrozzi* (1810) and *St. Irvyne* (1811). Often seen as cheap imitations of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Gothic fiction, *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* have been regarded as uncharacteristically Shelleyan. Indeed, many scholars in the past have assumed that because the novellas are disjointed and fragmented, Shelley must have simply tired of the Gothic genre. In fact, the cult of the Romantic genius is so strong that, although there is now a push to reassess the Romantic canon, Shelley's Gothic fiction is still largely seen as substandard trash. In this dissertation I argue that *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* are melodramatically excessive yet complex works. I contend that the novellas demonstrate Shelley's experimentation with language, form, and genre, his interest in science and philosophy, and the fragmentation of his literary identity. I locate *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*—and indeed Shelley's other Gothic works—in the context of their intellectual production and literary environment. I therefore aim to restate the significance of Shelley's Gothic fiction.

In the early 1810s Shelley's literary output was immense. Writing to James T.T. Tisdall in 1808, Shelley claims that he is so immersed in the literary culture of the day that 'in the Evening I fancy myself a Character' (*LPBS1*, 1964: 3, p. 2). I also consider some of Shelley's other early productions such as *Original Poetry by Victor and Cazire* (1810), *Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson* (1810), *The Wandering Jew* (1810) and *Poetical Essay on the Existing State of Things* (1811). In his early work Shelley blends

the Gothic and the political, but he also willingly collaborates with others. Shelley co-wrote the ironically unoriginal *Original Poetry* with his sister Elizabeth, and while at Oxford he produced *Posthumous Fragments* and *The Necessity of Atheism* (1811) with Thomas Jefferson Hogg. I read Shelley's Gothic fiction in the context of the literature he was consuming at the time.

Given that the novellas are disconnected from the Romantic and Shelley canon, a brief plot summary of each is given here. *Zastrozzi* is a melodramatically excessive tale which almost goes beyond the point of function. It focuses on the eponymous character who seeks to avenge his mother after she was sexually ruined by Verezzi's father. The novella begins *in medias res* with Verezzi chained to a rock by the shadowy Zastrozzi. Verezzi manages to escape while Zastrozzi plots his recapture with Matilda, a noblewoman who is sexually obsessed with Verezzi. Matilda finds Verezzi and, though Zastrozzi promises she will fulfil her desires, Verezzi still eyes her with suspicion. On the orders of Zastrozzi, Matilda informs Verezzi that his lover Julia is dead (although she is still alive at this point in the novella). Prone to moments of dangerous (in)sensibility, Verezzi develops a brain fever, and indeed his emotional extravagance is a clear sign of Shelley's indebtedness to sensibility, a cultural, aesthetic, and literary movement which placed an emphasis on feeling. Desperate to prove she is worthy of his love, Matilda enlists Zastrozzi, who instructs her to defend Verezzi from an 'assassin' (Zastrozzi in disguise). She does so and, touched by her courage, Verezzi agrees to marry Matilda. However, Matilda is soon summoned by the Inquisition in Venice. There, Verezzi spots a melancholy Julia and, again relapsing

into insensibility, he commits suicide. In a frenzy of passion, Matilda murders Julia by stabbing her 'in a thousand places' (Z, p. 142) and is arrested soon afterwards, along with Zastrozzi. At the trial, Matilda repents and asks for God's mercy, but is found guilty of Julia's murder. Zastrozzi, however, refuses to repent. After revealing the true motives of his crimes and declaring his atheism, Zastrozzi dies 'exulting' (p. 156). Indeed, in *Zastrozzi* Shelley's authorial sympathies are ambiguous. Though a self-declared atheist himself, Shelley also upholds the Christian ideal of atonement. Such ideological uncertainties problematise Shelley's literary and political identity.

Shelley's second novella *St. Irvyne* is about the quest for the elixir of life but is in fact far more complex. The novella follows Wolfstein, a German(ic) outcast taken in by the local banditti. One day, the banditti murder a Count and take his virtuous daughter Megalena hostage. Cavigni, the chieftain, desires Megalena, and a jealous Wolfstein plots to murder him. However, one of the bandits, Ginotti, mysteriously knows Wolfstein's plot. Wolfstein eventually manages to murder Cavigni and Ginotti is placed under suspicion until Wolfstein confesses. Ginotti exiles Wolfstein and Megalena to Genoa. There, Wolfstein constantly sees Ginotti, who promises to tell Wolfstein of his motives in the future. As the novella progresses, Wolfstein is increasingly imprisoned in thought by Ginotti. Wolfstein then becomes the object of affection of Olympia. A jealous Megalena orders Wolfstein to murder Olympia, but his courage fails him; realising that Wolfstein can never be hers, Olympia commits suicide with his dagger. Wolfstein and Megalena then flee Genoa.

Readers are then transported to a sentimental narrative which seemingly disrupts Shelley's Gothic plot. It begins with Eloise de St. Irvyne, who has returned to her family home in a miserable state. Five years previously, Eloise had travelled to Geneva with her dying mother and had stayed with the mysterious Nempere. After her mother dies, Nempere seduces Eloise and impregnates her. Eventually, Nempere summons Mountfort, an Englishman who agrees to 'buy' Eloise in reparation for Nempere's debts. Eloise falls in love with Mountfort's Irish companion Fitzeustace, who still believes in Eloise's virtue, and the two marry. In the duration of this sentimental tale Shelley peppers in the Gothic Wolfstein plot, and the parallelism of these two narratives complicate the linearity and structure of the novella. Wolfstein finds out that as a young man Ginotti became interested in natural philosophy and sought to obtain the *elixir vitae*. Ginotti promises to grant Wolfstein the secret of immortality and they agree to meet at the abbey of St. Irvyne. There, Wolfstein discovers Megalena's mangled corpse. A skeletal Ginotti orders Wolfstein to deny his Creator. When Wolfstein refuses to do so, lightning strikes and the prince of Hell appears; Ginotti transforms into a skeleton and Wolfstein is struck dead. Shelley ends his second novella with the ominous declaration that 'Ginotti is Nempere. Eloise is the sister of Wolfstein' (*SI*, p. 252). The abruptness of *St. Irvyne*'s denouement has confused scholars for decades. The disconnected fragmentation of *St. Irvyne* is indicative of Shelley's illusory poetic self, and indeed this schism has come to characterise his later poetry, particularly *The Triumph of Life* (1822)—as I detail more in Chapter Three.

Unsurprisingly, contemporary reviewers did not appreciate Shelley's Gothic novellas. Under particular scrutiny was Shelley's language. *The Critical Review* attacked *Zastrozzi*'s 'nonsensical and stupid jargon' (1810: p. 329) and *The Anti-Jacobin* likewise denounced *St. Irvyne*'s '*description run mad*' (qtd. Barcus, 1975: p. 51, original emphasis). Shelley uses archaisms like 'inutility', 'inerasible', 'frigorific', 'scintillation' and 'torpidity', and, as I consider in this dissertation, his excessive language is significant for a number of reasons. Not only does it reflect the extravagance of his Gothic narrative, but it also demonstrates his fascination with philosophy and science. Indeed, many of Shelley's archaisms can be found in earlier scientific works, which is unsurprising given his interest in the subject. While Gothic romance may be ridiculous for the likes of *The Critical Review* and *The Anti-Jacobin*, the genre is deeply rooted in philosophy, politics, and theology.

In addition, *The Critical Review* and *The Anti-Jacobin* present Shelley as a contaminated author. According to *The Critical Review*, 'ZASTROZZI is one of the most savage and improbable demons that ever issued from a diseased brain', condemning the 'gross and wanton pages' which threaten the modesty of young women; the novella is, the reviewer asserts, 'fit only for the inmates of a brothel' (1810: pp. 329 – 31).[1] As James Whitehead notes, 'Shelley was subjected to the invective of disease or

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[1] Shelley himself evokes the image of prostitution in his preface to *Adonais* (1821). Keats was, according to Shelley, a victim of 'literary prostitutes' who 'wantonly defaced one of the noblest specimens of the workmanship of God' (*RA*, 2012: p. 1249). By 'literary prostitutes' Shelley most likely meant William Gifford and the Poet Laureate Robert Southey. Shelley (and Byron) initially admired Southey but soon became disillusioned with his Tory politics (Cameron, 1942: p. 508). Shelley believed that Southey had written *The Quarterly*'s harsh review of Keats's *Endymion* (1818), which Shelley—and indeed many

mental disorder from his first appearance in print (2017: p. 118). Yet Shelley was not only chastised for his wantonness: he was also criticised for plain bad writing. *The Anti-Jacobin* surmised that 'HAD not the title-page informed us that this curious "Romance" [*St. Irvyne*] was the production of "a gentleman" … we certainly should have ascribed it to some Miss in her teens' (qtd. Barcus, 1975: p. 51). Described as a bad imitation of Ann Radcliffe, there is clearly a gendered dimension to the reception of *St. Irvyne*. Indeed, *The Anti-Jacobin* contributes to a wider conversation pertaining to the feminization of literary culture. For them, the Gothic is not only corrupting female readers but also encouraging them to pen their own romances. Although Shelley is certainly no 'Miss', such reviews nonetheless contributed to the shaping of Shelley's early career as but a youthful phase and the Gothic as a ridiculous mode.

Yet, as Susan Miller reminds us, Shelley's poetical self-fashioning has likewise contributed to the negative reputation of *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* (2012: p. 3). Writing on 8 March 1812 to Godwin, Shelley insists that his novellas were written in 'a state of intellectual sickliness and lethargy' of which 'St. Irvyne' and 'Zastrozzi' were the distempered although unoriginal visions' (*LPBS1*, 1964: 173, p. 266). In an earlier letter to Godwin, he explains:

> I was haunted with a passion for the wildest and most extravagant romances
> […] [F]rom a reader I became I [a] writer of Romance; before the age of
> seventeen I had published two 'St. Irvyne' and 'Zastrozzi' each of which tho
> quite uncharacteristic of me as now I am, yet serve to mark the state of my mind
> at the period of their composition.
>
> (159, pp. 227-8)

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others—thought had contributed to Keats's death. The review had in fact been written by John Wilson Croker.

Like other Gothic writers of the period, Shelley conceives his early fiction 'as at best a novel sideshow of romanticism, and at worst an embarrassing and pervasive disease destructive to national culture and social fabric' (Gamer, 2000: p. 8). Shelley's claim that his novellas are 'uncharacteristic' of his intellect has pervaded subsequent scholarship. The idea that his Gothic fiction is intellectually diseased largely comes from the nineteenth century. Indeed, Victorian discursive constructions of the Shelley canon has left a lasting imprint on criticism. John Addington Symonds, for instance, laments that *Zastrozzi* is uncharacteristically 'incoherent' and full of 'mad sentiment' (1878: p. 19). Victorian Shelleyans believed *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* to be translations of German originals, as it was impossible to suppose that Shelley could write 'balderdash so senseless' (*The Athenaeum,* 1880: pp. 297-8). As such, '[I]t is the act of the patriot to try to fasten such stuff upon any literature rather than that of his own country' (pp. 297-8).

Attitudes did not change in the mid-twentieth century either. Certainly, twentieth century Shelley criticism has promulgated the idea that his Gothicism is unworthy of his intellect. In *The Young Shelley: Genesis of a Radical*, Kenneth Neil Cameron 'heave[s] a sigh of a relief that he [Shelley] finally (via Godwin or anyone else) found that he had social "duties to perform" which would, henceforth, form the basis of his thinking and writing' (1950: p. 51). Like Shelley himself, Cameron—and other critics—believed *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* to be uncharacteristically juvenile. Over the course of two centuries scholars have uncritically absorbed Shelley's own

perception of his Gothic fiction, in what Jerome McGann calls the Romantic Ideology (1983: p. 1). It comes as no surprise, then, that *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* have not been taken seriously, for Shelley himself dismissed the novellas as sub-par romances that were 'uncharacteristic' of his present intellectual state of mind. Indeed, Donald Reiman and Neil Fraistat argue that Shelley's early fiction is testament to his 'self-critical denigration' and 'dissatisfaction with their aesthetic quality' (*CP1*, 1999: p. 264). Even two hundred years on, Shelley's Gothic fiction has not entirely shaken off its association with embarrassing juvenilia, and this is in part due to his own poetic shame. Shelley's Gothic fiction is the victim of critical humiliation: his own self-denigration, combined with the contemporaneous reception of his novellas and later Victorian modifications of the Shelley canon, have established this idea that *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* are unworthy of his 'genius'.

Certainly, what is deemed characteristically Shelleyan has led some scholars to make dubious claims. In *Shelley* (1968), Jean Overton Fuller justifies the plagiarisms in *Original Poetry* by claiming that Shelley read Matthew Lewis's Gothic ballads in a 'somnambulistic state, and… the words became internalized' (p. 31). Critics are so desperate to cling onto this sense of Shelley's literary 'wholeness' that they will attempt to justify Shelley's early fiction by any means. Just as Shelley justified to Godwin that *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* were written as a youthful enterprise, so do scholars rationalize Shelley's borrowings by insisting he did it unconsciously. However, to focus on Shelley's so-called literary 'wholeness' is to disregard the many nuances within his work, his fluctuating literary identity, and the complexity of his

early fiction. For, far from being simply plagiaristic, sub-standard Gothic novellas, *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*—and indeed the rest of Shelley's early fiction—reveal the poet's fascination with the Gothic and his experimentation with the boundaries of literary narrative and genre.

In the twentieth and twenty-first century, critical knowledge of the Shelley canon has been influenced by his editors. However, given that Shelley's Gothic fiction has historically been underestimated in criticism, it is perhaps unsurprising that there are omissions. In *The Longman Critical Reader: Shelley* (1993), for example, his early fiction is entirely absent; the collection focuses solely on the poetry Shelley produced between 1815 and 1822. Jack Donovan and Cian Duffy's *Selected Poems and Prose* (2016) is more comprehensive; however, although the edition includes some of Shelley's 1812 works and Gothic poetry ('The Irishman's Song', 'Fierce roars the midnight storm', 'Corpses are cold in the tomb'), again, it largely focuses on the later texts. Indeed, although there are countless editions of Shelley's poetry and letters, a complete and comprehensive edition of his prose is absent. Thus, although the Shelley canon is undergoing an expansion, a critical rehabilitation of his neglected works is still necessary.

While there has been a push in recent decades to take *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* seriously, there is still a gap in scholarship regarding Shelley's early literary pursuits. In his introduction to *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*, Stephen Behrendt states that 'scholars… have historically been troubled by how to assess [the novellas], and indeed by the question of how "seriously" they wish to take them in the first place' (2002: p. 10). The

Shelley who produced *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* is apparently at odds with the Shelley of *Prometheus Unbound* (1820). For Joseph Crawford, *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* are 'two extremely poor German-style Gothic novels… which mercifully sank without trace' (2020: pp. 135-6). Yet, for Behrendt, there are 'unmistakable foreshadowings' in Shelley's early fiction that would become 'hallmarks' of his major works (p. 12).

Tilottama Rajan makes a similar conclusion in her Lacanian reading of the novellas. For Rajan, *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* are 'a laboratory for the later work' (2010: p. 48). She emphasises that the novellas are Promethean as they are hyperreal narratives which disassemble their own narrative coherency (p. 54). Indeed, in the novellas Shelley rejects linearity and cohesiveness in place of lacunae. *St. Irvyne* concludes with the declaration that Wolfstein and Eloise are siblings, although Shelley gives no prior indication of this in the novella. As such, Rajan laments *St. Irvyne*'s 'hurriedly tacked-on ending' (p. 46), although, as I discuss in this dissertation, such fragmentation is characteristically Shelleyan.

Scholars who discuss Shelley's Gothic novellas tend to approach them in two ways. Either, as Angela Wright and Dale Townshend suggest, Shelley merely 'dabbles' in the Gothic before abandoning it completely (2016: p. 14), or they relate it back entirely to his later works. The issue with the former supposition is that it is far too dismissive of Shelley's position in the Gothic, when in actuality some of Shelley's later works are haunted by Gothic conventions. The most obvious example is *The Cenci* (1819). George Edward Woodberry observes that *The Cenci* is the 'climax' of Shelley's Gothic *oeuvre* with its Radcliffean landscapes and Sadean power relations (1909: p.

xxii). In fact, like Shelley's 1810 Gothics, *The Cenci* is so excessive that it almost goes beyond its function; it was deemed unstageable in 1819 due to its themes of incestuous rape and patricide.[2] Like the extradiegetic narrator of *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*, in his preface to *The Cenci*, Shelley posits himself as a moral steward: he asserts that his motivation for writing the tragedy was 'to make apparent some of the most dark and secret caverns of the human heart' (*SPPBS*, 2016: p. 275). After being raped by her father, Beatrice Cenci projects her psychological trauma onto the landscape: 'Even as a wretched soul hour after hour/Clings to the mass of life… makes more dark the dread abyss' (p. 311, III. lns. 252-4). Furthermore, Beatrice's inner mind 'Is like a ghost shrouded and folded up/In its own formless horror' (p. 306, III. lns. 110-11), anticipating psychoanalytical introspection which is crucial to readings of the Gothic. Then of course, there is the Count's murder itself, which would certainly fit any Gothic novel. The Count condemns Beatrice's soul 'Plague-spotted with my curses' (p. 321, IV. Ln. 94) and is dispatched by two assassins soon afterwards. What follows next is a classic Gothic denouement: locals scream 'murder!', the authorities arrive, and Beatrice is sentenced to death. Therefore, Shelley's place in the Gothic continued well after the publication of *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*.

While it makes sense to read *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* in relation to Shelley's later works, they have their own autonomy. Moreover, those who take Shelley's Gothic fiction 'seriously' often work from a psychoanalytical approach which, while useful,

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[2] In recent decades there has been a move away from the idea that *The Cenci* is unstageable, with an emphasis instead on the play's complex political issues and aesthetic transgression.

ultimately relies on a determined sense of personhood: that is, Shelley's literary value is inextricably linked with his maturity, which is why such approaches often read *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* in relation to *Prometheus Unbound*. By contrast, what I suggest in this dissertation is that Shelley, as a teenager, should be expected to produce 'significant' literary works. What has been deemed historically valuable in literary criticism is at times arbitrary. The unsophisticatedness of Shelley's Gothic fiction should not disqualify it from deeper study; rather, it is an opportunity to re-evaluate his authorship.

Shelley's Gothic *oeuvre* not only shows his state of mind but also his cultural consumption. Shelley digested a range of texts ranging from natural philosophy and astronomy to tales of the German Illuminati. He was heavily influenced by his Eton professors, James Lind, and Adam Walker, by whom he accessed the works of Erasmus Darwin, Joseph Priestley, and Humphry Davy (Ruston, 2007: p. 229). As such, *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* do not need to be read solely in relation to the content of his later career: they are also a memento of Shelley's intellectual life in the 1810s.

Even so, psychoanalysis tends to dominate Gothic scholarship. From Emily St. Aubert's physical and mental imprisonment in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) to Wolfstein and Eloise's psychological ravishment in *St. Irvyne*, the Gothic is a mode suited to psychoanalysis, which postulates that the real terror is the inner workings of the mind. In *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*, terror and psychological imprisonment often blends with desire. In this way, Shelley's Gothic fiction subscribes to what Eve Sedgwick calls the 'paranoid Gothic', in which a vulnerable man is persecuted by his

mirror-image, who also tends to be male (2008: p. 186, n.10). While this dissertation

does not take an ostensibly psychoanalytical approach, it can illuminate how Shelley

uses horror and terror.

The excessive style of *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* has contributed to the idea that

the poet's 'adolescent psyche' was 'disturbed' (Seed, 1982: p. 41).[3] The state of mind of

reviewers and critics show that there is a pre-existing hostility to the young Shelley

and his attempt at writing Gothic novellas. The state of mind of the fiction itself also

comes into play. It is no coincidence that Shelley uses the doppelgänger at a time when

Gothic writers became increasingly preoccupied with the sensation of psychological

turmoil. Shelley and Hogg consumed the works of John Locke, David Hume, and

George Berkeley, seventeenth century philosophers who dissected the science of the

mind (Bruhn, 2009: p. 374). As I discuss in Chapter One, Shelley was an ardent lover

of science, so it comes as no surprise that he was interested in the proto-psychological

potential of the Gothic. To contextualise this further, there follows a summary of the

development of the Gothic genre and its subsequent popularity.

The 1790s was the Golden Age of Gothic romance, which dominated the

literary market in the middle of the decade. At its peak in 1795 with a market share of

38 percent, this figure dipped to 20 percent in 1810 (Miles, 2002: p. 42), a year or two

before Shelley began writing his own novellas. Robert Miles notes that the Gothic was

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[3] In his post-Freudian analysis of *Zastrozzi*, Eustace Chesser concludes that Shelley 'was an introspective schizoid type with arrested sexual development at an undifferentiated stage, showing itself in elements of narcissism, homosexuality and immature heterosexuality'. He goes on to note that, '[W]ere it not that his dreams were inspired by genius, Shelley could be dismissed as a futile visionary' (1965: pp. 51-2).

not homogenous and thus ranged from conservative Gothics to Jacobin tales of terror (p. 45). Shelley consumed such works; he was fond of Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797), Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794) and *St. Leon* (1799) and Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya* (1806). According to Thomas Medwin, Shelley was 'enraptured' by Dacre's 'Monk-Lewisy production' (1913: p. 25). Shelley absorbed a range of narratives, and, as I discuss in Chapter Two, this creates an intriguing tension between the conservative and radical authorial voices found in Shelley's own Gothic novellas.

Thanks to writers such as Godwin and Thomas Paine, Jacobin texts started to emerge in the mid-1790s. *Caleb Williams* is hailed as 'the first ostensibly Jacobin Gothic' (Miles, 2002: pp. 48-9), and indeed Gothic romance started to be associated with what Carol Davison calls 'terror-romanticism' (2009: p. 4), that is, works that were seen to endorse the sentiments of the French Revolution. Angela Wright surmises that the Gothic 'was increasingly perceived as the translational container in which French sentiments and ideals were imported into British fiction' (2013: p. 65). Jean-Jacques Rousseau's scandalous sentimental novel *Julie, Ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), in which a fallen woman retains her virtue, had a major impact on the British literary market and was read by Shelley. Although the Gothic was associated with juvenile commodification (Gamer, 2000: p. 12), it increasingly became correlated with the foreign literature of France and Germany. This is not to brandish all Romantic Gothics as Jacobin—after all, the Gothic was appropriated by conservatives too—but that

rather as a genre it is deeply embedded in politics. Nevertheless, the Gothic retained its popularity in the 1790s right through to the nineteenth century.

By the early nineteenth century, the Gothic had become wearily familiar to public readership. Even Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, which was published in 1810 but written in the 1790s, satirizes Catherine Morland's obsession with Radcliffean romance. By the Napoleonic period, such parodies were common, and the Gothic 'underwent a radical revitalization in the course of the 1810s and 1820s, after which it was distilled, in a variety of firms, into a diversity of genres' (Davison, 2009: p. 187). One way that the 'import of terror' survived was through the numerous Gothic chapbooks and bluebooks that proliferated the market (Wright, 2013: p. 150). These chapbooks were essentially mini plagiarisms of popular romances od the period and were designed to be 'literally read to pieces' (Behrendt. 2002: p. 27). Known as 'shilling shockers', these short penny dreadful-like stories democratized reading, allowing Gothic romances to circulate within a much wider audience. As such, chapbooks and bluebooks have been blamed for the subsequent decline of Gothic romance (Hoeveler, 2014: p. 188). Strangely, Shelley's *St. Irvyne* was abridged as a Gothic chapbook between 1815-1818. John Bailey's *Wolfstein*, which closely resembles Shelley's second novella, tells the tale of a German outcast that flees to the woods and joins the banditti. There, he meets Barozzi, a mysterious figure who gains control of the bandits. Bailey's *Wolfstein* was reissued in 1822, probably due to the recent death of Shelley, who had drowned some months previously (Behrendt, 2002: pp. 28-9). The Gothic thus becomes (re)fragmented; already a popular form by the 1810s, it is further

cannibalized through chapbooks and bluebooks that abridge, adapt, and literally reshape Gothic texts.

Indeed, scholarly unease regarding Shelley's Gothic fiction is in part due to the commodification of the genre. As Emma Clery notes, the commercialization of the Gothic resulted in the 'spiritualisation of commerce', that is, how the Gothic became increasingly conflated with market capitalism (1995: p. 7). After Shelley's death in July 1822, Mary Shelley published Gothic short stories for the *Keepsake* and *Forget-Me-Not* magazines to support herself financially. Yet, like *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*, Mary Shelley's 1830s Gothic fiction has been relatively unexplored because of its commodification (Sussman, 2003: p. 164).

However, it is this very marketization which challenges dominant assumptions of Romantic authorship. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century originality and authenticity was highly contested. In *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759) Edward Young makes a clear distinction between 'originals' and 'imitations':

> [T]he pen of an original writer, like Armida's wand, out of barren waste calls out a blooming spring: out of that blooming spring an imitator is a transplanter of laurels, which sometimes die on removal, always languish in a foreign soil.
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> (1971: p. 339)[4]

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[4] Taken from Young's letter to Samuel Richardson, the author of *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753). In *Original Composition*, Young consistently uses botanical metaphors when referring to authorial originality: 'barren waste', 'that blooming spring', 'transplanter of laurels', 'foreign soil'; the implication being that 'originals' naturally blossom, whereas 'imitations' are weed-like.

The issue with the Gothic, of course, is that its very non-linearity makes it difficult to tell what is original, and it is therefore 'a parasitical economy' (Derrida, 1980: p. 59).[5] The Gothic is a textual vampire in that it sucks out material from other sources, and hence what is considered 'authentic' soon becomes murky. As Harold Bloom argues in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), writers are trapped in the labyrinth of indebtedness; while poets attempt to establish their originality, they ultimately 'misinterpret' an earlier work and therefore become assimilated in the literary tradition (p. 30). This applies to Shelley's Gothic fiction too: *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* have been charged with a literary 'aesthetic violation' (Mazzeo, 2007: p. 2) wherein the so-called authenticity of Shelley's early fiction is questioned not only by his contemporaries but also by modern criticism. Shelley's immersion in the Gothic obscures his poetic identity as it is a genre steeped in cliches and literary allusions, but this is not a hindrance to critical analysis. Shelley is not a transcendent individual genius, but a young man fascinated by the potentials of the Gothic and completely immersed in the wonders of the literary world: in an 1810 letter to J. J. Stockdale, Shelley mentions that *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* have the potential to '*mechanically* sell[s] to circulating libraries' (*LPBS1*, 1964: 23, p. 20, original emphasis).

In fact, like the books in the circulating libraries, the Gothic is constructed from a heterogeneous form of 'mingled yarn'.[6] As Gamer puts it, the Gothic 'is a site that

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[5] In *The Law of Genre* Derrida argues that textual purity is a fallacy: generic boundaries are disrupted by an 'internal division of the trait, impurity, corruption, contamination, decomposition, perversion, deformation, even cancerization, generous proliferation, or degenerescence' (1980: p. 57).
[6] From Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well* (1623). In a letter to Benjamin Bailey dated 1817, Keats applies the phrase 'mingled yarn' to describe the eccentric networkability of the Leigh Hunt circle:

moves, and that must be defined in part by its ability to transplant itself *across* forms and media' (2000: p. 8). Jerold E. Hogle concurs, stating that 'the Gothic is a thread made of conflicted and multicolored fibres that keeps being woven in and out of Romantic writing' (2012: p. 200). Although writers such as Shelley, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats appropriated the Gothic they also attempted to distance themselves from it. As Hogle notes, this has resulted in an underestimation of the Gothic genre in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and beyond (2012: pp. 198-200). Maggie Kilgour provides an ingenious metaphor for the malleability of the Gothic, which is:

> … assembled out of the bits and pieces of the past. While it therefore can at times seem hopelessly naïve and simple, it is, at its best, a highly wrought, artificial form which is extremely self-conscious of its artificiality and creation out of old material and traditions […] Gothic creation thus suggests a view of the imagination not as an originating faculty that creates ex nihilo, but as a power of combination […] Gothic creation is a Frankensteinian process.
>
> (1995: p. 4)

Unstable in form and crossing generic sites, the Gothic is metaphorically constructed from different parts of literary meat (prose, poetry, romance, terror, the novel of sensibility) that are then sewn together to create a so-called 'artificial' form that has been at once a source of inspiration and contempt for writers and scholars alike for centuries. This is an apt metaphor as *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*, like many other Gothic novels of the period, push literary boundaries and are (sometimes clumsily) 'stitched'

[…] From No. 19 I went to Hunt's and [Benjamin] Haydon's who live now neighbours. Shelley was there—I know nothing about anything in this part of the world—every Body seems at Loggerheads. There's Hunt infatuated—there's Haydon's picture in statu quo. There's Hunt walks up and down his painting room criticising every head most unmercifully—There's Horace Smith tired of Hunt. The web of our Life is of mingled Yarn. (*SLJK,* 2002: p. 25).

together. Moreover, Shelley's Gothic novellas have been discarded by many scholars who tend to 'throw out' these early attempts at fiction due to their artificiality.

The construction of Romanticism as a movement is likewise ambiguous and still disputed today. Back in 1924, Arthur O. Lovejoy conjectured that 'the word "romantic" has come to mean so many things that, by itself, it means nothing. It has ceased to perform the function of a verbal sign' (p. 232). The insolvability of Romanticism extends to the Gothic which is equally fluid as a term. Yet if it has been established the Gothic and Romanticism are unsolvable and ambiguous, there seems to be little incentive to approach Shelley's early fiction in the same way, despite the fact that *St. Irvyne* in particular is known for its enigmatic denouement. Shelley the man is just as enigmatic: at once radical and conservative, atheistic, and agnostic, sole literary genius, and collaborative author, identifying and recognising the enigma of Shelley as a man and as a writer can help enlighten us as to why he was so intrigued by the Gothic while he simultaneously dismissed it as a form of 'intellectual sickliness'. *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* are curious specimens and are worthy of consideration as they supposedly contradict the popular image of Shelley as an heroical poet. Building upon Kilgour's Frankensteinian metaphor, Shelley's literary identity is constructed of different parts, and thus to sacrifice one (low Gothic writer) in favour of the other (high poetic genius) leads to oversimplification and generalisation of Shelley's literary output in his comparatively short life. By contrast, I suggest that Shelley's experimentation with literary genre and form in the early 1810s points to the fluidity of his poetic identity.

The fluidity of Shelley's literary identity is analogous to the poststructuralist concept of the 'author-function' (Foucault, 1998: p. 211). In *S/Z* (1974) Roland Barthes makes a distinction between 'writerly' and 'readerly' texts: the former is characterised by enigma and requires engagement on part of the reader, while the latter is a product of its context (1974: p. 4). Although Shelley's Gothic fiction is completely embedded within its culture, it is nonetheless indecipherable and necessitates readerly effort. To impose a limit on Shelley's Gothic fiction is to impose a limit on his authorship. While Romantic scholarship has been keen to assert the fluidity of Shelley's poetic personhood, when it comes to his Gothic fiction critics still impose a fixed meaning on its composition. As I make clear in this dissertation, Shelley's literary identity does not suit these rigid binaries of 'seriousness' and 'ridiculousness'; he is all of these things and more. Consequently, it is a fallacy to rigidly define Shelley, when not only his authorship but the very definition of Romanticism is constantly in flux.

Indeed, the non-linearity of the Gothic and Shelley's poetic self is akin to a postmodern poetics. In *Gothic Postmodernism: Voicing the Terrors of Postmodernity* (2009), Maria Beville asserts that the 'gothic-postmodern' is a literature of terror (pp. 8-9); *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*, however, the Gothic and the postmodern work as a literature of fragmentation. As significant, some of Shelley's later works (most notably *The Cenci*) are haunted by his earlier Gothic conventions; they are so excessive almost to the point of malfunction. Methodologically speaking, then, the 'gothic-postmodern' works in Shelley's early fiction as a site of underlying disjunction and excess.

Shelley's early attempts at authorship and his place in the Gothic are therefore more complex than credited. *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* mediate an odd position in the Romantic canon as, while they are early works of Shelley, they are published two decades after the Golden Age of Gothic romance. In order to understand Shelley's intellectual milieu and his state of mind at the time, it is necessary to explore his Oxford years (1810-11). Chapter One investigates Hogg's biography, *Shelley at Oxford* (1822-3). I also scrutinise twentieth and twenty first century biographies by Kenneth Neil Cameron, Richard Holmes, James Bieri and John Worthen. But the significance of Shelley's Oxford years moves beyond the purely biographical. I analyse the impact of cosmology and chemistry in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century as well as the cultural and philosophical contexts of atheism. By addressing this, it becomes clear how the language of science, philosophy and theology inflects Shelley's Gothic fiction. Moreover, I consider Shelley's other Oxford Gothics, such as *Original Poetry, The Wandering Jew, Posthumous Fragments,* and *Poetical Essay*. At this point in time Shelley engages in a symbiotic relationship with other texts and authors.

Chapter Two examines Shelley's first novella *Zastrozzi*. It looks at how Shelley's 'nonsensical and stupid jargon' reflects the titanism of his characters. In particular, I interrogate the etymology and application of Shelley's language. Though much work has been done of the chemical context(s) of *Frankenstein*, Shelley's Gothic fiction is equally indebted to contemporaneous scientific knowledge. In *Zastrozzi* Shelley appropriates the vernacular of cosmology and philosophy and gothicises it, which complicates the narrative. Just as science ponders mysterious phenomena, so does the

Gothic hint at a peculiar—and potentially supernatural—event (Talairach, 2019: p. 150). As well as this, I analyse Shelley's conflicting authorial voice. Sympathising with atheistic revenge and then condemning it, it is unclear where Shelley's ideological position lies, and the chapter concludes that, although Shelley ultimately sympathises with atheism, the moral frisson inherent in *Zastrozzi* dislocates his authorial intent.

Chapter Three reassess the disjunction between the Gothic and the sentimental in *St. Irvyne*. Readers are taken from a German Gothic landscape to a French sentimental environment. Although these modes appear to be disconnected, Shelley links them by comparing Gothic (in)sensibility and delirium to the dangers of a too lenient female education, which Mary Wollstonecraft famously derided in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Then, I interrogate the novella's puzzling finale. While it has been assumed that Shelley arrogantly tired of the Gothic and therefore left the novella unfinished, I suggest that the lacunae present in *St. Irvyne* points to a fragmentation of form which destabilizes Shelley's sense of authorship. While it has been established that later manuscripts such as the *Triumph* point to Shelley's fragmented selfhood, I argue that *St. Irvyne* should be read in the same way, as readers compel themselves to fill in the novella's gaps.

Hence, this dissertation seeks to realign and re-evaluate Shelley's sense of authorship and how this has largely been uncritically absorbed in criticism. By locating Shelley's Gothic fiction in the contexts of its production and literary influences, I aim to demonstrate that Shelley's poetic personhood has always been fragmentary and illusory. The Gothic is a perfect analogy for Shelley's literary

identity: fragmented, stitched together, and influenced by science and philosophy, both the Gothic genre and Shelley's authorial voice are incoherent. This pragmatic approach to the generic content of Shelley's early fiction rehabilitates texts that have formerly been considered ridiculous, substandard, and second-rate.

I

Straight Outta Oxford

In his introductory letter to Godwin, Shelley declares that he is 'ardent in the cause of philanthropy and truth' (*LPBS1*, 1964: 157, p. 220), clearly distancing himself from his Gothic endeavours. The idea that Shelley was an advocate of virtue, and an intellectual martyr was taken up by his contemporaries who sought to map out the development of the poet, and indeed, nineteenth century biographies of the poet are divorced from the reality of his life and works, and thus a critical re-evaluation is necessary. This chapter primarily uses Hogg's semi-fictional *Shelley at Oxford* which, though invaluable, is nonetheless biased toward its author. Hogg at times overexaggerates his role in Shelley's life and their expulsion from Oxford, which I interrogate as an anchor to the dissertation. Yet I do not simply analyse Shelley's personal life; I also look at his intellectual and cultural milieu. At Oxford Shelley digests the wonders of chemistry and astronomy and absorbs the philosophical works of Baruch Spinoza, John Locke, David Hume, and George Berkeley. In order to comprehend Shelley's Gothic fiction, it is vital that his literary and cultural contexts are understood. Indeed, Shelley's consumption of the natural sciences, philosophy and politics shape his Gothic fiction. After all, the genre is deeply entrenched in its intellectual culture.

In the first section, I dissect Shelley's (brief) experience at Oxford; his relationship with Hogg, his absorption of literary, philosophical, and scientific works, and the production of the *Necessity*. While the *Necessity* has been regarded as the genesis of Shelley's revolutionary thought, I scrutinise the philosophical roots of

atheism. Indeed, atheism mingles with pantheism and agnosticism, thereby complicating Shelley's authorial agency.

Then, I explore Shelley's other early productions, particularly *Original Poetry*, *The Wandering Jew*, *Posthumous Fragments* and *Poetical Essay*. In the early 1810s Shelley experiments with different literary forms and narratives while still retaining a deep interest in the Gothic. Crucially, in this period Shelley co-operates with other authors, namely Elizabeth Shelley and Hogg. Shelley's Oxford years are a period of exchange with his scientific surroundings; with earlier philosophical works; and with his acquaintances. Shelley's Oxford years and the (Gothic) works he produced at the time are testament to his engagement with the world around him.

I: Oxford, 1810-11

In *Shelley at Oxford* Hogg explains in some detail the idiosyncrasy of his friend. When the pair first met, they engaged in a friendly dispute about German literature; Shelley had 'an enthusiastic admiration' for the German school, whereas Hogg 'asserted their want of nature' (1904: pp. 6-7). Hogg describes Shelley as an unusually captivating person:

> [H]is figure was slight and fragile, and yet his bones and joints were large and strong. He was tall, but stooped so much that he seemed of low stature… [H]is complexion was delicate and almost feminine, of the purest red and white… [H]is features, his whole face, and particularly his head, were, in fact, unusually small; yet the last *appeared* of a remarkable bulk, for his hair was long…
>
> (pp. 10-11)

Such descriptions of Shelley as a recklessly wild young man contradict the image of him as an ethereal martyr.[1] However, as Timothy Webb reminds us, Hogg 'reshaped' his first impressions of Shelley so that his 'revolutionary ardours' became instead a sign of his manic 'eccentricity' (1977: p. 7). This sense of rashness and dissension is also reflected in Hogg's description of Shelley's apartment, which was littered with:

> [B]ooks, boots, papers, shoes, philosophical instruments, clothes, pistols, linen, crockery, ammunition and phials innumerable, with money, stockings, prints, crucibles, bags and boxes were scattered on the floor and in every place, as if the young chemist, in order to analyse the mystery of creation, had endeavoured first to re-construct the primeval chaos.
>
> (1904: p. 31)

Just as Victor Frankenstein is fascinated by 'the wonderful effects of steam' (2008: p. 24), so is Shelley intrigued by the potentials of science. Like Frankenstein, Hogg notes that Shelley had a 'zealous earnestness for the augmentation of knowledge', even describing him at one point as 'the wizard in his cave' (1904: p. 22-4).

Shelley's 'wizardry' was inspired in part by Adam Walker and James Lind. Walker was affiliated with the Lunar Society and had published *Analysis of a Course of Lectures on Natural and Experimental Philosophy* (1766) and *A System of Familiar Philosophy* (1802) which Shelley may have read (Ruston, 2007: p. 232). Walker believed in the need to make scientific knowledge accessible, and this had a profound effect on the young Shelley. For Shelley, religious superstition is 'irreconcilable with the

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[1] Shelley's contemporaries tend to portray him as unusually slim and tall (about five foot eleven) with large eyes and slightly unkempt hair. What is most striking, however, is descriptions of Shelley's voice. Thomas Love Peacock describes it thus: '[T]here is a good deal in these volumes about Shelley's discordant voice… he spoke in sharp fourths, the most unpleasing sequence of sound that can fall on the human ear' (1909: p. 16). Despite this, Peacock asserts that Shelley read Shakespeare beautifully.

knowledge of the stars' (qtd. pp. 235; 228). As Walker's astronomy lectures pondered the truth of knowledge and creation, it is little surprise that Shelley used this as evidence of God's intangibility.

Lind also guided Shelley's scientific interests; he became an 'intellectual guide and an emotional father-figure' and introduced him to demonology (Holmes, 1974: pp. 25-6). Hogg records that at Eton Shelley sneaked into the local church and 'consulted his books, how to raise a ghost', with Shelley declaring on another occasion 'that the Devil followed him' (1858: p. 34).[2] One can imagine that through his own scientific pursuits, Shelley himself pursued the *elixir vitae* that interests the youthful Frankenstein and destroys Ginotti and Reginald de St. Leon. Hogg notes that Shelley owned '[A]n electrical machine, an air pump, the galvanic trough, a solar microscope and large glass jars and receivers' (1904: p. 31). Holmes suggests that Shelley was not so much fascinated by 'physical' science than its imaginative potential, as '[C]hemistry, electricity, astronomy fused easily with alchemy, fire-worship, explosives and physical investigations' (1974: p. 16). Hogg's descriptions perpetuate this idea of Shelley's eccentricity, but they also highlight the diversity of Shelley's scientific interests, which ranged from devil-worship to cosmology—and these are not necessarily mutually exclusive.[3]

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[2] Shelley's interest in demonology took a more sinister turn in 1813. While staying in the Tremadog region in Wales with his first wife Harriet Westbrook, Shelley claimed to have been the victim of a demonic assassination attempt. No one else saw the perpetrator, leading some to question if Shelley had in fact hallucinated the entire event. To this day it remains unexplained and is still referred to as 'Shelley's Ghost' (Shepherd, 2015: n.p.).

[3] For an exploration of material and imaginative occultism in the Romantic period, see Stephanie Churms, *Romanticism and Popular Magic: Poetry and Cultures of the Occult in the 1790s* (2019).

According to Hogg and subsequent biographers, Shelley and his friend equally bonded over their contempt for the college authorities. In an 1812 letter to Godwin, Shelley heroically declares that 'Oxonian society was insipid to me, uncongenial with my habits of thinking' (*LPBS1*, 1964: 159, p. 228). Oxford reputedly 'took shape in his mind as a personal challenge, a fortress of superstition and mediocrity' (Holmes, 1974: p. 39). However, while Shelley did engage in his intellectual surroundings, I do not want to merely suggest that Oxford was the birth of his revolutionary thought. Rather, what is significant is that Shelley was conflicted by his class privilege. As he stipulated to Leigh Hunt, he was destined to 'fill [his father's] vacant seat' in Parliament by becoming a Whig (*LPBS1*, 1964: 49, p. 54).

Regardless of his inner class conflict, by 1810 Shelley raged against authority. In a Gothically impassioned letter to Hogg, he decries religious despotism:

> Oh! I burn with impatience for the moment of Xtianity's dissolution, it has injured me; I swear on the altar of perjured love to revenge myself on the hated cause of the effect… I will stab the wretch in secret.—Let us hope that the wound which we inflict tho' the dagger be concealed, will rankle into the heart of our adversary.—My father wished to withdraw me from College, I *would* not consent to it.—There lowers a terrific tempest, but I stand as it were on a Pharos, & smile exultingly at the vain beating of the billows below—[.]
> (*LPBS1*, 1964: 30, pp. 27-8)

It is worth noting that 'the hated cause of the effect' had a more personal aspect to it. Between 1808 and 1809, Shelley engaged in a youthful affair with his cousin Harriet Grove, but she would eventually come to be alarmed by Shelley's heterodox sympathies (Bieri, 2004: p. 103). It is possible that '[I]f Shelley had not been frustrated in love, perhaps his hatred [for God] would have been less keen' (Wroe, 2012: p. 47).

However, Shelley's ill-fated love affair is not the sole cause. At Oxford Shelley engages in a symbiotic relationship with earlier texts, which led him to pen his own 'little tract'—the *Necessity*.

Often regarded as the birth of Shelley's intellectual insurgence, the *Necessity* invites religious believers to prove the existence of God. The advertisement reads,

> *As a love of truth is the only motive which actuates the Author of this little tract, he earnestly entreats that those of his readers who may discover any deficiency in his reasoning, or may be in possession of proofs which his mind could never obtain, would offer them, together with their objections to the Public, as briefly, as methodically, as plainly as he has taken the liberty of doing.* Thro' deficiency of proof.
>
> AN ATHEIST
>
> (1880: p. 303)

Shelley had read Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670), which bemoans that mankind has been 'thoroughly enslaved by every kind of superstition' in place of 'reason… and human wisdom' (2016: p. 66). Running through *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* and the *Necessity* is an attestation of rationality: superstition becomes, to quote William Blake, a 'mind-forged manacle' (*RA*, 2012: p. 207, ln. 8).

In the *Necessity* Shelley and Hogg postulate that belief 'is an act of volition' (1880: p. 305). Faith is 'a passion of the mind' and therefore 'no degree of criminality can be attached to disbelief' (p. 309). Since belief is a passive act of the mind, disbelief is also involuntary and therefore not punishable.[4] Indeed, in the *Necessity* Shelley and

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[4] Shelley and Hogg's contention that belief is involuntary is indebted to Hume.

Hogg emphasise that knowledge (belief) is based upon perception, intuition, and the

three 'degrees of excitement':[5]

> [1] The senses are the sources of all knowledge to the mind, consequently their evidence claims the strongest assent.
>
> [2] The decision of the mind founded upon our own experience derive from these sources, claims the next degree.
>
> [3] The experience of others which addresses itself to the former one, occupies the lowest degree.
>
> (p. 306)

Colin Jager notes that in the early modern period belief—and in turn religion—became

'an increasingly mentalistic' concept which valued perception and sense (2014: p. 616).

Like Shelley, Locke defines knowledge by 'three degrees': intuition, demonstration,

and sensation (1977: p. 42). Perception is also a key aspect of the empirical philosophy

of Berkeley and Hume. In *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*

(1710), Berkeley uses the phrase '*esse is percipi*' ('to be is to be perceived') to indicate

that existence and consciousness is tied up with sensation and sight (2008: p. 84).

Hume makes a distinction between 'impressions' and 'ideas', but in his *Enquiry*

Concerning the Principles of Morals (1751), he claims that mankind should 'reject every

system of ethics, however subtle or ingenious, which is not founded on fact and

observation' (1912: p. 7). This is Shelley and Hogg's primary argument: to believe

something is to see it, to sense it. Instead of relying on the testimony of prophets,

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[5] It is worth pointing out that Shelley also used the phrase 'degrees of excitement' to refer to the stages of male sexual arousal (Wroe, 2012: p. 45).

Shelley and Hogg rely on the logical faculties of the mind. Since no one has actually observed God, then an almighty being cannot rationally exist.

However, it is critical to recognise that the definition of atheism has changed over time.[6] While contemporaries of Spinoza and Hume may have viewed them with some suspicion as atheists, their philosophical enquiries are now generally considered to lean closer to pantheism and agnosticism. As well as this, Locke in fact uses his 'three degrees' to support the existence of God: 'since we have sense, perception, and reason, and cannot want a clear proof of Him as long as we carry ourselves about us' (1849: p. 475). Therefore, Shelley and Hogg adapt the doctrines of empirical philosophy for the *Necessity*, even if such ideas are in fact grounded in a belief in God.

Certainly, the history of religious belief and its institutional roots is complex. Alan Kors observes that in the early modern world, university-educated gentlemen were 'taught, formally and informally, to generate "objections"… and to overcome them… all for purposes of triumphant refutation' (1990: p. 53). As such, atheism is in fact 'a very Christian concept' in that religious belief became an object of scrutiny in scholarly environments (Jager, 2014: p. 618). If true, then, far from defying religious authority, Shelley and Hogg's *Necessity* does in fact conform to the institutional norm of theological debate.

Shelley's religious (un)belief has been the subject of debate since his death and is still contested today. In their obituary of the poet, *The Courier* stated that 'Shelley,

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[6] For a critical investigation of the development of atheism as an identity, see David Berman, *A History of Atheism in Britain: From Hobbes to Russell* (1988).

the writer of some infidel poetry, has been drowned: now he knows whether there is a God or no' (qtd. Mole, 2017: p. 100).[7] Scholars have since contended that there is a certain religiosity to Shelley's *oeuvre*. Perhaps Stopford Brooke was not wrong when he declared to the Shelley Society in 1886 that '[T]he world will always be grateful for the religious gravity in Shelley's teaching' (qtd. p. 100). In 1937 Ellsworth Barnard stressed that the Shelley canon is testament to his 'religious insight' (p. 8) and later critics—including A.M.D. Hughes and Teddi Chichester Bonca—have claimed that Shelley was a pantheist rather than an atheist. Hughes even goes so far as to suggest that the main atheistic argument in the *Necessity* can be attributed to Hogg rather than Shelley (1947: p. 118). After all, in an 1812 letter to Elizabeth Hitchener Shelley admits that 'Southey says I am not an Atheist but a Pantheist' (*LPBS1*, 1964: 156, p. 219). Although Shelley rejects Southey's assertion, it reveals the ambiguity of the poet's (un)belief. Nonetheless, Shelley's atheistic notoriety has persisted.

In the *Necessity* Shelley and Hogg question the agency of God as the author of all things. In the process Shelley seeks to establish his own agency. The pamphlet is signed off with 'Q.E.D', demonstrating Shelley's attempt to establish himself as a bringer of truth who has seen reason—albeit in a provocative way.[8] At the same time, however, Shelley undermines his own authorial power. In *Zastrozzi*, Shelley uses the following verse from *Paradise Lost* (1667): 'that their God/May prove their foe, and

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[7] Shelley is a poet who is revered and scorned in the public consciousness. Bysshe Inigo Coffey terms these two respective groups 'Shelleyolatry' and 'Shelleyphobia' (2021: p. 5).
[8] *Quod Erat Demonstradum* ('what is to be shown') is used by Spinoza in his *Ethics, Demonstrated in Geometrical Order* (1677).

with repenting hand/Abolish his own works'. It is with unrepenting hand that Shelley and Hogg attempt to 'abolish' God's sovereignty. Shelley in turn problematises his own position as a sole author: it is unclear which parts of the *Necessity* are written by Shelley, and thus he 'abolishes' his role as an individual bringer of truth. Indeed, Shelley's attempted abolition of God's agency—and in turn his own—anticipates the poststructuralist conception of the death of the 'Author-God': an author is not a superior body whose work is tethered to one single meaning but is in fact a functional principle.[9] Barthes claims that literature is an 'anti-theological activity' as it refuses to 'fix meaning' to an omniscient entity (1977: p. 147). Such is the case with Shelley and the *Necessity*: his authorial intent is not fixed and therefore cannot be 'deciphered' (p. 147).

By attacking God as the author of all things, Shelley also undermines the cult of the literary genius. Although authorial originality, individuality and authenticity has long since been recognised as a key aspect of Romanticism (Higgins, 2005: p. 1), in the *Necessity* Shelley subverts this and in so doing obscures his literary selfhood. By this I mean that, while biographical criticism has posited the *Necessity* as the genus of Shelley's revolutionary principles, his literary intent is actually deconstructed: if his

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[9] In 'The Death of the Author' Barthes postulates that the context of a work is completely detached from its author: 'a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological meaning' (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space' (1977: p. 146). By contrast, Michel Foucault argues that, instead of a 'dead' author, the author simply does not exist: 'the name of the author remains at the contours of the text… the function of an author is to characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society' (1998: p. 211). The author's function is therefore completely embedded in society and culture.

individual contribution to the *Necessity* is contested, his position as a radical author is destabilised.

Shelley and Hogg's assertion that they require 'proof' hints at the seeming tension between science and religion. Yet the dichotomy between both disciplines is not so clear cut. Both science and religion are deeply rooted in ideas of creation and the 'augmentation of knowledge' which so appealed to Shelley. Although the *Necessity* points to a cultural conflict between science and theology, they do in fact mingle.

Despite Shelley and Hogg's contempt for university, they were nonetheless shocked by their expulsion. Shortly after the *Necessity* was put on sale, a fellow of the college spotted the pamphlets and ordered Slatter and Munday to burn them (Wroe, 2012: p. 43). Hogg and Shelley were then summoned to an interrogation. In *Shelley at Oxford* their expulsion is an incredibly dramatic episode wherein Hogg and Shelley are presented as intellectual superiors:

> I [Shelley] am expelled!... [T]he master produced a copy of the little syllabus, and asked me if I were the author of it… 'if I can judge from your manner', said I, 'you are resolved to punish me if I should acknowledge that it is my work. If you can prove that it is, produce your evidence; it is neither just nor lawful to interrogate me in such a case and for such a purpose. Such proceedings would become a court of inquisitors, but not free men in a free country.
>
> (1904: pp. 219-20)

Shelley apparently 'sat on the sofa, repeating with vehemence the words "Expelled, expelled!" his head shaking with emotion, and his whole frame quivering' (p. 221). Hogg then supposedly took it upon himself 'to point out the extreme unfairness' of Shelley's treatment by the college jury (p. 225). Hogg concludes his account by emphasising '[T]he narrative of the injurious effect of this cruel, precipitate, unjust

and illegal expulsion upon the entire course of his subsequent life would not be wanting in interest or expulsion' (p. 229). Like other contemporaries of Shelley, Hogg presents his friend as an individual genius who suffered at the hands of tyrants.

II: Oxford Gothics, 1810-12

As has already been mentioned, Shelley produced an impressive corpus of literature between 1810 and 1812. In October 1810, Timothy Shelley visited Oxford with his son. According to Henry Slatter, Timothy had told the booksellers at Slatter and Munday that '[M]y son here, has a literary turn; he is already an author, and do pray indulge him in his printing freaks' (qtd. Worthen, 2019: p. 32). Although it is impossible to say if Timothy said these exact words, it demonstrates Shelley's engagement with and desire to enter the literary market. The phrase 'printing freaks' has been picked up by scholars, and indeed it encapsulates the reception of Shelley's early fiction. However, it is worth pointing out that in this period 'freak' signified capriciousness (OED, 2020, n.p.) and therefore what Timothy probably meant is that Shelley's 'literary turn' is a fad. This section focuses on *Original Poetry by Victor and Cazire*, *Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson*, and *Poetical Essay on the Existing State of Things*, three of Shelley's 'printing freaks' that he wrote in the same period as *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*. Equally significant, Shelley's literary productions in this period demonstrate his openness to collaboration. Far from the Romantic solitary genius, Shelley exchanged ideas and knowledge with his friends and family, even before his collaboration with Mary Shelley.

Before he enrolled at Oxford, Shelley co-wrote *Original Poetry by Victor and Cazire*[10] with his sister Elizabeth—a sibling collaboration of which John and Anna Laetitia Aikin,[11] Charles and Mary Lamb, and the Brontës shared. Collaboration was a significant aspect of Shelley's literary career: as Anna Mercer stresses, the literary relationship between Shelley and Mary 'is conducive to creativity and diverse methods of literary composition' (2019: p. 5). While not as intense as his intellectual partnership with Mary, Shelley's collaboration with Elizabeth on *Original Poetry* is the product of a close relationship and environment of exchange.

As is the case with many of Shelley's early fiction, *Original Poetry* has suffered from a lack of scholarship due to its blatant plagiarisms. The Shelley siblings borrow—and copy—heavily from *Tales of Terror* (1801), a collection of Gothic ballads often misattributed to Lewis (Duff, 2016: p. 51). Indeed, shortly after its publication *Original Poetry* was removed from the shelves once it became apparent that the collection was not so original after all. Still, *Original Poetry* is testament to Shelley's fascination with the Gothic genre and its possibilities.

David Duff suggests that 'Shelley's apprenticeship to this collaborative, plagiaristic poetry left a lasting mark on his work and contributed to the more sophisticated intertextuality of his later poetry' (p. 55). Yet, this reinforces the problematic dichotomy of Shelley's juvenilia and later works. *Original Poetry* is indeed

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[10] Cazire is the name of the heroine in Dacre's *Confessions of the Nun of St Omer* (1805).

[11] The Aikins' *Miscellaneous Pieces* (1773) features the short Gothic narrative, 'Sir Bertrand, a Fragment'. Like *Original Poetry*, the fragment has suffered from authorial obscurity, due to the fact that individual compositions have never been fully acknowledged. While the fragment is often attributed to Anna—and she indeed contributed to the piece—it is likely that John is the main author (Toner, 2015: p. 97).

unoriginal; but that should not discount it from academic discussion. Furthermore, Duff's claim that Shelley's collaborative works are solely 'plagiaristic' is demeaning; it ultimately reinforces the idea of an organic Shelley, a concept which is now being reassessed. Regrettably, this scholarly oversight underestimates the worth of Shelley's literary collaboration(s), which is not only a site of intellectual exchange but also collaborative humour. This last aspect is key to *Original Poetry*, which relishes in lurid Gothic excess.

Shelley's poem 'Revenge' is one of many in *Original Poetry* that deploys Gothic imagery and closely resembles Zastrozzi's need for vengeance (Murphy, 1975: p. 42). In the poem, Adolphus takes his lover Agnes with him to meet the spirit of his half-brother Conrad, who reveals that his mother was dishonoured by Adolphus's father:

> Thy father, Adolphus! was false, false as hell,
> And Conrad his cause to remember it well,
> He ruined my mother, despised me his son,
> I quitted the world ere my vengeance was done.
>
> (*CP1*, 1999: p. 29, lns. 45-8)

In 'Revenge', Conrad annihilates Agnes for Adolphus's father's wrongdoings. He informs Adolphus that he will drag Agnes 'to Hades all blooming in charms…And fierce yelling fiends shall exult o'er thy bride' (p. 30, lns. 54-6). Similarly, in *Zastrozzi*, Verezzi suffers as a result of his father's debauchery. At the Inquisition, Zastrozzi tells the tribunal that his mother Olivia was 'A victim to falsehood': seduced by Verezzi's father, she was left ruined after the former refused to marry her. On her deathbed, Olivia instructs her son to 'revenge her wrongs' 'on his [Verezzi's father] for ever' (*Z*, p. 155). Like Conrad, Zastrozzi's vengeance is guided by his mother's sexual

(dis)honour. As Behrendt points out, Shelley warned against 'the ignoble desire for revenge that lowers the avenger to the same bestial level as that of the oppressors whose crimes they seek to avenge by means of physical attacks on the body' (2002: p. 22).

Another poem worth mentioning is 'Ghasta, Or, the Avenging Demon!!!'. With its three exclamation marks in the title, it is clear that the poem is ridiculously lurid. 'Fiend-like goblins' roam the earth, and, in typical Gothic fashion, their presence provokes 'shivers' and 'convulsions' of horror (*CP2*, 1999: pp. 31-37, lns. 15; 193; 200). More significantly, 'Ghasta' is indebted to the legend of the Wandering Jew, a familiar archetype not just in the Gothic genre but in Romantic literature more generally. Certainly, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, and Lewis were all influenced by the legend of Ahasuerus.[12] The Wandering Jew is also an organising metaphor for the Romantic Gothic. In Lewis's *The Monk*, Don Raymond meets a 'Stranger' with 'a burning Cross impressed upon his brow' who exorcises the Bleeding Nun (1998: p. 150). Such is what we see in 'Ghasta': The Wandering Jew has 'A burning brilliance on his head' and summons demonic apparitions (*CP1*, 1999: p. 35, ln. 145). The warrior, who 'Gazed upon the cross of fire', is annihilated by the spirits and sinks 'convulsed in death' (p. 37, lns. 190; 200), anticipating Ginotti's '[T]idings of despair and death' to Wolfstein, who melodramatically 'expires' in horror (*SI*, p. 252).

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[12] N.I. Matar notes that, although Romantic poets appropriated the myth of the Wandering Jew, they were not so much interested in the Jewish community than Ahasuerus' symbolic potential: for the Romantics, the Wandering Jew was 'a literary means to a poetic end' (1988: p. 225).

Shelley revisited the tale of the Wandering Jew in his epic of the same name. Written in 1809/10, *The Wandering Jew* centres on Paulo, a man doomed to roam the earth for all eternity after mocking Christ. Shelley describes the episode in a characteristically Gothic style:

> Earth to her centre trembled,
> Rent in twain was the temple's vail,
> The graves gave up their dead;
> Whilst ghosts and spirits, ghastly pale,
> Glared hideous on the sight,
> Seen through the dark and lurid air…

<div align="right">(CP1, 1999: p. 62, lns. 39-44)</div>

Shelley questions the omnibenevolence of God (the 'Eternal Avenger') and the altruism of his men: 'Who is the God of Mercy?—where/Enthroned the power to save?' (p. 86, lns. 412-13). Resembling the Gothic endings of 'Ghasta' and *St. Irvyne*, *The Wandering Jew* has an ominous denouement: 'thunders murmured awfully', and Paulo is annihilated by demons, 'for doom is thy misery' (p. 87, lns. 430-33). Regrettably, *The Wandering Jew* has not been viewed favourably by critics. Yet, considering that Shelley remained intrigued by the myth of the Wandering Jew throughout his life, it deserves recognition. Indeed, Shelley's early works are part of a textual web of 'mingled yarn'. The yarn of *The Wandering Jew* threads Shelley's Gothic works together, for it appears repeatedly in the literature produced between 1810 and 1812. The fibre of the poem is weaved into *St. Irvyne*:

> —Why then unbidden gush'd the tear?
> --
> Then would cold shudderings seize his brain,
> As gasping he labour'd for breath;
> The strange gaze of his meteor eye,

> Which, frenzied, and rolling dreadfully,
> Glar'd with hideous gleam,
> Would chill like the spectre gaze of Death,
> As, conjured by feverish dream,
> He seems o'er the sick man's couch to stand,
> And shakes the fell lance in his skeleton hand.

<div align="right">(SI, p. 218)</div>

What is significant in this stanza is Shelley's language. Indeed, there is a certain medicinal bodiliness to Paulo's 'cold shudderings' and 'feverish dream'.[13] Furthermore, Paulo's 'meteor eye' recalls Shelley's interest in the cosmic.[14] However, in chapter eight of *St. Irvyne*, this epigraph takes on a slightly different meaning. Ginotti relentlessly pursues Wolfstein and Megalena once they flee to Genoa. Hence, Ginotti's 'strange gaze', 'meteor eye'[15] and 'the spectre gaze of Death' takes on a more psychological turn in *St. Irvyne*. As Rajan notes, Ginotti is the 'Dark Interpreter' or shadowy presence in the text (2010: p. 47). Here, Shelley reverses the role of the Wandering Jew; in the poem, it is Paulo who is scrutinised under the watchful eye of God. Conversely in *St. Irvyne*, it is the Wandering Jew (Ginotti) who seeks Wolfstein. This epigraph foreshadows the annihilation of both Paulo and Wolfstein, for both see the 'skeleton hand' of death.

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[13] Shelley's language here also recalls the tubercular bodiliness of Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' (1819) and 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' (1819).

[14] In Shelley's poetry 'meteor' has different denotations. In *Queen Mab* (1813) Shelley uses 'meteor' to refer to the transience of happiness and the persistence of suffering caused by man: '…his soul/Blasted with withering curses; placed afar/The meteor-happiness, that shuns his grasp' (*CP2*, 2004: p. 192, lns. 99-101); in Act II of *Prometheus Unbound* Panthea describes Demogorgon's cave as a 'meteor-breathing chasm' (*SPPBS*, 2016: p. 226, ln. 3) and in Act IV, 'The pale stars… Hastes, in meteor-eclipsing array' (p. 254, lns. 1-5).

[15] Originally 'gorgon eye'.

Shelley retuned to a collaborative partnership with Hogg on *Posthumous Fragments*, a collection which has blatant political overtones. *Posthumous Fragments* was inspired by the real Margaret Nicholson, who in 1786 claimed to have been usurped from the throne and attempted to assassinate King George III; she was incarcerated in an asylum for the rest of her life. But Shelley's pseudonym is worthy of comment. Shelley writes under the pseudonym 'John Fitzvictor', a name which not only recalls the 'Victor' of *Original Poetry* but is also an Irish name (Behrendt, 2002: p. 41).[16] After all, Shelley would distribute his 'An Address to the Irish People' a year or so after *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* (Fitzsimons, 2014: pp. 7-8).

Before his 'Address', though, Shelley had already played with treason in his *Posthumous Fragments*. In a letter to Lady Charlotte Campbell in 1811, Scottish poet Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe acknowledges *Posthumous Fragments* as a daring political venture. He explains that Shelley, 'who lives upon arsenic, aquafortis,'[17] writes poetry that is 'stuffed full of treason' (qtd. *CP1*, 1999: p. 237). As with *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*, here Shelley is cast as a lunatic due to the content, political colour, and linguistic style of his work. Indeed, throughout the nineteenth century Shelley was figured as 'a body in Bedlam', though representations of Shelley's so-called lunacy shifted to a more idealized peculiarity in subsequent biographies (Whitehead, 2017: p. 144).

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[16] Shelley and Harriet Westbrook travelled to Dublin to campaign for Catholic emancipation, but the 'Address' came across as condescending to the Irish populace (Fitzsimons, 2014: p. 10).

[17] Aqua fortis, more commonly known as nitric acid, was used to treat venereal diseases, leading some like John Worthen to conclude that Shelley had contracted syphilis while at Eton (2019: p. 38). However, while nitric acid and mercury *was* used to treat syphilitic patients, the remedies were also administered for a variety of other ailments.

However, to assume that *Posthumous Fragments* is merely political is an oversimplification, and indeed some of the poems are unmistakably Gothic. 'The Spectral Horseman' is a 'mystic form', 'a shadowy sprite/More thin they are than the mists of the mountain' (*CP1*, 1999: p. 101, lns. 28-9). Like *Original Poetry*, 'The Spectral Horseman' contains stereotypical Gothic imagery and language. Shelley still seems to be preoccupied with the Wandering Jew:

> The phantom courser scours the waste,
> And his rider howls in the thunder's roar.
> O'er him the fierce bolts of avenging heaven
> Pause, as in fear, to strike his head…
>
> (p. 102, lns. 37-40)

It may seem rather odd that Shelley inserts such a Gothic poem in an otherwise flagrantly political collection of verse. But it is worth remembering that Gothic imagery and language punctures the fragments, even at its most political. In 'Ambition', a poem which criticises the 'oppressors of mankind', soldiers 'shudder[s] in death's latest agonies' (p. 93, ln. 8) which recalls the writhing convulsions of Shelley's Gothic hero-villains. Additionally, in 'Fragment Supposed to be an Epithalamium of Francis Ravillac and Charlotte Cordé',[18] Shelley deploys a typical Gothic mode right from the beginning:

> 'TIS midnight now—athwart the murky air,
> Dank and lurid meteors shoot a livid gleam;
> From the dark storm-clouds flashes a fearful glare,
> It shews the bending oak, the roaring stream.
>
> (p. 95, lns. 1-4)

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[18] François Ravaillac was a French Catholic who assassinated King Henry IV of France; Charlotte Corday was a French revolutionary figure who assassinated Jacobin leader Jean-Paul Marat.

From the offset readers are plunged into a sublime[19] landscape which echoes the jutting rocks and cataracts found in Gothic novels. But this is not the only instance where the Gothic seeps into the poem. Shelley martyrs Ravaillac and Corday for ridding the world of tyrants, who are welcomed to Satan's 'dark domain' (p. 97, ln. 66). While the 'Epithalamium' clearly carries a political message, it is underscored by Gothic imagery. Shelley ends his poem with a Gothic vision: 'But t wa t is sweeter to revenge's ear/Than the fell tyrant's last expiring yell?' (p. 98, lns. 109-10). Reiman and Fraistat argue that the typography of 't wa t' is probably intentional on Shelley's part (pp. 254-5). The Gothic and the political are therefore not separate modes. This thematic mingling not only allows Shelley to criticise tyranny (a particularly Gothic concern) but to also revel in extravagant and lurid poetic detail. notably, Ravaillac and Corday were both French revolutionary figures, demonstrating that the recent events in France were not far from Shelley's mind.

It is important to recognise that *Posthumous Fragments* subscribes to the tradition of the found manuscript. This sense of metatextuality appears in the advertisement; John Fitzvictor states that the public are curious to read '*a more copious collection of my unfortunate Aunt's poems*', adding that there are '*other papers in my possession, which shall, in that case, be subjected to their notice*' (*CP1*, 1999: p. 92, original

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[19] The critical history of the sublime is complex, but throughout this dissertation I use it in the Burkean sense, in which the sublime is analogous to terror and is 'productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling' (2015: pp. 33-4). Kant, by contrast, distinguishes two forms of the sublime: the 'mathematical' and the 'dynamical' sublime. The mathematical sublime is a feeling based on one's experience of an overwhelmingly large object, the dynamical an irresistible force of nature. For a discussion on the sublime and its relationship with the Gothic, see David B. Morris, 'Gothic Sublimity' *New Literary History* (1985): pp. 299-319.

emphasis). If Shelley's ravings against tyranny are intertextually subversive, then so is the form: the advertisement of *Posthumous Fragments*—and even that of the *Necessity*—demonstrates Shelley's experimentation with literary modes and relish for the tongue-in-cheek. Therefore, the dichotomy scholars make between Shelley's ridiculousness and 'serious' poetry is futile. Shelley himself is a posthumous fragment of different ideas and voices projected onto him by biographers after his death. He is an assemblage in the New Materialist sense of the word, 'a multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms' (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007: p. 69). Instead of adhering to a fixed definition, Shelley's authorial self is kaleidoscopic; he is truly a found manuscript.

A year after the publication of *Posthumous Fragments*, Shelley again revisited the theme of institutional despotism in his *Poetical Essay*. The poem was written in support of Peter Finnerty, an Irish journalist who was imprisoned for libel in 1811. In the preface, Shelley 'shrink[s] back in disgust' against tyrants, who have 'deprived' their fellow humans of 'mental capabilities' (1811: p. 6). Building on from his 'little tract', Shelley condemns 'the deprivation of liberty' as the 'severest of injuries' (p. 6). Anticipating the moral rhetoric of *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*—and later 'The Masque of Anarchy' (1819)—Shelley mourns the loss of innocence at the hands of despots: 'let me pause, yet turn aside to weep…Still let us hope in Heaven (for Heaven there is)/That sainted spirit tastes ethereal bliss' (p. 14, lns. 89-93). Shelley's 'hope in Heaven' is rather strange given that he held opposite beliefs at the time, but this may have been to avoid accusations of treason. For Nora Crook, Shelley's heavenly hope illustrates

his deism, as he 'never abandoned' his faith in the afterlife (2016: p. 23). Again, although *Poetical Essay* is political, Shelley's authorial voice is nonetheless ambiguous.[20]

Godwinian in style, *Poetical Essay* undoubtedly echoes *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), which disparages the 'unavoidably corrupt' Georgian elite (1993: p. iv). Madeline Callaghan observes that *Poetical Essay* demonstrates Shelley 'seeking to fashion a poetic voice that can intervene in political affairs' (2017: p. 26). However, this is precisely what Shelley tried to convince Godwin; writing in 1812, Shelley claims that Godwin's 'inestimable book' 'opened to my mind fresh & more extensive views... I rose from its perusal a wiser and a better man' (*LPBS1*, 1964: 159, p. 228). It is likely that Shelley here intended to impress Godwin and make a favourable impression; as Hogg ironically notes in *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (1858), the poet 'saw events... not as they really were' (p. 68). Though Shelley contends he read Godwin after he wrote his Gothic novellas, he was familiar with Godwin's *Caleb Williams* and *St. Leon* during his Oxford years, something which I discuss in more detail in Chapter Three. Writing to Hitchener in 1811, Shelley recommends a Godwinian reading list: 'Have you read (2) Godwins St. Leon—(1) his Enquirer—(3) his political justice—(4) his Caleb Williams.—1 is very good; 2 is good very good; 3 is

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[20] Crook also ponders the question of whether Elizabeth contributed to *Poetical Essay*; in a letter to Hogg, Shelley claims that a poem of his (*Poetical Essay*) has 'some of Eliza's in it' (qtd. 2016: p. 22). While Crook is sceptical, such attestations demonstrate Shelley's dialogical engagement with other poetic voices (p. 22).

long, sceptical good; 4 is good.—I put them in order that I would advise you read them' (144, p. 195).

As is clear in Godwin's *Caleb Williams* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, in *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* Shelley is preoccupied with the oppressor/oppressed dynamic. Zastrozzi and Ginotti are awe-inspiring figure who assume tyrannical control over their victims, but this is not just a political trope. Tyranny and liberty are ostensibly Gothic concerns; therefore, Shelley's early literature is a melting pot of genres and ideas which cannot neatly be categorised as 'political'. Rather, Shelley's time at Oxford is a period of literary and authorial experimentation.

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By the time Shelley had reached his twentieth birthday in 1812, he had been expelled from Oxford and had written more than ten literary works. Shelley's preoccupation with the Gothic extended beyond his novels, and his fascination with the Wandering Jew continued after the publication of *St. Irvyne*. It is in this period where Shelley begins to share and co-operate with his acquaintances, and this relationship would culminate in his intellectual exchanges with Mary Shelley. As significant is Shelley's intellectual concerns regarding the authority of God and how he appropriated natural philosophy and astronomy in order to reject Christianity. The importance of *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* is that they are produced at the exact moment when Shelley is engaging with the world around him, as well as developing his literary identity. Far from the embarrassing Godwinian disciple or the solitary genius, Shelley at this point was open

to new ideas and adaptation and was carving out his voice—whether philosophical,

political, or Gothic.

Gothic Excess and Dysfunction in *Zastrozzi*

The first of Shelley's two novellas, *Zastrozzi* is a short but melodramatic tale of revenge. Although scholars have erroneously assumed that the shortness of *Zastrozzi* is equal to a simplistic narrative, this is far from the case. While structurally simpler than *St. Irvyne*, *Zastrozzi* is a text of dysfunction and disconnection. In this chapter I scrutinise the nuances intrinsic to *Zastrozzi*, arguing that through excessive Gothic language, (in)sensible Gothic bodies and a conflicting ideological voice, Shelley tells readers nothing about the narrative. Confusingly, in *Zastrozzi* Shelley's omniscient narrator seems to uphold the principles of Christianity, however, he ultimately sympathises with Zastrozzi's material atheism. Crucially, while *Zastrozzi* is steeped in the ridiculous, Shelley's novella is heavily indebted to the theatricality of contemporaneous science. While the language in *Zastrozzi* is unmistakably Gothic, it is also cosmological, astrological, and theatrical. Therefore, *Zastrozzi* is a melting pot of ideas and experimentation which confounds the narrative and in turn Shelley's authorship.

Zastrozzi is further complicated by Shelley's Gothic inheritance. Shelley borrows heavily from Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*, a lurid Gothic tale which centres on the lusty and murderous passions of two Italian aristocratic siblings, Victoria and Leonardo de Loredani. Distraught by their mother's infidelity, they both become outcasts; Victoria marries a man whom she does not love and eventually falls for his brother, Henriquez, while Leonardo joins a tribe of banditti with his lover Megalena.

Victoria plots with Henriquez's African servant Zofloya to destroy Lilla (Henriquez's lover) and to attain him no matter the cost. With the help of Zofloya, Victoria captures Lilla and informs Henriquez that she is dead, which results in his maddening delirium. Zofloya then gives Victoria a potion which transforms her into Lilla, and after raping Henriquez, he succumbs to self-annihilation. Victoria refuses to forgive her mother and after Leonardo and Megalena commit suicide, she is eventually destroyed by Zofloya, who reveals himself as Satan. It is clear that there are many parallels between *Zofloya* and *Zastrozzi*, and indeed even the titles sound familiar. The use of 'z' in a title or character name is particularly Gothic.[1]

To complicate matters further, *Zofloya* is a cannibalized version of Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) which in turn prompted Ann Radcliffe to pen *The Italian* (1797). Although the reputation of the novels of Dacre, Lewis and Radcliffe have eclipsed that of Shelley's Gothic fiction, they are all fragmented. After all, when it comes to Gothic romance, what is considered (un)original is deeply ambivalent. Certainly, *The Monk* is heavily indebted to the writings of the Marquis de Sade and German romance (Wright, 2002: p. 39). Shelley's Gothic inheritance is therefore not standardized, and this complicates the linearity and structure of his early fiction. Aside from Shelley's influences, in this chapter I also detail how he uses staple Gothic literary devices almost to the point of parody; how he plays with gender stereotypes

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[1] Another example of the 'z' name is Zambinella from Honoré de Balzac's *Sarrasine* (1830). While it is not outwardly a Gothic tale, *Sarrasine* is framed by a *danse macabre*. Sarrasine and Zambinella are the subjects of Barthes's *S/Z*.

(mainly (in)sensibility), how he omits crucial events, and how his 'nonsensical and stupid jargon' (1810: p. 329) goes beyond the functional principle of language.[2]

In *Zastrozzi* Shelley uses nearly all the tropes, motifs, themes, and literary devices that had come to characterise Gothic fiction in the eighteenth century. Beginning *in medias res* with the imprisoned Verezzi (who is chained to a rock in an act of Promethean suffering), it quickly becomes apparent to readers that Shelley delights in pushing Gothic tropes to 'the limits of their tolerance' (Finch, 1999: p. 43). Echoing the excessive horror found in Lewis and Dacre, Shelley's Julia is 'stabbed… in a thousand places (*Z*, p. 142) and 'disfigured with numberless ghastly wounds' (p. 144). But this is not the only way Shelley appropriates and exhausts the Gothic. The characters' names themselves are to be found in countless Gothic texts, particularly the names Matilda, Julia, Ugo, Paulo, and Bernardo. Two decades earlier, Jane Austen had parodied the 'knowledge of Julias and Louisas' of the reading public (2003: p. 103), and Shelley certainly seems to have been no stranger to this.

Of course, there is not one source Shelley consulted for the characters' names and he blends characters from *Zofloya*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and *The Castle of Otranto*. Matilda the Contessa Laurentini is a combination of Dacre's Victoria de Loredani, Radcliffe's Signora Laurentini di Udolpho and Walpole's Matilda. Additionally, Verezzi is one of Montoni's henchmen in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

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[2] Another poet whose overindulgent language was reproved is Keats, albeit in a different way to Shelley's Gothicisms. Keats's aesthetic and sensuous imagery was censured for bordering on linguistic indecency. Byron joked about 'Johnny Keats's p-ss-a-bed poetry' and referred to *Endymion* as a type of poetic onanism (qtd. Nersessian, 2021: p. 3). Criticisms of Keats's language are clearly implicated by class and gender politics.

Zastrozzi's name, too, with its three Z's, 'represents the alien, 'not English' element in naming the Other' (Kelly, 1989: p. 108). As is common in Gothic fiction of the period, *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* are set in an unidentified foreign country resembling at once France, Italy, and Germany, 'a pan-Europeanism that is disorienting rather than cosmopolitan' (Rajan, 2015: p. 795). This mingling of Shelley's influences results in a disoriented narrative, as it is unclear where and when Zastrozzi is set and who its main actors are.

Moreover, Shelley 'thematizes plot' (Rajan, 2010: p. 61) in that *Zastrozzi* has a missing chapter, a literary device which has its own tradition. Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759) omits chapter twenty-four and features black and blank pages, and Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771) begins at chapter eleven. This omission of events within the narrative encourages readers to creatively interact with the text. With this in mind, *Zastrozzi* is what Barthes calls a 'writerly' work, for readers become 'a producer of the text' instead of passive consumers (1974: p. 4).

In terms of the Gothic, this plays into the idea of the found manuscript. Austen's parodic Catherine Morland discovers a manuscript in General Tilney's wardrobe which she believes to be a clue to his wife's mysterious whereabouts in a moment of Radcliffean suspense, only for it to be a laundry list. Many Gothic heroines discover such a manuscript or memento which supplements the narrative. The text itself becomes a found manuscript, resulting in 'unreliable or inarticulate' narrators (Spooner, 2006: p. 38). In *Zastrozzi*, Shelley omits chapter seven and skips ahead to the onset of Verezzi's delirium. Shelley repeatedly omits events and small details, and this

is partly to do with the way the text is written. *Zastrozzi* is characterised by quick, slap-dash sentences which reflects the pacey excess of the narrative.

However, Shelley's deliberate style of writing means that the narrative is at times inarticulate and non-linear, just like the Gothic. The genre can be understood as a corpus of found manuscripts: saturated with intertextualities, frame narratives and metanarratives, Gothic texts are incoherent documents which the reader has to interact with in order to stitch the narrative together. As will be seen, though, the non-linearity of Shelley's Gothic novellas is such that they can never be coherently stitched together. Shelley had thus inherited a literary mode that was already a collection of ancient documents discovered and reworked by eighteenth century novelists. By the time Shelley had published *Zastrozzi*, the Gothic genre had become a literary posthumous fragment.

What is clear in *Zastrozzi* is Shelley's 'relish of the language' (Worthen, 2019: p. 24). It is worth noting here that many Gothic romances in the period were lambasted for linguistic dissipation: The *Literary Journal* charged Dacre and her novel *Zofloya* with 'murdering the English language' and 'wonder[ed] at the power of the maggoty disease in applying extravagant language to common things' (qtd. Craciun, 1997: p. 266).[3] In *Zastrozzi*, Shelley's 'nonsensical and stupid jargon' (1810: p. 329) is so excessive that it overwhelms the narrative. For instance, in a characteristically Gothic fashion, Matilda is tortured by Verezzi's fidelity to Julia: 'nourished by restless

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[3] For a discussion on Dacre's linguistic excess, see Beatriz González Moreno, 'Gothic Excess and Aesthetic Ambiguity in Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*' *Women's Writing* (2007): pp. 419-434.

reveries, the most horrible anticipations blasted the blooming Matilda' (*Z*, p. 118).

Furthermore, Matilda's serenity is 'only to be succeeded by a fiercer paroxysm of

passion' (p. 119). Shelley uses alliterative language that, typical of Gothic fiction,

signifies the characters' mental torture and sexual lust, such as 'restless reveries',

'paroxysm of passion', and 'repressed rapture' (p. 125). Moreover, characters die

'convulsing' or 'writhing' in 'inexpressible' or 'unutterable' anguish. Shelley's

language is in fact so elaborate that it fails in its function, much like a missing chapter.

Although such unrestrained language is typical of the Gothic genre, it is clear here

that Shelley delights in using titanic language for titanic characters. Verezzi has a

'straining eyeball' and in a moment of insensibility 'a Lethean torpor crept over his

senses' (p. 139). Shelley is fond of the phrase 'Lethean torpor', which he often uses in

relation to Verezzi's 'benumbing' by Matilda (p. 136). Perhaps not coincidentally,

'Lethean' is also used in *Paradise Lost*.[4]

As well as this, the unusual word 'scathed' makes an appearance in *Zastrozzi*:

'[T]he mountains were clothed half up by ancient pines and plane-trees… on which

might be seen, occasionally, a scathed larch, lifted their gigantic and misshapen forms'

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[4] In Book II of *Paradise Lost*, the harpies are tempted by the river of Lethe. 'Ferry' is an allusion to Charon in Dante's *Inferno*, the ferryman of the damned:

> They ferry over this Lethean Sound,
> Both to and fro, thir sorrow to augment,
> And wish and struggle, as they pass, to reach
> The tempting stream… (2000: p. 40, lns. 604-7)

Keats also alludes to Lethean oblivion in 'Ode to a Nightingale': 'My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains/My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk… One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk' (*RA*, 2012: p. 1464, lns. 1-5); and in the opening lines of 'Ode on Melancholy' (1819): 'No, no, go not to Lethe, neither twist/Wolf's-bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine' (p. 1469, lns. 1-2).

(p. 110). Shelley of course uses the word 'scathed' in relation to sublimity, but it is frequently used in a poetic manner. In *The Wandering Jew*, Paulo's misery is 'like the scathed pine-tree's height/Braving the tempests of the night' (*CP1*, 1999: p. 67, lns. 215-16). This echoes Milton's use of the word in *Paradise Lost*, a favourite work among Romantic writers. Like Zastrozzi's intellectual and philosophical aptitude, Milton's Satan is 'far these/Beyond compare of mortal prowess' (2000: p. 18, I.XI. ln. 588). Milton anticipates the Romantic sublime landscape when he compares the faithfulness of Satan's followers to a 'witherd' environment (p. 18, I.XI. ln. 612): 'As when Heavens Fire/Hath scath'd the Forrest Oaks, or Mountain Pines… Stands on the blasted Heath' (p. 18, I.XI. lns. 612-15).[5]

A particular Shelleyism which appears frequently in *Zastrozzi* is 'scintillation', which is defined as 'emitting sparks; twinkling; sparkling' (OED, 2020, n.p.). In *Zastrozzi* 'scintillation' is used in relation to sublimity or sexual obsession. For instance, Matilda has 'scintillating eyes' (*Z*, p. 101) but there is also 'scintillating lightning' which 'flashes' across the landscape (p. 119). 'Scintillation' not only connotes a sort of savage, thundering wildness, but also a chemical reaction; after all, Shelley probably witnessed 'scintillating sparks' when conducting experiments in his dormitory at Oxford.

Considering Shelley's lifelong fascination with the astral, it comes as no surprise that he uses words with cosmological denotations. 'Scintillation' appears in

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[5] Walter Scott—a poet with whom Shelley was very familiar—also used 'scathed' in *The Lady of the Lake* (1810), *Rokeby* (1813) and *The Lord of the Isles* (1815) (OED, 2020, n.p.).

the 1789 issue of *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London* to describe the cosmos (OED, 2020, n.p.) and although it is impossible to determine if Shelley read this, it may be no coincidence that Lind was a Fellow of the Royal Society (King-Hele, 1992: p. 263). Therefore, 'scintillation', like many of Shelley's archaisms, denotes not only a Gothic ferocity but also a scientific phenomenon. As such, Shelley's mingling of scientific knowledge with Gothic tropes points to an unexplainable, almost pyrotechnical event which contradicts the logic of Enlightenment society.

'Frigorific' also makes its way into *Zastrozzi* and, like 'scintillation', can be used in scientific contexts (Worthen, 2019: p. 25). Shelley uses it thus: '[T]he extreme horror seized his [Verezzi's] brain—a frigorific torpidity of despair chilled every sense, and his eyes, fixedly, gazed on vacancy' (Z, p. 137). 'Frigorific' is defined as '[P]roducing cold, freezing; cooling' and has its roots in seventeenth century natural philosophy (OED, 2020, n.p.). Shelley uses it to signify being chilled by horror, but again 'frigorific' is a word also used in physics. Science thus provides the language of literature and philosophy in the period, which is not unexpected given Shelley's lifelong fascination with the subject.

Indeed, in *Zastrozzi* Gothic titanism is at times indistinguishable from scientific phenomena. In the 1780s Adam Walker and his sons showcased their 'eidouranian', an orrery which projected the solar system to a fascinated audience. The Walkers' mechanism was greatly inspired by German theatrical designer Philippe de Loutherbourg, whose 'eidophusikon',

> presented in miniature an enhanced version of the theatrical experience…[W]ithin the box, viewers saw cutouts and models moving without apparent cause… [T]hese included landscapes, cities, battles, a shipwreck at sea, and finally Satan mustering his armies from Milton's *Paradise Lost*… [T]he visual scene was accompanied by harpsichord music and other sound effects such as thunder.
>
> (Golinski, 2017: p. 148)

Like the astronomical theatre of Loutherbourg and the Walkers, the Gothic is able to invoke the psychophysiological of the sublime. From characters suspended in dramatic *tableaux* to Miltonic melodrama, the spectacle of the eidophusikon mirrors the overblown theatricality and pyrotechnical possibilities of the Gothic. The eidophusikon is almost uncannily preternatural in its ability to (re)produce scintillating phenomena and to show cut-outs moving 'without apparent cause'. In *Zastrozzi* Shelley's Gothic extravagance is likewise theatrical: Matilda lures Verezzi to 'an eminence, clothed with towering wood; the trees around formed an amphitheatre' (*Z*, p. 113) and, in another 'paroxysm of passion' she steals to woods where a 'crashing thunder now rattled madly above' (p. 119). As such, the thundering ferocity of the Gothic is both theatrical and scientific. Given that scientific lectures were increasingly spectacular, it is no surprise that the period is termed 'the age of wonder'. In this period, Richard Holmes suggests, '[t]he explorer, the scientific observer, the literary reader, experience the Sublime: a moment of revelation into the idea of the unbounded, the infinite' (2008: p. 207). Science and literature are thus united in their ability to inspire sublime beauty and terror which overwhelms the observer.

The psychosomatic possibilities of the Gothic and scientific knowledge is most obvious in Verezzi's medicalised body. When Verezzi learns of Julia's (false) death, he

raves with 'the wildest delirium' (*Z*, p. 93). This episode resembles Henriquez's

maniacal fever in *Zofloya*, which is also triggered by Victoria's fabrication of Lilla's

death. But, as Diego Saglia reminds us, Verezzi's delirium 'recycle[s] a recurrent

episode in eighteenth century and Romantic sentimental fiction in which the plot

comes to a standstill when a character, generally a heroine, develops a life-threatening

disorder' (2016: pp. 41-2). Verezzi's conscious body is in fact analogous to the missing

chapter of the text: overpowered by sensibility, Verezzi's body starts to malfunction

which in turn disrupts the narrative of the text.

Verezzi suffers from the 'darker repercussions' of sensibility, one which proves

near fatal (Csengei, 2012: p. 3). As physician Robert Whytt postulates in *Observations*

on the Nature, Causes, and Cure of Those Disorders which have been Commonly called

Nervous, Hypochondriac, or Hysteric (1765):

> [A] delicate or easily irritable nervous system, must expose a person to various
> ailments, from causes, affecting either their body or mind, too slight to make
> any remarkable impression upon those of firmer and less sensible nerves.
>
> (p. 115)

Such is the case with Verezzi, who becomes a medical experiment subjected to the

scrutinous gaze of various characters. The eighteenth century saw a boom in

anatomical practice, due in part to a surge in medical schools.[6] Anatomical culture in

this period was in fact a spectator sport: medical students could observe surgeons like

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[6] The Royal College of Surgeons was established in 1800. Guy's Hospital also apprenticed young surgeons, such as Keats, who studied there in 1815. With the rise of anatomical culture came an increase in body-snatching, as anatomy was taught by dissection. The only corpses legally allowed in anatomy schools were those of convicts, and supply quickly outstripped demand; hence some young surgeons took to illegally obtaining corpses (Talairach, 2019: p. 94). Of course, body-snatching is a classic theme of Gothic fiction.

William Lawrence and Astley Cooper[7] conduct dissections in the anatomical playhouse. Just as *Zastrozzi* is performative, so is medicine in this period a form of entertainment.

As important, surgery was an intersubjective enterprise. The surgeon Charles Bell, for instance, once declared that he is 'exhausted by the suffering of others' (qtd. Brown, 2020: p. 251); his brother John—also a surgeon—imagined 'how much stronger must the patient's own feelings be, when he waits in awful suspence [*sic*], while he learns even from the countenance of his surgeon, the sentence of life or death' (qtd p. 242). Similarly, in *Zastrozzi*, Verezzi's psychosomatic delirium triggers emotion in those around him. Although '[A]ccustomed… to scenes of horror', Verezzi's insensibility is nonetheless 'too much' for Matilda 'to behold with composure' (Z, p. 93). She calls for a 'humane physician', 'a man of sense' who advises Matilda to seek medical help herself. Although the physician is described as logical, his reassurance 'operated as a balm upon [Matilda's] soul' (pp. 94-5). Fundamentally, then, Verezzi is 'a textual guinea pig' (Saglia, 2016: p. 44).[8] The Gothic body becomes medicalised, an object of inquiry for characters and in turn readers.

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[7] The Shelleys consulted Lawrence while travelling in Europe from 1814. The 'vitalist-materialist controversy', which saw Lawrence (materialism) and John Abernethy (vitalism) argue about whether there was a distinction between living and non-living beings and if electricity could spark a 'life force', is thought to have partly inspired Mary Shelley's formation of Victor Frankenstein (Smith, 2019: p. 303). Astley Cooper was a famous physician and anatomist.

[8] It is worth mentioning here that Shelley suffered from nephritis and was apparently in so much pain that he eventually agreed to be placed in a mesmeric trance in order to alleviate the symptoms of his condition (Davies, 2014: p. 1).

Verezzi's medicalised body has a gendered dimension too. For Miller, Verezzi is 'placed in the position of being like a slave due to his kidnapping… his limited capacity for self-expression and loss of consciousness indicate a type of enslavement' which is a sign of Verezzi's 'androgyny' (2012: pp. 29-30). Certainly, sentimental excess was often associated with femininity. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* Wollstonecraft

> wish[es] to persuade women to endeavour to acquire strength, both of mind and body, and to convince them, that the… delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness, and those beings… will soon become objects of contempt.
>
> (1993: p. 73)

Verezzi has neither strength of body nor mind, although he is able to persevere and thus retain some element of his masculinity. At first a victim to 'torpid insensibility' (*Z*, p. 66), Shelley informs readers that eventually, Verezzi's 'youth and good constitution prevailed' (p. 105). Verezzi's sentimentality therefore points to an androgynous passivity.

In opposition to Verezzi's passivity, Matilda takes on a much more active role within the novella. A manifestation of Dacre's Victoria de Loredani, Matilda is a monstrous female associated with excess—not a sentimental excess, but a savage one. Shelley describes Matilda's passion as 'unquenchable' (*Z*, p. 104), an adjective which not only appears in Milton's *Samson Agonistes* (1671) but has also been used in biblical translations.[9] Like Victoria de Loredani, Matilda's 'soul, shook by contending

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[9] *Samson Agonistes* was published as part of *Paradise Regained*, in which Samson is captured by the Philistines and is blinded. After his release Samson tells the chorus, 'Lords are lordliest in thir wine…

paroxysms of passion which consumed her, was transported by unutterable ecstasies

of delirious and maddening love' (p. 112).

Matilda is presented as a Circe-like figure who enchants the oblivious Verezzi

through 'seductive blandishments' (p. 112) and 'syren illusion' (p. 86). At first a source

of disgust to Verezzi, Matilda is eventually able to gain his kindness and then his

affection. Like a siren, Matilda performs 'most enchanting, most pensive music' (p.

122), and her seduction culminates when she rescues Verezzi from the 'assassin'. To

quote Lady Macbeth, Matilda 'look[s] like the innocent flower' but is 'the serpent

under't' (*NS*, 1997: I.V. lns. 63-4). Crucially, Shelley describes Matilda as 'wily', an

adjective associated with Medusa, the Lamia, and the serpent. In fact, like Medusa,

Matilda 'fixed it [her eye] on her rival; and had it possessed the power of the basilisk's,

Julia would have expired on the spot' (*Z*, p. 136). Indeed, Shelley describes Matilda at

one point as 'some supernatural or ethereal form' (p. 82); but although Shelley gives

no real indication that Matilda is non-human, the constant references to her 'wiliness',

'blandishments', and 'artifice' show that she transgresses normative femininity—

known as 'feminine propriety' in the period—which placed an emphasis on women's

morality and sexual self-denial (Poovey, 1985: p. 9; 110).

For Bonca, Matilda is the mediator between Verezzi and Zastrozzi, occupying

a sexually ambiguous role that is 'overpoweringly masculine' (1999: p. 61). As

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No less the people on thir Holy-Days/Impetuous, insolent, unquenchable' (1688: p. 46, lns. 1418-1422).
In the Miltonic sense 'unquenchable' is defined as something '[T]hat cannot be overcome' (OED, 2020,
n.p.). however, 'unquenchable' is likewise used in some fourteenth to seventeenth century biblical texts
to describe 'inextinguishable' fire, i.e., the pits of Hell.

Zastrozzi's female counterpart and doppelgänger, Matilda 'represents in part the forbidden possibility of homosexual desire' (p. 61) which is also prominent in Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, *Fleetwood* (1805) and *Mandeville* (1817).[10] But if Verezzi is 'androgynous' as Miller states, then Matilda is a symbol of excessive femininity: for she is a nymphomaniac who takes on a more active role than Verezzi and, like Zastrozzi, pursues him relentlessly. Shelley even mentions that Zastrozzi 'played a double part' (Z, p. 79), mainly through Matilda. Certainly, Zastrozzi and Matilda both renounce God, desire Verezzi, have seductive linguistic powers, and seek vengeance.

For Shelley, the main sin of Matilda and Zastrozzi is their insatiable need for vengeance. Shelley's epigraphical use of Milton speaks to the point:

——That their God
May prove their foe, and, with repenting hand
Abolish his own works—This would surpass
Common revenge.

(p. 59)

Here, Beelzebub swears everlasting vengeance and destruction against God. Beelzebub's proposition to 'surpass/Common revenge' is a theme which permeates *Zastrozzi*. Much like 'honest Iago', Zastrozzi assumes the role of Matilda's associate while simultaneously plotting Verezzi's destruction. Moreover, Matilda's serpent-like deception mimics the manipulation of Adam and Eve. Thus 'with repenting hand' does Matilda 'abolish her own works'.

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[10] For a discussion on homophobia in the works of Godwin see Robert J. Corber, 'Representing the "Unspeakable": William Godwin and the Politics of Homophobia' *Journal of the History of Sexuality* (1990): pp. 85-101. Many Georgian radicals did not extend their political reform to sodomites, as homosexuality was scorned as an aristocratic practice at odds with female suffrage (pp. 86-8).

Repeatedly throughout the text Zastrozzi dwells on 'the completion of my just revenge' (p. 73):

> I will taste revenge: for revenge, is sweeter than life: and even were I to die with him [Verezzi], and, as the punishment of my crime, be instantly plunged into eternal torments, I should taste superior joy in recollecting the sweet moment of his destruction. Oh! would that destruction could be eternal!
>
> (p. 73)

Retribution is the main driving force of Zastrozzi and indeed the narrative itself; readers are unaware of the reason of Verezzi's imprisonment, and it is only in the final few pages that Zastrozzi reveals the motive for his crimes. The 'natural malevolence of his heart' feeds Zastrozzi (p. 67), who is able to withstand extreme hunger and fatigue in his pursuit of Verezzi almost to a superhuman standard.

Crucially, there is a momentary lapse in Zastrozzi's hatred, and he feels the sting of conscience when observing a feeble Verezzi praying for justice:

> What can be a greater proof of the superiority of virtue than that the terrible, the dauntless Zastrozzi trembled!... [F]or an instant he shrunk within himself… his awakened conscience reflected images of horror. But again revenge drowned the voice of virtue—again passion obscured the light of reason, and his steeled soul persisted in its scheme.
>
> (p. 68)

Zastrozzi's 'stinging conscience' is only momentary and redoubles his thirst for revenge. In Romantic Gothic fiction villains tend to 'tremble' with the pang of remorse. In *Caleb Williams*, Falkland is often 'afflicted' with 'the torment of his mind' (1988: pp.8-9), that is, the guilt of his crimes: his desire to hide the truth results in his death and a guilt-stricken Caleb, who is 'truly miserable' (p. 336). Similarly, in *The Italian*, Schedoni feels acutely 'the violence of remorse and grief' (2000: p. 274) after he

attempts to murder his daughter (who is in fact his niece). These flashes of guilt allow writers like Shelley to do two things. Firstly, it allows him to comment upon and condemn tyranny, revenge, and hatred. Secondly, it allows the extradiegetic narrator to provide a moral commentary, a point to which I return shortly.

Matilda's need for vengeance is based on her own nymphomania. Like Victoria de Loredani who seeks to destroy 'the abhorred Lilla' (1997: p. 197), Matilda is focused on murdering the innocent Julia, who is 'relegated to the margins' of the narrative by Shelley (Rajan, 2010: p. 60). Matilda's relentless change of mood is almost feverish; at one point fixed by 'a quiet depression of spirits', in the next 'revenge, hate, and the fervour of disappointed love, burned her soul' (Z, p. 107). Like Zastrozzi, Matilda too is 'engrossed by one idea' (p. 110):

> Oh, Julia! hated Julia! words are not able to express my detestation of thee. Thou hasn't destroyed Verezzi—thy cursed image, revelling in his heart, has blasted my happiness for ever; but, ere I die, I will taste revenge—oh! exquisite revenge!["] She paused—she thought of the passion which consumed her—[…] [A]gain the idea of Verezzi's illness—perhaps his death—infuriated her soul. Pity, chased away by vengeance and disappointed passion, fled.—
>
> (p. 111)

Matilda's feverish passion is reflected in the feverish structure of the passage. One murderous though speedily follows another, and Shelley's excessive use of caesuras signal Matilda's all-consuming fervour and wavering guilt: 'She paused—she thought of the passion which consumed her—'. As the narrative progresses, Matilda begins to forfeit religious doctrine in place of a more atheistic one, thanks to the seductive power of Zastrozzi's language.

Take, for instance, the scene in which Matilda asks Zastrozzi if he 'believe[s] that the soul decays with the body, or if you do not… where goes the soul which now actuates its movements?' (p. 103). In response, Zastrozzi answers that 'this soul must endure for ever, that no fortuitous occurrences, no incidental events, can affect its happiness… it will gain superior advantages in a future state' (p. 103). Thus does Zastrozzi 'by an artful appeal to her passions…extinguish the faint spark of religion which yet gleamed in Matilda's bosom' (p. 103). Zastrozzi's own 'blandishments' upon Matilda results in her renunciation of God in place of vengeance. Shelley illustrates Zastrozzi's moral seduction of Matilda by inserting the following verse from *Macbeth* (1606):

> Art thou afraid
> To be the same in thine own act and valour
> As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
> Which thou esteemest the ornament of life,
> Or live a coward in thine own esteem,
> Letting *I dare not* wait upon *I would*?
>
> (p. 100, original emphasis)

Lady Macbeth here dismisses her husband's doubts as to whether he should murder Duncan, but Shelley applies this to Matilda's wavering repentance and religious belief. Zastrozzi takes on the role of Lady Macbeth: 'But even did I desire to persuade you from the purpose on which your heart is fixed, I should not say it was wrong to attempt it; for whatever procures pleasure is right, and consonant to the dignity of man, who was created for no other purpose but to obtain happiness' (p. 102). Thus Zastrozzi's 'sophisticated arguments' leave Matilda 'cool and collected' (p. 102).

The textual and moral fragmentation of *Zastrozzi* points to its disfigured form. Shelley's conflicting ideological voice raises questions about how radical Shelley is in this period. As is the case with *St. Irvyne*, Shelley's ideas are co-opted. Known as 'Shelley the Atheist' at Eton, the poet uses a more conservative narratorial voice in the novella, despite his own anti-establishment views. Diane Long Hoeveler recognises this conundrum:

> Shelley's two Gothic romances present yet another interesting problem for the literary critic: what are we to make of what appear to be intensely conservative domestic, religious, and ideological agendas when we know that the author, in fact, held diametrically opposite opinion and beliefs at the time of composition?
> (2013: p. 201)

Although I would not go so far as to suggest that the narrator is 'intensely conservative', it does seemingly contradict the Shelley who 'burn[ed] with impatience for the moment of Xtianity's dissolution' (*LPBS1*, 1964: 30, p. 27). Shelley appropriates this more conservative or whiggish voice particularly in the final chapters of *Zastrozzi* when Matilda is imprisoned and awaiting trial at the Inquisition for the murder of Julia. flirting with atheism beforehand, Matilda now seeks the 'God of mercy! God of heaven!' (*Z*, p. 150):

> Matilda knew not how to pray; but God, who from the height of heaven penetrates the inmost thoughts of terrestrial hearts, heard the outcast sinner, as in tears of true and agonising repentance, she knelt before him.
> (p. 150)

Himself an outcast sinner', Shelley allows his atheistic heroine to recant. This sense of 'moral stewardship' (Behrendt, 2002: p. 26) inflects the Gothic more generally and can be observed in the works of Radcliffe, Lewis and Dacre. But the fact that such an

emphasis on the benevolence of God can be found in Shelley's works—a man known

to have resisted authority—comes as a surprise. After all, it would make sense for

Shelley to sympathise with Zastrozzi, who despises 'the false and vulgar superstition'

(much like Shelley in 1810) of Christianity.

The narrator does at times sympathise with Zastrozzi, but his sympathies are

much more nuanced and fluctuate between materialist atheism and moral

conservatism, sometimes on the same page. As such, Shelley's role as a radical author

is destabilised even before the production of his now famous 'radical' works. Shelley's

ideological righteousness is most obvious in the denouement. In a Faustian-like

dream-vision, Matilda is visited by an angel who warns her to repent:

> Strangely brilliant and silvery clouds seemed to flit before her sight: celestial
> music, enchanting as the harmony of the spheres, serened Matilda's soul, and,
> for an instant, her situation forgotten, she lay entranced.
>
> On a sudden the music ceased; the azure concavity of heaven seemed to open
> at the zenith, and a being, whose countenance beamed with unutterable
> beneficence, descended.
>
> It seemed to be clothed in a transparent robe of flowing silver: its eye
> scintillated with super-human brilliancy, whilst her dream, imitating reality
> almost to exactness, caused the entranced Matilda to suppose that it addressed
> her in these words:—
>
> "Poor sinning Matilda! repent, it is not yet too late.—God's mercy is
> unbounded.—Repent! And thou mayest yet be saved."
>
> (p. 149)

This whole passage is governed by sibilance: 'strangely brilliant and silvery clouds',

'sight', 'celestial, 'super-human', 'serened soul'. Here the angel takes on the role of

seducer. The music which accompanies the angel is 'enchanting', recalling the

language used to describe Matilda's own allurements. Furthermore, the angel's eye 'scintillates', which echoes Matilda's savage desire for Verezzi while also denoting the angel's cosmological form. Enchanting Verezzi with her own 'celestial transports', it is now time for Matilda to be mesmerized, not by Zastrozzi or heterodox belief, but by a symbol of repentance.

That being said, Shelley criticises 'the displeasure of the inquisition, whose motives for prosecution are inscrutable, whose decrees are without appeal' (p. 134). Matilda foreshadows her own imprisonment when she remarks that the 'the victim expires in horrible tortures, or lingers the wretched remnant of his life in dark and solitary cells' (p. 135) and indeed this is what she and Zastrozzi endure before their execution. Discursive constructions of the atrocities of the Inquisition 'became integral to the development of a larger discourse network [in Gothic fiction] that preyed on British anxieties about the cruelties and legal atrocities practised in Catholic countries' (Hoeveler, 2014: p. 148). Whiggish Gothic texts criticised such practices, instead advocating a more 'teleological' and progressive Protestantism (Townshend, 2013: p. xxix). Shelley subscribes to elements of this whiggish Gothic; after all, Radcliffe, Lewis Dacre and Walpole sympathised with the whiggish cause, and Shelley's destiny was to become a member of Parliament for the party.

However, Gothic (anti)Catholicism is far from straightforward. The Inquisition features heavily in Radcliffe's *The Italian*, one of Shelley's favourite novels. In it, the hero Vivaldi is wrongly imprisoned along with his servant Paulo for heresy. Yet, the Judge is presented as 'just', and other representations of 'fair Inquisitors' can be found

in Gothic texts of the period (Hughes, Punter & Smith, 2013: p. 347). However, although Shelley's inquisitors are 'stern' and 'relentless ministers of justice' (*Z*, p. 148), Zastrozzi and Matilda's punishment is expected and deserved. If Shelley condemned the insatiability of revenge, then it comes as no surprise that Zastrozzi and Matilda face the consequences of their actions.

I suggest that what Shelley is doing here is deploying a trick used by writers like Lewis and Dacre; that is, pushing the horror, immorality, and indulgence of the characters' actions to the extreme and then condemning it so as to contain the text's subversion and also to allow the author to morally distance themselves from its (im)morality. As Behrendt suggests, 'the narrator's seemingly moral disclaimers and admonitions themselves function… equally to underscore the transgressive nature of the sentiments or activities of the characters who are ostensibly the objects of the narrator's nice moral discrimination' (2002: p. 19). David Brookshire proposes that 'Shelley deftly subverts conventional ideology while at the same time satisfying its moral prescriptions by splitting the diegetic reality from its subversive subtext…that complicates any reading of the novel (2009: p. 29). This is precisely what happens in *Zastrozzi*; Shelley details excessive acts of Monk-Lewisy murder, sexual lust, and blasphemy, and then ends his novella with the diabolical Zastrozzi dying on the rack. The annihilation of suffering or corrupt characters (whether by execution or the wrath of Satan) is not untypical of Gothic fiction, and indeed is one which Shelley used repeatedly ('Revenge', 'Ghasta', *The Wandering Jew*, *Zastrozzi*, *St. Irvyne*). However, the fact that Shelley's Gothic novellas are inflected with such ideological ambiguities

shows he was experimenting with the boundaries of 'moral stewardship' which Behrendt referred to.

Despite the consensus that it is simplistic, *Zastrozzi* is in fact a novella of dysfunction. Shelley's indebtedness to Dacre and Lewis—who also borrowed material from other sources—accelerates the textual and structural fragmentation of the Gothic genre, which by the 1810s had become wearily familiar to the reading public. In *Zastrozzi* Shelley pushes the genre to his own extremes. All primary characters are victim to excess, whether that be androgynous sentimentality (Verezzi), lust (Matilda) or atheist vengeance (Zastrozzi and Matilda). In *Zastrozzi*, however, linguistic excess goes beyond its function, which in turn disrupts the linearity of the text. Prone to 'torpid insensibility' and swooning extravagance, the Gothic body soon starts to malfunction. As such, the Gothic body becomes a missing chapter as it is to some extent unreadable and incoherent. The dysfunctionality of *Zastrozzi* anticipates the structural and authorial fragmentation present in *St. Irvyne*.

III

St. Irvyne **and the Shellaporia**

The second of Shelley's Gothic novellas, *St. Irvyne*, has been hailed as a more complex work than its predecessor. Certainly, Shelley's descriptions of Gothic sublime landscapes are more effective and detailed and the complexity of the narrative points towards a more sophisticated literary style. However, it is this very complexity which has confused Shelley scholars ever since its publication. Shelley interweaves his Gothic narrative with a morally conservative sentimentalist one, thereby complicating any reading of the novella. Moreover, Shelley does not provide a satisfactory ending, leaving readers with more questions than answers. *St. Irvyne*'s disjunction has led some scholars to believe Shelley arrogantly tired of the Gothic. However, in this chapter I argue that Shelley does connect the sentimental and the Gothic modes, mainly through gendered discussions of (in)sensibility, education, and desire. In addition, I interrogate *St. Irvyne*'s puzzling denouement. While Shelley connects the sentimental and the Gothic, he paradoxically leaves gaps and omissions in the novella, particularly at the end. I argue that it is these very omissions which typify what is considered 'Shelleyan'. This chapter thus seeks to realign the seeming disconnectedness of Shelley's second novella.

As in *Zastrozzi*, in *St. Irvyne* Shelley uses typical Gothic names from a variety of sources. Wolfstein's name is Germanic in origin, which fits his role as a member of the banditti but also recalls Friedrich Schiller's *Die Räuber* ('The Robbers', 1781), an enormously popular drama in the eighteenth century. In fact, Shelley's own characters

were recycled, such as in the 1822 chapbook adaptation of *St. Irvyne*, *Wolfstein; or, the Mysterious Bandit*. The names of most of Shelley's other characters recall French and Italian ancestry. Ginotti, Megalena, Olympia, and Cavigni are Italian forenames; Nempere, Mountfort, Fitzeustace and Eloise are French. Importantly, Ginotti/Nempere is both, which problematises his identity: Ginotti seems to imply that was a student at a university such as Ingolstadt like Frankenstein. On the other hand, it is not clear when he transforms into Nempere. This is never fully explained by Shelley, who splits Ginotti/Nempere as two entities in two different environments (Wolfstein in Germany, Eloise in France) while simultaneously implying that they are one and the same, which he reveals somewhat haphazardly in the conclusion.

The name 'Eloise' resembles not only Rousseau's New Heloise but also Emily St. Aubert, Radcliffe's heroine in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Eloise travels to Geneva with her ailing mother, which echoes Emily's journey to Gascone with her dying father Monsieur St. Aubert. 'Fitzeustace' is a historic name of rank and wealth which suggests that Shelley's Irish hero is an honourable nobleman. Perhaps, as Finch suggests, Fitzeustace is 'a subdued signal of liberal sympathy for the contemporary Irish cause' (1999: p. 50). Shelley had visited Ireland with his first wife Harriet Westbrook and her twenty-nine-year-old sister Eliza in 1812. Their mission was to advocate for the Irish cause and to instil a sense of rebellion in the local people. This was manifested in Shelley's 'An Address to the Irish People' (1812) but as Eleanor Fitzsimons points out, the treatise came across as condescending to the local residents, especially since Shelley was born in the English aristocracy (2014: p. 10). Therefore, it

is possible that the situation in Ireland was not far from Shelley's mind when he penned *St. Irvyne*, which was written a year or two before his voyage to Dublin. As such, *St. Irvyne* includes a plethora of sources that complicates any interpretation of the novella.

The main focus in existing scholarship has indeed been on the 'division' of Shelley's narrative. It has been common in Shelley criticism to regard the Gothic and sentimental plots in *St. Irvyne* as irreconcilable modes. In her psychoanalytical reading of Shelley's Gothic novellas, Rajan contends that 'until the end the Wolfstein and Eloise stories seem completely unconnected' (2010: p. 47). As well as Rajan, Finch argues that in the novella Shelley increasingly focuses on the Eloise plot 'so that by the final two chapters the original gothic plot has disappeared completely, entirely supplanted by this later sentimentalist narrative' (1999: p. 35). Finch suggests that this seeming irreconcilability results in the narrative 'suddenly wrenching itself outside its existing plot and initiating a new line of narrative' in what is 'a clash of ideologies' (p. 44; p. 46), which is also true of Gothic fiction as a whole. In the middle of the Gothic Wolfstein narrative Shelley unexpectedly transports readers to a French sentimentalist environment, and indeed this is a site of contest within the novella.

The Gothic, according to Finch, becomes displaced by a narrative which focuses on 'female powerlessness' (p. 44) and this may be true; however, 'female powerlessness' is also typical of Gothic fiction. In many eighteenth century Gothics— including the works of Radcliffe, Lewis, Walpole and Dacre—the heroine is threatened (either physically, mentally, or both) by a Gothic villain or supernatural

force. In addition, Eloise and Wolfstein are doubles, and as I discuss in this chapter, both are victims of persecution prone to (in)sensibility. Therefore, as in *Zastrozzi*, in *St. Irvyne* Shelley takes a more androgynous approach to gender. As well as this, Finch's conviction that Eloise and Fitzeustace 'drift free of the dark pessimistic pull of the text' (p. 65) is not entirely convincing, for in the novella it is not clear when events take place. Readers first meet Eloise returning to her family home ruined and penniless; at the end, she travels to England to marry Fitzeustace, although this seems to take place in the past. Therefore, it is unclear whether Eloise's return takes place before or after her reunion with Fitzeustace. Moreover, as I discuss next, Shelley also interweaves his Gothic narrative with comments on educating the young female which is characteristic of the literature of sensibility.

Despite the consensus that the sentimental and the Gothic are never brought together in the narrative of *St. Irvyne*, these two modes are in fact interwoven by Shelley, mainly through Olympia. A victim of both sentimental and Gothic excess, Olympia represents at once virtue (sensibility) and lust (Gothic). A girl of 'exquisite loveliness' (*SI*, p. 197), Olympia soon develops a 'maddening desire' for Wolfstein, paralleling not only the relationship between the latter and Megalena but also Matilda's passion for Verezzi and Victoria de Loredani's obsession with Henriquez. Yet, characteristic of eighteenth century sentimental fiction, Shelley provides a didactic statement right in the middle of his Gothic narrative:

> A false system of education, and a wrong expansion of ideas, as they became formed, had been put in practice with respect to her youthful mind; and indulgence strengthened the passions which it behoved restraint to keep within

73

proper bounds, and which might have unfolded themselves as coadjutors of virtue, and not as promoters of vicious and illicit love.

<div align="right">(p. 197)</div>

Olympia and Eloise both suffer from 'ignorance', the difference being that in the former it has resulted in unbounded desire and vice. Channelling the monstrous femininity of her rival Megalena (as well as Matilda), Olympia experiences 'tumultuous passions' which are 'too fierce for utterance'. Though characteristic of Gothic excess, the inability to utter one's feelings also typifies the culture of sensibility. In eighteenth century sentimental fiction female characters often negate and withhold emotions (Csengei, 2012: p. 168). Like the Gothic, the literature of sensibility was appropriated by more conservative and radical writers. Just as Shelley inherited the Gothic narratives of Dacre, Lewis and Radcliffe, so did he inherit a larger cultural dialogue pertaining to sensibility, feeling and the (un)openess of emotions.

Olympia's lack of self-control would have provoked an attack from Wollstonecraft, who in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* derides the 'false system of education' which inspires vanity instead of 'nobler ambition[s]' (1993: p. 71). Wollstonecraft criticises Rousseau's *Emile* (1762), which had argued that women lack reason. But in *St. Irvyne* Shelley appropriates both a Wollstonecraftian and Rousseauian sensibility: Shelley's female characters seem to dangerously lack reason, but they also typify the French sensibility of indulgence. Hence, Shelley's didactic moralizing is part of a much broader debate concerning education, virtue, emotion, and vanity.

Strikingly, Shelley's social commentaries mirror those found in the Eloise plot, for they are doubles; both are young, naïve, and have no experience of the world. Yet, the difference is that Eloise's ignorance becomes in essence virtue, whereas Olympia becomes a quasi-monstrous female. However, upon her suicide Olympia is refigured as a virtuous damsel; she becomes an 'unchanging image of loveliness' whose 'alabaster bosom' now reeks 'in purple gore' (*SI*, pp. 205-6). The fact that Olympia chooses to commit suicide is not only a typical Gothic death but also serves to valorise her. Olympia's innocence is likewise furthered by her foretelling of Wolfstein's attempted murder of her. Like Shakespeare's Clarence, Olympia, 'scarcely knowing whether this were not a dream', 'dreamed that you [Wolfstein] were about to murder me' (p. 205).

Another image of 'unchanging loveliness', Eloise exhibits traits of the classic sentimental heroine. Eloise's virtue is threatened by Nempere, who seeks to attain her just as Wolfstein is pursued by Ginotti. On her deathbed, Eloise's mother warns her, '[W]hen you see a man enveloped in deceit and mystery; when you see him dark, reserved, and suspicious, carefully avoid him… spurn him from you as you would a serpent' (pp. 214-15). Nempere tempts Eloise from the metaphorical Garden of Eden, and eventually, 'so great and so unaccountable an influence had he gained on her soul, that ere long, on the altar of vice, pride, and malice, was immolated the innocence of the spotless Eloise' (p. 232). However, despite losing her physical virginity, Shelley emphasises that Eloise has retained her spiritual and intellectual virtue. Again, Shelley peppers this narrative with moral commentaries on society, the treatment of 'fallen'

women, and education. In one of his most scathing attacks, Shelley condemns libertinism:

> And thinkest thou, libertine, from a principle of depravity—*thinkest thou that thou hast raised thyself to the level of Eloise, by trying to sink her to thine own?*—No! Hopest thou that thy curse has passed away unheeded or unseen? *The God whom thou hast insulted has marked thee! – In the everlasting tablets of heaven in thine offence written! – but poor Eloise's crime is obliterated by the mercy of Him, who knows the innocence of her heart*.

> (p. 232, my emphasis)

Eloise is spiritually superior to Nempere due to 'the innocence of her heart'. Shelley again deploys a Christian rhetoric which triumphs dignity and belief and condemns depravity and disbelief. Described as the 'Eternal Avenger' in *The Wandering Jew*, the wrath of God is again excited in *St. Irvyne*, albeit for a different reason. In place of God's malignity towards Paulo, the All-Mighty smites Nempere for his corruption and exploitation of Eloise. Shelley frames this as a crime not only against God, but also against nature, for the moon hides 'her pale beams in a dusky cloud, as if blushing to contemplate a scene of so much wickedness' (p. 233).[1] Yet, Eloise's preservation of virtue is simultaneously radical as it harks back to Rousseau's New Heloise, who marries a nobleman despite having had sexual intercourse with her tutor Saint-Preux out of wedlock. Such is the case with Eloise; though pregnant with Nempere's child, Fitzeustace acknowledges her 'sweet spirit' (p. 242). Uncontaminated by libertinism, Fitzeustace abhors the vulgarity of societal expectations of virtue:

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[1] The moon is a symbol of Diana, the virgin goddess of the hunt. Shelley's personification is similar to Romeo's description of the moon, 'Who is already sick and pale with grief/That thou [Juliet], her maid, are far more fair than she' (*NS*, 1997: p. 891, II.II. lns. 47-8). Shelley also uses Shakespeare's Queen Mab as the title of his poem of the same name.

> "Know you not", exclaimed Eloise, in a low, faltering voice, "know you not that I *have been* another's?"

> "Oh! suppose me not", interrupted the impassioned Fitzeustace, "the slave of such vulgar and narrow-minded prejudice. Does the frightful vice and ingratitude of Nempere sully the spotless excellence of my Eloise's soul?—No, no…
>
> (p. 247, original emphasis)

Fitzeustace's remark that he is not 'the slave of vulgar and narrow-minded prejudice' echoes Zastrozzi's—and indeed Shelley's—rants against Christian doctrine. However, Shelley here frames this as a comment on society, gender, and marriage. Scholars consider Fitzeustace to be a Shelleyan poet, which is ironic considering that *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* are regarded as uncharacteristically Shelleyan. A prototype of Peacock's Scythrop, Fitzeustace 'wanders about' and 'writes poetry' (p. 242). Fitzeustace, like Shelley, seeks the counterpart of his soul to be united in love, for Eloise is 'destined as you were for mine, from the first instant the particles composing the soul which I adore, were assimilated by the God whom I worship' (p. 247). Significantly, Fitzeustace condemns legal marriage, considering it as 'a human institution, and incapable of furnishing that bond of union by which, alone can intellect be conjoined; *I regard it as but a chain*, although it keeps the body bound, still leaves the soul unfettered: it is not so with love' (pp. 249-50, my emphasis). Eloise is again chained, the difference being that she is not imprisoned by the gaze of Nempere but by the gaze of enlightened society. Equally as important, Fitzeustace claims that he suffers 'from a father's curse' (p. 49), resembling Mary and Percy Shelley's soured familial relationships.

Repeatedly throughout the text Shelley emphasises Ginotti/Nempere's ability to colonise the minds of Eloise and Wolfstein. Though encompassing virtue, Eloise feels compelled towards Nempere for reasons unexplained. Even at the event of her mother's death, Eloise's mind is colonised by the image of Nempere: 'in vain she essayed to pray… her thoughts were not within her own control' (p. 216). Eloise's endeavours to pray are ineffective, signifying Nempere's attempts to displace God in her mind and to become her Creator. As well as being sexually violated by Nempere, Eloise is also psychologically ravished, for her mind is turned towards Nempere by 'almost *mechanical* force' (p. 216, original emphasis). Wolfstein, too, is imprisoned in thought by Ginotti.

Wolfstein is emasculated by Ginotti's psychological torments. Like Eloise, Wolfstein is chained by 'a kind of mechanical force':

> when the mysterious disposer of the events of his existence was before him, a consciousness of the inutility of his refusal compelled him to submit to the mandates of a being, whom his heart sickening to acknowledge, it unwillingly confessed as a superior.
>
> (p. 223)

At first exhibiting traits of bloodthirsty masculinity, at this point in the novella Wolfstein becomes more passive, albeit reluctantly. At the beginning, Wolfstein acts almost like Zastrozzi; an outcast, Wolfstein is a 'hardened villain' fed by revenge and threatened by 'eternal damnation, tortures inconceivable' in the afterlife (p. 175). But as the novella progresses Wolfstein becomes more submissive. He is increasingly emasculated not just by Ginotti, but also by Megalena. Channelling Lady Macbeth, Megalena mock's Wolfstein's hesitation to murder 'the innocent Olympia' (p. 202).

78

She scoffs: 'Ah! base deceiver, do you hesitate?' (p. 203). On the other hand, Wolfstein exhibits traits of monstrous femininity himself; Shelley describes him as 'the wily villain' at one point (p. 176), which recalls Matilda's murderous lust in *Zastrozzi*. Furthermore, Wolfstein experiences 'love, maddening, excessive, unaccountable idolatry' (p. 172) which leads him to take revenge against Cavigni and which resembles the lust-induced vengeance of Matilda, Victoria, and Olympia.

There are different types of gazes in *St. Irvyne*: the gaze of the oppressor (Ginotti/Nempere), the gaze of the oppressed (Wolfstein, Eloise), the gaze of revenge (Wolfstein, Megalena, Olympia), the gaze of inquiry and awe (Wolfstein, Eloise, Ginotti, Fitzeustace). These different types of gazes complicate not only character dynamics but also desire. By this I mean that as the narrative progresses Ginotti becomes increasingly conflated with the images of Megalena and Olympia in Wolfstein's mind, thus signalling a kind of homosexual panic and psychological ravishment which Eloise is also subjected to by Nempere. Wolfstein is relentlessly pursued by Ginotti, Megalena, and Olympia, and all three desire him one way or another. Ginotti desires Wolfstein in that he 'marks' him as the only 'worthy' man in existence (p. 195); Megalena desires him with 'exulting and speechless passion' (p. 185); and, as the double of Megalena, Olympia too desires Wolfstein with 'maniac wildness' (p. 199). Moreover, Megalena's declaration that she 'can bear the tortures of disappointed love, better than you [Wolfstein] can evade the scrutiny of one who did adore thee' (p. 201) is also true of Ginotti's oppressive gaze, for Wolfstein's attempts to 'evade' his captor are fruitless. Wolfstein submits to Ginotti by a resistless force:

'such a man is he who watches my every action, *whose power I feel within myself is resistless, and not to be evaded*' (p. 195, my emphasis). At first attempting to evade the scrutiny of Ginotti, Wolfstein eventually recognises the 'terrible connexion… which subsisted between himself and Ginotti' (p. 195).

This sense of homosexual panic characterised late eighteenth century Gothic fiction. As Eve Sedgwick notes, 'the "classic" early Gothic contains…plots… about one or more males who not only is persecuted by, but considers himself transparent to and often under the compulsion of, another male (1985: p. 91). Sedgwick terms this 'homophobic thematics' by which she means that the rejection of homoerotic desire 'was a force in the development of Gothic fiction' (p. 92). Although Sedgwick mainly focuses on *Frankenstein* and *Caleb Williams*, the same is also true of Shelley's Gothic novellas. Both *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* chronicle the torments of a 'hapless' male victim tormented by the scrutinous gaze of another man. Just as Nempere colonises the mind of Eloise, so does Ginotti often efface the image of Megalena and Olympia from Wolfstein's mind, and he experiences '[I]ndefinable emotions… in his heart, by sensations awful, and not to be described' (*SI*, p. 190). In the same passage, Shelley emphasises how Wolfstein is 'resistlessly attracted to the sphere chill of horror that played around Ginotti's glance' and, like Eloise, 'in vain attempted to notice other objects' (p. 190).

For Rajan, Ginotti is 'the shadow of or unresolved remainder left after the destruction of Nempere' (2010: p. 49). Confusingly, Ginotti exists as the same time as Nempere, which brings into question if Ginotti is human or a supernatural spirit in

the deep recesses of Wolfstein's and Eloise's unconscious. Rajan notes that Ginotti/Nempere is a 'nonidentity', 'a textual unconscious rather than just a gap or aporia' (p. 68). By this she means that Ginotti is a 'remainder', a shadowy figure that is beyond comprehension. Moreover, Rajan contends that Ginotti is a 'Promethean transgressor' (p. 54) who, like Demogorgon in *Prometheus Unbound*, is a 'botched-up' creature relegated to the recesses of the text (p. 70). Yet, Ginotti's Promethean transgression goes beyond Rajan's notion of his 'unreadabilty'. Recounting his youth, Ginotti tells Wolfstein that he gazed at 'the empyrean sky' (*SI*, p. 237) which in Greek cosmology is the highest heaven made of fire. Ginotti is therefore a *Prometheus Pyrphoros*, a fire-bringer whose quest for knowledge transcends mortal comprehension and offends divinity.

But if Ginotti is unreadable, then so is the narrative itself. One of the main issues with *St. Irvyne* is its confusing and abrupt denouement. In the conclusion, Shelley ends with the following statement: 'Ginotti is Nempere. Eloise is the sister of Wolfstein… let endless life be sought from Him who alone can give an eternity of happiness' (*SI*, p. 252). Again, here Shelley appropriates a morally conservative narratorial voice to excite the reader's remorse and pity. However, what is most important is Shelley's declaration that Eloise and Wolfstein are siblings, for no real indication of this is given in the novella beforehand. However, Shelley provides clues; in some of the Eloise chapters there are mentions of 'a brother's death' which triggers an emotional response from Eloise and her sister Marianne. These mentions of a dead brother are often accompanied by a melancholy ballad sang by Eloise; for instance, in the ninth

chapter Eloise recites a song written 'by my poor brother… about ten days before he died. 'Tis a gloomy tale concerning him; he ill deserved the fate he met. Some future time I will tell it you [Nempere]' (p. 232). This particular song tells the tale of a 'desolate wanderer' who 'must quit at deep midnight her pitiless home'. Here, then, the imagery of the Wandering Jew (associated with Wolfstein and Ginotti) is conflated with the imagery of a 'pitiless home', which Eloise returns to after her ruination. Moreover, in stanza two Eloise's brother inscribes, '[H]ow sad, when dear hope every sorrow is soothing…Is the stern voice of fate that bids happiness flee!' (p. 231). The 'stern voice of fate' could be God (the 'Eternal Avenger'), Ginotti, Nempere, or all three. It seems that Wolfstein foretold his own death in the final stanza:

> Thy love's pallid corse the wild surges are laving,
> O'er his form the fierce swell of the tempest is raving;
> But, fear not, parting spirit; thy goodness is saving,
> In eternity's bowers, a seat for thee there.
>
> (p. 232)

Shelley seems to be fond of this melodramatically sublime Gothic death, for it appears in 'Revenge', 'Ghasta', *The Wandering Jew*, and *St. Irvyne*. Following Eloise's recital, Shelley warns: 'Beware, Eloise!—a precipice, a frightful precipice yawns at thy feet! advance yet a step further, and thou perishest! (p. 233). Eloise too verges on the brink of Gothic annihilation but is saved by 'thy religion' (p. 233). However, although Wolfstein also refuses to disavow God, he too becomes a 'pallid corse'. The fact that Eloise and Wolfstein are doubles is also a clue to their relationship, for they are both persecuted by the same spirit and are outcasts. Indeed, it is implied that Eloise and Wolfstein were predestined to be pursued by Ginotti/Nempere. Ginotti even warns

Wolfstein at one point, '[F]ool, then, that thou art, to deny me!' (p. 220). An omnipresent God-like figure, Ginotti/Nempere has watched over the siblings since birth.

Confusingly, what seems to be one of the main components of the text—the obtainment of the elixir of life—is only revealed in the last few chapters. As in *Frankenstein* and *St. Leon*, the secret of immortality is textually withheld in *St. Irvyne*, as otherwise readers would know how to obtain it. Like Shelley, Ginotti's '*curiosity*, and a desire of unveiling that latent mysteries of nature, was the passion by which all the other emotions of my mind were intellectually organized' (p. 234). This, too, echoes Frankenstein's obsession with natural philosophy and the quest for immortality. Similar to Mary Shelley's condemnation of Frankenstein's unethical pursuit of new life and in turn revenge, Shelley too seems to regard the *elixir vitae* as 'a blasphemous undertaking' (Brewer, 2006: p. 37). Ginotti 'shudders' to remember how '*selfish* and *self-interested* as I was' (p. 234). However, flashes of Shelley the atheist come through too, as Ginotti believes that 'priestcraft and superstition were all the religion which *man* ever practised' (*SI*, p. 234). Ginotti 'dives into the depths of metaphysical calculations' and '[W]ith sopihstical arguments had I convinced myself of the non-existence of a First Cause' (p. 234).

Of course, Ginotti's insistence on reason and dismissal of superstition echoes Shelley and Hogg's argument in the *Necessity*. However, yet again, Shelley simultaneously provides a Christian narrative of damnation. Contemplating 'the sound of a bell from a neighbouring convent' which 'struck a chord in unison with my

soul' (p. 236), Ginotti holds a momentary belief in divinity. Then, Ginotti dreams of a 'phantasm… which was fascination itself' (p. 237) but refuses to join the attractive spirit:

> No sooner had I uttered these words, then methought a sensation of deadly horror chilled my sickening frame; an earthquake rocked the precipice beneath my feet; the beautiful being vanished; clouds, as of chaos, rolled around, and from their dark masses flashed incessant meteors [..] I beheld a form more hideous than the imagination of man is incapable of portraying, whose proportions, gigantic and deformed, were seemingly blackened by the inerasible traces of the thunderbolts of God…
>
> (p. 237)

Just as Victoria is annihilated by the Satanic Zofloya on a rocky precipice, so is Ginotti faced with destruction by the Prince of Hell. This scene is filled with Gothic sublime imagery, and indeed the 'misshapen proportions' of the landscape parallel Satan's 'deformity' as well as anticipating Ginotti's own 'gigantic' and misshapen form. The 'inerasible traces of the thunderbolts of God' also echoes God's role as the 'Eternal Avenger' in *The Wandering Jew*, and, like Paulo, Ginotti too is doomed to wander the earth. Like Ambrosio's fear-induced disavowal of God in *The Monk*, Ginotti too is driven by fear to accept Satan's power.

Given that Shelley's novella is apparently 'unsolvable', many scholars in the past have assumed that he arrogantly abandoned the Gothic mode. In his biography of Shelley Cameron suggests that 'during his composition of the novel Shelley's interests in political and philosophical subjects began to seem rather futile to him, so that he desired only to finish it up as rapidly as possible and get on to work which seemed of some significance' (1951: p. 33). Additionally, Desmond King-Hele harshly

states that '*St. Irvyne* is quite unreadable[.] Its preposterous unfinished is an insult no

reader would tolerate' (1960: p. 7). This oversimplification of Shelley's early prosaic

career has left a lasting imprint on scholarship, even in more recent publications. For

Kim Wheatley, the ending of *St. Irvyne* is 'ridiculously abrupt' and 'nonsensical' (2016:

p. 78) and indeed far too many critics have assumed that the denouement of *St. Irvyne*

is the result of Shelley wanting to progress onto bigger and better things, as it were.

However, the idea that Shelley all of a sudden 'tired' of the Gothic underestimates the

complexity of the novella and also assumes that *St. Irvyne* is a finished product.

'Boredom' hints at Shelley's arrogance, but the gaps in his Gothic fiction are there for

a reason. Considering that *St. Irvyne* interweaves a sentimental domestic narrative, a

Germanic Gothic tale, and the quest for the elixir of life, the idea that Shelley suddenly

neglected the novella is not a satisfactory answer as to why it is, in effect, incomplete.

As Behrendt reminds us, Shelley intended his novella to be a triple decker.

Indeed, given that *St. Irvyne* resembles *St. Leon* narratologically and thematically, one

can infer that perhaps Shelley intended his novella to be larger. *St. Leon* is a slow burn

novel in that Godwin introduces the narrative gradually; starting at the Field of Cloth

of Gold and Pavia, Godwin then slowly unravels a domestic plot surrounding St.

Leon's ruination of his family and it is only more than half-way through the novel that

the philosopher's stone is introduced. Perhaps Shelley intended to do the same thing;

in a letter to Stockdale, Shelley dismisses their confusion at the ending:

> My dear sir,
> I did not think it possible that the romance would make but one small volume,
> it will at all events be larger than Zastrozzi. What I mean as 'Rosicrucian' is the

elixir of eternal life which Ginotti had obtained. Mr. Godwin's Romance of St. Leon, turns upon that superstition; I enveloped it in mystery for the greater excitement of interest, and on a re-examination you will perceive that Mountfort physically did kill Ginotti, which must appear from the latter's paleness.—Will you have the goodness to send me Mr. Godwin's Political Justice, when do you suppose 'St. Irvyne' will be out.

<div align="right">(LPBS1, 1964: 24, p. 21)</div>

Shelley here seems more eager for the publication of his novella than tired of it. He is right to point out Mountfort's complicity in Nempere's death. Mountfort is 'pallid' and remarks to Eloise that 'the officers of justice are in pursuit of me' (p. 246). The problem is, however, that this particular section of the novella lacks development, which is why the death of Ginotti/Nempere seems abrupt and disjointed. The end of the Eloise/Nempere plot is hastily tied up, and what would have been an intriguing domestic plot is cut short. Hence it may be possible that the gaps in *St. Irvyne* are the result of disappointment and potential discouragement from Stockdale. Yet this does not factor into account that perhaps the gaps in *St. Irvyne* are intentional and tell us more about Shelley's authorship than assumed. Indeed, in *St. Irvyne* Shelley 'abandon[s] [the] obsession with telling the whole story' (Barthes, 1977: p. 52).

What scholars often seem to not realise is that the disparities in *St. Irvyne* are there for a reason. while it has been implied that the Shelley who penned *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* is not the same Shelley who eloquently surmised that 'poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world' (*SPPBS*, 2016: p. 678), this dichotomy does not acknowledge that the poet himself is essentially incomplete. Paradoxically, it is this very incompleteness which has come to characterise Shelley's later career as a philosophical poet.

Indeed, considerable work has been done on the incompleteness of Shelley's *oeuvre*. His last major work, the *Triumph*, is characteristically fragmented: Shelley drowned before he could complete the manuscript. The *Triumph*, which is indebted to Dante's *Inferno*,[2] is an ontological poem in which Shelley stumbles upon the 'Shape' of Life in 'a waking dream'; he then meets Rousseau, who proceeds to tell his own narrative (*SPPBS*, 2016: p. 571, ln. 42). As the manuscript is unfinished, the *Triumph* has invited much criticism on its fragmentation. In 'Shelley Disfigured', Paul de Man maintains that the *Triumph* is a product of 'archaeological labo[u]r' and that 'Shelley… like a statue, can be broken into pieces, mutilated, or allegorized' (1984: pp. 93-5). De Man goes on to say that the *Triumph* is a poem shaped by shapelessness as it deconstructs its meaning even as it acquires it (p. 107). The shapelessness of Shelley's *oeuvre* is a common theme in scholarship, although the focus tends to be on his later work.

What is striking about the *Triumph* is that its composition is so inextricably linked to Shelley's death, and therefore his poetic consciousness leads a 'posthumous existence' (*SLJK*, 2002: pp. 369-70).[3] Indeed, the *Triumph* is regarded as a posthumous fragment, shrouded in enigma: Shelley's mangled corpse has come to represent the incompleteness and textual disfigurement of the poem. Nancy More Goslee interrogates the Bodleian manuscript of the *Triumph*, which was seemingly written on

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[2] For Shelley's reading of Dante, see Antonella Braida, *Dante and the Romantics* (2004).

[3] For Shelley as metaphorical disfiguration, see Suzanne L. Barnett, '*Epipsychidion* as Posthumous Fragment', *Keats-Shelley Journal* (2016): pp. 89-99; and Marjorie Levinson's *The Romantic Fragment Poem: A Critique of a Form* (1986).

different scraps of paper with different ink, thus leaving gaps in its composition.

Goslee argues that Shelley's poetic 'blots' can enrich our understanding of Rousseau's—and Shelley's—subjectivity (2011: p. 206):

> [T]his gap, this accidental "blotting" for us of a crucial passage in Rousseau's encounter with the "shape all light", appears to readers of the manuscript as a mysterious absence or silence—… [W]e as much later readers should be prompted by this textual gap to recognize that Rousseau's subjectivity, his gap or "blotting" of consciousness, has two distinct stages, now separated by this accidental textual loss.
>
> (p. 206)

Goslee notes that the *Triumph* displays 'a profound anxiety' about poetic linearity and that readers 'witness how marks and blots offer traces for interpretation' (p. 208). Ironically, poetic 'blotting' is textually and intellectually enriching when found in Shelley's later poetry—but is a severe 'mistake' in his Gothic fiction. Shelley's Gothic novellas have indeed been seen as a blot, but rather a blot on his literary career rather than something which reconceptualises his authorship. As important, Shelley is already leading a posthumous existence even before his death: he had already published his aptly titled *Posthumous Fragments* in 1810, and the rest of his Gothic fiction is likewise textually incomplete.[4]

But if the *Triumph* is testament to Shelley's 'palimpsestic self' (p. 208), then so is *St. Irvyne*. His early fiction has been 'washed out' by his contemporaries as well as modern scholars. Furthermore, Shelley's Gothic fiction has been viewed as an

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[4] Connections have been made between Shelley's Gothic fiction and the *Triumph*. In his article on *Zastrozzi* and the *Triumph*, Hogle claims that the latter is a Gothic poem as it is concerned with the phantasmagorical, the mirror-image, and ideological conflict (2015: n.p.).

underwriting, a mere antecedent to works like *Prometheus Unbound*. Indeed, if Shelley

scholars emphasise the importance of the materiality of his poetry, this is rarely

extended to his Gothic texts. In his work on Shelley's relationship with his publishers.

Behrendt notes that the physicality of Shelley's drafts confused his acquaintances.

While in Italy Shelley would send his manuscripts to intermediaries in England,

leaving gaps in his verse, and hence his intermediaries were 'forced to guess' his

intentions (2012: p. 91). But this is precisely the case with *St. Irvyne* in particular.

Shelley's publishers and in turn modern critics have been 'forced to guess' the

denouement of *St. Irvyne* out of their own curiosity. Surely then this materiality can

be said for his Gothic works too.

If it has been established that gaps, aporias, and omissions are characteristically

Shelleyan, the inconsistencies in *St. Irvyne* have been paradoxically regarded as

uncharacteristically Shelleyan. It has even been assumed that Gothicism is not

Shelleyan at all. The problem is not the favouring of poetry over prose either. Textual

omission has a wider literary tradition, and one which Shelley certainly subscribes to.

Lacunae used by Sterne and Mackenzie, for instance, demonstrates the

supplementation of storytelling and 'the illusory nature of connected narration'

(Manning, 2004: p. 88). *St. Irvyne* is also illusory; details are unexplained, things are

left unsaid, and the disjunction between the Gothic and the sentimental is also an

illusion. Shelley's indebtedness and allusions to the cult of sensibility in *St. Irvyne*

further shows that the fragmentation of his novella is nothing new or surprising and

is in fact entirely fitting of the sentimental (and Gothic) genres.

Whether due to posthumous editorial overseeing, geographical distance, or his manner of writing at the time, Shelley has always left blanks in his verse. If the 'blots' of Shelley's Italian manuscripts can enrich our understanding of his relationship with his publishers and poetic selfhood, then the same can be said for his Gothic fiction: Shelley as a man and as a writer is an aporia, a posthumous fragment od ideas, identities and literary meditations then assembled by his contemporaries and uncritically absorbed by subsequent critics. This scholarly oversight only serves to perpetuate the division between Shelley the meta-textually sophisticated (i.e., *The Triumph of Life*) and Shelley the plagiarist who leaves puzzling gaps in his Gothic works. Yet there is not just one Shelley and to attempt to separate his poetic selfhood is a fallacy. Shelley's Gothic fiction shows that the poet has always been a fragment, a Gothic manuscript 'found' by scholars with the scraps of his 'embarrassing' Gothicism shoved into the metaphorical closet of existing scholarship. Shelley's Gothic omissions culminate in *St. Irvyne*, a novella of disjunction which rejects any linear sense of 'readability'. *St. Irvyne* is in fact a perfect analogy for Shelley as a man and as a writer; disjointed, puzzling, nuanced, and inconclusive. To favour non-linearity in Shelley's later poetry but search for answers in his Gothic works misses the point. Regrettably, when it comes to *St. Irvyne*—and the rest of Shelley's early fiction—scholars, in the words of Keats, succumb to an 'irritable reaching after fact and reason' (*SLJK*, 2002: pp. 41-2).

Conclusion

Towards Shelley's Gothic Postmodernism

In his *Athenaeum Fragments* (1798), Friedrich Schlegel philosophises about the nature

of poetry: '[T]he romantic kind of poetry is still in the state of becoming; that, in fact,

is its real essence: that it should forever be becoming and never be perfected' (1971: p.

175). For Schlegel, Romantic poetry unites the poetic, the prosaic, nature, art, criticism,

and philosophy. Most significant, however, is the notion that Romantic poetry should

'never be perfected': far from a homogenous and organic form of literature—an idea

which dominated mid-twentieth century new criticism[1]—Romanticism is fragmented,

obscure and fluid. Schlegel was in fact ahead of his time in his insistence on the

mutability of Romantic poetry. There is not one Romanticism, just as there is not one

Shelley.

Yet, while it has been established that Romanticism is 'an open field rather than

a clearly defined and distinct concept' (Haekel, 2017: pp. 1-3), scholars still strive for

rigidity in Shelley's early Gothic fiction. Though there has been a push in recent

decades to take *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* seriously, Shelley is still charged with literary

carelessness by many scholars: that is, the suggestion that he dabbled in the Gothic,

arrogantly abandoned it, and matured as a radical poet who was preoccupied with

the imagination, nature, philosophy, and politics. Although such tropes are

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[1] In his response to Lovejoy's 'On the Discrimination of Romanticisms', René Wellek famously asserted
that 'the same conceptions of poetry and of the workings and nature of poetic imagination' define
European Romanticism (1949: p. 147).

undoubtedly a significant characteristic of (British) Romantic literature, this everlasting narrow view of the Shelley canon ultimately serves to perpetuate the futile idea of a homogenous and organic Shelley. However, this is at odds with the reality of Shelley's literary identity, which is heterogeneously Frankensteinian. While recent Shelley criticism has endeavoured towards a more open view of his poetic personhood, his Gothic fiction is equally significant and deserves more attention. Scholarship should therefore move beyond the rational albeit rather narrow interpretation of *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* as mere antecedents to *Prometheus Unbound*.

Indeed, Shelley's Gothic *oeuvre* is far from simplistic. It is ridiculous, excessive, political, scientific, philosophical, intertextual, collaborative, plagiaristic, and at times indecipherable. But it is this very protean aspect of Shelley's Gothic fiction which makes it ripe for reinterpretation. Scholars should embrace Shelley's Gothic excess instead of solely endeavouring for seriousness and coherency. The complex layering of Shelley's Gothicism is testament to the fragmentation of his authorship, which is constantly in flux. Hence, the idea of a poetically 'whole' Shelley is fallacious.

The fractured incomprehensibility of Shelley's Gothic fiction and his literary career more generally points to a postmodern conception of authorship.[2] This dissertation has used an historically-situated and biographical approach to Shelley's early work that moves towards a conception of Shelley's Gothic postmodernism,

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[2] For a postmodern reading of *A Defence of Poetry* (1821), see Troy Urquhart, 'Metaphor, Transfer, and Translation in Plato's *Ion*: The Postmodern Platonism of Percy Bysshe Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry*', *Romanticism on the Net* (2003).

suggestive of new ways of reading his *oeuvre*, rather than adopting a postmodern methodology from the outset. Though Beville defines the 'gothic-postmodern' in relation to hauntology (2009: p. 9), in *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* the Gothic and the postmodern work as a literature of fragmentation. Like its Romantic counterpart, postmodernism as a concept is frustratingly abstract. Generally speaking, however, postmodern fiction is characterised by paradox, narratorial unreliability and contradiction. In an article on Joycean narrative uncertainty, J. Hillis Miller notes that current narrative theory

> … question[s] the concept of organic unity or wholeness which has been the central assumption guiding much interpretation of fiction. In place of wholeness has been the hypothesis of heterogeneity, indeterminacy, or open-endedness.
>
> (1982: p. 3)

Deconstructivist and poststructuralist narrative theory posits the author not as a single omniscient entity but rather one that circulates and rejects firmness. The same applies to Shelley's Gothic *oeuvre*, although it is published one hundred and fifty years or so before poststructuralist debate comes to fruition in literary criticism. Heterogeneity, absence, and scission are fundamental to *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*, and yet such characteristics have been seen as a hindrance to readerly analysis rather than enriching our grasp of Shelley's literary experimentation. In both *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* Shelley textually withholds crucial plot information which ruptures narrative coherence. Moreover, Shelley's Gothic fiction is epitomized by illusion: his Oxford poems (*The Wandering Jew, Original Poetry, Posthumous Fragments*) and prose fiction are not just unsophisticated pastiche. Rather, they are part of a complex web of mingled

yarn which destabilizes Shelley's authorship. It is all of this which makes Shelley's Gothic fiction postmodern, as it becomes part of a 'labyrinth of the interminable narration' (Lyotard, 1984: p. 80).

As Gerhard Hoffman observes, '[T]he postmodern paradox places the impossible within the possible, interconnects that which is *not* connectable, superimposes perspectives that are *not* compatible[.] It both divides and fuses the seemingly forever separate' (2005: p. 218). Similarly, paradoxical (dis)connection is essential to Shelley's Gothicism. Not only is his Gothic fiction disconnected from both the Romantic and Shelley canon, but the texts themselves are characterised by textual disconnection and fusion. *St. Irvyne* in particular rejects narrative linearity while simultaneously fusing the Gothic and the sentimental narrative modes.

Certainly, on close inspection it is not at all surprising that *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* are textually and authorially paradoxical. After all, it is this precise schism which partly defines Romantic era sentimental and Gothic fiction. A prime example of this is Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*; its black and blank pages encourages active rather than passive readerly engagement. Similarly, the trope of the found manuscript defines late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Gothic fiction. *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*—and Shelley's other Gothic works—are a corpus of dysfunction. Both Shelley's Gothic language and Gothic bodies work in tandem and are so excessive that they are, in effect, not fit for purpose. Shelley's 'convulsing' hero(in)es, with their obsessive 'paroxysms of passion' and 'Lethean torpor' serve as a missing chapter, one which quite literally tells readers nothing. Read in the context of the found manuscript, then,

it becomes clear that Shelley does not deviate from but rather subscribes to contemporaneous sentimental and Gothic literature.

Shelley's Gothic fiction, then, is a textual Gordian knot. His early prose and poetry challenge dominant assumptions of his authorship, one which assumes a teleological sense of selfhood. *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*, as well as Shelley's other Gothicisms, are testament to the flexibility, versatility, and kaleidoscopic nature of his literary identity.

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