

ABSTRACT

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My dissertation participates in a developing body of Romantic criticism that seeks to trace the crucial, yet uncertain, relationship between Romanticism and the Gothic. Recent studies argue persuasively for the influence of gothic aesthetics on the major poets of the Romantic era, yet surprisingly little attention has been given to Percy Bysshe Shelley, for whom, more than any other Romantic, the gothic sensibility arguably provided the most powerful and lasting influence during the course of his career. Shelley's earliest publications, including his two gothic novels—*Zastrozzi, a Romance* and *St. Irvyne; or, The Rosicrucian*—have received scant critical attention and demand an analysis that approaches these early works with the same theoretical rigor that his mature poetry receives. I employ the insights of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory to interrogate my distinction between the *Shelleyan* subject of Romanticism and the *Shelleyesque* subject of Gothicism. Where the Shelleyan gaze finds synthesis, desire, pleasure, sublimity, benevolence, and being; the Shelleyesque gaze finds antagonism, drive,

jouissance, monstrosity, perversion, and lack. Rather than an undisciplined juvenile phase of Shelley's development, the *Shelleyesque* continues to operate throughout his mature poetry in unsettling and provocative ways, particularly in works such as *Prometheus Unbound*—generally considered to be Shelley's most idealistic attempt to transcend the political, sexual, and psychological antagonisms associated with the gothic tradition—further complicating the uncanny relationship between Romanticism and the Gothic.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY AND THE GOTHIC

By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: <i>Zastrozzi, a Romance</i> : Paranoiac Fantasy and the Semblance of Subversion.....	16
Chapter Two: <i>St. Irvyne; or, The Rosicrucian</i> : Gothic Drive and Romantic Desire.....	60
Chapter Three: <i>The Wandering Jew</i> : Superstition and Subjectivity.....	97
Chapter Four: The Gothic Prometheus.....	132
Bibliography.....	180

INTRODUCTION

My dissertation participates in a developing body of Romantic criticism that seeks to trace the crucial, yet uncertain, relationship between Romanticism and the Gothic. Michael Gamer, in *Romanticism and the Gothic*, points out that “at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century . . . neither ‘gothic’ nor ‘romantic’ had yet taken their modern meanings” and that the Gothic is rather “a discursive site crossing the genres” (2-3). Recent studies such as Gamer’s, Anne Williams’s *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*, Thomas Pfau’s *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy*, Robert Miles’s *Gothic Writing*, David Richter’s *The Progress of Romance*, Stephen Bruhm’s *Gothic Bodies*, and Ellen Brinks’s *Gothic Masculinity*, argue persuasively for the influence of Gothic aesthetics on the major poets of the Romantic era. Miles and Williams, in particular, inform my approach to the Gothic. For Miles, the Gothic is not a set of conventions, but a “a ‘carnavalesque’ mode for representations of the fragmented subject. Both the generic multiplicity of the Gothic, and what one might call its discursive primacy, effectively detach the Gothic from the tidy simplicity of thinking of it as so many predictable, fictional conventions” (4). Similarly, for Anne Williams the Gothic “outlines a large, irregularly shaped figure, an irregularity that implies the limitations of language—appropriate for the category containing [the] unspeakable ‘other’” (23). Ultimately, for Williams, the Gothic “is a discourse that shows the cracks in the system that constitutes consciousness, ‘reality’” (66). Williams, as does Jerrold Hogle, models her

approach on Julia Kristeva's theory of the "abject," or the "throwing off" of fundamental inconsistencies of our being. According to Kristeva, the "abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to *I*" (1) and that there is "nothing like the abjection of self to show that all abjection is in fact recognition of the want on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded" (5). In terms of the Gothic, Hogle argues that characters in Gothic fiction "deal with the tangled contradictions fundamental to their existence by throwing them off onto ghostly or monstrous counterparts that then seem 'uncanny' in their unfamiliar familiarity . . ." (5).

As impressive and important as these recent studies are, surprisingly little attention is given to Percy Bysshe Shelley, for whom, more than any other Romantic, the Gothic arguably provided the most powerful and lasting influence during the course of his career. Although Shelley claimed, in an oft-quoted letter to Godwin, that by 1812 he was no longer a "votary of Romance," his reading habits and poetic interests suggest instead that what he had given up was not an interest in the Gothic itself but the well-worn conventions of the "Old Gothic" of Walpole and Radcliffe that had since become the object of satire and ridicule. We know from Mary Shelley's *Journal*¹—the best source for tracking Shelley's reading habits—that both Mary and Percy continued to read (and read aloud to friends) a number of Gothic texts, which included, among many others, William Beckford's *Vathek*; Charles Brockden Brown's *Weiland*, *Ormond*, *Edgar Huntley*, and *Arthur Merwyn*; Charlotte Dacre's *Zafloya*; Godwin's *Caleb Williams* and *St. Leon*; Caroline Lamb's *Glenarvon*; Charles Maturin's *Fatal Revenge; or the Family of Montorio* (1807) and *J.*

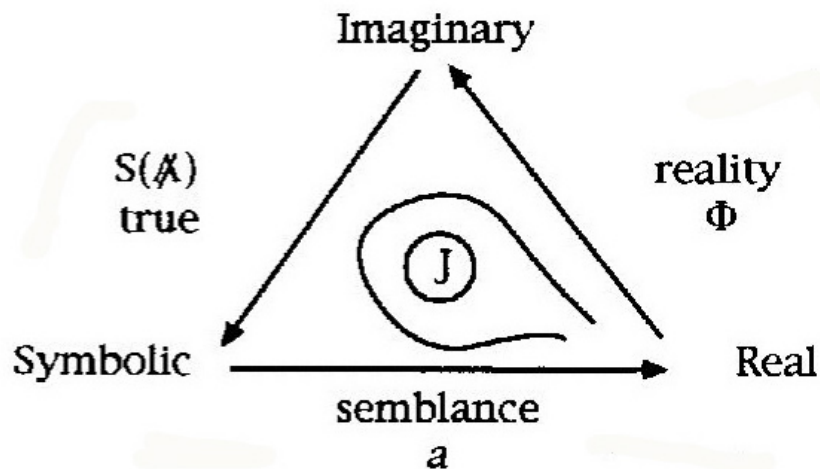
Bertram (1816); Thomas Love Peacock's *Nightmare Abbey* (in which Shelley is playfully satirized in the character of Scythrop); John Polidori's *The Vampyre*; along with all of Matthew Lewis's and Ann Radcliffe's works. Shelley also enjoyed the Gothic productions of Germany, which included Goethe's *Faust*; Frederick Schiller's *The Robbers* and *The Ghost Seer*; and the aptly titled *Phantasmagoriana*, a French translation of a collection of ghost stories (translated into English in 1812 as *Tales of the Dead*). In fact, Thomas Love Peacock remarked that "Brown's four novels, Schiller's *Robbers*, and Goethe's *Faust* were, of all the works with which he was familiar, those which took the deepest root in his mind, and had the strongest influence on his character He devotedly admired Wordsworth and Coleridge, and in a minor degree Southey . . . but admiration is one thing and assimilation is another; and nothing so blended itself with the structure of his interior mind as the creations of Brown."²

Shelley's earliest publications, including his two gothic novels—*Zastrozzi, a Romance* and *St. Irvyne; or, The Rosicrucian*—have received scant critical attention and demand an analysis that approaches these works with the same theoretical rigor that his mature poetry receives. My study of the importance of Shelley's early gothic works attempts to fill a gap in Shelley scholarship by establishing a more detailed reading of Shelley's early works and to argue that Shelley's gothic sensibility is fundamental to fully appreciating the psychological complexities and antagonisms in his mature poetry, using as my test case his great lyrical drama *Prometheus Unbound*.

Throughout my study, I employ the insights of Lacanian psychoanalytic

theory to interrogate the distinction between the *Shelleyan* subject of Romanticism and the *Shelleyesque* subject of Gothicism. I resist the temptation to literalize this split or to apply a rigid definition to either his Gothic or Romantic works, terms I use provisionally. Where the Shelleyan gaze finds synthesis, desire, pleasure, sublimity, benevolence, and being; the Shelleyesque gaze finds antagonism, drive, *jouissance*, monstrosity, perversion, and lack. What will become clear in my reading, is that these two designations operate antagonistically across the body of his writing and characterize the aesthetic tension in Shelley that has traditionally been defined in terms of skepticism and idealism. Rather than an undisciplined juvenile phase of Shelley's development (as many critics have traditionally argued), I claim that the *Shelleyesque* continues to operate in unsettling and provocative ways throughout his mature poetry, particularly in *Prometheus Unbound*, generally considered to be Shelley's most idealistic attempt to transcend the political, sexual, and psychological antagonisms associated with the gothic tradition. I argue that the Gothic, for Shelley, provides the aesthetic ground through which his most idealistic moments are mediated. It functions as the "Real" that always returns to its place as a site of failure when the imagination fails or when the aspirations of the Romantic ego are confronted with the void of subjective destitution. Major poems such as *Alastor*, "Mont Blanc," *Julian and Maddalo*, *Epipsychidion*, *Adonais*, and *The Triumph of Life*, all enact a version of this failure and exemplify Shelley's appreciation for the complexities of psychological trauma.

Theoretically, my study is informed by concepts drawn from Lacan's schematic representation of the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real orders that appears in *Seminar XX: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973* (83):



At the risk of introducing more confusion than necessary into my analysis, my operative definition of the Gothic is that it is an aesthetic of the Lacanian Real. The Gothic aesthetic provides a representational site where irruptions of the Real disturb the subject's experience of reality and interactions with others. On a structural level, the Symbolic, Imaginary, and Real refer to, respectively, the signifier, signified, and the bar that separates the two and that resists any totalizing identity between word and image, or between self and other. In terms of the subject's experience of reality, the Symbolic refers to the register of language and ideology; the Imaginary to nature, the body, and to the images with which the subject identifies; and the Real to the impossible, the antagonism that resists symbolization. The three objects on the side of the

triangle—the object-cause of desire (a), the phallus, or phallic function (Φ), and the signifier of the barred Other ($S [/ A]$)—refer to the objects that are produced as the Real undergoes symbolization and *jouissance* (the “J” in the middle) is evacuated. In other words, the three objects indicate a mediation of the Real after the subject enters language and undergoes symbolic castration. Although an oversimplification, the triad of Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic can usefully be applied to Gothic, Romantic, and Enlightenment. Where the Enlightenment critical procedure is to bring the imaginary under the determinations of the symbolic, the Romantic procedure is to free the imaginary from the reification of the symbolic. The Gothic, in turn, represents the antagonism that resists the movement from one to the other.

One of the key Lacanian terms I deploy throughout my study is “fantasy,” which Lacan defines as the split subject’s relation to his/her object-cause of desire.³ The object-cause is not the object itself but is the difference between an articulated demand for the object and the satisfaction it provides. The remainder when one is subtracted from the other is the object-cause, and the lack of satisfaction sets in motion the metonymic movement of desire from one object to the next. Thus “fantasy” is the frame in which the subject structures his/her desire and provides the coordinates for a consistent sense of “reality.” So when I say that the Gothic is an aesthetic of the Real, I do not mean that it is a representation of the Real, which resists symbolization. I mean that the Gothic represents the traumas, fears, and proliferation of images associated with the breakdown of reality as it is structured through fantasy. I hope to make these distinctions more clear as I use them

throughout my study to exemplify those moments in Shelley's texts where the subject's fantasy frame is placed under pressure by traumatic encounters with the alterity of the Other or an aleatory event that ruptures a given socio-ideological context.

The first three chapters of the dissertation are devoted to establishing new readings of Shelley's earliest and most important gothic works: the novels *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*, and Shelley's first book-length poem, *The Wandering Jew*. Shelley scholars have neglected these early works largely on aesthetic grounds. Kenneth Neill Cameron encapsulates what was once the predominant critical attitude towards Shelley's interest in the Gothic, writing that Shelley, during his "votary of Romance" period "was genuinely interested in the mysterious and the occult . . . and in his novels he was, from time to time, carried away by his subject . . . but he wrote largely with his tongue in his own cheek—delighting, at times, in parodying his own style—aware, as he was writing the novels, of their inherent ridiculousness, but interested in a quick, schoolboy fame" (28). One of the wagers I make in my study is that if we examine these works with the same seriousness and theoretical rigor that Shelley's mature poetry receives, what we find is that the Gothic is, for Shelley, at first an experimental aesthetic through which he develops an increasingly sophisticated psychology of trauma. It is a critical commonplace that the Romantics internalize gothic form and establish a psychological depth that is often lacking in their literary precursors. The ruined castle, the tempestuous elements, the mysterious strangers, and so forth, thus become a model for the mind. In an important new work, *Romantic Psychoanalysis*,

Joel Faflak claims that psychoanalysis (a term, Faflak points out, that was coined by Coleridge) emerges in Romanticism itself as a “body of writing struggling to find its own identity” (8). In Shelley’s gothic works we find a poet struggling to find his own artistic identity and to establish an aesthetic capable of representing both ideological and psychological complexity.

In chapter one, I begin with an overview of critical responses to Shelley’s early gothic works to establish the space for my own readings. I take particular issue with readings that fail to take these works seriously simply because they participate in a “vulgar” genre that Shelley would later abandon. I also take issue with criticism that seeks to interpret Shelley’s early work through the lens of his later poetry and metaphysical positions, arguing that precisely the opposite critical stance should be taken. Shelley’s Gothic provides a baseline account, so to speak, of his earliest philosophical, political, and psychological interests, and articulates a mode of subjectivity that recognizes rather than sublimates the antagonisms produced within the social field where the combinatory dynamics between subject, self, object, and other are expressed. In his first gothic romance *Zastrozzi*, I argue that Shelley appropriates the conventions of the gothic novel to reveal the ideological mechanisms of anti-Jacobin paranoid fantasy. It is important to remember that by the time Shelley began writing his early gothic works the popularity of the genre was in decline, as were Republican revolutionary aspirations that had seemingly been defeated by reactionary forces. Shelley, thus, attempts to remobilize the Gothic by satirizing the reactionary paranoid fantasy of the Jacobin monster and to interrogate the desires and fears that produces it. I

also show how Shelley then subjectivizes these paranoiac images by giving them a voice and an identity that exceeds the paranoiac image and articulates a model of subjectivity and desire that is presciently modern, one that destabilizes not only the self-transparency of the Enlightenment ego, but also the more idealistic strains of Romantic consciousness.

While more ambitious than *Zastrozzi*, Shelley's second gothic novel, *St. Irvyne*, is a fascinating mess, beset with apparent contradictions and structural gaffes. The novel is a transitional work for the young Shelley as he sought to find a more effective register through which to represent in materialist terms his increasingly abstract sensibility. *St. Irvyne* is a text where Shelley is clearly moving towards that direction, and, tellingly, it is the last work of prose fiction he would publish.⁴ In contrast to critics who ascribe the novel's structural inconsistencies to immaturity or sloppiness, I demonstrate how *St. Irvyne* exemplifies the Lacanian notion of "fantasy" and its function in sustaining a "subject of desire" as a defense against the "real" of the drive. The "desire of the Other" always functions as a third term that disrupts or negates the complementary relation between the masculine and the feminine. Shelley stages this impasse by constructing two parallel narratives that never converge: the Eloise / Fitzeustace / Nempere plot and the Wolfstein / Megalena / Ginotti plot. If we accept Shelley's insistence on the speculative identities between Ginotti and Nempere, and between Ginotti and Wolfstein, then we must conclude that a speculative identity exists between Wolfstein and Nempere. Such a relation suggests that the "event too dreadful for narration" (which led to Wolfstein's unexplained exile) is actually

Wolfstein's incestuous desire for his sister, a forbidden transgression that resulted in Eloise's pregnancy. The incestuous "event" is thus mediated in two different aesthetic modes—the gothic and the sentimental. Wolfstein and Eloise exist in radically different ideological universes, and Shelley sharpens this distinction by placing Wolfstein in the German lineage of gothic barbarism and by placing Eloise in the French lineage of gentrified sentimentalism. The revelation that Wolfstein and Eloise are brother and sister is revealed only in the perfunctory final paragraph, which I interpret as the "real" of incestuous drive that resists symbolization and narrative resolution. Shelley's early figurations of the "painted veil" of fantasy can be located at the level of intra- and interpersonal psychological dynamics—among the combinatory relations of subject, self, and Other. When the subject's symbolic universe collapses and the veil of fantasy is lifted, the subject encounters the impenetrable and traumatic alterity of the Other. Desire gives way to drive, pleasure to *jouissance*, and reality to the Real. Throughout my analysis of *St. Irvyne*, I exemplify these inter-subjective dynamics by reading figurations of desire and drive against Shelley's budding adherence to Godwinian rationalism. *St. Irvyne* implicitly critiques the self-transparency—the conjunction of will and desire—that Godwin's philosophy demands, while simultaneously presenting Godwin's philosophical positions as a solution to the impasses that negate those very positions.

Because of *The Wandering Jew's* vexed textual history, no sustained critical reading of the poem has yet been offered. I read Shelley's *The Wandering Jew* as a poem that reveals, even as it participates in, the

psychology and cultural transmission of superstition. Like *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*, *The Wandering Jew* raises the unsettling possibility that “eternal Love” itself—which for Shelley will become the primary metaphysical force for revolutionary action—mirrors the structural properties of superstitious thought. In the doomed relationship between Paulo (the Wandering Jew) and his love interest Rosa, I show how the desire of the other is misrecognized as one’s own, and how they exist for each other only as objects in each other’s fantasy frames. If love is idealized (even fetishized) in the aesthetic of sensibility, it is pathologized in the aesthetic of the Gothic. The character of Paulo is one of the earliest analogues of Shelley’s Prometheus. Shelley often takes an established literary form, empties it of its ideological content, and establishes a fresh context in which the traces of that former content introduce a productive tension between residual and emergent forms of consciousness. In each iteration of the legend of the Wandering Jew in Shelley’s poetry (*Queen Mab*, *Alastor*, *Hellas*), the significance of the character shifts in accordance with the ideological work Shelley has him perform. These different registers are important in understanding how Shelley manipulates the supernatural and superstitious elements in his works within the context of transference and desire. The tension between superstition as a reified form of error and superstition as an index of an underlying imaginative productivity that is itself susceptible to further reification, provides an illuminating context from which to consider Shelley’s treatment of the Wandering Jew. Shelley is less interested in debunking the supernatural, choosing instead to represent the insidious ways in which the

supernatural enters one's experience of reality and provides the coordinates for one's desire. I focus on those moments in the poem where metaphorical descriptions of reality materialize into the diegetic reality itself as characters internalize those figurations into sense impressions, how supernatural elements become reified into superstitious formations. Paulo exists in the imaginative space between demystification, imagination, and reification. His status as both subject and superstition, both undead and immortal, remains ambivalent throughout the poem. Paulo sustains multiple registers of significance depending upon the frame of reference from which we interpret his story and his actions. *The Wandering Jew* offers an illuminating account of the complex interactions among metaphor, desire, fantasy, and identity that I interrogate further in my final chapter on *Prometheus Unbound*.

Critical responses to *Prometheus Unbound* have largely focused upon its plausibility, particularly whether or not Prometheus's psychological purification—whereby he substitutes his hatred for Jupiter with his love for Asia—constitutes an adequate enough cause to enable the emergence of a utopian republic of freely-desiring subjects. I read *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley's most optimistic work, through the lens of gothic paranoia, psychosis, and perversion, showing how the utopian aspirations of the drama are destabilized throughout by not only the gothic antagonisms articulated in his early work but also by poems such as *Mont Blanc*, *Epipsychidion*, *Julian and Maddalo*, *The Cenci*, *The Sensitive Plant*, and *Adonais*. Looking back to the conflict between gothic (masculine) and sentimental (feminine) aesthetics in *St. Irvyne*, I also argue that *Prometheus Unbound* represents a similar,

though far more ambitious, attempt to resolve the antagonism of sexual difference. Shelley's utopia conceives of a mode of being without antagonism—no class struggle, no identity politics, no pain nor guilt, and no reified gender determinations. In short, Shelley strives to represent a post-Oedipal society of undifferentiated libidinal flux, a movement from the castrating determinations of the phallic Symbolic to the affective *jouissance* of the maternal Semiotic. I show, however, that Prometheus's supposed psychological transformation is not so well-defined as we, or Prometheus himself, may believe. I argue that the philosophical categories of Shelley's "skeptical idealism" can be read productively in terms of the Lacanian formulation of perversion. By interpreting Prometheus as a perverse subject who disavows castration (his enchainment by Jupiter), rather than repressing or foreclosing it (as in neurosis or psychosis), and who positions himself as the object-instrument of the other's desire, we can better understand how he is able to simultaneously express pity and hatred. I conclude that the emergent subject of modernity and psychoanalysis—the materiality of consciousness itself—conditions the utopian aims of the drama and introduces a series of obstacles to Romantic subjectivity. Shelley's success as a poet is, paradoxically, a testament to the failure of imagination to "create from its own wreck the thing it contemplates," unable to transcend the "terror" that "survives the ravin it has gorged." For the poet of *Adonais*, the Romantic ego strives to imagine the "white radiance of Eternity" of an undifferentiated "One." And yet, as I conclude in "Percy Bysshe Shelley and the Gothic," the

Romantic ego is haunted throughout Shelley's work by the Gothic subject
"borne darkly, fearfully, afar."

¹ Of course, the time period covered in Mary's journal, which begins in 1814, does not include Shelley's earliest reading before and during the period of *Zastrozzi's* composition, which was written well before he met Mary while he was still enamored with the mercurial Harriet Grove. Mary herself read *Zastrozzi* on 12 October 1814 (at the same time, incidentally, she and Shelley were reading Godwin's *Political Justice*).

² See Pamela Clemitt's *The Godwinian Novel: The Rational Fictions of Godwin, Brockden Brown, Mary Shelley* for an excellent analysis of the influence of Godwin on Brown, and by extension, Shelley.

³ My understanding of Lacanian fantasy is drawn in large part from Žižek's *The Plague of Fantasies* (pp. 3-44). His discussion of the "seven veils of fantasy" is instrumental for my analysis of the figure of the veil in Shelley's work, which I interpret in terms of interpersonal dynamics in his early Gothic novels. The veil acquires a metaphysical significance in his poetry, but is still a function of the perceiving subject and, thus, a part of his or her fantasy frame. Shelley's skeptical idealism is a self-generating ontological veil, for example.

⁴ Shelley may have completed another novel entitled *Hubert Cauvin*, the manuscript of which is lost. We know only that the novel concerned the causes that led to the failure of the French Revolution.

CHAPTER ONE

Zastrozzi, A Romance:
Paranoiac Fantasy and the Semblance of Subversion

Zastrozzi, composed between March and late-August of 1809 and subsequently published in the spring of 1810 by J. Wilkie and G. Robinson of London,¹ was Shelley's first significant publication and reflects his early and abiding enthusiasm for the gothic and sensationalist literature of the period. A cursory reading of the novel reveals many obligatory gothic trappings—an ominous castle, a gloomy cave, a demon-like seductress with transgressive desires, a maudlin hero-victim entrapped by circumstances beyond his control, a spectral villain bent on revenge, and shadowy figures of established authority—all saturated with the requisite dose of brooding atmospherics and sublime scenery that often reflect the characters' "distempered" emotional states. Both in theme and style, *Zastrozzi* is clearly indebted to several of Shelley's favorite gothic novels—particularly Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797), Matthew G. Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), and Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya* (1806). Although *Zastrozzi* lacks the historical scope, descriptive depth, and narrative polish of Shelley's models, the novel follows an elaborate pursuit-escape narrative trajectory that is tightly structured and that unfolds at an energetic pace, incorporating aspects of gothic romance, sentimentalist fiction, and the philosophical novel.

Because Shelley's earliest works are not well known, I will begin by briefly summarizing the sequence of events in *Zastrozzi*. As the novel opens

we find the “wretched” Verezzi, the ostensible protagonist, “[t]orn from the society of all he held dear on earth, the victim of secret enemies, and exiled from happiness . . .” (61). Verezzi has been abducted in his sleep and then brought to a cave and chained to a rock by the “sublime” and “malevolent” Zastrozzi, for reasons we are as yet unaware. When a “scintillating flame” of lightning destroys the cavern, Verezzi is able to escape, but is further pursued by Zastrozzi and his co-conspirator Matilda, whose sexual passion for Verezzi threatens to separate him from his fiancé Julia, whom we meet in the flesh only much later in the novel. In collaboration with the “wily” Matilda, Zastrozzi sets out to murder Julia and recapture Verezzi so that Matilda can continue her seduction and win his heart (although, unknown to Matilda, Zastrozzi’s murderous intent extends ultimately to Verezzi).

When Zastrozzi fails to kill Julia, Matilda falsely informs Verezzi that Julia is dead and continues, though unsuccessfully, to seduce Verezzi and erase the memory of Julia from his distempered mind. To that end, Zastrozzi devises a plan in which he feigns an attempt to murder Verezzi, at which point Matilda rushes in and shields him, sustaining only minor injuries. Believing Julia to be dead and Matilda to have been his saviour, Verezzi, in a “Lethan torpor” at last professes his love to Matilda and consents to marriage. Soon after, Zastrozzi arranges a meeting in which Julia confronts Verezzi and Matilda. Dumbfounded at the sight of Julia and overcome with guilt, Verezzi commits suicide by stabbing himself in the chest. Matilda then plucks the blood-stained dagger from Verezzi's corpse, and in a frenzy of rage stabs the innocent Julia “with exulting pleasure, again and again,” burying “the dagger

to the hilt in her body, even after all remains of life were annihilated” (143).

The guilty parties are eventually discovered and brought before the authorities, where Zastrozzi confesses that he is actually Verezzi’s illegitimate half-brother and has sought vengeance against Verezzi on behalf of his disgraced mother (possibly a prostitute) who was abandoned by their father, whom he had murdered before the events of the novel take place. At the conclusion of the novel, Zastrozzi and Matilda are sentenced to execution by the Council of Ten for their murderous conspiracy. Although Matilda finally repents and reconciles herself with the Catholic Church, Zastrozzi unrepentantly and defiantly continues to express his “atheism” and disdain for institutional morality, even at the expense of his own life: “Even whilst writhing under the agony of almost insupportable torture his nerves were stretched, Zastrozzi’s firmness failed him not; but, upon his soul-illuminated countenance, played a smile of most disdainful scorn; and, with a wild, convulsive laugh of exulting revenge—he died” (156). Vengeance and transgressive sexual desires are punished, illegitimate threats to class structure and established authority are eliminated, and the equilibrium of the status quo is restored.

Although *Zastrozzi* successfully evokes the Italianate gothic tradition and offers an explicit moral resolution that would placate a genteel readership, the few contemporary reviews of *Zastrozzi* were unflattering, if not vitriolic, and no doubt contributed to Shelley’s lifelong acrimony towards critical responses in the press to his work. And yet, given the provocative subtexts of the novel, Shelley likely expected, and perhaps even delighted, in

such frenzied responses from conservative periodicals. The critical atmosphere of the early nineteenth century towards the glut of sensationalist fiction of the period is well exemplified in this passage from the following “Prospectus” that was submitted in support of the *New London Review; or Monthly Report of Authors and Books* (1799):

Though no arrogance will be indulged in this publication, whatever disturbs the public harmony, insults legal authority, outrages the best regards of the heart, invalidates the radical obligations of morality, attacks the vital springs of established functions of piety, or in any respect clashes with the sacred forms of decency, however witty, elegant, and well written, can be noticed only in terms of severe and unequivocal reprehension.²

In the spirit of such regulative moral criticism, the *Critical Review*, for example, offered these carefully considered observations on Shelley’s “shameless and disgusting volume”: “Zastrozzi is one of the most savage and improbable demons that ever issued from a diseased brain” . . . “a more discordant, disgusting, and despicable performance has not, we are persuaded, issued from the press for some time.” The review concludes that “We know not when we have felt so much indignation as in the perusal of this execrable production. The author of it cannot be too severely reprobated. Not all his ‘scintillated eyes,’ his ‘battling emotions,’ his ‘frigoric torpidity of despair,’ nor his ‘Lethan torpor,’ with the rest of his nonsensical and stupid jargon, ought to save him from infamy, and his volume from the flames” (329-31). *The Gentleman’s Magazine* was less dismissive in this pithy, though naive, account: “A short, but well-told tale of horror, and, if we do not mistake, not from an ordinary pen. The story is so artfully conducted that the reader cannot easily anticipate the denouement, which is conducted on the

principles of moral justice; and, by placing the scene on the Continent, the Author has availed himself of characters and vices which, however useful in narratives of this description, thank God, are not to be found in this country” (258). Mary Shelley herself, along with Shelley’s early biographers,³ encapsulates a critical perspective that would dominate Shelley studies for the next two centuries:

He was a lover of the wonderful and wild in literature, but had not fostered these tastes at their genuine sources—the romances and chivalry of the middle ages—but in the perusal of such German works as were current in those days. Under the influence of these he, at the age of fifteen, wrote two short prose romances of slender merit. The sentiments and language were exaggerated, the composition imitative and poor.⁴

Although less vitriolic than the *Critical Review*, most Shelley scholars begin discussing Shelley’s gothic novels (if they are discussed at all) by offering what amounts to an apology. Shelley’s gothic sensibility is thought to be an embarrassment at worst or a transitional phase at best. Recent critical approaches can be summarized in terms of the following interpretive strategies: 1) to dismiss outright Shelley’s gothic works as youthful effusions of unprincipled affectivity which, although of historical interest, are thoroughly conventional imitations of an established literary form; 2) to treat the novels as psycho-biographical case-studies that reveal Shelley’s own neuroses and sexual ambivalence; 3) to draw attention to Shelleyan irony and his subversive deployment of established conventions to transmit radical ideas; 4) to acknowledge fully Shelley’s early investment in the Gothic but then rely upon his later essays, poetry, and intellectual development as a key

to interpreting retroactively the early work within a larger narrative of Shelley's poetic development, in which his gothic sensibility is sublimated into more mature philosophical positions.

For Kenneth Neill Cameron, Shelley, during his "votary of Romance" period, "was genuinely interested in the mysterious and the occult ... and in his novels he was, from time to time, carried away by his subject ... but he wrote largely with his tongue in his own cheek—delighting, at times, in parodying his own style—aware, as he was writing the novels, of their inherent ridiculousness, but interested in a quick, schoolboy fame" (28). And "if Shelley's gothic novels are bad, his horror poetry written in the same period is worse" (33). For Cameron, of course, it is not until Shelley reads Godwin ("his master") and assumes his "social duties" that his work rises to the level of serious critical attention. A. J. Hartley (following Frederick Jones), argues that Shelley's "'taste for romances' definitely ended in November, 1810, when he ordered a copy of [Godwin's *Political Justice*] from Stockdale" (v). "That Shelley should have begun his literary life by conveying his ideas in the highly imaginative and popular medium of the Gothic 'thriller' indicates his propinquity with this aspect of romanticism which, though momentarily abandoned by him, he subdued and incorporated in his best poetry" (vi). For David Seed, *Zastrozzi* is a "crude and largely unconscious exploration of sexual fear." "Zastrozzi as a figure of revenge is banal and a stereotype" (5); "Matilda is quite simply a personification of sexual passion;" and Julia "supplies an image of idealized, non-sexual love" (7). Eustace Chesser, in his Freudian reading of *Zastrozzi* as Shelleyan psychomachy (and perhaps

channeling Peacock), claims that Shelley “was not a rebel without a cause—he had too many causes. He was an introvert with no strong sense of reality. . . . His all too short life was a continuous refusal to accept responsibility. He never completely grew up. His vision was centred upon the world as he would like it to be, not on the world as it is” (12). Chesser confidently 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. The bisexuality is clear from the manner in which he projects himself in *Zastrozzi* as equally divided between two male and two female characters. Were it not that his dreams were inspired by genius, Shelley could be dismissed as a futile visionary” (31-32). More forgiving is Frederick Frank, who reads *Zastrozzi* as “a dark fable of identity” (ix) that “combine[s] an expert knowledge of the elaborate technology of the Gothic romance and its mandatory apparatus with the future poet’s desire to arrive at a Gothic aesthetic through which beauty and horror could be expressed simultaneously (ix). Although Frank concludes that Shelley’s Gothic is “basically a solipsistic excursion,” it does create “a nightmarish dialectic between opposite and incompatible selves in order to see these forces nullify one another within the general framework of the Todestraum or dream of death” (x).

Jerrold Hogle, who offers one of the more thorough analyses of Shelley’s gothic novels, nevertheless questions *Zastrozzi*’s literary merit: “Shelley’s plotting ranges from the static to the nonsensical” and that if “there is a linear cohesion in Shelley’s fiction, it is often impossible to find” (79). But

Hogle does, however, find significance in the way *Zastrozzi* anticipates Shelley's mature poetry and metaphysical writings, noting that *Zastrozzi* is a work "about the higher unity of the self prohibiting its arrival with antitheses of its own making. Every sequence circles back on the mind's dark chamber where the soul chooses to diffuse and battle itself and thus envelop the chamber in gloom. The principal events are states of being, each 'a personification of the struggle which we experience within ourselves,' as Shelley would later put it" (85).

These interpretive approaches tend to minimize in two ways the importance of Shelley's gothic novels. The first approach takes the form of a fetishist denial—"I know very well, but all the same . . ."—in which Shelley's gothic sensibility, although fully recognized, is minimized by choosing to believe as if it were simply an undisciplined experimentation with a tarnished genre that bears little relevance to his mature work and reputation. The second approach takes the form of an obsessional response, in which the Gothic is seen as a foreign element that disturbs Shelley's natural poetic development and must be theorized away to maintain a sublimated image of Shelley as avatar of high Romanticism. Each of these defenses against the "Real" of Shelley's Gothic drain it of its concrete particularity and mask the antagonistic voids around which his early work circulates.⁵ The young Shelley's construction of a post-Enlightenment gothic subject produces an impasse that is not easily recuperated within the context of his later works, which may, I argue, be read as reaction-formations against the consequences that such a gothic subject precipitates.

Throughout my study, I interrogate this distinction between the *Shelleyan* subject of Romanticism and the *Shelleyesque* subject of Gothicism. Where the Shelleyan gaze finds synthesis, desire, pleasure, sublimity, benevolence, and being; the Shelleyesque gaze finds antagonism, drive, *jouissance*, monstrosity, perversion, and lack. In fact, I will argue that the *Shelleyesque* continues to operate in unsettling and provocative ways throughout his mature poetry, particularly in works such as *Prometheus Unbound*, generally considered to be Shelley's most idealistic attempt to transcend the political, sexual, and psychological antagonisms associated with the gothic tradition.

The most recent studies of Shelley's gothic novels, though still few, have been informed by the growing interest in the complex relations between the Gothic and Romanticism, and by the emergence of Gothic studies as a legitimate discipline of scholarly inquiry.⁶ As Stephen Behrendt has argued, Shelley often exploits conventional forms to transmit radical ideas,⁷ so it is not surprising that Shelley would choose the Gothic as a vehicle through which to surreptitiously express his interests. Indeed, one is tempted to read Zastrozzi's various philosophical exhortations (which Hannah More would have characterized as "speculative infidelity") in the context of Shelley's own iconoclastic positions at the time. For example, in series of letters to Hogg between 1810 and 1811 Shelley writes, in language that could have been spoken by Zastrozzi himself:

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 which *even now* I can scarcely help

deploring. . . . Let us hope that the wound which we inflict tho' the dagger be conceald, will rankle in the heart of our adversary. (27-28)

Yet here I swear, and as I break my oath may Infinity Eternity blast me, here I swear that never will I forgive Christianity! it is the only point on which I allow myself to encourage revenge; every moment shall be devoted to my object which I can spare, & let me hope that it will not be a blow which spends itself & leaves the wretch at rest but lasting long revenge! I am convinced too that it is of great disservice to society that it encourages prejudice which strikes at the root of the dearest the tenderest of its ties. Oh how I wish I *were* the Antichrist, that it were *mine* to crush the Demon, to hurl him to his native Hell never to rise again—I expect to gratify some of this insatiable feeling in Poetry. (35)

In an extended philosophical discussion with Matilda, Zastrozzi expresses the same antipathy to religious orthodoxy:

“Am I not convinced of the non-existence of a Deity? am I not convinced that death will but render this soul more free, more unfettered? Why need I then shudder at death? why need any one, whose mind has risen above the shackles of prejudice, the errors of a false and injurious superstition.” (153)

Throughout the course of the novel, Zastrozzi argues in favor of a number of often contradictory Enlightenment philosophical motifs, from the utilitarian calculus of pleasures and pains to Godwinian perfectibility to mechanistic determinism and, ultimately, back to pagan fatalism: “whatever procures pleasure is right”; man “was created for no other purpose but obtain happiness”; “. . . rather than suppose that by its own innate and energetical exertions, this soul must endure for ever, that no fortuitous occurrences, no incidental events, can affect its happiness; but by daring boldly, by striving to verge from the beaten path, whilst yet trammelled in the chains of mortality, it will gain superior advantages in a future state”; “fate wills us to die: and I intend to meet death, to encounter annihilation with tranquility.” Yet despite

his avowed atheism, Zastrozzi's elaborate scheme for revenge against Verezzi is actually informed by, and dependent upon, the reality of a Christian heaven and hell as well as in the immortality of the soul (an irony that functions prominently in Lewis's *The Monk*). Regarding the murder of his father, Zastrozzi laments: "But I destroyed his *body* alone . . . time has taught me better: his son's *soul* is hell-doomed to all eternity: he destroyed himself; but my machinations, though unseen, effected his destruction" (155).

John Whatley argues that Zastrozzi is "a well-spoken and committed Atheist" (203) and that Shelley's "representatives of atheism and revolution are yet 'villains' who through conspiracy, deceit, and violence forward social disruption, but they are equally fascinating in their power to satirize and undercut Church morality and to allow the fulfillment of desire" (209). Although Zastrozzi is an equal-opportunity sophist, more Hobbesian or Machiavellian than Godwinian, who appropriates into a bricolage of contradictory positions whatever discourse suits his purposes, he may be "well-spoken," but is hardly "committed" to any particular cause other than revenge. And neither he nor Matilda successfully "undercut Church morality." Matilda ultimately reconciles herself to the Church and Verezzi is executed by the Inquisition, whose absolute authority is never in doubt and remains fully intact at the conclusion of the novel. On the one hand we can point to the hypocritical self-interest of Matilda's religious awakening and Zastrozzi's Satanic-like resistance against absolute authority, but on the other hand we have to ask if such supposed insights are really all that subversive? From a progressivist standpoint, is Shelley asking us to identify with murderers who

are, despite their transgressive and liberating ambitions, consumed by self-gratification? Is Shelley championing a Bataillean “expenditure” beyond the pleasure principle that ultimately seeks to sustain prohibitions for the purpose of producing the desire to transgress them? We should perhaps be inclined to take Shelley at his word when he admonishes one reader of the novel against confusing his own radicalism with that of his characters: “If he takes me for any one whose character I have drawn in *Zastrozzi* he is mistaken quite” (*Letters*, 11).

Such is the interpretive crux of *Zastrozzi*, caught in the balance between the gothic aesthetic’s reactionary and revolutionary impulses. Revolutionary desire is always in danger of falling into a “logic of specular doubling” or “structural repetition” that mirrors the oppressive mechanisms of power it seeks to displace.⁸ As Peter Starr notes, “If one undertakes direct, political action . . . then the logics of specular doubling and structural repetition apply. But if one refuses such action, then one’s revolt will at best be hopelessly marginal, at worst a reinforcement of institutionalized power” (8). For Shelley, the most vivid example of such a scenario would have been, of course, the degeneration of republicanism into terror in the French Revolution, where, according to Starr, revolutionaries became “trapped in a dualistic, paranoid world where rivalry springs from the narcissistic illusion of one’s own subjective unity” (9). And in the figure of *Zastrozzi*, Shelley demonstrates his budding appreciation for the complexities and dangers of revolutionary change and the ways in which desire is inextricably bound to political commitment.

But if Shelley's aim is simply to diagnose the failings of Enlightenment revolutionary discourse by drawing attention to the destructive desires that underwrite its universalizing drive (to distinguish between the "subject of the statement" and the "subject of the enunciation"), then we might expect Shelley to adopt a narrative strategy similar to that employed by Charlotte Dacre in *Zofloya*. The narrator of *Zofloya* informs us early on that to understand the transgressive desires of Victoria we must elucidate, in the spirit of Enlightenment curiosity and utilitarian ethics, the "causes" of her destructive behavior:

The historian who would wish his lessons to sink deep into the heart, thereby essaying to render mankind virtuous and more happy, must not content himself with simply detailing a series of events—he must ascertain causes, and follow progressively their effects; he must draw deductions from incidents as they arise, and ever revert to the actuating principle (3).

Throughout the course of the novel, however, the narrator's attempts to account for Victoria's increasingly complex desires and motivations seem inadequate, almost to the point of comic absurdity. The failure to reduce Victoria's subjectivity to a network of causal determinations (for example, negligent parenting), suggests that Dacre's narration works ironically as a critique of Enlightenment itself, particularly the more dogmatic strains of French mechanistic materialism (La Mettrie's *L'Homme Machine* and Holbach's *Système de la Nature*, for example) that reduce human relationships to a scientific model of strict necessity.

Shelley's investment in materialism, however, was beginning to strengthen during the period of *Zastrozzi's* composition, so he was, perhaps,

disinclined to adopt Dacre's ironic stance toward Enlightenment critical gestures.⁹ Shelley's narrator too adds a layer of ironic subtext, but from a different ideological perspective. The narrator often pauses to comment upon characters and events from a position of the "Church morality" that Whatley identifies, which signals the narrator's complicity with conservative ideology and, by extension, with Verezzi. Zastrozzi is admonished for his "sophistry," and his inability to "contemplate the wonderful operations, the mysterious ways of Providence" (102); and when Matilda prays for God's forgiveness, the narrator happily reports that "mercy, by the All-benevolent of heaven, is never refused to those humbly, yet trusting in his goodness, ask it" (150). But again, this does not necessarily undercut church morality because, given the exaggerated evil and narcissism of Matilda and Zastrozzi, the disapprobation towards them would seem to be justifiable.

I argue that Shelley deftly subverts conventional ideology while at the same time satisfying its moral prescriptions by splitting the diegetic reality from its subversive subtext, revealing a radically intersubjective dynamic that complicates any reading of the novel that either reduces the characters to static gothic stereotypes or that resolves the tensions within a determinate nexus of cause and effect. Because the narrative is doubly refracted through a conservative lens, we must resist the impulse to valorize the characters of Verezzi and Julia at the expense of Matilda and Zastrozzi, who are actually the far more interesting and complicated characters in the novel (and like Milton's Satan, more "ethical" in a sense).

But the temptation to identify with Verezzi and Julia persists nonetheless, particularly when we consider the similarity between the situation in which Verezzi finds himself at the beginning of the novel and that of Prometheus in *Prometheus Unbound*: “Verezzi was chained to a piece of rock which remained immovable. The violence of the storm was past, but the hail descended rapidly, each stone of which wounded his naked limbs. Every flash of lighting, although now distant, dazzled his eyes, unaccustomed as they had been to the least ray of light” (64). Several critics have commented upon the similarity here between Verezzi and Prometheus,¹⁰ but the resemblance is a lure that will prove to be superficial and misleading over the course of the novel and distorts any interpretation of Shelley’s early work through the retroactive gaze of his later treatment of similar themes. Envisioning Verezzi as a precursor to the “champion of mankind” strains credulity. As much as we might empathize with his suffering, Verezzi turns out to be a passive “hero” who represents unreflecting, reactionary aristocratic privilege, one of the primary targets of Shelley’s subversive critique. Furthermore, Verezzi occupies a space that is traditionally populated by female protagonists in gothic novels: in *Zastrozzi*, it is the *male* who is pursued, confined, and tormented by a sublime figure of phallic power—two if we count Matilda and her predatory sexuality—rather than a young, virtuous female. Throughout the course of the novel, Verezzi is coded as feminine, and the only feature which signifies his masculinity is his choice of love objects. The attitude towards gender and power expressed in the novel is ambiguous, subject to continual destabilization as Matilda and Verezzi negotiate their gendered

positions in relation to one another, finally reaching a provisional equilibrium within a common fantasy frame. Tilottama Rajan has drawn attention to the overdeterminations in Shelley's novels, clearly evident in the shifting positions of gender and power.¹¹

I argue, however, that *Zastrozzi*'s explicit representations of subversion are a semblance designed to alert us to a far more subversive strategy at work in the novel, one that is more historically informed than has been previously recognized and that interrogates the intellectual context in which it was written. By the time Shelley published *Zastrozzi* in 1810, the popularity of the gothic genre was in decline and its conventions had already become a target of satire and parody in the wake of the anti-Jacobin backlash against the revolutionary zeal expressed in the "Pamphlet Wars" of 1790-91.¹² As M. O. Grenby argues in *The Anti-Jacobin Novel*, "The 'Revolution debate,' the 'war of ideas,' withered away, not because every champion of radical doctrine had been utterly converted by the logic of the conservatives, but because few of them . . . could be found who wished to defy a near unanimous and highly militant anti-Jacobinism to put forward what had suddenly become dangerously unorthodox opinions" (5). Understandably, England's guarded interest in the French Revolution—notably, calls for universal human rights and progressive social reform derived from the enlightened exercise of reason—would be drastically tempered by the subsequent regicide and Reign of Terror in France. And when Great Britain declared war on France in 1803, those who continued to advocate republicanism and the founding principles of the Revolution were largely swept away in a tide of nationalistic fervor,

portrayed as anarchists and threats to the providentially sanctioned social hierarchy secured in the British Constitution.

The ambiguous status of the Gothic regarding its transgressive revolutionary potential, on the one hand, and its reactionary, ameliorative impulse, on the other, participates in a larger aesthetic context in which the master signifiers of the Revolutionary era were points of bitter contention between those, like Edmund Burke, who framed the established authority of the *ancien regime* in sublime terms and the republicanism of Revolution as monstrous; and those, like Paine, Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and other Enlightenment progressives, who framed the Revolution in sublime terms and the *ancien regime* as monstrous. Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) was one of the most influential books on aesthetics in the eighteenth-century and established much of the theoretical grounding for gothic aesthetics. Burke defines the sublime as the "strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" (59) and has as its source objects that "excite the ideas of pain or danger" (58). But "when danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we everyday experience" (60). A "terrible" object can become a source of the sublime if the individual can overcome or master the danger by elevating the mind in aesthetic contemplation (Furniss 27). The original terror felt for the object is transformed into awe and respect. The beautiful, on the other hand, is opposed to the sublime. Because the beautiful originates in pleasure rather

than pain, it is a passive aesthetic experience that does not require the mental exertion demanded of the sublime. Burke applies his aesthetic categories to political and social relationships so that beautiful qualities, such as tenderness and affection between men and women, assume a subordinate position to sublime qualities, such as the awe and respect shown by subjects to their rulers and state.

Burke considers pain to be a more powerful emotion than pleasure, so qualities associated with the sublime are privileged over those of the beautiful. In terms of gender, the Burkean aesthetic reflects the predominant eighteenth-century hierarchy: sublime qualities of nobility, reason, and awe are associated with men; and beautiful qualities such as passion, friendship, and elegance are associated with women. Burke applies his aesthetic categories to government as well. The feudal political structure of the *ancien régime*, both in England and France, represents a sublime political structure that inspires awe, admiration, and respect for a powerful patriarchal authority founded on centuries of political, ecclesiastical, and social tradition. The following passage from Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* is typical:

We fear God; we look up with awe to kings, with affection to parliaments, with duty to magistrates, with reverence to priests, and with respect to nobility. Why? Because when such ideas are brought before our minds, it is natural to be so affected; because all other feelings are false and spurious, and tend to corrupt our minds, to vitiate our primary morals, and make us unfit for rational liberty
(76)

Burke found the French Revolution to be sublime as long as it remained a safe distance removed from English society, viewed as sublime spectacle; however, as English spectators became active participants and began to pose a threat to the English political structure, then the Revolution became a perversion of the sublime, or a sublime theater of the monstrous (Furniss 128). Burke writes that one should “approach the faults of the state as to the wounds of a father, with pious awe and trembling solitude” (84). He continues:

By this wise prejudice we are taught to look with horror on those children of their country who are prompt rashly to hack that aged parent in pieces and put him into the kettle of magicians, in hopes that by their poisonous weeds and wild incantations they may regenerate the paternal constitution and renovate their father's life. (84)

The hegemonic struggle between Jacobin and anti-Jacobin factions to define and control the meaning of master signifiers such as “freedom,” “nature,” “progress,” “necessity,” “good,” “evil,” “masculine,” “feminine,” etc., finds its aesthetic counterpart in the gothic literature (“sickening trash,” as one *Quarterly Review* critic put it) produced during the apex of its popularity in the 1790s and early 1800s¹³.

Anti-Jacobin anxieties concerning revolutionary and progressive aims was organized primarily around three concerns: the levelling of a preordained social hierarchy, the disruptive effects of social mobility, and the corruption of the ruling élite itself.¹⁴ The anti-Jacobin fiction of the period emphasizes the dangers to British social stability when challenged by the “new philosophy” of Enlightenment progressives. Clara Reeve writes, for instance, in her preface to

Memoirs of Sir Roger de Clarendon (1793): “The new philosophy of the present day avows a levelling principle, and declares that a state of anarchy is more beautiful than that of order and regularity. There is nothing more likely to convince mankind of the errors of these men, than to set before them examples of good government, and warnings of the mischievous consequences of their own principles.”¹⁵ Anne Thomas, in *Adolphus de Biron* (1795?) writes: “I must, however, acknowledge that we have some restless Spirits amongst us, who by their seditious Writings have contributed no a little to the Work of Destruction . . . I thank Heaven the number of such Miscreants is but small, when compared to the Spirit of the whole Nation.”¹⁶ And Robert Dallas writes, in *Percival, or Nature Vindicated. A Novel* (1801): “Men who born to fortune are appointed by Providence to the administration of a certain portion of the interests of the world: they are the helmsmen of happiness; and if they desert the wheel, is there any wonder that the even course should be lost?”¹⁷

Two poems in particular from *The Anti-Jacobin Review* (1799) effectively condense the perceived threats and vaguely generalized fear of revolutionary change into a coherent image of monstrosity against which the anti-Jacobin imaginary could organize its desire. “Ode to Jacobinism,”¹⁸ ostensibly written by “An English Jacobin,” opens with an invocation to the

Daughter of Hell, insatiate power,
 Destroyer of the human race,
 Whose iron scourge and madd’ning hour
 Exalt the bad, the good debase; (1-4)

Under the guidance of this “Daughter of Hell,” the Jacobin sympathizer seeks to satisfy “Revenge” (25) and usher forth, from behind a “sophist veil” (41),

“Fire, rapine, sword, and chains, and ghastly Poverty” (40) and to “taint the mind, corrupt the heart” (44). The Jacobin’s ultimate motive is, therefore, to

Teach us to hate and revile;
Our glorious Charter’s faults to scan,
Time-sanction’d Truths despise, and preach Thy Rights of Man. (48)

And in “Ode to a Jacobin,”¹⁹ a more satirical piece, the “Unchristian Jacobin” (1) is represented as an atheist who rationalizes the violence of the Terror, forgoing “Mercy” (18), “Pity” (19), and “humanity” (28) to profess a “love of executions” (41) that makes one “fit for Revolutions” (42). The poem concludes by admonishing the Jacobin for thinking “All Constitutions bad, but those bran new” (48).

Anti-Jacobin fiction and criticism was so successful that after only thirty-six issues the *Anti-Jacobin Review* closed-up shop in 1798, declaring that “the SPELL of *Jacobin invulnerability* is now broken.”²⁰ Conservative discourse had successfully linked progressive philosophies with violence, establishing the *image* of a *necessary* connection in place of a complex constellation of contingent historical determinations. It had also appropriated the rhetoric of Enlightenment to “naturalize” the socio-economic hierarchy and its attendant privileges. The meaning of an abstract universal term such as “Nature” was articulated through the negotiation of its concrete particularity; thus if “whatever is, is right” then social hierarchies are not perversions of nature, à la Rousseau, but the true expression of nature itself.

So Shelley was entering an ideological battle that had apparently already been won by reactionary forces. Conservative paranoia, however,

provided a target-rich environment for a transgressive aesthetic that played upon fears of persecution, conspiracy, and libertinism,²¹ and Shelley exploits this opportunity by positioning *Zastrozzi* not as a satire of the Gothic itself, but as a diagnostic study of anti-Jacobin paranoiac fantasy, expressed through one of their favorite targets of derision—the gothic novel. From the perspective of the anti-Jacobin imaginary, nothing could be seen as more threatening to the normative hetero-patriarchal circuit of regulated desire—as exemplified by Verezzi and Julia—than the sexually aggressive Matilda and the violently atheistic *Zastrozzi*, two exceptions against which the stability of traditional British social hierarchy were grounded. If Matilda and Verezzi’s father signify the moral corruption of the élite, then *Zastrozzi*, in the form of an obscene surplus, signifies the illegitimate product of such corruption. And Verezzi, although unknowingly, contributes to that corruption himself when he finally submits to Matilda’s seduction and forsakes his love for Julia.

When we consider *Zastrozzi*’s bricolage of contradictory Enlightenment rhetoric, his murderous desire for revenge, and his illegitimacy (which signifies a generalized threat to primogeniture and social hierarchy), from Verezzi’s perspective *Zastrozzi* embodies the paranoiac image of the Jacobin monster. And Matilda, whose excessive sexual degeneracy reads like a case study from Bienville’s *Nymphomania* (1775), embodies the paranoiac image of a fully pathological subject whose actions are determined solely by contingent self-interest. Matilda, like her namesake in Lewis’ *The Monk* and like Victoria in Dacre’s *Zofloya*, is described by the narrator (whose complicity with the anti-Jacobin imaginary should not be overlooked) in

similarly demonic terms—“wily,” “perfidious,” “syren,” “ferocious,” “frantic,” “delirious,” “horror-tranced,” and “wretched.” And, as Alenka Zupancic observes, “what is a demon if not a fully pathological subject?”²² Because Matilda and Zastrozzi are images drawn from reactionary paranoiac fantasy, interpretations that identify Shelley’s own radicalism with either character would actually *legitimate* the anti-Jacobin linkage of violence to sexual liberation and progressive philosophy. This is why, from a progressive standpoint, the explicit acts of transgression in the novel constitute only a semblance of subversion.

A more subversive strategy is at work in *Zastrozzi*, one that reveals how paranoiac images of the Other are generated by antagonisms inherent to the dominant ideology itself. Ideology, as Renata Salecl explains, is “the way society deals with the fundamental impossibility of it being a closed, harmonious totality. . . . Behind every ideology lies a kernel of enjoyment (*jouissance*) that resists being fully integrated into the ideological universe” (6). The ideological fantasy works to conceal this “kernel” by constructing a scenario that disguises inconsistencies, excesses, and antagonisms in the social order. Matilda and Zastrozzi, therefore, appear to Verezzi as the “*jouissance* of the Other,” a traumatic “kernel” of the Real that the normative hetero-patriarchal circuit of desire must conceal through fantasy. In other words, desire itself, as it is structured in fantasy, serves as a defense against the traumatic encounter with *jouissance* that threatens the consistency of the subject’s imaginary and symbolic identifications (ideal ego, ego-ideal). In *Zastrozzi*, the *jouissance* of the feminine Other is figured as a nymphomaniac,

and the *jouissance* of the masculine Other is figured as a bloodthirsty revolutionary. The paranoiac image of the Other, therefore, condenses a constellation of indistinct fears, threats, and desires, and functions as a defense against the breakdown of phallic structures of power that depend upon the stability of binary oppositions and upon the regulation of the metonymic movement of desire along the chain of signifiers.

Although Shelley represents Matilda and Zastrozzi as images drawn from anti-Jacobin paranoiac fantasy, those images do not remain static throughout the course of the novel, nor are they simply caricatures of conventional gothic villains. The only static characters are Verezzi and Julia. Verezzi is a MacKenziean man of feeling who finds himself thrust from the pleasures of sentimentality into a gothic nightmare of violent sensibility and conspiratorial danger. He remains transfixed by Zastrozzi's impenetrable gaze, paralyzed by fear: ". . . Verezzi stood bewildered, and unable to arrange the confusion of ideas which floated in his brain, and assailed his terror-struck imagination. He knew not what to believe—what phantom it could be that, in the shape of Zastrozzi, blasted his straining eye-balls— . . ." (90). Although we, as readers, eventually learn Zastrozzi's identity and his reasons for pursuing Verezzi, Verezzi himself never does. Thus there is no meaningful interaction between the two; they exist for each other only as image-objects. So if we claim that *Zastrozzi* poses a thought experiment in which the subject of aristocratic privilege encounters in reality the monsters he has created in paranoiac fantasy, might we not also argue that Zastrozzi sees Verezzi only as

an image of the aristocratic oppression that has denied him entrance into the socio-symbolic order?

The conservative ideology of the narrator makes it difficult to sustain such a reversal, but the implication is there and points to how revolutionary and reactionary discourses engage each other only through the conflict between fantasmatic materializations of their own lack. In Lacanian terms, we could say that Verezzi misrecognizes Zastrozzi, mistaking him as a phallic signifier rather than as a signifier of the barred Other. The phallus is an object that materializes the lack in the symbolic order, gives it a fascinating, powerful presence; whereas the signifier of the barred Other is an object that signifies this lack itself. Thus Lacan can claim that the phallic object is a signifier without a signified. Zastrozzi, as a fantasmatic condensation of anti-Jacobin fear, doesn't exist. He is a signifier of the lack in the *ancien régime* social hierarchy itself, the reminder (and remainder) that society does not exist as a harmonious totality. As Žižek explains, the phallus is at once a sign of power, but also signifies and masks a fundamental impotence: "The phallic signifier is, so to speak, an index of its own impossibility . . . the phallus is the signifier of castration . . . This logic of the phallic inversion sets in when the demonstration of power starts to function as a confirmation of a fundamental impotence" (Sublime 157). Only at the conclusion of the novel, after Verezzi has already committed suicide, do we learn that what lies behind the display of phallic power is Verezzi's illegitimate half-brother, an impotent figure in the context of the predominant social hierarchy.

Interestingly, Zastrozzi is able to sustain his phallic presence, even after being brought before, and sentenced to death by, the Inquisition: “He looked around him. His manner awed the tumultuous multitude; and, in uninterrupted silence, the spectators gazed upon the unappalled Zastrozzi, who, towering as a demi-god, stood in the midst” (154). Why, after learning of his identity, of his illegitimate birth, and of his past murders, do the spectators and council still confer upon Zastrozzi the image of sublime phallic authority? Part of the answer lies, no doubt, in the mesmerizing theatricality of Zastrozzi’s performance. He both fascinates and frightens. Furthermore, when considered as a paranoiac image of the Jacobin monster, we see how such images are not only cultural productions, but must necessarily maintain their sublime status in the anti-Jacobin imaginary; for to demystify the paranoiac image would be to lose the very object against which an ideology recognizes itself. The spectators, therefore, are invested in their “willing suspension of disbelief” (to appropriate Coleridge’s phrase) and are not inclined to give up their investment in the image of the Other. In his excellent book *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy*, Thomas Pfau isolates this curious relation between paranoia, knowledge, and the law:

. . . paranoia offers a first instance of how a distinctive historical period can be secured by observing a distinctive mode of formal-aesthetic production. Paradoxically, that very mode aims to forestall the very consciousness to which it vicariously gives rise. For in the age of revolutionary terror and government suppression (1789-98), knowledge is achieved dialectically, namely, by suspecting, investigating, and potentially indicting surface appearances and representations as mere clothing draped over the irrational. (145).

For Shelley, who seeks to re-mobilize the founding principles of Republican ideology, Zastrozzi functions too as just such a “surface appearance” “draped over the irrational” fears of *reactionary* ideology.

Matilda too is figured as a phallic object, which, not surprisingly, creates difficulties in her attempts to seduce Verezzi. Matilda occupies an especially dangerous position for Verezzi because she represents the possibility, in fantasy, of the full realization of the sexual relationship. She is beautiful, sexually uninhibited, culturally sophisticated, and presumably a woman of social standing like Julia. From a distance she engenders an alluring fascination, but approached too closely she becomes the monstrous Thing that threatens to swallow him up and annihilate his subjectivity. Matilda must masquerade as Verezzi’s object-cause of desire; that is, as the *objet petit a* in Verezzi’s fantasy frame. In other words, Matilda must *desublimat*e herself from a phallic object of terrifying *jouissance* into a compelling image of desire which both conceals and indexes a “feminine mystique.”

The importance of *objet petit a* in a love relationship can be understood in terms of Lacan's sexuation formulas, in which the feminine and masculine subject positions (these are not imaginary ego identifications) are structured asymmetrically in relation to the failure of the Symbolic to satisfy the drive (*jouissance*).²³ Each position is structured differently in response to this failure, which can be summarized as follows: All men are subject to the phallic function of symbolic castration and wholly captured within it. The male's position coincides with the phallic function and he is "whole" due *only*

to the *limitation* and *boundary* (posited as an exception) established by his full entry into the Symbolic. Women, however, are not fully identified with the phallic function, hence the woman is "not-all." She may say yes and no, or yes or no to it. In short, "woman's failure is with the signifier and man's failure is with the object" (Wright 177).

There is no symmetry between genders ("there is no sexual relationship") because the woman must either masquerade as the fantasy object of the male (be the phallus), or attempt to assume a masculine position by identifying with the phallus (have the phallus), which puts the woman in competition with the man for the phallus, for a privileged position within the Symbolic. However, the woman has the option of identifying with the signifier of the barred Other, which signifies the lack in the Symbolic order, a *jouissance* which is related to the materiality of the signifier itself and to the Real beyond castration. However, such an identification with the lack in language, while opening up the possibility of an asexual kind of *jouissance*, does not include the sexual relationship with a male. As Emily Apter describes it: "There is no absolute femininity beneath the veil, only a set of ontologically tenuous codes that normatively induct the feminine subject into the social practice of "being" woman through mimesis and parroting" (243).²⁴

According to Lacan's sexuation formula, the male identifies with the female as *objet petit a*; that is, she must occupy the place of the object-cause of desire in his fantasy scenario, she must "fit his formula" (Žižek, *Plague* 8). To do so, however, she must, as Apter points out, masquerade as the object of desire to fill-out his lack in a complementary way. There is no mystery

concerning Matilda's desire: "I adore you to madness—I love you to distraction. If you have one spark of compassion, let me not sue in vain—reject not one who feels it impossible to overcome the fatal, resistless passion which consumes her" (83). Verezzi's response to Matilda is one of "cold esteem," but in the following passage we get a glimpse of how Matilda will indeed become the object of his desire:

He could not love Matilda; and though he never had seen her but in the most amiable light, he found it impossible to feel any sentiment towards her, save cold esteem. Never had he beheld those dark shades in her character, which if developed could excite nothing but horror and detestation: he regarded her as a woman of strong passions, who, having resisted them to the utmost of her power, was at last borne away in the current—whose brilliant virtues one fault had obscured—as such he pitied her: but still could he not help observing a comparison between her and Julia, whose feminine delicacy shrunk from the slightest suspicion, even of indecorum. Her fragile form, her mild heavenly countenance, was contrasted with all the partiality of love, to the scintillating eye, the commanding countenance, the bold expressive gaze, of Matilda. (84)

To successfully seduce Verezzi, Matilda must appeal to the narcissistic component of his sexual economy. Verezzi resists Matilda for much of the novel, but as she begins to understand how to incite his desire, Verezzi's image of her softens: "“Emotions of pity, of compassion, for one whose only fault he supposed to be love for him, conquered V's softened soul” (86). And a bit later:

Still did he feel his soul irresistibly softened towards Matilda—her love for him flattered his vanity; and though he could not feel reciprocal affection towards her, yet her kindness in rescuing him from his former degraded situation, her altered manner towards him, and her unremitting endeavours to please, to humour him in every thing, called for his warmest, his sincerest gratitude. (88-89)

Matilda's "altered manner," which "she knew well how to assume," coupled with the beauty of her "symmetrical form," finally begins to work: "By affecting to coincide with him in every thing—by feigning to possess that congeniality of sentiment and union of idea, which he thought so necessary to the existence of love, she doubted not soon to accomplish her purpose" (115). Matilda does indeed "accomplish her purpose," but only after she has managed to substitute herself in the place formerly occupied by Julia, whom Verezzi now believes to have been murdered by Zastrozzi: "Oh Matilda! dearest, angelic Matilda! . . . I am even now unconscious what blinded me—what kept me from acknowledging my adoration of thee!—adoration never to be changed by circumstances—never effaced by time" (129). Matilda has successfully broken Verezzi's melancholic fixation on the lost object of his desire and entered his fantasy frame as the *object-cause* of his "unconscious" desire.

Throughout the course of the novel, Zastrozzi and Matilda undergo a metamorphic shift from powerful, phallic objects of paranoiac fantasy to impotent objects that reveal the fundamental lack of split subjectivity (between the phallus and object-cause of desire). But these are still objects. The final procedure of demystification is to subjectivize the paranoiac image itself, to reveal the split subject beneath the fascinating presence. Shelley's antagonists, Matilda and Zastrozzi, express a subjectivity that is far more complex than his protagonists, Verezzi and Julia. One is tempted to frame the actions of Matilda and Zastrozzi in terms of Kant's distinction between "radical" and "diabolical" evil, which he discusses in *Religion within the*

Limits of Reason Alone. Radical evil is an ethical position in which one's actions are determined solely by pathological motives. The pathological subject is determined by self-interest and gratification at the expense of the other—sexual gratification, greed, etc. all express the pathological subject's determination by nature and culture. Diabolical evil, on the other hand, characterizes a position in which the subject adopts the pursuit of evil itself as a moral maxim (i.e., a categorical imperative in the form of Milton's Satanic "Evil be thou my good."), even at the expense of one's own pathological interests, or even one's life.²⁵

Matilda clearly is a candidate for radical evil, and Zastrozzi for diabolical evil. Matilda violently pursues her passions until her self-interest is at stake. After Matilda kills Julia, she suddenly begins to reflect upon the eternal consequences: "The guilty Matilda shrunk at death—she let fall the upraised dagger—her soul had caught a glimpse of the misery which awaits the wicked hereafter, and, in spite of her contempt of religion—spite of her, till now, too firm dependence on the doctrines of atheism, she trembled at futurity; and a voice from within, which whispers "thou shalt never die!" spoke daggers to Matilda's soul" (143). Zastrozzi, however, suffers no such spiritual crisis, and pursues his maxim of revenge, even at the expense of his own life. He informs the Council:

"I have been candid with you. Judge, pass your sentence—but I know my doom; and, instead of horror, experience some degree of satisfaction at the arrival of death, since all I have to do on earth is completed." . . . Even whilst writhing under the agony of almost unsupportable torture his nerves were stretched, Zastrozzi's firmness failed him not; but, upon his soul-illuminated countenance, played a

smile of most disdainful scorn; and, with a wild, convulsive laugh of exulting revenge—he died. (156)

Diabolical and radical evil posit a fully interpellated subject, an automaton who follows his or her pathological motives because she or he *cannot choose not to*. The demonic subjects of radical and diabolical evil are, thus, consistent with the paranoid image of the transgressive Other. But as Kant argues, although absolute freedom is impossible and we cannot purify ourselves completely from our pathological determinations (we are after all trapped in finite, material bodies) we can exercise our freedom by choosing the *way* in which we are determined. And one of the signs of this freedom is guilt. What distinguishes Shelley's Gothic (and here we can see the emergence of a Romantic gothicism), is the self-reflexivity and psychological dissonance that his gothic antagonists experience. These moments are not explored in any depth in the novel—the narrator is too anxious to propel Matilda and Zastrozzi into their next heinous deed—but they appear nonetheless and constitute a kind of textual unconscious that compels us to peer beyond the paranoid image and consider Matilda and Zastrozzi as subjects rather than simply as objects of paranoid fantasy. There are several moments when Matilda pauses to reflect upon her actions, and in these moments we recognize her as a split subject: “I almost shudder . . . at the sea of wickedness on which I am about to embark! But still, Verezzi—ah! for him would I even lose my hopes of eternal happiness. In the sweet idea of calling him mine, no scrupulous delicacy, no mistaken superstitious idea, shall prevent me from deserving him by daring acts— . . .” (79). A moment later she exclaims: “Oh,

madness! Madness!" . . . "is it for this that I have plunged into the dark abyss of crime?—is it for this that I have despised the delicacy of my sex, and, braving consequences, have offered my love to one who despises me—who shuns me, as does the barbarous Verezzi?" (82). And this iconic image, in which Matilda sits perched like a gargoyle overlooking a sublime display of nature's destructive energy, captures perfectly Matilda's status as both fantasmatic object and split subject:

Matilda sat upon a fragment of jutting granite, and contemplated the storm which raged around her. The portentous calm, which at intervals occurred amid the reverberating thunder, portentous of a more violent tempest, resembled the serenity which spread itself over Matilda's mind—a serenity only to be succeeded by a fiercer paroxysm of passion. (119)

Even Zastrozzi has moments, though few, of conscientious reflection that suggest a moral capacity for guilt: "Zastrozzi sat for some time immersed in heart-rending contemplations; but though conscience for awhile reflected his past life in images of horror, again was his heart steeled by fiercest vengeance . . ." (75); and ". . . he thought of his past life, and 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" (68). This guilt-inducing "voice of virtue" that reflects "images of horror" speaks *through* and *for* Matilda and Zastrozzi and well exemplifies the split between superego and the Law. As Mladen Dolar explains, ". . . the surplus of the superego over the Law is precisely the surplus of the voice; the superego has a voice, the Law is stuck with the letter" (*Gaze and Voice*, 14). Throughout Shelley's work, we find many such instances where the voice and

gaze as “objects” produce a constellation of unsettling and often terrifying effects. The paradoxical status of the voice and gaze as *objects* is that they do not appear in the subject’s visual or aural field of perception. The gaze and voice signify that which is excluded from the perspective of the subject and point to an alterity or radical otherness, the fact that we can never fully identify with the object because we are constrained by our own point of reference. Thus, the examples *par excellence* of the object-gaze and the object-voice are darkness and silence (a pertinent example of which can be found in Shelley’s “Mont Blanc”). A distinguishing characteristic of the Gothic is that these objects are materialized in fantasy formations in ways that introduce the object-gaze and object-voice into the diegetic reality of the work itself. The alterity of the Other, its fundamental undecidability, is given concrete form. According to Dolar:

As soon as the object, both as gaze and as the voice, appears as the pivotal point of narcissistic self-apprehension, it introduces a rupture at the core of self-presence. It is something that cannot itself be present, although the whole notion of presence is constructed around it and can be established only by its elision. . . . If it appears as a part of the image, as it occurs, for example in the experience of the double, which has filled a whole library of romantic literature, it immediately disrupts the established reality and leads to catastrophe. (15)

In short, the Gothic is the discourse of the psychotic. The specular doubling, fears of persecution, encounters with the *jouissance* of the Other, etc., that drive the action of Shelley’s *Zastrozzi*, *St. Irvyne*, and *The Wandering Jew*, are early attempts to explore and understand the psychological dissonances associated with a failed encounter with the Other (as language, culture, ideology) and others (individual egos, including the subject’s own).

Finally, I want to draw attention to Shelley's most effective strategy for representing the subjectivization of the paranoiac image. Critics who interpret the images and actions of Matilda and Zastrozzi only in terms of Verezzi's state of mind, as images drawn from the unconscious of his own psychological processes, miss the radical intersubjectivity at work between all of the characters. And those who suggest that Matilda and Zastrozzi are the only characters who are allowed to "fulfill their desire," we must ask the question: whose desire? In Lacanian terms, the "subject's desire is always the desire of the Other." That is, desire can be *for* the Other, determined *by* the Other, or a desire *for the Other's desire*—the "Other" being either the "big Other" itself (the symbolic register of language, ideology, culture, etc. out of which the effect of subjectivity is precipitated) or other individual others with whom one interacts. The most terrifying or uncanny moments in Shelley's Gothic occur when characters discover (or we as readers discover despite the characters' limited knowledge of their own self-experience) that their desire is not their own, that their free-will and actions are determined primarily by the desires of the Other as they are internalized in the formations of the ego, ego-ideal and superego.

Zastrozzi stages the process through which the desire of the Other is internalized, transferred, expressed, and subverted. For example, we can briefly restate the action of the novel in the following terms: Zastrozzi assumes for himself the desire of his mother, which sets in motion his merciless schemes to destroy Verezzi. Split between the "desire of the m(O)ther" and the "name of the father," Zastrozzi occupies a perverse

position as the object-instrument of his disgraced mother's desire for retribution: "Never shall I forgot her last commands.—My son, said she, my Pietrino, revenge my wrongs—revenge them on the perjured Verezzi—revenge them on his progeny for ever" (155). Matilda, in her union with Verezzi, assumes as her own the desire of Julia. Matilda's desire does not fully reach its object until she murders Julia. Matilda's stated desire actually masks her real desire, which is to destroy her sexual and social rival: ". . . Julia must die, and expiate the crime of daring to rival me, with her hated blood" (79). "Julia, the hated, accursed Julia's image, is the phantom which scares my otherwise certain confidence of eternal delight: could she but be hurled to destruction— . . ." (131). Matilda's phallic, destructive intensity, so well-veiled to Verezzi, finally reaches its apex when Matilda murders Julia in a "ferocious" confluence of desire and *jouissance*:

"Nerved anew by this futile attempt to escape her vengeance, the ferocious Matilda seized Julia's floating hair, and holding her back with fiend-like strength, stabbed her in a thousand places; and, with exulting pleasure, again and again buried the dagger to the hilt in her body, even after all remains of life were annihilated.

At last the passions of Matilda, exhausted by their own violence, sank into a deadly calm: she threw the dagger violently from her, and contemplated the terrific scene before her with a sullen gaze. (143)

In this moment, Shelley's subjectivized paranoiac image reverts back to its original, horrifying presence, which ultimately realizes the desire of both the narrator and reader as reactionary others. That is, reactionary desire is satisfied, even though Shelley had frustrated that desire by humanizing the paranoiac images of Zastrozzi and Matilda. They reassume their status as Jacobin monsters, thus confirming the obscene enjoyment that underlies the

reactionary ethical stance. And, finally, by committing suicide, Verezzi ironically assumes as his own the desire of Zastrozzi. Thus, the actions of these “others” can only be understood within the larger context of the “big Other” (the patriarchal symbolic), from which both Zastrozzi and Matilda are excluded—Zastrozzi, as the illegitimate offspring of Verezzi’s father, and Matilda, whose sexual passion for Verezzi threatens the stability of the fully regulated sexual relationship, as exemplified by Verezzi and Julia.

On the one hand, *Zastrozzi* draws attention to the inter-subjective relations that actually drive and sustain the paranoid fantasy, but on the other hand, Shelley is also careful to maintain the tension between the demystification of the fantasy and its reduction to an explanatory network of causal relations, which empties the Gothic of its uncanny effect and reduces it to a species of the philosophical novel. Verezzi’s traumatic encounters with Zastrozzi and Matilda exemplify not only the rigidity of Burkean aesthetic categories, but also the limitations of a moral psychology derived from either Smithian sympathetic identification or a Benthamian utilitarian calculus of pleasures and pains, the two predominant strains of mid-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century ethical discourse. As a consequence of the attempt to establish a subjective position free from the artificial and corrupted determinations of culture, tradition, and ecclesiastical authority, the Enlightenment *philosophes* were faced with the difficult problem of formulating an ethics grounded in “natural disposition” and confirmed by presumably universal affects such as pleasure and pain.²⁶ An ethics derived from sympathetic identification with the other, however, suffers from the

problem of what to do if and when no identification with the other is possible. In other words, an ethics of sympathy, when pushed to its limits results in a narcissistic reflection of one's own values and we sympathize with those whose values fundamentally reflect our own. As Žižek explains, a "logic of respect retains the subject (the one doing the recognizing) in his place, in his subjectivity. And, any 'respect' worth its salt would ultimately destroy this place, would entail complete and total subjective destitution—and this is what the respect view can't theorize." The same logic holds for an ethics founded upon a Levinasian respect for the alterity of the "absolute Other," and this is where Shelley's Gothic finds its traction, in Verezzi's unbearable encounters with the inscrutable gaze of Zastrozzi and the threatening sexuality of Matilda.²⁷ To put it simply, how does one respond when sympathetic identification with the Other is impossible, when the inscrutable desire of the Other "presses too close" and threatens the consistency of one's subjectivity? The radical intersubjectivity of identity, the metonymic movement of desire, and the destabilization of the imaginary stability of the ego, are the mechanisms that produce the terrifying effects of Shelley's Gothic and complicate the notion of a free, autonomous subject of Enlightenment revolutionary agency.

If the Enlightenment critical procedure is to demystify the image of the Other (nature, sexual difference, power, etc.) by bringing it under the determinations of the symbolic, then the gothic strategy would be to reveal how this determined image is non-identical with itself.²⁸ The demystification of gothic effects, as exemplified in Radcliffe for example, may indeed reveal

the illusions produced through epistemological error, but the price to be paid for this demystification is a further mystification of the network of intersubjective relations that point to another register of the Gothic, the “real” of desire, i.e. the impenetrable desire of the Other and its irreducible excess, the engine which drives paranoiac fantasies of conspiracy and persecution, the implications of which were not lost on David Hume who, in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, writes:

For what is more capricious than human actions? What more inconstant than the desires of man? And what creature departs more widely, not only from right reason, but from his own character and disposition? An hour, a moment is sufficient to make him change from one extreme to another, and overturn what cost the greatest pain and labour to establish. Necessity is regular and certain. Human conduct is irregular and uncertain. (92)

While the Gothic—in its figurative and narrative extravagance—may at first appear to be an unsuitable aesthetic mode through which to ground concrete ideological critique, Shelley deftly subverts the diegetic reality of the narrative in favor of a reality that explores the socio-psychological dynamic that creates the dialectical tension between transgressive revolutionary action and paranoiac conservative reaction.²⁹ And perhaps most fundamentally, Shelley raises the following question: To what extent are those who are excluded from or marginalized within the dominant ideology still subject to its norms and prohibitions?

In his *Memoirs of Shelley*, Thomas Love Peacock cites *The Cenci* as one of the few times Shelley “descended into the arena of reality” (73), but it is in his early gothic novels that Shelley first grounds abstract philosophical, social,

sexual, and ethical antagonisms within the concrete register of intersubjective relations. The “ineffectual Angel” strain of criticism—the result of a complicated cultural machine starting with Mary Shelley, Hogg, and Hunt and later solidified by Peacock and Arnold³⁰—has long since been displaced by the post-structuralist Shelley who deconstructs the concrete representations of diegetic reality to reveal the abstract structures of language and ideology which produce the subjective effect of reality. The antagonism between the concrete particularity of self-experience and the abstract categories through which it is mediated drives much of the productive tension in Shelley’s mature work and sustains its enduring gothic sensibility. Although similar, I do not equate the post-structuralist subject with the gothic subject, nor the post-structuralist Shelley with the gothic Shelley. The difference between the two hinges on the status of the “object,” or rather, the persistence of the object; i.e., the remainder of the real that resists symbolization and therefore cannot be reduced to or recuperated within the socio-symbolic field—another example of the non-identity of a concept with itself. I will further explore the implications of this distinction and the unsettling persistence of the object—as voice and gaze—in my analysis of *Prometheus Unbound* in chapter four.

Zastrozzi (along with *St. Irvyne* and *The Wandering Jew*) provides a baseline account, so to speak, of Shelley’s earliest interests in a wide range of disciplines—aesthetics, politics, ethics, psychology, and philosophy—and explores issues such as the perversion of justice into revenge; the narcissistic pursuit of self-gratification and the subsequent impasse of an ethics founded upon sympathy; the difficulties of sustaining an emancipatory ideological

position against oppressive orthodoxies of established authority; and most significantly, the challenges, both aesthetic and practical, of articulating a subjective position capable of surviving its own destitution when, after demystifying the “painted veil” of fantasy, one confronts the void in which “Hope and Fear”—those “twin destinies” that drive the negative dialectics of Shelleyan desire—“for ever weave their shadows o’er the chasm, sightless and drear.”

¹ In a 7 May 1809 letter to Longman & Company, Shelley announces his “intention to complete & publish a Romance, of which I have already written a large portion, before the end of July” (*Letters* I, 4). Frederick Jones notes that although *Zastrozzi* is the most likely candidate, “Shelley wrote, in part at least, several novels which never got into print, and this may be one of them” (4).

² Cited in M.O. Grenby’s *The Anti-Jacobin Novel*, p. 177.

³ Edward Dowdon writes: “*Zastrozzi*” is a boy’s attempt to rival and surpass the pieces of contemporary fiction which for a time had caught his fancy—romances of pseudo-passion and the pseudo-sublime written in staccato sentences of incoherent prose. In “*Zastrozzi*” the boy-author abandons himself, with characteristic singleness of feeling, to his conceptions, and lives with enthusiasm prepense in a world of elaborated absurdity. It is a marvel of the grotesque-sublime; and yet not without a curious interest for those who would study the psychology of genius, since it was the brain that conceived *Zastrozzi* which created Count Cenci, and the inventor of Julia and La Contessa di Laurentini who in after-years made Asia the consoler and sustainer of Prometheus” (21).

⁴ This quotation is taken from Mary Shelley’s note to *Queen Mab* in her four volume 1839 edition of Shelley’s poetry (I.101-102).

⁵ We should include Shelley himself in these critical disavowals of his own work, although it should be noted that Shelley continued to send *Zastrozzi* to prospective readers, which would certainly suggest an enduring attachment, or at least ambivalence, to his early gothic productions.

⁶ See, for example, Michael Gamer’s *Romanticism and the Gothic*, Robert Miles’s *Gothic Writing*, Anne Williams’s *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*, and David Richter’s *The Progress of Romance*.

⁷ See Steven Jones’s *Shelley’s Satire* and Stephen Behrendt’s “Introduction” to his edition of Shelley’s *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* (pp. 9-53).

⁸ See Peter Starr’s *Logics of Failed Revolt* for an insightful analysis of these structural repetitions.

⁹ *Queen Mab* (1813) has been thought to mark the culmination of Shelley’s strict materialism, from which he would not awaken from his own dogmatic slumber until the *Alastor* volume of 1816. See, however, Neil Fraistat’s “The Material Shelley: Who Gets the Finger in *Queen Mab*” (*Wordsworth Circle* 33.1 [2002]: 33-36), in which Fraistat argues that Shelley was already interrogating this strict materialism in *Queen Mab* itself. Adriana Cracuin has pointed out that in spite of *Zofloya*’s transgressive content, Dacre herself, oddly enough, was politically conservative. So it stands to reason that she would have been more inclined to critique Enlightenment doctrine than Shelley, who never abandoned the progressivist principles of Enlightenment.

¹⁰ See David Halliburton’s “Shelley’s ‘Gothic’ Novels” (*K-SJ* 36 [1967]: 39); David Murphy’s *The Dark Angel* (39); and A. J. Hartely’s “Foreward” to his edition of Shelley’s novels (viii).

¹¹ See Tilottama Rajan's "Promethean Narrative: Overdetermined Form in Shelley's Gothic Fiction" in *Shelley: Poet and Legislator of the World*, pp. 240-52.

¹² See M. O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution*.

¹³ In *The Progress of Romance*, David Richter finds a tenuous relation between the French Revolution and the Gothic, and argues that they should not be explicitly linked. His argument holds for early gothic novels (written, of course, before the Revolution), but for second generation Romantics like Shelley, the gothic aesthetic initially proves to be a useful diagnostic instrument to explore Revolutionary failure and the linkages between subjectivity, terror, and evil.

¹⁴ See Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel*, pp. 126-68, for a detailed analysis.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 104.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 126.

¹⁸ *Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin*, pp. 94-96.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 211-13.

²⁰ See Jonathan Wordsworth's "Introduction" to *Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin* for more details about the history of the periodical and its contributors.

²¹ An important example, for Shelley, of anti-Jacobin conspiracy fantasy associated with the Revolution was Abbé Barruel's *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism*, published in 1797. Barruel's narrative on the Illuminati, a text Shelley read out loud to Mary and others on 9 October 1814 (a day before Mary herself read *Zastrozzi*; see *Journal*, p. 19), is a paranoid defense of monarchy, hierarchy, and property that blames Freemasonry for the destructive excesses of the French Revolution. Shelley admired the doctrines of the Illuminati, however, but not their secrecy. See, for example, his March 2 1811 letter to Leigh Hunt, where Shelley writes of the "great influence" of "*Illuminism*" in the efforts to "establish *rational liberty*" (*Letters* I, 54).

²² See Alenka Zupancic's *Ethics of the Real* for a full discussion on the relation between Lacanian and Kantian ethics.

²³ Lacan's sexuation formulas appear in chapter seven, "A Love Letter," in *On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, p. 78.

²⁴ One of the finest examples of this "veil of femininity" in Romantic poetry is Keats's *Lamia*.

²⁵ See Zupancic's *Ethics of the Real* and Joan Copjec, ed., *Radical Evil*.

²⁶ In the British Moral Sense School (founded by Lord Shaftsbury and elaborated by Francis Hutcheson), for example, Adam Smith, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) articulates an ethics grounded in the sympathetic identification with the Other; Jeremy Bentham, in *The Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1781), grounds an ethics upon the utility of actions judged according to a calculus and pleasures and pains. Shelley is caught between French atheistic, mechanistic materialism and British empiricist natural benevolence.

²⁷ The *philosophes* of the Enlightenment themselves wrestled with the implications of their own theories. A notable example: although he proclaimed the materialist maxim that “Nothing that exists can be either against nature or outside of nature,” Diderot was hesitant to apply natural philosophy as an explanatory theory for human actions and psychology. He lamented, in a letter to Sophie Volland, that “It infuriates me to be enmeshed in a devilish philosophy which my mind is forced to accept but my heart to disown.” And in *The Elements of Physiology* he remarked, in a sentiment worthy of the Gothic: “Sometimes the universe seems to me only an assemblage of monstrous beings.”

In a passage from *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith offers this curious passage that would appear to justify a carefully regulated form of revenge:

These passions, however, are regarded as necessary parts of the character of human nature. A person becomes contemptible who tamely sits still and submits to insults, without attempting either to repel or to revenge them. We cannot enter into his indifference and insensibility: we call his behaviour mean-spiritedness, and are as really provoked by it as by the insolence of his adversary. Even the mob are enraged to see any man submit patiently to affronts and ill usage. They desire to see this insolence resented, and resented by the person who suffers from it. They cry to him with fury to defend, or to revenge himself. If his indignation rouses at last, they heartily applaud and sympathize with it. It enlivens their own indignation against his enemy, whom they rejoice to see him attack in turn, and are as really gratified by his revenge, provided it is not immoderate, as if the injury had been done to themselves. (45)

Here, the respect for otherness is revealed to be a respect for the other as reflected through a narcissistic gaze founded on similarity.

²⁸ The paradigmatic example of the non-identity between the image and its concept is, of course, the creature from Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, who materializes the unaccountable gaps that haunt any totalizing concept of the Enlightenment subject.

²⁹ Or, in Lacanian terms, between “reality,” as it is supported through fantasy frames, and the “real,” which resists symbolization.

³⁰ For an excellent overview of the evolution of Shelley’s critical reception, see Donald H. Reiman’s and Neil Fraistat’s “Shelley’s Reputation before 1960” in *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose (SPP)*, pp. 539-49.

CHAPTER TWO

St. Irvyne; or, The Rosicrucian:
Gothic Drive and Romantic Desire

St. Irvyne; or, The Rosicrucian is Shelley's second gothic romance and the last work of prose fiction he would publish. The novel was published in 1811 during Shelley's first year at Oxford, although he likely completed most of it in 1810 while still at Eton. Like *Zastrozzi*, the aesthetic of *St. Irvyne* reflects Shelley's interest in and enjoyment of the popular productions of the Minerva Press and, particularly, Lewis's *The Monk*, *The Castle Spectre*, and *Tales of Wonder* (a collection of gothic ballads and lyrics written and compiled with Southey and Scott); Radcliffe's *The Italian* and *The Romance of the Forest*; and Dacre's *Zofloya*. Shelley also draws from Godwin's *St. Leon*; Rousseau's *Julie; ou la nouvelle Héloïse*, and Schiller's *Die Räuber* for characterization and settings.¹ *St. Irvyne* further develops, if not exaggerates to a feverish pitch, the primary psychological theme established in Shelley's first gothic romance *Zastrozzi* (1810): the destructive cycle of vengeance fueled by passion, jealousy, and aggression when one's identity is put under pressure by threats, real or imagined, from others or by exclusion from one's socio-cultural context itself.

St. Irvyne contains two plotlines. The first opens on a stormy night with Wolfstein taking up the company of a brotherhood of monks after they have dissuaded him from a suicidal act. The monks are then ambushed by bandits, who lead Wolfstein to a subterranean cavern where he enlists as one of their band. Wolfstein is later captivated by the alluring beauty of Megalena,

who has been abducted by the bandits after they have robbed and murdered her father. Wolfstein plots to poison Cavigni, chief of the bandits, only to be saved from almost certain death by an enigmatic bandit named Ginotti. Eventually, Wolfstein and Megalena plot their escape from the bandits, but during their escape they encounter Ginotti, who demands that Wolfstein must swear that at some future point he will bear witness to his life story and provide him with a fitting burial. After that point, Wolfstein encounters Ginotti from time to time, usually after moments of doubt and romantic difficulties, such as when Wolfstein finds himself being seduced by Olympia during his own seduction of Megalena. Megalena then learns of Olympia's designs on Wolfstein and demands that he murder Olympia. Wolfstein reluctantly agrees, but when the moment arrives, Wolfstein freezes and refuses to carry out the murder of the sleeping Olympia. When she awakes and discovers Wolfstein's intention, she takes his dagger and commits suicide. At this traumatic moment, Ginotti appears again and requests that Wolfstein fulfill his oath. He recounts to Wolfstein the story of his life and arranges to give him the elixir of eternal life at the ruins of an abbey next to St. Iryne's castle. Wolfstein meets with Ginotti, and the exchange is made, which results in both of their deaths.

While the Wolfstein/Megalena/Ginotti narrative is pure gothic romance, the second narrative, which concerns a young woman named Eloise de St. Iryne and her suitor Fitzeustace, begins as gothic romance and then transitions to a sentimentalist mode. We learn the history of Eloise's last six years of her life during her return to the castle of St. Iryne. After the death of

her mother in Geneva, Eloise was seduced by the charming, though nefarious, Nempere. Eloise becomes pregnant, causing Nempere to abandon her and pass her off to Mountfort, an Englishman, as payment for a gambling debt. Mountfort then inexplicably murders Nempere and decides to place Eloise under the protection of Fitzeustace. Eventually, Eloise marries Fitzeustace and they both return to England, where Fitzeustace adopts her illegitimate child as his own.

While more ambitious than *Zastrozzi*, *St. Irvyne* is a fascinating mess, beset with contradictions and structural gaffes.² For example, chapters five and six are missing entirely, without explanation. The main plot breaks off unexpectedly to introduce a parallel narrative that appears to bear little relation to the main one, reconciled only in a brief concluding paragraph. And in several instances Shelley seems to lack any interest in the narrative machinery itself.³ The narrator often interjects phrases such as “it is sufficient to conceive what cannot be so well described” (185) and “Needless were it minutely to describe each trivial event” (187) and “No incident worthy of narration occurred to disturb the uninterrupted tenour of their existence” (189). Taking issue with Frederick Frank’s observation that such gaps and impasses (common stylistic devices of gothic literature) are “a deliberate ploy to intensify the reader’s consternation” (xiv), Stephen Behrendt instead suggests that “Shelley’s aim likely was less consternation than plain *engagement*. Whatever would more effectively draw the reader *into* the joint act of creation with the author by which the work was ‘created’ or ‘performed’ in the reader’s consciousness—that seems to have been fair game for Shelley

even early in his career” (37). Behrendt’s reading is a generous one, although I would argue that given the energetic density with which Shelley describes the phenomenology of trauma, he simply lacked patience or interest in the diegetic requirements of prose fiction. Those situations that Shelley’s narrator finds tedious and unworthy of further narration would occupy many pages of detailed elaboration from the pen of Radcliffe, Lewis, or Godwin. However fantastical the subject matter, the gothic novel is still a descendant of the realist fiction of Richardson and Fielding. And “reality” is precisely the category that Shelley wishes to place under pressure. Yet Shelley is less interested in the deconstruction of realist narrative conventions, in the mode of Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* for example, choosing instead to focus on the ways in which reality, to sustain its consistency, depends upon the mediation of a supplemental idealization.

The Lacanian term for this supplement, which also functions as reality’s condition of possibility, is *fantasy*: the subject’s relation to the object-cause of desire. As Žižek explains, desire, whose metonymic movement is mediated through fantasy, is a protection against the real of drive: “. . . *fantasy is the very screen that separates desire from drive*: it tells the story which allows the subject to (mis)perceive the void around which drive circulates as the primordial loss constitutive of desire” (Plague 32). *St. Irvyne*’s importance for understanding Shelley’s early development can be found in the way in which Shelley attempts to represent the traumatic consequences of a failure in one’s fantasy frame. In these instances, the narration is vivid and compelling. Tellingly, Shelley’s narrative omissions

occur at those moments when the characters have been able to re-establish, through fantasy, a sense of normality, which Shelley would later figure as a “painted veil which those who live call life.” The “hope” and “fear” that lurk behind the veil of fantasy are Shelley’s primary objects of interest and find expression in the parallel narratives of the Romantic sentimentalism of the Eloise/Fitzeustace/Nempere plot and the gothic barbarism of the Wolfstein/Megalena/Ginotti plot.

Figurations of the veil in Shelley’s work take many forms and generate significances that cannot simply be reduced to a metaphysical boundary between the phenomenal and the noumenal or an epistemological boundary between the known and the unknown. While it is easy to get caught up in trying to determine Shelley’s shifting philosophical beliefs, at a fundamental level his early figurations of the veil can be located at the level of intra- and interpersonal psychological dynamics—among the combinatory relations of subject, self, and Other.⁴ When the subject’s symbolic universe collapses and the veil of fantasy is lifted, the impenetrable and traumatic alterity of the Other is encountered. Desire gives way to drive, pleasure to *jouissance*, and reality to the Real.

In his *Romantic Psychoanalysis*, Joel Faflak defines Romanticism “as a body of writing struggling to find its own identity . . .” (8) and that “Romanticism constitutes itself as a scene of psychoanalysis to deal with the trauma of Romanticism’s search for itself” (5). My own study is very much in sympathy with Faflak’s project, and although Faflak does not discuss Shelley in any detail, his focus on “the emergence of psychoanalysis in Romanticism”

is particularly relevant for Shelley, along with Wordsworth, Coleridge, De Quincey, and Keats, to whom Faflak devotes the body of his argument. In both form and aesthetic, *St. Irvyne* is a transitional work for the young Shelley as he sought to find a more effective register through which to represent in materialist terms his increasingly abstract sensibility. *St. Irvyne* can be read as a thought experiment where the Gothic becomes the surrogate for poetry as Shelley attempts to work out the complications associated with expressing psychological imagery within the narrative constraints of prose fiction. Shelley's frustrations with the formal requirements of prose is exemplified in the narrative of *St. Irvyne* itself when, on several occasions, the characters pause to write or recite a poem or to sing a song that more accurately reflects their emotional and psychological state⁵. Where, in *The Castle of Otranto*, Horace Walpole introduced the literalized fantastic into realistic prose fiction, the Romantics will perform a further reversal by introducing a psychological realism into the figurative realm of poetry. One can already detect in *St. Irvyne* Shelley's movement towards the poetic⁶. Where *Zastrozzi* displays a crisp, economical narrative style, the diction of *St. Irvyne* reflects a lyrical quality more reminiscent of Radcliffe than Lewis or Dacre. A brief comparison between the opening passages of *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* demonstrates this shift. From *Zastrozzi*:

Torn from the society of all he held dear on earth, the victim of secret enemies, and exiled from happiness, was the wretched Verezzi!
All was quiet; a pitchy darkness involved the face of things, when, urged by fiercest revenge, Zastrozzi placed himself at the door of the inn where, undisturbed, Verezzi slept. (61)

And from *St. Irvyne*:

Red thunder-clouds, borne on the wings of the midnight whirlwind, floated, at fits, athwart the crimson-coloured orbit of the moon: the rising fierceness of the blast sighed through the stunted shrubs, which, bending before its violence, inclined towards the rocks whereon they grew: over the blackened expanse of heaven, at intervals, was spread the blue lightning's flash; it played upon the granite heights, and, with momentary brilliancy, disclosed the terrific scenery of the Alps, whose gigantic and misshapen summits, reddened by the transitory moonbeam, were crossed by black fleeting fragments of the tempest cloud. The rain, in big drops, began to descend, and the thunder-peals, with louder and more deafening crash, to shake the zenith, till the long-protracted war echoing from cavern to cavern, died, in indistinct murmurs amidst the far-extended chain of mountains. In this scene, then, at this horrible and tempestuous hour, without one existent earthly being whom he might claim as friend, without one resource to which he might fly as an asylum from the horrors of neglect and poverty, stood Wolfstein;—he gazed upon the conflicting elements; his youthful figure reclined against jutting granite rock; he cursed his wayward destiny, and implored the Almighty of Heaven to permit the thunder bolt, with crash terrific and exterminating, to descend upon his head, that a being useless to himself and to society might no longer, by his existence, mock Him who ne'er made aught in vain. (159)

This shift in representation from simple description to a more complex phenomenological mode anticipates the phantasmagoric sequences found in *Alastor, Laon and Cythna*, and *Prometheus Unbound*, where the “operations of the human mind” are expressed metaphorically through a cacophony of violent naturalistic images. For Wolfstein, no Romantic correspondence between nature, symbol, and imagination is possible. Not only is he alienated from society, but nature itself is a traumatic abyss of otherness in which his split subjectivity is expressed in the fields of vision and sound:

Yet, unheeding the exclamations of the maddened Wolfstein, fiercer raged the tempest. The battling elements, in wild confusion, seemed to threaten nature's dissolution; the ferocious thunderbolt, with impetuous violence, danced upon the mountains, and, collecting more terrific strength, severed gigantic rocks from their else eternal basements; the masses, with sound more frightful than the bursting thunder-peal, dashed towards the valley below. Horror and desolation marked their track. (160)

The “dissolution” of nature that leaves “horror” and “desolation” in its tracks establishes a powerful metaphor of repressed trauma that survives as a fundamental fantasy in the unconscious, a figure Shelley would use in *Prometheus Unbound* where “In each human heart terror survives / The ravin it has gorged” (I.i.618-19). In *Shelley’s Goddess*, Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi insightfully points out that in these lines “the gothic rantings of Shelley’s adolescent fiction come to controlled expression” (154). The cause of the “terror” that survives in the heart of Wolfstein is never revealed to the reader. All we are told of Wolfstein is that he was a “wealthy potentate in Germany” who was exiled from the “lap of luxury and indulgence” (163). The narrator never explains the circumstances of his exile, and even Wolfstein himself cannot bear to think of or discuss with Megalena the “event which imposed upon him an inseparable barrier to ever again returning” (163).

Interestingly, given the novel’s debt to Godwin’s *St. Leon* and Schiller’s *Die Räuber*, Shelley avoids supplying a detailed account of Wolfstein’s background or establishing a causal chain of events that would sharpen his critique of the societal or personal corruption out of which those events originated. The “event” that “led him to quit his native country” is “almost too dreadful for narration” (175). Whatever the “event” was, it cannot be inscribed into Wolfstein’s symbolic universe, and Shelley maintains its mysterious ambiguity by denying it a narrative context. As an irruption of the real that “resists symbolization,” the event indexes a constitutive antagonism in Wolfstein’s psychic economy that draws him away from the normative circuit

of desire and towards the all-consuming void of drive. And for Shelley, where there is a void, there is a veil. In *St. Irvyne*, it is in the “impossibility of the sexual relationship” where the antagonism between the void of subjectivity and the veil of fantasy is represented most explicitly and is shown to produce consequences well-beyond the relation between the masculine and feminine.

In his Seminar XX, Lacan offers his most succinct formulation of the impossibility of the sexual relationship as “that which doesn’t stop not being written” (94). As readers of Shelley well know, his portrayals of the sexual relationship are fraught with frustrations, impasses, disappointments and despair. Relationships are represented in all of their complexity, but they are never “written”; that is, they arrive at no final formula that would efface all difference into the totality of the “One,” an unmediated link between self and other that does not appropriate difference within a narcissistic condensation of the other into an ideal image or object that serves to fill the lack in the desiring subject⁷. Although satisfying relationships are certainly attainable, the relation between the masculine and the feminine (structural positions in relation to the castrating function of language, not biologically determined) is always mediated by the subject’s fantasy frame: “everything we are allowed to approach by way of reality remains rooted in fantasy” (95).

If sexual difference is “real” and thus impossible to symbolize, then the gothic romance is its symptom. *Alastor, Laon and Cythna, Epipsychidion, Julian and Maddalo*, and *Prometheus Unbound* are well-known examples that document Shelley’s struggle to represent poetically this antagonism. Because of Shelley’s apparent frustration with the diegetic demands of prose

fiction, however fantastical the subject matter, through poetic discourse he finds a more effective mode for expressing the “unreality” of the fantasy frame itself. Shelley’s fiction, however, does offer its own insights into the veil of fantasy by positing the traumatic consequences of its breakdown. Like Verezzi from *Zastrozzi*, the main characters in *St. Irvyne* suffer a catastrophic separation from a socio-symbolic network that provides the coordinates for their fantasy frames, exposing the void of subjectivity unsupported by fantasy. Wolfstein desperately tries to fill the void and re-establish his fantasy frame by entering into a romantic relationship with Megalena. For Wolfstein, Megalena appears as a sublime object that arrests his gaze and reflects a formal permanence into which his distempered mind can find refuge and structure:

. . . the hapless Wolfstein, ever the victim of impulsive feelings, found himself bound to her by ties, more lasting than he had now conceived the transitory tyranny of woe could have imposed. For never had Wolfstein beheld so singularly beautiful a form;—her figure cast in the mould of most exact symmetry; her blue and love-beaming eyes, from which occasionally emanated a wild expression, seemingly almost superhuman; and the auburn hair which hung in unconfined tresses down her damask cheek—formed a resistless *tout ensemble*. (168)

Megalena is also the victim of a traumatic encounter and, like Wolfstein, seeks an escape from her unbearable situation. Where Wolfstein identifies with Megalena as sublime sexual object, Megalena identifies with his phallic presence: “his figure majestic and lofty, and the fire which flashed from his expressive eye, indefinably to herself, penetrated the inmost soul of the isolated Megalena” (169). This tenuous relation between the masculine and feminine is disrupted by the emergence of a third party, the lascivious leader

of the bandits, Cavigni. Having robbed and murdered her father, Cavigni then claims Megalena as his “possession” and intends to marry her against her will.

Whereas Wolfstein is initially fascinated by Megalena’s beauty and form,

Cavigni is driven solely by acquisitive lust:

Cavigni was enraptured with the beauty of Megalena, and secretly vowed that no pains should be spared to gain to himself the possession of an object so lovely. The anticipated delight of gratified voluptuousness revelled in every vein as he gazed upon her; his eye flashed with a triumphant expression of lawless love, yet he determined to defer the hour of his happiness till he might enjoy more free, unrestrained delight, with his adored fair one. (170)

The resemblance between Cavigni and Count Cenci is worth noting. Both function as a kind of Freudian primal father from *Totem and Taboo*, the uncastrated Other who freely enjoys and is subject to no prohibitions. Cavigni warns Megalena that he will “force the jewel from its casket” (172-73) if she refuses to assent to marriage, a thinly veiled threat of rape. The emergence of a romantic rival throws Wolfstein back into an emotional frenzy, and whatever genuine feelings he may have at first harbored for Megalena turn uncannily similar to those of Cavigni: “his bosom was the scene of the wildest anarchy; the conflicting passions revelled dreadfully in his burning brain:—love, maddening, excessive, unaccountable idolatry, as it were, which possessed him for Megalena, urged him on to the commission of deeds which conscience represented as beyond measure wicked, . . .” (172).

In my analysis of *Zastrozzi*, I argued that one of the primary themes of that novel is the way in which the “desire of the Other” always functions as a third term that disrupts or negates the harmonious relation between the

masculine and feminine. As Lacan puts it, “one’s desire is always the desire of the Other.” What drives the action in *Zastrozzi* is the transference of desire from one individual to another, bringing into relief the difference between the “subject of the enunciated” and the subject of the enunciation”; that is, the split between the subject’s stated desire and the subject’s unconscious desire, the “place” from where the subject speaks. On the imaginary level of the ego, the subject misrecognizes the other’s desire as his or her own. The same dynamic is at work in *St. Irvyne* where Wolfstein’s desire for Megalena is incited and intensified by his jealous response to Cavigni. Megalena ceases to become an object of sexual desire and instead becomes an object of status that solidifies Wolfstein’s identity as a rival to Cavigni. This shift in the status of the object is reflected in the shift of Wolfstein’s gaze from Megalena to Cavigni: “With a gaze of insidious and malignant revenge was the eye of Wolfstein fixed upon the chieftain’s countenance” (181). Wolfstein’s gaze often becomes “fixed” upon an object, suspending the normal circuit of his desire and situating him in the monstrous realm of drive (his gambling habit being but a socially structured form of drive). He returns again and again to the position of subjective destitution in which we find him at the beginning of the novel: “. . . he cursed his wayward destiny, and implored the Almighty of Heaven to permit the thunderbolt, with crash terrific and exterminating, to descend upon his head, that a being useless to himself and to society might no longer, by his existence, mock Him who ne’er made aught in vain” (159). And in yet another instance where one of Shelley’s early protagonists foreshadows the endless suffering of Prometheus, Wolfstein addresses his compulsion to

the death drive directly to the big Other: “What, what is death?—Ah, dissolution! thy pang is blunted by the hard hand of long-protracted suffering—suffering unspeakable, indescribable” (159-60).

It is not surprising then that relationship between Wolfstein and Megalena is destined to fail. They exist for one another only as objects that function as an anchor for the fantasy frame that sustains their access to a consistent reality. By chance alone they find themselves in each other’s fantasy frame at a traumatic moment. Upon immediately recognizing in the other the object that could fill their respective lack, their “courtship” consists of a single exchange:

At the sight of him Megalena arose from her recumbent posture, and hastened joyfully to meet him; for she remembered that Wolfstein had rescued her from the insults of the banditti, on the eventful evening which had subjected her to their control.

“Lovely, adored girl,” he exclaimed, “short is my time: pardon, therefore, the abruptness of my address. The chief has sent me to persuade you to become united to him; but I love you, I adore you to madness. I am not what I seem. Answer me!—time is short.”

An indefinable sensation, unfelt before, swelled through the passion-quivering frame of Megalena. “Yes, yes,” she cried, “I will—I love you—.” (173)

Megalena’s desire too is incited by romantic rivalry when, later, the sexually precocious Olympia attempts to seduce Wolfstein. Megalena’s reaction is so strong that she demands that Wolfstein kill Olympia. He reluctantly agrees, but when the fateful moment arrives Wolfstein is unwilling to kill Olympia and she takes her own life, stabbing herself with the dagger Megalena had given to Wolfstein. As Peter Finch points out, however, this episode “demonstrates the pervasively violent nature of Wolfstein’s sexuality:

behind his heroic masculinity lies a sexual desire riddled with potentially murderous hostility” (41). Finch goes on to argue:

. . . the phallus is neither possessed nor controlled by the masculinity that it privileges but depends instead upon the dual images of femininity, the otherwise uncontrollably sexual woman (Megalena) and the otherwise unattainably innocent woman (the re-configured Olympia), against which it is defined. Within this economy of representations the Phallus is used to control female sexuality on the one hand and to annex a feminized realm of purity and virtue on the other, punishing the first image of Woman as the sexual Other and violating and concealing the second’s asexual otherness. (42)

While I agree with Finch that Wolfstein’s failure to possess the phallus (a signifier that would guarantee the stability of his identity) is the primary motivation that determines his actions, I take issue with his characterizations of Megalena as the “uncontrollably sexual woman” and Olympia as the “unattainably innocent woman.” Just after their escape from the banditti, it is Wolfstein who is overcome by sexual passion for Megalena, and he attempts to overcome her virtue by appealing to the necessity of natural inclinations:

. . . overcome by the passion which, by mutual indulgence, had become resistless, he cast himself at her feet, and, avowing most unbounded love, demanded the promised return. A slight spark of virtue yet burned in the bosom of the wretched girl; she essayed to fly from temptation; but Wolfstein, seizing her hand, said, “And is my adored Megalena a victim then to prejudice? Does she believe, that the Being who created us gave us passions which never were to be satiated? Does she suppose that Nature created us to become the tormentors of each other?” (188)

And conversely, Olympia is described in terms similar to that of Victoria, Charlotte Dacre’s sexually driven protagonist from *Zofloya*:

From habitual indulgence, her passions, naturally violent and excessive, had become irresistible; and when once she had fixed a determination in her mind, that determination must either be effected, or she must cease to exist. Such, then, was the beautiful Olympia, and

as such she conceived a violent and unconquerable passion for Wolfstein. (197)

Megalena's jealousy of Olympia is understandable: given their similarities in personality and temperament, Wolfstein and Olympia are mirror images of each other. This alone may explain why Wolfstein is unable to kill Olympia. To do so would mean killing that part of his desire that Megalena is unable to fulfill. And yet Wolfstein still clings to Megalena despite the fact that she fails to embody the image he has of her in his fantasy frame. He needs the semblance of a normal sexual relationship grounded in fantasy and desire to protect him from his destructive tendency towards *jouissance* and drive. The Megalena/Olympia duality that Finch identifies thus fails to recognize a crucial point: it is precisely this gap between Megalena as image-object in fantasy space and her individual particularity that marks the impossibility of the sexual relationship:

Megalena was not the celestial model of perfection which his warm imagination had portrayed; he began to find in her, not the exhaustless mine of interesting converse which he had once supposed. Possession, which, when unassisted by real, intellectual love, clogs man, increases the ardent, uncontrollable passions of women even to madness. . . . Wolfstein no longer regarded her with that idolatrous affection which had filled his bosom towards her. (192)

The problem for Wolfstein, therefore, is not one of privileging one kind of femininity over another, but lies in the fact that *no* articulation or combination of the feminine is adequate to fill the void of the primordial lost object. The narrator, however, in one of many similar judgments suggests that just such a scenario is possible and that the impediment to the relationship

consists in Wolfstein's failure to incorporate an intellectual component into the relationship:

Yet the love with which Wolfstein regarded Megalena, notwithstanding the strength of his expressions, through fervent and excessive, at first, was not of that nature which was likely to remain throughout existence; it was like the blaze of the meteor at midnight, which glares amid the darkness for awhile, and then expires; yet did he love her now; at least if heated admiration of her person and accomplishments, independently of mind, be love. (189)

In the parallel narrative of Eloise and Fitzeustace, which I will discuss more fully in a moment, Shelley attempts to represent an ideal relationship grounded in sympathy and intellect. But the price to be paid for that idealism is the sacrifice of physical intimacy—a sexual relationship without the sex.

The murderous love triangle between Wolfstein, Megalena, and Olympia extends the critique of the destructive consequences of jealousy first articulated in the Verezzi, Matilda, and Julia narrative from *Zastrozzi*. There is, however, one crucial distinction between the two that significantly alters the scope of that critique: in *Zastrozzi*, Matilda's duplicitous actions are conscious choices. She chooses to pursue a course of "radical evil" despite the consequences. She learns that to appeal to Verezzi she must wear a mask of genteel femininity, to masquerade herself as the object-cause of his desire. In *St. Irvyne*, on the other hand, deception itself is shown to be a structural component of the sexual relationship; that is, neither Megalena nor Wolfstein consciously attempt to deceive the other, to pretend to be something they are not. The gap between the image and the individual leads to a misrecognition that is retroactively assumed to be a conscious deception. Neither of them

turn out to be who the other thought they were. Furthermore, neither turn out to be who *they* think they are. This alterity (the gap between subject and ego) within both the self and the other remains inaccessible, an absent cause that cannot be accounted for and yet produces a series of effects.

The importance of the Gothic in understanding Shelley's development lies not in the transition from a supposed gothic immaturity to Romantic high-mindedness. The Gothic in Shelley's work "always returns to its place," to quote one of Lacan's definitions of the real. The real both resists and demands its articulation, but it cannot be mediated. *The Triumph of Life*, Shelley's last poem, reads like a ghastly procession of philosophers and poets that European culture had called upon (including Shelley) to mediate the alterity of the Other. *In Triumph*, Shelley attempts to "traverse the fantasy,"—to create a space of possibility, to shatter the imaginary unity of the world, so that new forms of being might become possible. The Gothic returns in Shelley at those moments when dialectic fails and the terrifying abyss of the Other leads one to ask yet again, as in the final line of *The Triumph of Life*,—"What is Life?"—an appeal to the very Other from which the question originates. Shelley's Gothic, therefore, serves as critique against, and answer to, the forms of being that would occupy Shelley's fantasy space throughout his career. It is particularly instructive to read Shelley's Gothic against his later philosophical and political thought, not merely as a precursor but as a critique of those later positions. It is in this sense that the philosophy of Godwin, crucial to Shelley's development, develops as a reaction-formation against the psycho-ideological impasses that Shelley explores in his early work.

I would argue that *St. Irvyne* offers a proleptic critique of Shelley's later adherence to Godwinian necessity and rationalist perfectibility. In *Political Justice*, Godwin articulates a theory of society that depends upon transparency not only between self and other but also, even more crucially, between self and will—a consciousness and identity fully transparent to itself. Just as matter is subject to the immutable laws of physical necessity, so must the mind (another modality of matter) be subject to a similar chain of cause and effect: “the theory of the human mind is properly, like the theory of every other series of events with which we are acquainted, a system of mechanism; understanding by mechanism nothing more than a regular succession of phenomena, without uncertainty of event, so that every consequent requires a specific antecedent, and could be no otherwise in any respect than as the antecedent determined to be” (360-61). All the “actions of men are necessary,” Godwin writes, and “the man who is acquainted with *all the circumstances* under which a living or intelligent being is placed upon any given occasion is qualified to predict the conduct he will hold, with as much certainty as he can predict any of the phenomena of inanimate nature” (336, italics mine). When “all the circumstances” that form the causal chain of human behavior are brought before the understanding, Godwin concludes that:

Multitudes will never exert the energy necessary to extraordinary success, till they shall dismiss the prejudices that fetter them, get rid of the chilling system of occult and inexplicable causes and consider the human mind as an intelligent agent guided by motives and prospects presented to the understanding, and not by causes of which we have no proper cognisance and can form no calculation. . . . Remove the causes of this ignorance or this miscalculation, and the effects will cease. (110)

Godwin's theory, which anticipates the Habermasian ideal of communicative rationality, is a powerful argument that would later empower Shelley in deconstructing the ideological foundations of established authority and to refute its prejudiced claims of structural necessity. We can, of course, speculate about Wolfstein's background and acknowledge his life of "luxury and indolence" as the context in which his tempestuous and undisciplined character was formed.⁸ But in keeping the background of Wolfstein shrouded in mystery, the novel emphasizes how the link between the void of subjectivity and the inscrutability of the Other are revealed when the veil of the subject's fantasy is lifted.

At the mercy of his disordered temperament, Wolfstein is a mystery even to himself, "instinctively impelled to deeds of horror and danger" (164). Godwin's philosophy cannot account for the agency of the unconscious and is operative only at the level of imaginary relations between self and other. One might argue that when Coleridge's ancient mariner inexplicably shoots the albatross, he pierces the heart of Godwin's philosophy as well. One could argue that this split between self-presence and self-alienation occurs in the founding gesture of Romanticism itself: Wordsworth's and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*, where the Ancient Mariner's obsessive drive to account for his traumatic encounter with inscrutable necessity by constructing a fantasy scenario drawn from the medieval imaginary threatens to destabilize the Wordsworthian poetics of simplicity and ameliorating correspondence between thought and emotion⁹.

To determine “all the circumstances” that have served as the cause of one’s actions would require the subject to bring the unconscious under the power of the understanding and will. This self-identical correspondence between the imaginary and the symbolic is the fantasy of the utilitarian subject—a thinking automaton who is capable of determining moral actions through an absolute calculus of pleasures and pains. The salient point of Lacan’s theory of fantasy is that it operates on an unconscious level, structuring the subject’s relation to the object-cause of desire rather than to the self’s relation to an object of desire. The “object-cause” is simply the gap between need (imaginary) and demand (symbolic) that resists full satisfaction and triggers the movement of desire from one partial object to the next.

I have hesitated to discuss the significance of Ginotti up to this point because although he is the key to interpreting the psychological dynamics of *St. Irvyne*, his presence in the novel is, ironically, unnecessary in terms of the causal sequence of events. He neither encourages nor discourages Wolfstein to kill Cavigni. And even after Wolfstein’s confession to the murder, when Ginotti intervenes on Wolfstein’s behalf and promises to the bandits in return for Wolfstein’s safety that they “shall no more behold him (183),” the narrative had already suggested that the bandits were under the spell of Wolfstein’s powerful presence and likely would not have harmed him:

His magnanimity and courage, even whilst surrounded by the most threatening dangers, and the unappalled expression of countenance with which he defied the dart of death, endeared him to the robbers: whilst with him they all asserted that they felt, as it were, instinctively impelled to deeds of horror and danger, which, otherwise, must have remained unattempted even by the boldest. (164)

After the initial shock, they likely would have looked upon him as their new leader. Nor does Ginotti influence Wolfstein's original intent to kill Olympia. These key moments that drive the action of the narrative would have taken place regardless of Ginotti's presence in the novel. Only after Wolfstein has committed these murderous and self-destructive acts does Wolfstein posit Ginotti as the cause of his actions: "for of the misfortunes which had succeeded his association with the bandits, he had not the slightest doubt in his own mind, that Ginotti was the cause" (193). Recall also that after Olympia's suicide Wolfstein minimizes his culpability by placing the blame solely on Megalena: ". . . he could not but now regard her as a fiend, who had been the cause of Olympia's destruction; who had urged him to a deed from his nature now shrunk as from annihilation" (206).

Wolfstein's defining characteristic is to project his own culpability and guilt onto others, refusing to take responsibility for his actions. He is often described as being "unappalled" by the horrific things he does. His lack of conscience in these moments would seem to contradict the narrator's claims that Wolfstein is tormented by his conscience: "Remorse for his crimes tortured him: yet, steeling his conscience, he essayed to smother the fire which burned in his bosom; to change the tenour of his thoughts—in vain! he could not" (185). The split in Wolfstein between "unappalled" disaffection and "tortured" affection, distinguishes Wolfstein as a more psychologically complex character than any other in Shelley's gothic novels, and the function of Ginotti is clearly meant to externalize some aspect of the turmoil of Wolfstein's psychic economy. The crucial link between the two occurs

immediately after Wolfstein has posited Ginotti as the “cause” of all his woes.

Wolfstein vows

to unravel the mystery in which he saw Ginotti was shrouded; and resolved, therefore, to devote that night towards finding out his abode. With feelings such as these, he rushed into the street, and followed the gigantic form of Ginotti, who stalked onwards majestically, as if conscious of safety, and wholly ignorant of the eager scrutiny with which Wolfstein watched his every movement. . . . he resolved to follow Ginotti, even to the extremity of the universe. (193)

Of the few critics who have taken *St. Irvyne* seriously enough to offer a detailed reading of the novel, most agree that the novel is, in the words of Frederick Frank, an “impressive performance in the craft of terrifying the mind with phantasmatic images of various unwanted selves which hide in the unconscious” (ix). For Jerrold Hogle, the “battle of thesis-antithesis thus appears as the central cosmic paradox, the problem of a One becoming the Many in order to be revealed in something different from itself that is still itself all along” (80). And Peter Finch, in the best reading of the novel to date, argues that Ginotti is a “preternaturally powerful Father-figure” (64) who haunts Wolfstein’s conscience as a precursor of the Freudian superego. While I agree with Finch that Ginotti does function as a kind of superegoic agency for Wolfstein, I hesitate to ascribe to Ginotti the characteristics of a “preternaturally powerful Father-figure.” Unlike Schedoni, Radcliffe’s sublime villain from *The Italian*, Ginotti does not stand-in as a representative of corrupted ecclesiastical or state power, which would confer upon him the authority of the patriarchal symbolic and its prohibitions. He more accurately represents an Enlightenment Faustian figure that tempts, more than pricks, Wolfstein’s active conscience. This shift from the dominant ecclesiastical

ideology to an emergent Enlightenment ideology is significant in several ways. First, Ginotti himself, like Wolfstein, is an outcast, not because he is a corrupted figure of state power but because his scientific drive has alienated him from the normative heterosexual circuit of desire. Here the link between Radcliffe's critique of the Catholic Church and Shelley's critique of Enlightenment merge. If Radcliffe identifies the gap between the stated, idealized, ideology of power and the corrupted individuals (in all their pathological ties and weaknesses) through whom that power operates, then Shelley locates a similar gap between the abstraction of scientific rationalization and the individuals who embody its process.

But can we really ascribe to Ginotti a superegoic agency that sparks Wolfstein's guilty conscience? It is important to note that Wolfstein's guilty conscience is already fully present before Ginotti appears on the scene:

"Conscience too, awakened conscience, upbraided him for the life which he had selected, and, with silent whisperings, stung his soul to madness" (165).

Ginotti first appears after Wolfstein has joined the group of Alpine bandits.

Initially, Wolfstein finds Ginotti intriguing but not necessarily threatening:

although mysterious and reserved, his society was courted with more eagerness, than such qualities might, abstractedly considered, appear to deserve. None knew his history—*that* he concealed within the deepest recesses of his bosom; nor could the most suppliant entreaties, or threats of the most horrible punishments, have wrested from him one particular concerning it. Never had he once thrown off the mysterious mask, beneath which his character was veiled, . . . something lurked behind which yet remained unknown. (172-73)

Only when Wolfstein begins to contemplate murdering Cavigni to gain the love of Megalena for himself does Ginotti begin to transform, in Wolfstein's

mind, into a figure of paranoiac, conspiratorial anxiety. Even then, however, Ginotti is less an externalization of the superego and than he is an image of Wolfstein's ego-ideal. More specifically, Ginotti materializes the gap between Wolfstein's ideal-ego and his ego-ideal, between how he would like to see himself and how he would like others to see him:

Every one submitted to Ginotti: for who could resist the superior Ginotti? From the gaze of Ginotti Wolfstein's soul shrank, horrified, in confessed inferiority: he who had shrunk not at death, had shrunk not to avow himself guilty of murder, and had prepared to meet its reward, started from Ginotti's eye-beam as from the emanation of some superior and preter-human being. (183)

His soul sank within him at the idea of his own littleness, when a fellow-mortal might be able to gain so strong, though sightless, an empire over him. He felt that he was no longer independent. . . . His soul shrank with mingled awe and abhorrence from a being who, even to himself, was confessedly superior to the proud and haughty Wolfstein. (195)

Wolfstein admires Ginotti for his calm steadiness, self-assurance, and the respect he garners from others. There is little to suggest that Ginotti wields any prohibitive agency over Wolfstein; in fact, Ginotti represents precisely the opposite: a being who is unconstrained by prohibitions who exists outside of the injunctions of the socio-ideological context within which Wolfstein identifies himself. Ginotti is both mirror and screen for Wolfstein. In the inscrutable gaze of the other, he projects his desire for a stable identity but receives in return a reflection fraught with mystery and terror. Ginotti's relation to Wolfstein is thus radically ambiguous. Whatever term we apply to him—ideal-ego, ego-ideal, superego, unconscious, desire of the Other, etc.—fails to contain him, shifting from one moment to the next along with

Wolfstein's psychological dynamics. In this sense, Ginotti embodies, literally, the void of Wolfstein's subjectivity—the fundamental point at which signification fails to interpellate a subject—thus staging the impossibility of Godwinian self-transparency. Wolfstein and Ginotti circle around each other, pursue each other, but rather than reaching a common ground of understanding, Ginotti, from Wolfstein's point of view, becomes even more sublime and menacing, to the point of omnipresence. It is here, in the final confrontation between Wolfstein and Ginotti, that Wolfstein's fantasy frame dissolves completely and places him within the realm of drive.

Ginotti's drive to pursue eternal life inversely mirrors Wolfstein's drive to pursue death, thus staging the paradoxical notion that "every drive is a death drive." Like Coleridge's ancient mariner, Ginotti is a subject of pure drive. Having acquired the object of his desire (the elixir vitae), he is left without any substantial content that would give significance to eternal life, no objects of desire. In other words, without any socio-symbolic support for his unique mode of existence, he is driven to communicate his secret with the aim of inscribing it in the form of symbolic exchange. Only then can he "die." What Ginotti ultimately desires is symbolic castration, the proof of which becomes clear in his insistence, without any proof to sustain his belief, in the existence of God. Without the castrating cut of the paternal metaphor that would circumscribe his existence and provide it with meaning, Ginotti occupies an uncanny space between symbolic and real death. Like the Wandering Jew, Ginotti is *undead, non-mortal*; a being who retains the predicates of humanity but is abjected from the normative socio-cultural

context. The crucial moment for Wolfstein occurs when, before conferring upon him the secret of the elixir vitae, Ginotti demands that Wolfstein fulfill his vow: “Wolfstein, dost thou deny thy Creator?”—“Never, never.”—“Wilt thou not?”—“No, no,—any thing but that” (252). At this point the “frightful prince of terror” appears, Ginotti’s frame “moulder[s] to a gigantic skeleton” leaving only “two pale and ghastly flames” glaring from his “eyeless sockets,” and Wolfstein dies, the “power of hell” having no “influence” over him. Simply put, Ginotti is reduced to pure gaze, to the scopic drive that had defined him in life, while Wolfstein, upon accepting the paternal metaphor, suffers the “death” of symbolic castration.

Another way to approach this would be to consider what would happen if the subject achieved full consciousness of its unconscious desires. In a sense, this is what happens when Ginotti reveals all of his secrets to Wolfstein. Would such knowledge obliterate the subject? Wolfstein’s paranoiac idea that Ginotti is the “cause” of all his woes would actually be accurate, although his refusal to take responsibility for actions or change his behavior still marks his failure to engage in the process of acquiring increased self-awareness that Godwin stresses. Mladen Dolar argues:

As soon as the object, both as gaze and voice, appears as the pivotal point of narcissistic self-apprehension, it introduces a rupture at the core of self-presence. It is something that cannot itself be present, although the whole notion of presence is constructed around it and can be established only by its elision. So the subject, far from being constituted by self-grasp in the clarity of its presence to itself, only emerges in an impossible relation to that part that cannot be presentified. Only insofar as there is a Real (the Lacanian name for that part) as an impossibility of presence, is there a subject. . . . For the object embodies the very impossibility of attaining auto-affection, it

introduces the scission, the rupture in the middle of the full presence and refers it to a void. (15-16)

To identify fully with one's specular Other, then, is to fully identify with a void, of which the specular other is the materialization of a negative magnitude. And it is the function of fantasy to shield the subject from that void and provide a psychical apparatus that creates the field of reality in which the subject locates itself in language.

We can approach this dynamic from yet another angle, similarly related. In an attempt to tie together the loose narrative strands of the novel, the final paragraph of the novel informs us of an uncanny connection:

Ginotti is Nempere. Eloise is the sister of Wolfstein. Let then the memory of these victims to hell and malice live in the remembrance of those who can pity the wanderings of error; let remorse and repentance expiate the offences which arise from the delusion of the passions, and let endless life be sought from Him who alone can give an eternity of happiness. (252)

Many readers of *St. Irvyne* have had difficulty relating these two distinctive narrative strands to one another. Shelley himself, in a 19 November 1811 letter to his perplexed publisher Joseph Stockdale, defended the ending of *St Irvyne* by claiming: “[w]hat I mean as Rosicrucian is the elixir of eternal life which Ginotti had obtained. Mr Godwin's romance *St. Leon*, turns upon that superstition & on a re-examination you will perceive that Mountfort physically did kill Ginotti, which must appear from the latter's paleness” (Letters I, 21). Shelley's less than convincing explanation has prompted several critical interpretations that attempt to make sense of Shelley's purpose. Kenneth Neill Cameron, no great admirer of Shelley's early forays

into the Gothic, observes that "... if Nempere and Ginotti are the same person, he is killed twice, once by Mountfort in plot two and then again by the secret elixir in plot one. Nor is there any indication how this suddenly revealed relationship of characters makes any real connection between the two plots. There does not seem to be any interrelationship, either in action or in motivation, between the two even if Eloise is Wolfstein's sister and Nempere is really Ginotti" (33). David Halliburton is slightly less literal-minded when he supposes that "... Shelley means to convey the idea that Ginotti, killed by Mountfort, comes to his appointed meeting with Wolfstein as a spirit. Although Ginotti has already been, in his own words, "blasted to endless torment," he has still one mission on earth: to induce Wolfstein to renounce God as he has done. ... Having already been killed, he is rather being given that form which he will retain until the end of time" (44). John Murphy writes that "Shelley's intention might have been to suggest that Ginotti-Nempere is a corrupting force that seeks to destroy Wolfstein's soul and his sister's body, but since the novel is not fully worked out, one can only speculate about the relationship between the two plots" (31). Finch, again, offers a compelling solution:

The Rosicrucian motif appears to have served Shelley primarily as metaphor for the perpetuation and transmission of the authority of a preternaturally powerful Father-figure from one generation to the next, and it is sexual desire rather than secret alchemy which the novel implies is the most significant means of effecting this disciplinary transmission. . . . 'St. Irvyne' is thus, as both place and name, a site of monstrous inheritance: the family-space within which the ambivalent legacy of the dark Father is transferred from its privileged but cursed depository in one generation to whoever is to succeed in the next. (64-65)

As I have already discussed, I disagree with Finch's reading that Ginotti/Nempere represents a "powerful Father-figure." In establishing a speculative identity between Ginotti and Nempere, Shelley carries out a critique of phallic presence similar to his unmasking of Zastrozzi. By subjectivizing the sublime, paranoiac image of Zastrozzi held by Verezzi, Pietro Zastrozzi is shown to be an ordinary individual with his own desires, insecurities, and frailties. If Pietro is the castrated version of Zastrozzi, then Nempere is the castrated version of Ginotti. To Eloise, Nempere still retains his power to fascinate, but to Mountfort and Fitzeustace, he is just another libertine with a gambling problem who has taken advantage of an unsuspecting young women.

In what can only be described as a shocking turn of events, Mountfort returns one night to Eloise and Fitzeustace—"his clothes stained with blood, his countenance convulsed and pallid as death" (246)—and confesses that he has killed Nempere. By eliminating Nempere from the narrative (ironically through murder!)¹⁰, Eloise and Fitzeustace are free to pursue their sentimental relationship. Although Fitzeustace displays a passion for Eloise eerily similar to that of Wolfstein for Megalena, the key difference is that he looks beyond his melancholic fixation to engage in a sympathetic exchange of affection with Eloise:

Fitzeustace madly, passionately doted on Eloise: in all the energy of uncontaminated nature, he sought but the happiness of the object of his whole affections. He sought not to investigate the causes of his woe; sufficient was it for him to have found one who could understand, could sympathize in, the feelings and sensations which every child of nature whom the world's refinements and luxury have not vitiated, must feel,—that affection, that contempt of selfish gratification, which

every one, whose soul towers at all above the multitude, must acknowledge. He destined Eloise, in his secret soul, for his own. (243)

We might note here that Fitzeustace's "sympathy" in this passage extends only to Eloise's sympathetic identification with "his" feelings and sensations, but such is the tenor of sympathy for the young Shelley. Similarly, for Eloise:

Eloise, though a *something* prevented her from avowing them, *felt* the enthusiastic and sanguine ideas of Fitzeustace to be true: her soul, susceptible of the most exalted virtue and expansion, though cruelly nipped in its growth, thrilled with delight unexperienced before, when she found a being who could understand and perceive the truth of her feelings, and indeed *anticipate* them, as did Fitzeustace; . . . (247)

The juxtaposition of the gothic Wolfstein/Megalena/Ginotti narrative against the sentimental Eloise/Fitzeustace/Nempere narrative still leaves us with some unanswered questions, despite Shelley's attempt to resolve the difficulties in the concluding paragraph. While it is clear that Shelley intends to present a scenario and an aesthetic in which the "sexual relationship" (in the Lacanian sense) is possible and to identify the means of achieving it, we are left with several inconsistencies that cannot be explained away simply by accusing Shelley of sloppiness. If Wolfstein and Eloise are brother and sister, then why is he German and she French? Why when we first meet Eloise is she returning to St. Irvyne alone, a "poor outcast wanderer" to whom the "vice and unkindness of the world hath torn her tender heart"? (208) when the narrative that follows records the last five years of her life up to her marriage to Fitzeustace? The last paragraph of the novel before the conclusion states: "They soon agreed on a point of, in their eyes, so trifling importance, and arriving in England, tasted that happiness, which love and innocence alone

can give. Prejudice may triumph for awhile, but virtue will be eventually the conqueror” (250).

There is one explanation for these inconsistencies that would further strengthen my claim that the fundamental theme of the novel concerns the significance of fantasy as a protection against the real of the drive: the scandalous possibility that if we accept the speculative identities between Ginotti and Nempere, and between Ginotti and Wolfstein, then we must conclude that a speculative identity exists between Wolfstein and Nempere. Such a relation suggests that the “event too dreadful for narration” (which led to Wolfstein’s unexplained exile) is actually Wolfstein’s incestuous desire for his sister, a forbidden transgression which resulted in Eloise’s pregnancy. And furthermore, the sentimental narrative of Eloise and Fitzeustace can be interpreted as a scenario in which the trauma of this incestuous drive is mediated through the fantasy frame of Eloise. Thus the “event” is mediated in two different aesthetic modes—the Gothic and the sentimental—to mirror the respective fantasy frames of Wolfstein and Eloise. Wolfstein and Eloise exist in two different ideological universes, and Shelley sharpens this distinction by placing Wolfstein in the German lineage of gothic barbarism and by placing Eloise in the French lineage of gentrified sentimentalism. Wolfstein projects his unconscious desire upon Ginotti, while Eloise projects her unconscious desire upon Nempere in an attempt to transfer it from Wolfstein.

The connection between Wolfstein and Nempere is not arbitrary and is supported in several moments in the text of the novel, the most obvious being in the way Nempere seduces Eloise:

“Why,” said Nempere, “are we taught to believe that the union of two who love each other is wicked, unless authorized by certain rites and ceremonials, which certainly cannot change the tenour of sentiments which it is destined that these two people should entertain of each other?”

“It is, I suppose,” answered Eloise, calmly, “because God has willed it so; besides,” continued she, blushing at she knew not what, “it would—“

“And is then the superior and towering soul of Eloise subjected to sentiments and prejudices so stale and vulgar as these?” interrupted Nempere indignantly. “Say, Eloise, do not you think it an insult to two souls, united to each other in the irrefragable covenants of love and congeniality, to promise, in the sight of a Being whom they know not, that fidelity which certain otherwise?”

. . . “Surely, the adoration of two beings unfettered by restraint, must be most acceptable! . . .” (230-31)

And recall Wolfstein’s appeal to Megalena, which I cited earlier:

. . . “And is my adored Megalena a victim then to prejudice? Does she believe, that the Being who created us gave us gave us passions which never were to be satiated? Does she suppose that Nature created us to become the tormentors of each other?” (188)

The similarities here should not shock us, but offer a compelling insight into the future poet of *Laon and Cythna* and *The Cenci*. My discussion does not focus on the psycho-biographical implications of Shelley’s work, but it is worth noting here that Shelley could be working through some of his own unconscious tensions regarding his incestuous desire for his sister Elizabeth, a point explored by James Bieri in his recent biography of Shelley.¹¹ Such a reading also brings to bear the incestuous intellectual and familial resonances of Shelley’s surrogate father-figure, William Godwin, and his eventual marriage to Mary Godwin. As Anne Williams remarks in *Art of Darkness*: “‘Gothic,’ in contrast to other forms of romance (or any mode of literary expression), is determined—indeed ‘overdetermined’—by the rules of the

family. . . . Gothic plots are family plots; Gothic romance is family romance” (22). Although Shelley had not yet met Mary during the time he was writing the novel, the unconscious desires that circulate in the subtexts of his early Gothic works casts a provocative shadow over the dynamics of his future familial relationships.

I end this chapter with a naive question: why do these characters who are freed from prohibitions end up in such despair? Why are they so monstrous? Shouldn't the suspension of prohibitions result in a free-flowing wave of Marcusian (or Promethean) Eros? Far from representing a “dark Father figure,” we should assume precisely the opposite: that Ginotti/Nempere represents the *absence* of the father and his prohibitions. The paradox of prohibition is that in addition to its often repressive or tyrannical effects, prohibitions also function as a means to pacify the subject's unbearable relation to *jouissance*. In other words, the phallic function both cuts one off from the Real but also protects one from its traumatic effects. Through fantasy, the obsessive fixation of drive is replaced by the metonymic movement of desire, which is itself created because of the differential structure of language. Žižek argues that “the unapproachable Thing which resists subjectivization, this point of failure of every identification, is ultimately *the subject itself*. (*Everything* 245). In *St. Irvyne*, Shelley articulates “this point of failure of every identification” by locating it in the interplay of gazes and the phantasmatic content that Wolfstein and Eloise project into those inscrutable gazes of the Other. Neither is able to confront the truth of their forbidden desire nor reconcile the incestuous,

“unapproachable Thing” within a normative heterosexual circuit of desire. At the risk of misreading Shelley’s Humean axiom that “nothing exists but as it is perceived” (*SPP* 506) from his essay “On Life,” we should take this “nothing” literally—as void or vacancy—rather than as *all things* exist only as they are perceived, as Shelley no doubt meant¹². The void of the subject and of the Other, the “nothing” that acquires positive content when the subject attempts to fill the void or create a veil of fantasy as protection against it, is the preoccupation of Shelley’s early work and returns again and again in his mature poetry as testament to the enduring significance of Shelley’s gothic sensibility.

¹ The significance, however, of the borrowings from Godwin and Schiller are deployed for different reasons in *St. Irvyne*. The novel lacks the depth of philosophical, historical, and cultural critique that inform those works. Shelley encountered Godwin first as a novelist and had not yet made his turn to Godwinian rationalism. The first mention of Godwin's works in Shelley's letters appears in a 26 November 1811 letter to Elizabeth Hitchener. Shelley recommends to Hitchener that she read, in the following order, *St. Leon* ("is very good"), *The Enquirer* ("is good very good"), *Political Justice* ("is long, sceptical good"), and *Caleb Williams* ("is good"). Although he may have encountered Godwin's *Political Justice* while at Eton, in a 16 January 1812 letter to Godwin he emphasizes that "I have desired the publications of my earlier youth to be sent to you, you will perceive that *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* were written prior to my acquaintance with your writings." In a previous letter, 10 January 1812, Shelley explains:

From a reader I became I [a] writer of Romances; 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. I shall desire them to be sent to you; do not however consider this as any obligation to yourself to misapply your valuable time.—It is now a period of more than two years since first I saw your inestimable book on 'Political Justice'; it opened to my mind fresh & more extensive views, it materially influenced my character, and I rose from its perusal a wiser and a better man.—I was no longer the votary of Romance; till then I had existed in an ideal world; now I found that in this universe of ours was enough to excite the interest of the heart, enough to employ the discussions of Reason. I beheld in short that I had duties to perform.—Conceive the effect which the Political justice would have upon a mind before jealous of its independance, and participating somewhat singularly in a peculiar susceptibility.—My age is now nineteen; at the period to which I allude I was at Eton.—No sooner had I formed the principles which I now profess, than I was anxious to disseminate their benefits. (227-28)

² Not surprisingly, many Shelley scholars have criticized *St. Irvyne* in the same disparaging terms as *Zastrozzi*. Kenneth Neill Cameron dismisses Shelley's early Gothic works for their "inherent ridiculousness" (28); David Halliburton argues that "St. Irvyne shows little if any advance over the earlier work in the development of ideas" (47); John Murphy notes that "one should not anticipate significant change in the young author's techniques or thematic interests until *Queen Mab* appears" (25); and Jerrold Hogle claims that Shelley's fiction "appears to be a mass of blunders, especially by the classic standards of 'realistic' novels" ("Stream," 78).

³ John Murphy, for example, notes that “Distinct problems arise from two irreconcilable plots, loose development of themes, and vague relationships between central characters” (29). Frederick Frank, however, in the Introduction to his edition of *St. Irvyne*, suggests that the narrative omissions and inconsistencies in the novel playfully mimic similar stylistic oddities in other Gothic and sentimental novels (xiii).

⁴ Shelley’s radical skepticism itself, of course, creates a self-generating ontological veil, the contradictions of which I will discuss in chapter four on *Prometheus Unbound*.

⁵ Another illuminating angle from which to contrast the aesthetic differences and similarities between Shelley’s poetry and prose of the period is to examine his treatment of similar themes in the Esdaile Notebook (much of which was written concurrently with his novels), a collection of poems that remained unpublished during his lifetime but which contain many instances where Shelley expresses poetically similar themes that appear in his gothic novels.

⁶ Anne Williams, in *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*, argues that the gothic cannot be defined by genre or conventions, but rather as a poetic mode, where “language both mediates the unspeakable ‘other’ and shows the impossibility of that mediation. . . . Gothic is a discourse that shows the cracks in the system that constitutes consciousness, ‘reality’” (66). Again, this excellent, recent study of the Gothic and Romanticism ignores Shelley, but his poetry illustrates perfectly the Gothic aesthetic Williams articulates.

⁷ The one significant exception would be, of course, *Prometheus Unbound*, where the union of Prometheus and Asia signifies the triumph of “eternal Love” over the cycle of vengeance and hatred that has consumed Prometheus and Jupiter for over 3,000 years. I will confront this issue in chapter four and call into question this example of the fulfillment of the Lacanian “sexual relationship.”

⁸ See, for example, *Political Justice* (V.2 and 3) for Godwin’s analysis of the corrupted and “unnatural” upbringing and education of princes.

⁹ Wordsworth’s attempts to minimize the influence of Coleridge’s poems in the volume speaks to this tension, as is Coleridge’s own revisions of the poem which sought to reduce its “obscurity” and “strangeness.” In the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, *The Rime* was placed at the beginning of the volume, in the second edition Wordsworth had it moved to end. See R.L. Brett’s and A.R. Jones’s “Introduction” (pp. xix-liv) to their edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* for more on this fascinating struggle.

¹⁰ I’m tempted here to draw a connection between Mountfort creating through murder the possibility for the ideal love between Eloise and Fitzeustace and Demogorgon’s role in creating the possibility for Prometheus and Asia to fulfill their love relationship by eliminating Jupiter as the impediment. Such a reading may do more violence than is warranted to *Prometheus Unbound*, but the structural implications are similar.

¹¹ See James Bieri, *Percy Bysshe Shelley* (p. 142) for more on Shelley’s possible incestuous desire for his sister Elizabeth.

¹² In Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry*, he does revise this phrase to read "All things exist as they are perceived, at least in relation to the percipient" (*SPP*, 533).

CHAPTER THREE

The Wandering Jew:
Superstition and Subjectivity

Edward Dowden, one of Shelley's earliest biographers, noted that the character of the Wandering Jew "haunted Shelley's imagination, and was not lost to view in after years" (20). The Wandering Jew appears explicitly, though under different guises and names, as the Stranger in "Ghastly; or The Avenging Demon" (1810), as the speaker in "The wandering Jew's Soliloquy" (?1809-10), as Paulo in *The Wandering Jew* (1810), as Ahasuerus in *Queen Mab* (1813), *Alastor* (1816), and *Hellas* (1822); and as a mysterious outsider in the prose fragment *The Assassins* (1814). So not only does the Wandering Jew figure prominently in Shelley's earliest work, he also appears in *Hellas*, Shelley's last completed poem, thus confirming the enduring significance of gothic motifs and themes throughout his career. But the Wandering Jew's presence and the significance of his struggle is also implicitly felt in many other works, most significantly *Prometheus Unbound*: as the protagonist in *The Wandering Jew*, Paulo's endurance of the torments inflicted by a perceived implacable deity and the complexity of his psychological dissonance establishes him as the earliest analogue for the character of Prometheus, both of which fuse the eternal suffering of an outcast with the firm defiance of Milton's Satan.

In each iteration of the legend in Shelley's poetry, however, the significance of the Wandering Jew changes in accordance with the ideological work Shelley has him perform. These different registers are important in

understanding how Shelley manipulates the supernatural and the superstitious elements in his works within the context of psychological transference and desire. But there is also an ambivalence in Shelley towards the Wandering Jew that is not easily reconciled. In *Romantic Returns: Superstition, Imagination, History*, Deborah Elise White identifies a crucial tension in Romantic poetics between the demystification of superstition and the liberation of the imaginative power that creates superstition:

Pre-Romantic and Romantic writings both participate in modernity's work of demystification even as they oppose it. They do this by subsuming superstition to a more general figure of imagination or, an equivalent figure for the pre-Romantics, fancy. At the level of imagination, superstition can be explained as an effect rather than experienced as a cause. The thematization of its errors is, therefore, almost always a stalking horse—or a red herring. The real thesis of the *romance à thèse* is the “truth” that imagination lies at the origin of all superstitious errors. It is, so to speak, the *aufhebung* or sublation of superstition—that which both negates and preserves it in a presumably more enlightened synthesis. . . . Yet, from the very inception of a “pre”-Romanticism, imagination has awakened the suspicion that it is, after all, only another superstition—less a model of demystification than the institution of a new mystery. (10-11)

This split between superstition as a reified form of error and superstition as the index of an underlying imaginative productivity that is itself susceptible to further reification, provides an illuminating context in which to consider Shelley's treatment of the Wandering Jew. Two examples, one from *Queen Mab* and the other from *Hellas*, illustrate succinctly the tension White describes and will add further context to my reading of *The Wandering Jew*.

Queen Mab, generally considered to be Shelley's first major poetic achievement, is a didactic poem of 9 cantos in which Shelley articulates a radical atheistic-materialist perspective from the point of view of an all-

knowing Fairy who educates a young girl while she dreams concerning the secrets of the past, present, and future,—an irony in itself worth mentioning and which also speaks to Shelley’s efforts to resist the reification of his own metaphysical grounds. Whereas Paulo, in *The Wandering Jew*, occupies an uncertain position in relation to the God he believes to be punishing him—his psychological angst is purely self-generated—Ahasureus in *Queen Mab* is a figure of “fearless resignation” and possesses the “wisdom of old age,” having been witness to the history of the perpetual “crime and misery, / Which flows from God’s own faith” (VII.236-37). Echoing the defiance of Milton’s Satan, Ahasuerus declares:

But my soul,
 From sight and sense of the polluting woe
 Of tyranny, had long learned to prefer
 Hell’s freedom to the servitude of heaven.
 Therefore I rose, and dauntlessly began
 My lonely and unending pilgrimage,
 Resolved to wage unwearable war
 With the almighty tyrant, and to hurl
 Defiance at his impotence to harm
 Beyond the curse I bore. The very hand
 That barred my passage to the peaceful grave
 Has crushed the earth to misery, and given
 Its empire to the chosen of slaves. (VII.193-204)

Of interest here is that although Mab has summoned the phantasm of Ahasureus to serve as witness to the tyranny of the Christian God and to chronicle the history of misery his followers have perpetuated in his name,—in much the same way Paulo will function in *The Wandering Jew*—Mab dismisses him with a wave of her wand as an error in human thought, “a ghost of ages gone” (VIII.42):

The Fairy waved her wand:
 Ahasuerus fled
 Fast as the shapes of mingled shade and mist,
 That lurk in the glens of a twilight grove,
 Flee from the morning beam:
 The matter of which dreams are made
 Not more endowed with actual life
 Than this phantasmal portraiture
 Of wandering human thought. (VII.267-75)

Reiman and Fraistat note that Shelley employs the Wandering Jew here “as a means of discrediting Christian values and beliefs and insisting upon the fictionality of its central events. These events and the existence of God are true from the perspective of the Wandering Jew only because he is himself ‘a wondrous phantom’ (VII.64), part of the larger fiction constructed by Christianity” (CPPBS II, 575). But yet, in *Hellas* (1822), a drama concerning the Greek struggle for independence for which Shelley had great hopes, Shelley returns to the legend and seems to figure Ahasuerus as an embodiment of thought itself. When the tyrant Mahmud (the Turkish potentate), having been troubled by three disturbing visions, summons Ahasuerus for council, Ahasuerus informs him:

The future and the past are idle shadows
 Of thought’s eternal flight—they have no being.
 Nought is but that which feels itself to be. (783-85)

...

. . . Thought
 Alone, and its quick elements, Will, Passion,
 Reason, Imagination, cannot die;
 They are, what that which they regard, appears,
 The stuff whence mutability can weave
 All that it hath dominion o’er, worlds, worms,
 Empires and superstitions— (792-801)

As George K. Anderson remarks:

Nowhere, apart from *Hellas*, is Ahasuerus such a doughty exponent of the philosophy of the abstract ideal. No other writer of the romantic age, major or minor, has within the short span of a dozen years so transformed an important creature of his poetic imagination. It is almost possible to say that Shelley has laid down the basic framework within which move all of the later nineteenth-century aspects of the Wandering Jew. (187)

And yet, still further complicating the issue, Shelley, in his Notes to *Hellas*, explains his representation of the Wandering Jew:

I could easily have made the Jew a regular conjuror I have preferred to represent the Jew as disclaiming all pretension or even belief in supernatural agency and as tempting Mahmud to that state of mind in which ideas may be supposed to assume the force of sensations through the confusion of thought with the objects of thought, and the excess of passion animating the creations of imagination.

It is a sort of natural magic, susceptible of being exercised in a degree by any one who should have made himself master of the secret associations of another's thoughts. (*SPP*, 463)

So does Ahasuerus here represent the “exponent of the philosophy of the abstract ideal” or does he, as Shelley suggests in his Note, represent a clever practitioner of mental manipulation who uses his “natural magic” to deceive Mahmud? If, following White’s distinction, the Ahasuerus of *Queen Mab* corresponds to a demystification of superstition, then the Ahasuerus of *Hellas* corresponds to the tension between demystification and the “institution of a new mystery.” And Paulo, protagonist of *The Wandering Jew*, a poem written before *Queen Mab* and *Hellas*, exists in the imaginative space between demystification, imagination, and reification. His status as both subject and superstition remains undecidable throughout the text, able to contain multiple registers of significance depending upon the frame of reference from which we interpret his story and his actions.

In the preface to the poem, Shelley states that the Wandering Jew is “an imaginary personage, noted for the various and contradictory traditions which have prevailed concerning him” and that he is a “groundless” superstition (43). What then are we to make of Shelley’s purpose in devoting an entire poem to this superstition? The reader is immediately conditioned to question the veracity of what follows and to expect perhaps that the poem will follow in the Radcliffean tradition of the “supernatural explained,” in which Paulo is shown to be a fraud or delusional, which would shatter the fantastical reality established in the poem and restore the context to an empirically verifiable reality. While the poem does on occasion make gestures in that direction, supernatural elements appear throughout and are experienced by characters other than Paulo.

When supernatural occurrences are explained, there is often a sense of disappointment, that the explanation is somehow insufficient despite its plausibility (which is another way of saying that the alterity of the Other is simply re-assimilated into the field of symbolic reality). Shelley is less interested in debunking the supernatural, choosing instead to represent the insidious way the supernatural comes into being for the subject, how it functions in psychological and ideological contexts, how it serves as a vehicle for desire, and how the undecidability of the supernatural becomes reified into superstitious formations. Superstitions and the supernatural are very “real” to those who believe in them, and to simply explain them away in terms of an objective or independent reality runs the risk, as White suggests, of mystifying the ideological ground that supports the supposed reality that

replaces it. In his brilliant reading of Shelley's major poetry in *Shelley's Process*, Jerrold Hogle argues that Shelley's poetry is driven by a process of "radical transference," a "ceaseless transition between elements of thought" (vii) where form and content are continually destabilized as they pass through each other in the creation of new forms of thought. This practice of "deterritorialization," to use Deleuze's and Guattari's term, provides an aesthetic vehicle through which Shelley's iconoclastic aims and linguistic skepticism find expression. And Shelley's different figurations of the Wandering Jew exemplify this practice at the level of literary convention and genre. Shelley often takes an established literary form, empties it of its ideological content, and establishes a fresh context in which the traces of that former context introduce a productive tension between residual and emergent forms of consciousness.¹ Paulo retains the traces of the Wandering Jew legend, but is also liberated from those anti-Semitic conventions and is transfigured into both an icon of resistance and a desiring subject in his own right.

For this reason alone it is surprising that the poem has received scant critical attention, but understandable given the poem's complicated textual history. Few of Shelley's poems present greater textual problems than the *The Wandering Jew*. In part this is due to the claim of Shelley's cousin Thomas Medwin that the work was a collaboration between himself and Shelley. But with the recent publication of Donald H. Reiman's and Neil Fraistat's authoritative edition of Shelley's work in *The Complete Poetry of Percy*

Bysshe Shelley (vol. I, 2000), much of the textual confusion has been laid to rest, with the evidence pointing to Shelley as the sole author.²

Another reason for the lack of critical attention is the characteristic disdain heaped upon Shelley's early gothic works. For Kenneth Neil Cameron, the poem combines "the worst features of *Original Poems* [1810] in long narrative form" (34). George K. Anderson, author of the one indispensable study in English on the Wandering Jew legend, declares that the poem's "florid romantic verse" and "heated lyricism" results in verse that is "uninspired," a plot that's "silly" and a whole that is simply "bad" (187). Reiman characterizes the poem as "immature and worthless," (*Shelley*, 19) although he does recognize its importance as Shelley's first effort to construct a long poem that demonstrates budding Shelleyan characteristics such as allusiveness and a tendency to suggest rather than state intervening events in the plot. Reiman and Fraistat do, however, in *CPPBS* point to "the diction, the pace, and quality of verse, the metaphysical, religious, and psychological concerns, and the great intensity of the four-canto poem" (199) as marks of Shelley's developing style.

The plot of the poem is quite simple. Canto I opens with the arrival of the protagonist Paulo (the Wandering Jew) to seventeenth-century Padua. Paulo is drawn to the ringing of church bells where he observes a distressed young novitiate, Rosa, about to undergo the rite of investiture. Paulo quickly intervenes and sweeps Rosa away to a mountain retreat and takes her as his mistress. In the succeeding cantos, Paulo relates his history and reveals his identity as the Wandering Jew to Rosa and to his traveling companion

Victorio, who also falls in love with Rosa. Paulo's harrowing tale of persecution by a vengeful God and his several attempts at suicide shock and fascinate his listeners. In the final canto, Victorio himself attempts to commit suicide because of Rosa's unrequited love, but is persuaded not to by a Witch who instead offers him a potion that will poison Paulo, in exchange for his soul and allegiance to the Devil. When Victorio returns to kill Paulo he mistakenly poisons Rosa instead. The fragment breaks off as Paulo, hovering over the body of Rosa, demands answers to questions that have plagued him during the course of his miserable existence:

Who is the God of Mercy?—where
 Enthroned the power to save?
 Reigns he above the viewless air?
 Lives he beneath the grave?
 To him would I lift my suppliant moan,
 That power should hear my harrowing groan;—
 Is it then Christ's terrific Sire?
 Ah! I have felt his burning ire,
 I feel,—I feel it now.— (IV.408-16)

The final three lines are ambiguous, given that Paulo's God is absent throughout the entire poem, leaving us to wonder from where, and from whom, the "fiendish" voice of judgment comes:

"O Demon! I am thine!" he cried.
 A hollow fiendish voice replied,
 "Come! for thy doom is misery." (IV.427-29)

In chapter one, I argued that in his first gothic novel, *Zastrozzi*, Shelley employs a two-fold narrative-critical strategy: first, to demonstrate that gothic stereotypes such as the hyper-sexualized Matilda and the demonically vengeful Zastrozzi are images drawn from anti-Jacobin paranoid fantasy;

and second, to then subjectivize those images by giving them an agency that allows Shelley to explore the inter-subjective dynamics that generate such paranoiac fantasies. This same strategy is also evident in *The Wandering Jew*, where Paulo is given a voice and a platform to express his subjectivity, far exceeding any agency given to his literary precursors. Where *Zastrozzi* explores the psychology of paranoiac fantasy, *The Wandering Jew* expands this exploration to include the transmission and perpetuation of superstition. Shelley's reflexive skepticism towards these fantastical images invite us to look beyond the diegetic reality established in the poem and to recognize the ideological and psychological mechanisms that produce and sustain such reality.

When, in Canto III, Paulo relates his history to Rosa and Victorio, the basic facts of his story closely follow the legend of the Wandering Jew as it was first condensed from a number of apocryphal sources into writing by Roger of Wendover in the thirteenth century:

“How can I paint that dreadful day,
 That time of terror and dismay,
 When, for our sins, a Saviour died,
 And the meek Lamb was crucified!
 ‘Twas on that day, as borne along
 To slaughter by the insulting throng,
 Infuriate for Deicide,
 I mock’d our Saviour, and cried,
 ‘Go! Go!’ ‘Ah! I will go,’ he said,
 ‘Where scenes of endless bliss invite,
 To the blest regions of the light;
 I go—but thou shalt here remain,
 Nor see thy dying day
 Till I return again.” (III.9-22)

Here Paulo carries the guilt of Christ's death as it functions in the anti-Semitic imaginary, a guilt he fully internalizes into his own superego. Although a Jew, Paulo despairs of having mocked "our Saviour," the "our" confirming his identification with Christianity while also posited as its exception. Paulo is thus caught within an indefinite judgment, a *neither/and* relationship: neither Christian nor Jew, yet something of each; just as he is neither dead nor alive but *undead*, an *unJew* and *unChristian*³. Placed in a subjective position outside of, yet fully submitted to, the law, the voice of the obscene supereogic supplement begins to speak:

Then full on my remembrance came
 Those words despised, alas! too late!
 The horrors of my endless fate
 Flash'd on my soul and shook my frame;
 They scorch'd my breast as with a flame
 Of unextinguishable fire;
 An exquisitely torturing pain
 Of frenzying anguish fired my brain.
 By keen remorse and anguish driven,
 I called for vengeance down from Heaven.
 But, ah! the all-wasting hand of Time,
 Might never wear away my crime! (III.50-61)

...
 The self-inflicted torturing pangs
 Of conscience lent their scorpion fangs,
 Still life prolonging, after life was fled. (III.67-69)

As Paulo continues his tale he speaks of being "Rack'd by the tortures of the mind" (III.160) and longing to "plunge beneath / The mansions of repelling death!" (III.161). After attempting suicide, Paulo exclaims: "Oh! would that I had waked no more! / Vain wish! I lived again to feel / Torments more fierce than those of hell! (III.192-94). Throughout the first three Cantos, Paulo represents a passive, though hystericized, subject who endures his suffering at

the mercy of an unmerciful, vengeful God. He is an icon of elegiac resignation more than of sublime resistance at this point in the poem, and the more we learn of his suffering the more attention it draws to what Shelley conceived to be the tyrannical injustice of the God of orthodox religious belief. Emptied of his anti-Semitic content and positioned as a mirror that reflects the irrationality and cruelty of religious orthodoxy, Paulo functions as a screen upon which others project their own desire, including the reader.

In Lacanian terminology, the supernatural represents an excess of the Imaginary over the Symbolic; that is, a breakdown in “symbolic efficiency” (explanatory power) leads to the creation of an overabundance of images that attempt to account for and visualize the gaps in the Symbolic so that the subject can make some kind of sense, however horrifying, of the uncertainty and fear when one experiences when confronted with the uncertainty of a traumatic event. The gothic aesthetic exaggerates this process by literalizing the figurative language and fantastical images that are produced when language fails to symbolize the unrepresentable: i.e., the unconscious, desire, the subject, the Other. And if the Gothic seems absurd it is because when metaphor is literalized its supposed equivalence to the object, or psychological process it describes, is shown to be radically insufficient, which leads to even more elaborate images in an attempt to fill the gap.

This incongruous relation between the Imaginary and the Symbolic manifests itself as the Real. So when Lacan insists that the Real is that which “resists symbolization,” and that it is an index of “impossibility,” we must remember that the Real manifests itself at the moment when the *impossible*

and the *necessary* converge. Lacan's point is that the impossible happens, and when it does happen (what Alain Badiou would call an "event") this traumatic irruption cannot be accounted for in terms of a given symbolic universe. The gothic aesthetic is, of course, replete with these kinds of traumatic events and horrifying images. And because they appear as the impossible, they are often perceived as evil. The very mechanism of representation posits its own limits and designates a certain beyond which it refers to as "unrepresentable." In this case, we can say that the place of something that has no image is designated symbolically; and it is this very designation that endows whatever finds itself in this place with the special power of fascination. Since this unrepresentable is usually associated with the transgression of the given limits of the Symbolic, it is spontaneously perceived as "evil," or at least disturbing.

For Shelley, the significance of the Wandering Jew is that he is a being who finds himself in that uncanny space where impossibility and necessity intersect (that is, where the impossible encounter retroactively assumes a position of necessity), not only in his own relationship to an external power whose motives he cannot comprehend, but also in his relation to others for whom he himself is an incomprehensible being. One encounters him precisely *as* the impossible, and his terrifying presence as an inscrutable Other sets in motion a complex series of psycho-social responses that attempt to normalize his presence and bring it back into the fabric of symbolic consistency, even if that means defining him as an exception, an outsider. That is, he is appropriated into the symbolic as an exception that gives form to the

impossibility he signifies. Such is the formula for superstition. But Shelley complicates his status as an outsider by reframing his position from one of exception to one of immanence, a projection of Christian ideology that gives form to fears and desires that cannot be openly articulated. Although no one would mistake the aesthetic quality of Shelley's early gothic productions like *The Wandering Jew* with his mature poetic accomplishments, Shelley's approach to the legend is an ambitious attempt to dramatize the same kind of psychological complexities found in his later work, but without the illusory safety net that his budding idealism will provide later (but that will create difficulties of its own).

For the Wandering Jew himself, in a more general or allegorical sense his story also stages the impossibility and necessity of entering the Symbolic and becoming a subject. His resistance against God, the paternal metaphor, is a resistance to interpellation into a socio-symbolic context, Christianity, that excludes him as a Jew. He is dead in the Symbolic, but alive in the Imaginary, immortal in the sense that he represents a past that refuses to be appropriated into an emergent ideology, a past that the present must retain as a perverse warning that to resist Christianity is tantamount to subjective destitution. Like Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, Paulo's "death in life" is the supplemental image that confers significance to the "life in death" promised by Christianity.

Shelley immediately complicates this mutually exclusive relation by establishing two very different settings through which Paulo travels: an idyllic countryside and a church where a young girl named Rosa is about to

unwillingly enter her novitiate. The poem opens with an idealized description of the surrounding countryside and its inhabitants:

So soft the clime, so balm the air,
So pure and genial were the skies,
In sooth 'twas almost Paradise,— (I.13-16)

This pre-lapsarian setting describes “days of innocence and joy” where “peasants danced upon the lawn” and “thrill to amorous ecstasy” . . . “Subdued by the pow’r of resistless Love.” They are “Free from the world’s tumultuous cares, / From pale distrust, from hopes and fears, / Baneful concomitants of time,—” (I.47-49). The image of this harmonious totality is interrupted by the emergence of a “stranger” (whom we later find out is Paulo) who introduces the threat of disruption: “Too soon shall the tempest’s blast the year, / And sin’s eternal winter reign around” (I.56-57). Like the narrator of *Zastrozzi*, the narrator in *The Wandering Jew* appears to be complicit with the Christian point of view and identifies the arrival of Paulo with the arrival of sin. This allows Shelley to present the poem from a point of view that is not overtly antagonistic to Christian morality, while at the same time establishing a context for the reflexive skepticism and irony that subsequent events invite us to consider.

At the very moment the stranger enters the scene, he is startled by church bells and is immediately overcome with anxiety and dread:

But, hark! A convent’s vesper bell—
It seemed to be a very spell—
The stranger checked his courser’s rein,
And listened to the mournful sound:
Listened—and paused—and paused again:
A thrill of pity and of pain

Through his inmost soul had past,
While gushed the tear-drops silently and fast. (I.76-83)

Paulo is drawn towards the church, where the mood and atmosphere stands in sharp contrast to the pastoral harmony of the countryside:

Peal upon peal the music floats—
Now they list still as death to the dying notes;
Whilst the soft voices of the choir,
Exalt the soul from base desire;
Till it mounts on unearthly pinions free,
Dissolved in heavenly ecstasy.

Now a dead stillness reigned around,
Uninterrupted by a sound;
Save when in the deadened response ran,
The last faint echoes down the aisle,
Reverberated through the pile, (I.110-20)

Even though the narrator describes the Mass with solemn piety, it stands in stark contrast to libidinal energy and natural harmony described in the opening scene, where “base desire” is tempered by joy and sympathy and sublimated into “amorous ecstasy.” “Death” is the operative word in the description, from the “deadened response” of the “still as death” congregation to the “dying notes” of the choir. The repressive atmosphere of the ceremony is further exemplified by the nun who is overseeing the ceremony:

Now her dark and penetrating eyes
Were raised in suppliance to heaven,
And now her bosom heaved with sighs,
As if to human weakness given. (I.128-31)

The abbess is described in terms not unlike the demons we will encounter later:

Her stern, severe, yet beauteous brow

Frowned on all who stood below;
 And the fire which flashed from her steady gaze,
 As it turned on the listening crowd its rays,
 Superior virtue told,—
 Virtue as pure as heaven's own dew,
 By which, untainted, never knew,
 To pardon weaker mould.
 The heart though chaste and cold as snow—
 'Twere faulty to be virtuous so. (I.132-41)

As the opening scene makes clear, the harmonious consistency of the idyllic landscape and its inhabitants is only possible when viewed from a distance. As we move closer to the church and are introduced to individual characters, the scenery and mood shifts and begins to reflect their cognitive dissonance, anxiety, and repression. The ideal image exists then only as an idea in the poem and one that is never encountered in the real experiences of any of the characters. One can imagine cinematically this movement from ideality to reality, a Romantic noir so to speak, as the wide angle shot of the idyllic landscape gradually pans across the scene and slowly zooms in on the stranger (Paulo) and then into the church. The harmony initially presented, which is more pagan than Christian, is shown to be an illusion, or at least an image that is at odds with the pious solemnity of the church, and draws our attention to the deceptive lure of the image. Beneath the suppliant, virtuous image of the abbess flows a libidinal energy that belies her austere self-presentation. Similarly, when we first meet Rosa she too is described in ideal images. As the “fainting novice” is brought to the altar:

The roses from her cheek are fled,
 But there the lily reigns instead;
 Light as a sylph's, her form confest,
 Beneath the drapery of her vest,

A perfect grace and symmetry;
 Her eyes, with rapture form'd to move,
 To melt with tenderness and love,
 Or beam with sensibility,
 To Heaven were raised in pious prayer,
 A silent eloquence of woe; (I.148-57)

...

They dragged her to the altar's pale,
 The traveller leant against the rail,
 And gazed with eager eye,—
 His cheek was flushed with sudden glow,
 On his brow sate a darker shade of woe,
 As a transient expression fled by. (I.168-73)

As Reiman and Fraistat point out, Shelley likely modeled Rosa on several characters from his favorite gothic novels, including Radcliffe's *The Italian*, Henry Ireland's *The Abbess*, and perhaps took her name from "Rosa Matilda" (Charlotte Dacre), the author of *Confession's of a Nun of St. Omer* and *Zoflyoa*, whose Victoria shares many resemblances to Matilda in Shelley's *Zastrozzi*.⁴ The Gothic is, of course, populated with young damsels in distress who flee a strong paternal figure or repressive social structure, but I want to draw attention to another text that adds psychological context to Rosa's predicament: Diderot's *La Religieuse*. It's uncertain whether or not Shelley read *La Religieuse*, but he admired Diderot's philosophical works (whose influence is most readily apparent in *Queen Mab*). In the young novitiate Suzanne, Diderot fashions a character that exhibits, like Rosa, a passionate resistance to church establishment and who displays a psychological depth that far exceeds most of the one-dimensional characters found in many gothic novels, women who are acted upon but possess little agency of their own. On the surface, Rosa does not appear to rise above the level of a stereotype. She is

young, beautiful, and a victim of her circumstances. But if we allow Rosa the benefit of a will and the means to express her desire, then I argue that such a maneuver creates an additional context for the poem's actions and deepens the psychological implications. Like Diderot's Suzanne, Shelley's young novice Rosa conceals a subterranean realm of desire that, although never explicitly represented, nevertheless produces a series of effects in the poem.

The ringing of the vesper bell links together two significant events of the poem. The bell is a signifier of interpellation and misrecognition for both Paulo and Rosa. Paulo is reminded of his status as a wandering outcast and Rosa is horrified at the prospect of becoming a novice. Neither is an identity of their choosing. We've already seen how Paulo's disposition worsens as he hears the church bells, and as Rosa is about to be brought to the altar she displays a passionate outburst of fear and resistance:

At length she shrieked aloud,
 She dashed from the supporting nun,
 Ere the fatal rite was done,
 And plunged into the crowd.
 Confusion reigned throughout the throng,
 Still the novice fled along,
 Impelled by frantic fear,
 When the maddened traveller's eager grasp
 In firmest yet in wildest clasp
 Arrested her career. (I.185-94)

Thus we have the conjunction of three traumatic responses: Paulo's self-recognition as wandering outcast, Rosa's resistance to church authority, and the anxious confusion of the congregation. In each case, the circuit of normative desire has been shattered by an eruption of *jouissance*. And it is at this very moment, when conventional morality is disrupted and the

conflicting desires of everyone involved converge, that the figure of the Wandering Jew materializes. This establishes the ground for a dual reality in the poem: on the one hand, we have the story of Paulo and his history of persecution; and on the other hand, we have an examination of how figures such as the Wandering Jew come into being as a materialization of inherent fears and desires. For Rosa, Paulo is a projection of wish-fulfillment; but for the church hierarchy and the congregation, the Wandering Jew represents the dangers of transgression, and, more specifically, a temptation that threatens young women's virtue, as it is defined by the church.

When in the Preface Shelley points to the “various and contradictory traditions” (43) that have been generated concerning the Wandering Jew, he recognizes that the Wandering Jew is essentially a signifier without a signified, an empty vessel into which an ideology can externalize antagonisms that must remain unacknowledged for society to maintain its consistency. As Bruce Felsenstein points out, the legend of the Wandering Jew “underlines the sense of difference between the host group and Other, while simultaneously defending the vested beliefs of the host group. The Wandering Jew as Other, it is now generally recognized, is primarily a projection of Christian values and beliefs” (61). And as Žižek, in *Tarrying with the Negative*, explains:

The element which holds together a given community cannot be reduced to the point of symbolic identification: the bond linking together its members always implies a shared relationship towards a Thing, towards Enjoyment incarnated. This relationship towards the Thing, structured by means of fantasies, is what is at stake when we speak of the menace to our “way of life” presented by the Other: it is

what is threatened when, for example, a white Englishman is panicked because of the growing presence of “aliens.” (201)

In other words: “Society doesn’t exist. The Jew is its symptom.” As the “Thing,” a disruptive element in the social fabric, Paulo materializes into the Wandering Jew.

In Paulo, Shelley gives this empty signifier a signified and then allows Paulo to narrate his struggle to resist the forces that define him. And in fact, by giving the Wandering Jew an identity and subjectivity, he seems out of place, even in a poem that bears his name in the title. Nowhere in Shelley’s literary precursors for the Wandering Jew (most notably Lewis’s *The Monk* and Schubart’s *Der ewige Jude*, both drawn from Roger of Wendover’s medieval popularization of the myth) does the Wandering Jew find himself in love with a young novice and involved in a murderous love triangle.⁵ But Shelley utilizes this somewhat absurd turn of events to dramatize Paulo’s search not only for an object of desire but also the means to organize his desire. And he seems to find his object of desire in Rosa.

After they make their escape from the church, the narrative description mirrors the impending passion between Paulo and Rosa:

Hark! hark! the demon of the storm!
 I see his vast expanding form
 Blend with the strange and sulphurous glare
 Of comets through the turbid air.
 Yes, ’twas his voice, I heard its roar,
 The wild waves lashed the caverned shore
 In angry murmurs hoarse and loud,
 Higher and higher still they rise;
 Red lightnings gleam from every cloud
 And paint wild shapes upon the skies;
 The echoing thunder rolls around,

Convulsed with earthquake rocks the ground. (1.203-14)

Characters in gothic literature fall in love at the drop of a hat, and in Shelley's early work this is no exception, but soon afterwards all hell, literally, breaks loose. If love is idealized (even fetishized) in the aesthetic of sensibility, it is pathologized in the aesthetic of the Gothic. Although Shelley will later make great claims for the power of a philosophically-informed universal "Love," its often shattering effects in the context of individual desire and sexual difference is never completely sublimated (i.e., *Alastor*, *Epipsychidion*, *Julian and Maddalo*). And, to return once again to Deborah Elise White's distinction between demystification of superstition and its reinscription, Shelley's gothic works raise the unsettling possibility that love itself is a superstition, which is precisely why it is so traumatic. In the Gothic, love is experienced as the Real, as a traumatic disruption of the subject's inner sense of consistency and, in this structural sense, a form of evil. How gothic characters deal with that radical, yet often exhilarating, threat to identity constitutes the space of ethics; that is, how does one react to the *jouissance* of the Other? Rosa's first reaction to this mysterious other who has escorted her to safety is one of fear and dread:

Rising from her death-like trance,
 Fair Rosa met the stranger's glance;
 She started from his chilling gaze,
 Wild was it as the tempest's blaze,
 It shot a lurid gleam of light.
 A secret spell of sudden dread,
 A mystic, strange, and harrowing fear,
 As when the spirits of the dead,
 Drest in ideal shapes appear,
 And hideous glance on human sight—

Scarce could Rosa's frame sustain,
The chill that pressed upon her brain. (I.238-49)

The figurative language Shelley employs here precisely describes the supernatural "reality" we encounter later in the poem, first in Paulo's description of his own history and then in Victorio's (his friend and companion) encounter with a witch who promises him a potion that when administered to Rosa will cause her to fall in love with him rather than Paulo. But Rosa overcomes her initial fear and is then able to identify sympathetically with Paulo, not as an image of otherness but as a fellow human being who suffers as she does.

Anon, that transient spell was o'er,
Dark clouds deform his brow no more,
But rapid fled away;
Sweet fascination dwelt around,
Mixed with a soft, a silver sound,
As soothing to the ravished ear,
As what enthusiast lovers hear; (250-56)

The "transient spell" signifies the fear associated with the unknown. Throughout the course of the poem we are witness to a number of spells, ancient books of "mystic characters," and demonic languages that are accompanied by strange, fleeting sounds that Shelley uses to emphasize that what we are encountering exists on the liminal boundaries of language and image where no direct causal relationship can be determinately established and where the performative powers of language dominate the stability of the denotative. Demons and witches carry these traces of the symbolic with them and are often subject to them in specific ways, as long as one has the

“knowledge” to control them. Paulo, for example, despite his powerlessness against God, nevertheless claims:

“Oft I invoke the fiends of hell,
And summon each in dire array—
I know they dare not disobey
My stern, my powerful spell. (III.310-13)

Paulo’s own description of his powers earlier, however, is expressed in the field of vision and limited to the finite materiality of the natural world:

“I pierce with intellectual eye,
Into each hidden mystery;
I penetrate the fertile womb
Of nature; I produce to light
The secrets of the teeming earth,
And give air’s unseen embryos birth:
The past, the present, and to come,
Float in review before my sight:
To me is known the magic spell,
To summon e’en the Prince of Hell,
Awed by the Cross upon my head,
His fiends would obey my mandates dread,
To twilight change the blaze of noon,
And stain with spots of blood the moon.
But that an interposing hand
Restrains my potent arts, my else supreme command. (III.232-47)

Paulo’s command of the performative, his knowledge of the “magic spell” that summons demons, and his insight into the “hidden” mysteries of the teeming earth would suggest that he has full control over the symbolic. And yet although he can “penetrate” the “fertile womb of Nature” he is still subject to the symbolic castration of a vengeful God, the master signifier, who restrains his “potent art.” The sexually charged language of his description clearly indicates that Paulo’s difficulties lie not with the object but with the signifier.

His libidinal energy finds expression in the Imaginary, which is further exemplified by his relationship with Rosa.

In Rosa, Paulo appears to have found an object around which his desire can circulate:

“Long has Paulo sought in vain,
A friend to share his grief;—
Never will he seek again,
For the wretch has found relief,
Till the Prince of Darkness bursts his chain,
Till death and desolation reign—
Rosa, wilt thou then be mine?
Ever fairest, I am thine!” (I.270-77)
...

“We’ll taste ethereal pleasure;
Such as none but thou canst give,—
Such as none but I receive,
And rapture without measure.” (I.316-19)

Paulo’s “love” for Rosa is rooted in sensuality. In a letter of 1 Jan. 1811, Shelley writes to his friend Thomas Jefferson Hogg:

Considering matters in a philosophical light, it evidently appears (if it is not treason to speak thus coolly on a subject so deliriously extatic) that we were not destined for misery.—What then shall happiness arise from? Can we hesitate? Love! dear love, and tho every mental faculty is bewildered by the agony, which is in this life its too constant attendant, still is not that very agony to be preferred to the most thrilling sensualities of Epicurism? (34)

Paulo mistakes the “the thrilling sensualities of Epicurism” for mature love, and, unsurprisingly, soon after he declares his love for Rosa his mind begins to return to his despair:

Friendship or wine, or softer love,
The sparkling eye, the foaming bowl,
Could with no lasting rapture move,
Nor still the tumults of his soul.

And yet there was in Rosa's kiss
 A momentary thrill of bliss;
 Oft the dark clouds of grief would fly,
 Beneath the beam of sympathy;
 And love and converse sweet bestow,
 A transient requiem from woe.— (II.69-78)

...

The music of her siren tongue
 Lull'd forcibly his griefs to rest.
 Like fleeting visions of the dead,
 Or midnight dreams, his sorrows fled:
 Waked to new life, through all his soul
 A soft delicious langour stole,
 And lapt in heavenly ecstasy
 He sank and fainted on her breast. (II.120-27)

Rosa is still an object of his desire and not a subject. And although we pity Paulo, he has not attempted to communicate with Rosa on a meaningful level or attempt to understand her own sense of alienation; unlike Rosa, who shares Paulo's sensual longing, yet yearns to peer beneath Paulo's troubled facade and offer him sympathetic understanding and trust:

“Strange, awful being,” Rosa said,
 “Whence is this superhuman dread,
 That harrows up my inmost frame?
 Whence does this unknown tingling flame,
 Consume and penetrate my soul?
 By turns with fear and love possessed,
 Tumultuous thoughts swell high my breast;
 A thousand wild emotions roll,
 And mingle their resistless tide;
 O'er thee some magic arts preside;
 As by the influence of a charm,
 Lulled into rest my griefs subside,
 And safe in thy protecting arm,
 I feel no power can do me harm:
 But the storm raves wildly o'er the sea,
 Bear me away! I confide in thee!” (II.326-40)

In moments such as these where the figurative language and the emotions they describe rest in poignant balance, it encourages us to put aside the supernatural aspects of the poem and focus on the inter-subjective dynamics between the characters: and more specifically, how superstition is transmitted from one person to the next, and one generation to the next when the difference between metaphor and object is destabilized.

Shelley dramatizes this process by introducing metaphors that then materialize into the reality of the action. For example, when Victorio first encounters the Witch the scene is described as follows:

Suddenly a meteor's glare,
 With brilliant flash illumed the air;
 Bursting through clouds of sulpherous smoke,
 As on a Witch's form it broke,
 Of herculean bulk her frame
 Seemed blasted by the lightning's flame;
 Her eyes that flared with lurid light,
 Were now with bloodshot lustre filled.
 They blazed like comets through the night,
 And now thick rheumy gore distilled;
 Black as the raven's plume, her locks
 Loose streamed upon the pointed rocks,
 Wild floated on the hollow gale,
 Or swept the ground in matted trail;
 Vile loathsome weeds, whose pitchy fold
 Were blackened by the fire of Hell,
 Her shapeless limbs of giant mould
 Scarce served to hide—as she the while
 “Grinned horribly a ghastly smile.”
 And shrieked with demon yell. (IV.171-90)

Here Shelley is clearly articulating how superstitions come into being as literalizations of metaphor and natural phenomena. The flash of the meteor is described “as” a Witch that “seems” to be bursting through the clouds. And what begins as a metaphorical mirroring and projection of Victorio's

conflicting passions and tempestuous desire suddenly transforms into the Witch herself as a way for Victorio to comprehend and give shape to those unconscious desires. And can we not apply the same logic to Paulo's experiences as well?

It's crucial to note that all of the supernatural events in the poem occur in isolation and are specific to the character to whom they happen. We only know of Paulo's supernatural encounters through his retelling. We never see him experience them and he never exhibits any supernatural powers towards other characters. Similarly, Victorio experiences the supernatural in isolation as well, and Rosa experiences nothing of the supernatural. Equally relevant is that Victorio only experiences the supernatural *after* hearing Paulo's tale. For Victorio and Rosa the supernatural becomes a possibility only because of their trust and belief in what Paulo has told them.

Here ceased the tale. Convulsed with fear,
The tale yet lived in Rosa's ear—
She felt a strange mysterious dread,
A chilling awe as of the dead;
Gleamed on her sight the demon's form.
Heard she the fury of the storm?
The cries and hideous yells of death?
Tottered the ground her feet beneath?
Was it the fiend before her stood?
Saw she the poniard drop with blood?
All seemed to her distempered eye
A true and sad reality. (III.444-55)

Paulo's memories now exist as possibilities in the imaginations of Rosa and Victorio. And when Victorio, in despair that Rosa loves Paulo and not him, attempts to commit suicide he is thwarted by a female demon in a scene that closely mirrors Paulo's own encounter with temptation. The transmission of

superstition reveals how the psychology of transference operates in Shelley's figurations of the Wandering Jew. If the Ahasuerus of Hellas represents the "subject presumed to know," then Paulo represents the "subject presumed to believe." Mahmud invests Ahasuerus with a knowledge that sets in motion the transference and Paulo invests his absent God with the knowledge that sets in motion his transference. We could extend this dynamic further by suggesting that Paulo assumes several subject positions. As an image of anti-Semitism, he is a subject presumed to enjoy; as one who has peered into the mysteries of nature he is a subject presumed to know; as the love object of Rosa he is a subject presumed to desire. The crucial point to make is that all of these subject positions are conferred upon him by those with whom he interacts. Whether or not he does possess secret knowledge or has been cursed by God or actually loves Rosa, the important point is that they believe so, which triggers the transference and sets in motion the transmission of superstitious belief from one subject to the next. This process is also clearly evident in other gothic Romantic works, particularly in Keats's *Lamia*, where Appolonius functions as the subject presumed to know who interpellates Lamia as a serpent, and in Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, who transmits his own superstitious beliefs to the wedding guest by the persuasive power of his performance alone.

In the epigraphs to the poem, Shelley includes several passages from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, that "magnificent fiction," as Shelley describes it in the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*. Satan's lament from Book IV, which serves as the epigraph to Canto I, is instructive:

“Me miserable, which way shall I fly?
 Infinite wrath, and infinite despair—
 Which way I fly is hell—myself am hell;
 And in this lowest deep, a lower deep,
 To which the hell I suffer seems a heaven.”

If the mind is its own place, then we should consider a reading of Paulo’s story that puts aside for a moment the supernatural elements, and ask: Can we believe what he says about himself? Can we believe the supernatural elements that Victorio encounters later in the poem? To deny the characters their supernatural experiences and explain them away as mere psychic projections risks a reductionist reading that posits Paulo as a garden variety psychotic and destroys the balance between, in Tzvetan Todorov’s terms, the “uncanny” and the “marvelous”; that is, the uncanny characterizes an empirical reality whose strangeness hints towards the supernatural but later establishes its impossibility, and the marvelous characterizes a reality in which the supernatural is fully accepted as a fact of the narrative universe.⁶ A reality that exists in suspension between the uncanny and the marvelous, where neither is privileged over the other and are treated with equal validity, which prompts a hesitation in the reader, Todorov calls the “fantastic.” And it is in the realm of the fantastic where Shelley is most comfortable and best able to express the empirical ground for the unrepresentable psychological dynamics of the characters, because in many ways Paulo *is* psychotic, in the precise Lacanian sense. He is a subject of symbolic foreclosure, a refusal to submit to the paternal metaphor which anchors the symbolic and provides the unitary signifier around which language acquires its meaning. For the psychotic,

metaphor is impossible and all signifiers are given literally. The psychotic's world is pregnant with signification, but with no grounding terms. Entry into the symbolic and the acceptance of symbolic castration produces lack, but it is a necessary step in becoming a subject and forging a substantive identity. Symbolic castration is the price one pays for becoming a self.

With this in mind, it is crucial to note that "God" appears nowhere in the poem, yet his influence is everywhere, and in different guises: as a tyrannical antagonist in Paulo's mind, as the moral context for the priests, nuns, and congregation; and as a deistic entity for the narrator and the joyful peasants of the opening scene. Like Paulo, God is an empty signifier, he functions, in Lacanian terms, as the "other" of the "big Other." He pulls the strings from behind the scene, but is ultimately inaccessible. The belief in an "other of the big Other" produces a variety of paranoid and psychotic responses. The function of this "other" is to fill in the gaps of the big Other—language, ideology—to mask the fact that the big Other does not exist, that the differential structure of language has no ultimate ground. The other of the big Other is posited as an image of desire when the subject faces an encounter with the Real, when the symbolic cannot account for a traumatic event experienced as the impossible. In this sense, Paulo and the God who torments him share a structural resemblance: each are a signifier without a signified, but God is a privileged master signifier in the ideology of Christianity, and Paulo is an empty signifier as its exception.

Paulo exists in an uncanny space between the two deaths—symbolic death and physical death,—"undead" rather than "immortal." Although he is

unable to die a physical death, he is at the same time incapable of recognizing the eternal within himself: his self-consciousness and will. His existential despair is so overwhelming that he cannot ameliorate it by articulating it into the symbolic texture of causality:

I sicken even unto death.
 Oh! hard would be the task to paint
 And gift with life past scenes again;
 To knit a long and linkless chain,
 Or strive minutely to relate
 The varied horrors of my fate. (III.433-38)

It is productive to read Kierkegaard's *The Sickness Unto Death* alongside Shelley because they approach the same problem from radically different perspectives. For Kierkegaard, despair—the “sickness unto death”—is experienced when one is unable to reconcile the finite with the infinite, the self with the creator, necessity with freedom. Despair is the product of a misrelation between the two and can take one of three forms: a denial of the self, a denial of the creator, or a denial of the relation itself. In *The Sickness Unto Death*, Kierkegaard writes:

The formula that describes the state of the self when despair is completely rooted out is this: in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it. (14)

...

Death is not the end of the sickness [unto death], but death is incessantly the end. To be saved from this sickness by death is an impossibility, because the sickness and its torment—and the death—are precisely this inability to die. (21)

Shelley, of course, as a self-proclaimed atheist has no interest in reconciling with Kierkegaard's god, but the formula is equally valid if we substitute

“master signifier” or “big Other” for “god.” Paulo’s despair is directed towards a symbolic that affords him no identity, and yet he is unable or unwilling to risk complete subjective destitution by traversing his fundamental fantasy and abandoning, rather than renouncing, the symbolic structure that determines his identity. Because he has no other means available to him to organize his desire, he is caught in an eternal quest for a new master. If, for Kierkegaard, the eternal signifies the positive presence of a god, then for Shelley the eternal signifies the negative presence of lack in the symbolic. Paulo organizes his desire by positing this “other” of the big Other, giving this lack a presence that allows him to sustain his identity. For the mature Shelley it will fall to Prometheus to risk his own subjective destitution by abandoning the phantasmatic other and to identify with the void itself beneath the symbolic.

What conclusions can we ultimately draw from the poem? Is Paulo a Promethean hero who should be commended for his resistance against a vindictive God? Or do we point to his ultimate failure and weakness in expressing his freedom, or his inability to look beyond his narcissism and meaningfully share himself with Rosa? Shelley himself may have been of two minds about this. On the one hand, in 3 Dec. 1811 letter to Hogg he writes: “For the immoral ‘never to be able to die, never to escape from some shrine as chilling as the clay-formed dungeon which now it inhabits’ is the future punishment which I believe in” (35). Paulo may be weak, but he is not immoral in a way Shelley would find damning. For in another letter to Hogg (20 Dec. 1810) Shelley writes: “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 which *even now* I can scarcely help deploring.—” (30). Here Paulo would seem to be a surrogate for Shelley’s own views. But the interpretive tension *The Wandering Jew* maintains throughout—between psychosis and allegory, desire and superstition—and elevates the material above its generic precursors. *The Wandering Jew* offers an illuminating account of the complex questions of language, desire, fantasy, and identity that I will interrogate further in the next chapter on *Prometheus Unbound*.

¹ See, for example, Susan Wolfson's analysis of "The Mask of Anarchy" in "Social Form: Shelley and the Determination of Reading" in her *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (pp. 193-226).

² For the full textual history of *The Wandering Jew*, see *CPPBS I*, pp. 189-207.

³ In *Tarrying with the Negative*, Žižek distinguishes between the "indefinite judgment" and the "negative judgment": "... noumena are objects of indefinite-limiting-judgment. By saying "the Thing is non-phenomenal," we do *not* say the same as "the Thing is *not* phenomenal"; we do not make any positive claim about it, we only draw a certain limit and locate the Thing in the wholly nonspecified void beyond it" (p. 111). Shelley's poetry is replete with instances of the indefinite judgment, which contributes to the uncanny effect these images produce, a point I will address further in my discussion of *Prometheus Unbound*.

⁴ See *CPPBS I*, 213.

⁵ See Anderson's *The Legend of the Wandering Jew*, pp. 90-95 for a survey of the Wandering Jew in British Folk Tales; and pp. 174-211 for representations of the legend during the Romantic era. See also David Punter's *The Literature of Terror*, chapter three: "Gothic and Romanticism" (pp. 99-129) for a discussion of the motif of the wanderer as anti-hero.

⁶ See chapter three, "The Uncanny and the Marvelous," from Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic*, pp. 41-57.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Gothic Prometheus

Throughout the first three chapters I have drawn a distinction between the Gothic-*Shelleyesque* and the Romantic-*Shelleyan* modes of subjectivity. In *Zastrozzi*, *St. Irvyne*, and *The Wandering Jew*, Shelley employs the gothic aesthetic as a representational site to articulate a subjectivity associated with antagonism, drive, *jouissance*, monstrosity, perversion, and lack. This Shelleyesque subject, which is predominate in his early work through the *Alastor* volume (1816), inhibits the emergence of the Shelleyan subject of synthesis, desire, pleasure, sublimity, benevolence, and being. In those early works, the Shelleyesque and the Shelleyan are set in antagonistic opposition where horror and beauty annihilate one another. And the attempts to mediate the “real” of the Gothic through ideal fantasy formations generates its own set of failures as the gap between the ideal and the actual perpetually negate each other in a self-generating series of ontological veils, or fantasy frames. Shelley’s Gothic, thus, stages the product of that failure, a ghastly monument to the non-identity of the concept to its object, the subject to its ego, and fantasy to its object of desire.

Prometheus Unbound (1819), because of its visionary and utopian aspirations, serves as an instructive example of how Shelley’s gothic sensibility informs his mature work. From a strictly formal perspective, the drama mirrors a standard gothic plot: two lovers (Prometheus and Asia), separated by an oppressive patriarchal structure (Jupiter) seek to escape their

confinement and re-establish an egalitarian sexual union based upon freedom, love, and sympathetic identification with others. Looking back to the conflict between gothic (masculine) and sentimental (feminine) aesthetics in *St. Irvyne*, I would argue that *Prometheus Unbound* represents a similar, though more mature, attempt to resolve the antagonism of sexual difference. The gothic aesthetic for Shelley represents not an imaginative fantasy outside the realm of experience, but the actual horror of the present “what is.” Shelleyan idealism, then, is mediated through the Gothic. *Prometheus Unbound* is Shelley’s most optimistic and ambitious attempt to achieve this mediation, to traverse—poetically and politically—the gap between “what is” and “what might be,” to release that “glorious Phantom” of futurity that “will illumine our tempestuous day” (“England in 1819”). Although Shelley’s drama is notoriously abstract and replete with dense, though exquisite, passages of descriptive poetry, both the present “what is” and potential “what might be” are clearly articulated.

As the drama opens, Prometheus—the “Champion of mankind”—having been confined by Jupiter to a rocky precipice in the Indian Caucasus and tortured unremittingly, addresses his adversary:

Monarch of Gods and Dæmons, and all Spirits
 But One, who throng those bright and rolling Worlds
 Which Thou and I alone of living things
 Behold with sleepless eyes! regard this Earth
 Made multitudinous with thy slaves, whom thou
 Requistest for knee-worship, prayer and praise,
 And toil, and hecatombs of broken hearts,
 With fear and self-contempt and barren hope:
 Whilst me, who am they foe, eyeless in hate,
 Hast thou made reign and triumph, to thy scorn,
 O’er mine own misery and thy vain revenge.— (I.1-11)

In his opening monologue, Prometheus establishes the gothic context from which the rest of the drama proceeds. The Jupiterian world is one of tyranny, servitude, hopelessness, mental and physical degradation and corruption, all produced through the destructive cycle of hatred and revenge. The entropic phenomenology of the Prometheus/Jupiter dyadic relationship inversely produces a corresponding proliferation of corruption and death in the natural environment. After Prometheus's enchainment, the Earth, his mother, informs us of the impact on herself:

Lightning and Innundation vexed the plains;
 Blue thistles bloomed in cities; foodless toads
 Within voluptuous chambers panting crawled;
 When Plague had fallen on man and beast and worm,
 And Famine,—and black blight on herb and tree,
 And in the corn and vines and meadow-grass
 Teemed ineradicable poisonous weeds
 Draining their growth, for my wan bosom was dry
 With grief,—and the thin air, my breath, was stained
 With the contagion of a mother's hate
 Breathed on her child's destroyer— . . . (I.169-79)

The imagery here is similar to that of Byron's "Darkness" (1816), itself a powerful example of the kind of gothic framing and apocalyptic dread found in *Prometheus Unbound*:

The world was void,
 The populous and the powerful was a lump,
 Seasonless, herbless, treeless, manless, lifeless--
 A lump of death—a chaos of hard clay.
 The rivers, lakes, and ocean all stood still,
 And nothing stirr'd within their silent depths;
 Ships sailorless lay rotting on the sea,
 And their masts fell down piecemeal; as they dropp'd
 They slept on the abyss without a surge—
 The waves were dead; the tides were in their grave,

The Moon, their mistress, had expir'd before;
 The winds were wither'd in the stagnant air,
 And the clouds perish'd; Darkness had no need
 Of aid from them—She was the Universe. (69-82)

To argue that the reality established at the beginning of the drama is one of a gothic nightmare requires no argument at all. Prometheus is trapped in a realm where “shapeless sights come wandering by, / The ghastly people of the realm of dream, / Mocking me” (I.36-38). Prometheus, even though he is denied sleep, inhabits a waking nightmare that borders on the delusional, if not psychotic.

Like the Gothic-Jupiterian nightmare of Act I, the Romantic-Promethean utopia of Acts III and IV are clearly articulated. After Prometheus “recalls” his curse and opens himself once again to his love for Asia, a series of events occur that ultimately lead to the renovation of the universe itself and the emergence of the Promethean age. Having surveyed the wondrous changes, the reborn Spirit of the Earth reports:

Those ugly human shapes and visages
 Of which I spoke as having wrought me pain,
 Past floating through the air, and fading still
 Into the winds that scattered them; and those
 From whom they past seemed mild and lovely forms
 After some foul disguise had fallen—and all
 Were somewhat changed—and after brief surprise
 And greetings of delighted wonder, all
 Went to their sleep again: and when, the dawn
 Came—wouldst thou think that toads and snakes and efts
 Could e'er be beautiful?—yet so they were
 And that with little change of shape or hue:
 All things had put their evil nature off . . . (III.iv.65-77)

And the Spirit of the Hour, at the conclusion of Act III, informs us:

The painted veil, by those who were called life,
 Which mimicked, as with colours idly spread,

All men believed and hoped, is torn aside—
 The loathsome mask has fallen, the man remains
 Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed—but man:
 Equal, unclassed, tribeless and nationless,
 Exempt from awe, worship, degree,—the King
 Over himself; just, gentle, wise—but man:
 Passionless? no—yet from guilt or pain
 Which were, for his will made, or suffered them,
 Nor yet exempt, though ruling them like slaves,
 From chance and death and mutability,
 The clogs of that which else might oversoar
 The loftiest star of unascended Heaven
 Pinnacled dim in the intense inane. (III.iv.190-204)

What is striking about Shelley's utopia is that it conceives of a mode of being without antagonism—no class struggle, no identity politics, no pain nor guilt, and no reified gender determinations. As the Earth, who in the Epithalamion of Act IV is now gendered as masculine in her duet with the feminine Moon, rejoices: “The joy, the triumph, the delight, the madness, / The boundless, overflowing bursting gladness, / The vapourous exultation, not to be confined!” (IV.319-21). In short, what Shelley is striving at is a post-Oedipal society of undifferentiated libidinal flux, a movement from the castrating determinations of the phallic Symbolic to the affective *jouissance* of the maternal Semiotic, where “Language is a perpetual Orphic song, / Which rules with Daedal harmony a throng / Of thoughts and forms, which else senseless and shapeless were” (IV.415-17).¹ The difficulty lies, of course, in moving from one mode to the other. As idealistic as Shelley can be at times, in no other work does he make quite this ambitious a leap into the circumambient air.² And we must consider whether Shelley is enabling the conditions of possibility for such a renovation or is rather revealing its

conditions of impossibility, thereby creating an imaginative space for further aesthetic interventions.

D. J. Hughes has argued that the visionary utopia of Act IV is kind of virtual reality where the “gradual emptying-out of the phenomenal and gradual presence of the noumenal” (117) is realized by “cleansing the ontological situation, restoring our sense of the potential, turning, through a series of verbal strategies, the actual back upon itself” (108). Hughes’s emphasis on restoring the latent potentiality of intellectual intuition is further elaborated by Timothy Webb’s analysis of Shelley’s use of negatives in *Prometheus Unbound*, such as the negative constructions found in the Spirit of the Hours’ speech above and Asia’s and Panthea’s journey to the realm of Demogorgon. For Webb, potentiality is created “through a series of negatives” that “suggests both the limitations of human understanding and the possibility of a realm in which the seemingly negative is caught up, transformed, redeemed, or even regenerated, by some higher reality” (37). Jerrold Hogle offers perhaps the most powerful argument in favor of the capacity of the imagination to remake the world in *Prometheus Unbound*. Arguing against the “integrative and totalizing direction” he finds in Earl Wasserman’s and Stuart Curran’s reading of the drama, Jerrold Hogle argues rather for a “demythologizing, not remythologizing” (169) reading where “older mythic patterns” are dispersed “into new, iconoclastic, and constantly altered relations with one another” (171). The “pyrotechnics” (as Barbara Gelpi puts it) of Hogle’s notion of “radical transference” is well-exemplified in this passage on Asia’s transfigurative powers:

What she sends into forms in nature no longer appears exactly what it was once it is reconstituted by its new surroundings. That is why Asia must probe into the mysteries of the “depths” in objects, even though *she* has often provided them, and why the surfaces of objects must then beckon her to “follow” them toward the deeper impulses generating their self-veiling growth. To receive, be, or project a transference, even in Asia’s case, is finally not to recognize the fact completely once the movement has occurred. It is, for a time, to see, as we have noted already, an implied depth elsewhere as possibly absolute “Spirit,” a self-generated, external essence facing a less self-contained interpreter, who must assume that depth to be the ground of visible surfaces (186-87)

Hogle’s notion of radical transference is so powerful, in fact, that it acquires a quasi-mystical agency of its own as it “obscures itself in its own veilings” (187). The performative power of language to transform the world not simply remodels objects but obliterates them in a Dionysian rush of deconstructive indeterminacy, creating space for the “virtual world” that Hughes identifies, similar to our presently emerging realm of cyberspace where identities, gender, phenomena, and other structures of an Oedipalized world of prohibitions are suspended.

Shelley himself, of course, speaks to the power of poetry to create the conditions for imaginative and moral renovation. In the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley writes that his aim is to

. . . familiarize the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical readers with beautiful idealisms of moral excellence; aware that until the mind can love, and admire, and trust, and hope, and endure, reasoned principles of moral conduct are seeds cast upon the highway of life which the unconscious passenger tramples into dust, although they would bear the harvest of his happiness. (*SPP*, 209)

In *A Defence of Poetry* (1821), Shelley further describes how these “beautiful idealisms of moral excellence” operate in conjunction with an epistemology of

moral and political change that “strips the veil of familiarity of the world” to reveal the beautiful “spirit of its forms”:

Poetry turns all things to loveliness; it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed; it marries exultation and horror, grief and pleasure, eternity and change; it subdues to union under its light yoke all irreconcilable things. It transmutes all that it touches, and every form moving within the radiance of its presence is changed by wondrous sympathy to an incarnation of the spirit which it breathes: its secret alchemy turns to potable gold the poisonous waters which flow from death through life; it strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty, which is the spirit of its forms. (*SPP*, 533)

“Poetry” thus, writes Shelley, “defeats the curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions” (533). The language of poets “is vitally metaphorical; that is, it marks the unapprehended relations of things, and perpetuates their apprehension until the words which represent them, become through time signs for portions and classes of thought instead of integral thoughts” (512).

Shelley would seem to be articulating an idealism where, through an aesthetic mediation, the error of ugliness and deformation are stripped away to reveal the eternal forms of ideal beauty, the “indestructible order” of the “true and the beautiful,” (512) as Shelley, following Plato, puts it. Yet he also claims that poetry is superimposed upon, added to, or combined with deformation, horror, grief, and change; thus subduing “into union” all “irreconcilable things.” This tension between demystification and transfiguration—or between indeterminate and determinate negation—corresponds to an aesthetic ideology in Shelley that distinguishes between deficiencies in objects versus deficiencies in their concepts. Where the

indeterminate negation critiques the object from a perspective of abstract ideality and finds the object lacking, the determinate negation critiques the object from a perspective of immanence and creates unity out of oppositions. Deformity, horror, grief, and change, then, in a purely negative mode, are but category errors. When viewed from a radical shift in aesthetic perspective, the source of these errors are shown to be merely a deficiency in their concepts. As Ross Woodman writes, “The implication is clear: Shelley’s apocalyptic vision (i.e., the vision of a universe continuously created as distinct from a universe continually perceived) belongs within a verbal universe. . . . It is, like Plato’s republic, a pattern set up in heaven” (*Apocalyptic Vision*, 20). Or, as Mary Shelley concisely put it in her 1839 edition of Shelley’s works, “Shelley believed that mankind had only to will that there should be no evil, and there would be none” (271).

Recent critical responses to Shelley’s ambitious drama have largely focused upon its plausibility, particularly whether or not Prometheus’ psychological purification—whereby he substitutes his hatred for Jupiter with his love for Asia—constitutes an adequate enough cause to enable the emergence of a utopian republic of freely-desiring subjects. For Stuart Peterfreund: “Going with the flow—the unidirectional flow of time, the cyclical flow of natural process, and the perpetual flow of language by means of which itself and all other sorts of flow are made memorable—is a theme central to the meaning of *Prometheus Unbound*” (239). For Leon Waldoff, the “utopian vision is psychologically sounder than it is generally acknowledged to be” and that “Prometheus’ aggressive feelings against Jupiter now emerge as moral

superiority” (79, 91). John Rieder argues that “Prometheus’s conscious forgetfulness does not denote any break or weakening of desire but rather the loss of the object of desire and, in the process of purification, the substitution of a new (or the original) one, Asia” (782). For Helen Brown Herson, “The oxymoronic journey of *Prometheus Unbound* is a journey toward perfection without a single reference point for perfection, a path without an ultimate goal, a theodicy without a god. Poetry is the prime mover here, the force of primordial love and justice” (374). D. J. Hughes claims that “. . . the first three acts of the poem have succeeded in destroying the actuality with which the drama opens: Prometheus chained to his rock” (110). David Bromwich notes: “One reason the erotic union of *Prometheus Unbound* succeeds in manifesting utopia is that the lovers, like Laon and Cythna, engage in a relationship of complete reciprocity, equality, and selflessness. Neither is (de-) limited by the fantasy of the other, and each is dedicated not only to the couple’s liberation but also to the freedom of humankind. In every way, Prometheus and Asia function as each other’s perfect complement” (259). But there are also critics who are less than convinced of drama’s success. Particularly harsh is Theresa Kelley, who writes: “. . . the Prometheus on display here is not the humbled, apologetic god, but the bare-knuckled authority who continues to call the shots, even when he is ostensibly the divine sufferer whom the Furies will torment (or try to torment) for the rest of Act I. . . . [a] god who inaugurates the chain of events that leads to a world revolution that is itself violent” (279). And Tilottama Rajan writes: “Perhaps the most troubling lacuna in play has to do with the unilateral nature of

Prometheus' forgiveness of Jove, on which the entire action depends. If Promethean love is indeed to inaugurate a new age, then surely this love cannot remain a paradise for a sect" (303). These are but a few examples of the wide-ranging critical approaches to the drama, and I will confront others during the course of my own argument. We can begin by focusing our attention on the referential context from which any interpretation must rest, for the plausibility of the drama depends upon our own complicity with or resistance against the metaphysical assumptions Shelley invites us to make.

As Earl Wasserman points out in his seminal reading of the drama, "Any interpretation of *Prometheus Unbound* as a work of 'poetic idealism' will necessarily be conditioned by a determination of the drama's area of reference, the level of reality in which it is enacted; and this in turn must be a function of what its protagonist represents" (255). Wasserman situates Prometheus in Shelley's "metaphysics of idealism," arguing that Prometheus represents Shelley's notion of the "One Mind," as Shelley defines it. For example, in his essay "On Life." Shelley writes:

The words, *I, you, they* are not signs of any actual difference subsisting between the assemblages of thoughts thus indicated, but are merely marks employed to denote the different modifications of the one mind. Let it not be supposed that this doctrine conducts to the monstrous presumption, that *I*, the person who now write and think, am that one mind. I am but a portion of it. The words *I*, and *you* and *they* are grammatical devices invented simply for arrangement and totally devoid of the intense and exclusive sense usually attached to them. (*SPP*, 508)

Shelley, shadowing forth here Jakobson's structuralist linguistics, recognizes how the pronominal shifter—I, you, they—designates the undecidable status

of the speaking subject in relation to the symbolic register (the “one mind”). As Lacan puts it, “Indeed, the I of the enunciation is not the same as the I of the statement, that is to say, the shifter which, in the statement, designates him” (*Four*, 139). This creates a problem for Wasserman because, as he admits, “If at the beginning of the play Prometheus were truly the One Mind as Shelley defined the concept, it would follow that he could not be represented by language” (359). Wasserman’s solution is to define the one mind as “absolute unity of Existence” and that “when Prometheus enters his cave with Asia the possibility of narrative has ended because he has passed beyond the limits of imagery and language. Only now is he truly the One Mind, and therefore he must disappear from the play” (360). I am less interested in Shelley’s ever-changing metaphysical positions, and more interested in the combinatory relations among subject, self, object, and Other that are so richly represented in Shelley’s poetry. Far from some abstract notion of the “One Mind” or transcendental subject of apperception, in the final analysis, so to speak, Prometheus turns out to be “human, all too human.”

Although in the Preface, Shelley writes that the imagery in the drama has been “drawn from the operations of the human mind” (*SPP*, 207), Prometheus’s hatred for Jupiter is fueled by the agony that he suffers through his body. Although we might interpret Prometheus’s physical afflictions metaphorically as a mind in turmoil (as we must), to do so would be to underappreciate the extent of his suffering and the effect it has on his own mind. Shelley’s poetry is so exquisitely delivered throughout the poem that it nearly

overshadows that what are witnessing in Act I is a horrific scene of physical torture:

The crawling glaciers pierce me with the spears
 Of their moon-freezing chrystals; the bright chains
 Eat with their burning cold into my bones.
 Heaven's winged hound, polluting from they lips
 His beak in poison not his own, tears up
 My heart: and shapeless sights come wandering by,
 The ghastly people from the realm of dream,
 Mocking me: And the Earthquake-fiends are charged
 To wrench the rivets from my quivering wounds
 When the rocks split and close again behind;
 While from their loud abysses howling throng
 The genii of the storm, urging the rage
 Of whirlwind, and afflict me with keen hail. (I.31-43)

Stephen Bruhm, in *Gothic Bodies: The Politics of Pain in Romantic Fiction*, argues that “Romantic authors share with their Gothic cousins a fascination with physical pain, and much Romantic production concerns itself with the implications of physical pain on the transcendent consciousness”; “to read the Gothic and Romantic together is to set in high relief the Gothic delimitation of the Romantic body” (xvi). As one of the Furies states, sent to tempt Prometheus to despair after recalling his curse on Jupiter: “In each human heart terror survives / The ravin it has gorged” (I.618-19). Although the Fury is describing the afflictions of humankind, it is crucial to consider whether or not Prometheus himself suffers the same consequences. For everything depends upon his will to purify himself of the terrors gorged into his own consciousness and, in effect, cleanse his unconscious of repressed terrors. Prometheus must, in other words, attain the kind of Godwinian self-transparency that Shelley called into question in *St. Irvyne*. If we examine

closely, however, those pivotal moments in which Prometheus substitutes his hatred for Jupiter with pity, upon which the entire process of imaginative renovation turns, we see that the psychological transformation is not so well-defined as we, or Prometheus, may believe.

As the drama opens, Prometheus is “eyeless in hate,” comforted only by his knowledge that Jupiter will one day be overthrown. He waits for the “crawling Hours”:

. . . one among whom
 —As some dark Priest hailes the reluctant victim—
 Shall drag thee, cruel King, to kiss the blood
 From these pale feet, which then might trample thee
 If they disdained not such a prostrate slave.— (I.48-52)

The intensity of this retributive fantasy is immediately undercut, however, by a radical shift in perspective that many critics have pointed to as Prometheus’s change of heart:

Disdain? Ah no! I pity thee,—What Ruin
 Will hunt thee undefended through the wide Heaven!
 How will thy soul, cloven to its depth with terror,
 Gape like a Hell within! I speak in grief
 Not exultation, for I hate no more
 As then, ere misery made me wise.—The Curse
 Once breathed on thee I would recall. (I.53-59)

Clearly, Prometheus’s use of the word “pity” is still attached to his retributive fantasy, which continues through the rest of the statement. It is an ironic “pity” meant to further denigrate Jupiter and signify his impotence. When Prometheus says that he hates “no more as then,” he refers to a time before misery made him wise; but does the “then” refer also to the sentence he has just spoken? Prometheus seems to have moved from hatred to wisdom in the

span of one sentence, which prompts Stuart Curran to argue that “Shelley has set in a linear, dramatic framework what is, in fact, an instantaneous moment of inspiration” (103). Other readers, however, have found Prometheus’ “instantaneous moment of inspiration” less plausible. For example, Stuart Sperry comments that the “notion that Prometheus, through a process of deliberate self-inquiry and self-recognition, has acquired the power to transform himself is one that we may supply as readers but that the play itself never either fully dramatizes or illuminates” (246). Barbara Gelpi observes that the “only movement forward is that Prometheus, having reviewed the events leading to his present anguish and analyzed his response to them, concludes that an attitude of enraged defiance compounds the evil he had hoped to destroy. He must abandon that strategy” (151). Theresa Kelley is even more skeptical, asking “what is Act I of *Prometheus Unbound* if it is not a staging of Promethean ambition and personal aggrandizement, with more than a few flickers of envy and revenge?” (280). I would argue that Prometheus’s supposed self-purification of the hatred and revenge he directs against Jupiter is complicated by his desire to retain the core of defiance that gives form to those destructive emotions. This is not a failure on Shelley’s part, but rather an appreciation of the psychological complexity of trauma. Prometheus does, however, attempt to convince himself, and the elements around him, that he has indeed undergone a significant change in perspective. He calls upon the Mountains, Springs, Air, and Whirlwinds to repeat to him the Curse that now he has forgotten:

If then my words had power

—Though I am changed so that aught evil wish
 Is dead within, although no memory be
 Of what is hate—let them not lose it now!
 What was that curse? for ye all heard me speak. (I.69-73)

Notice how his qualification—“I am changed”—takes the form of an afterthought in the midst of calling up a curse that has, although repressed, provided the substance of his being. It is important to note that up until this point Prometheus has been totally alienated in his hatred of Jupiter, confined within a mirrored relationship with his antagonist. He is unaware of, or unable or unwilling to communicate with, those around him, including Ione and Panthea, who daily visit him and sleep beneath his feet: “torture and solitude, / Scorn and despair,—these are mine empire:— / More glorious far than that which thou surveyest / From thine unenvied throne, O Mighty God!” (I.15-17). Even after his conversion Prometheus continues to use the language of domination, tyranny, and empire, terms that retain their traces of hierarchy and phallic structures of power. Before he calls upon the Furies to unleash their torments, Prometheus confidently declares: “Pity the self-despising slaves of Heaven, / Not me, within whose mind sits peace serene / As light in the sun, throned. . . . (I.428-30) and “Yet am I king over myself, and rule / The torturing and conflicting throngs within / As Jove rules you when Hell grows mutinous” (491-94).

As Susan Brisman has observed: “A total stranger to the Titan of Act I, the immaculate character in the Preface seems to stand for the objective of purifying sublime language of Satanic sediment. The ‘type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature’ is an ideal image that consolidates

(identifies and draws energy from) Shelley's anxiety about developing a new language that must advance the cause of resistance without the bullhorns of arrogance and wrath" (54). Indeed, the Prometheus of Shelley's Preface has more in common with Byron's "Prometheus" (1816), who patiently and silently suffers as a "symbol and a sign / To Mortals of their fate and force" (45-46), making "Death a Victory" (59). Byron's poem, written in the third person, does not allow Prometheus to speak for himself. He remains but a symbol of man's capabilities throughout. Shelley's Prometheus, on the other hand, is a speaking being with a psychological complexity that exceeds not only Byron's representation of the titan, but also Aeschylus's allegorical representation of individuality versus authority in his *Prometheus Bound*.

Prometheus's subject position in relation to language and the Other, however, is difficult to locate. From a psychoanalytical perspective, he would seem to embody, as synecdoche, the enchainment of the signifier to the signified, subject to the Law of Jupiter and frozen in a state of symbolic reification where there is "No change, no pause, no hope!" (I.24). Having undergone the cut of symbolic castration ("the bright chains / Eat with their burning cold into my bones"), the desire of the mother has been replaced, signified, by the paternal metaphor, the symbolic phallus³. As Barbara Gelpi explains:

... Prometheus' situation depicts synchronically the process of achieving separate, speaking consciousness as, according to Freudian theory, it is diachronically experienced by human subjects throughout history. Bringer of language and thus both bestower and epitomizer of human consciousness, he is thereby perpetrator and victim of the "murder" (Kristeva, *Revolution* 75) that is its price. His body serves as inscription of the sacrifice that has been made: castration. (144)

Prometheus's separation from his mother, the Earth, is brilliantly represented by Shelley in their inability to meaningfully relate to one another through language. When, in the midst of his agony, Prometheus calls out to the Earth and surrounding elements, he senses a presence but cannot mediate the experience through words: "I hear a sound of voices—not the voice / Which I gave forth.—" (I.112-13). Assuming the voice is his mother's, Prometheus continues:

Ha, what an awful whisper rises up!
 'Tis scarce like sound, it tingles through the frame
 As lightning tingles, hovering ere it strike.—
 Speak, Spirit! from thine inorganic voice
 I only know that thou art moving near
 And love. . . . (I.131-37)

To which the Earth replies "How canst thou hear / Who knowest not the language of the dead? . . . I dare not speak like life, lest Heaven's fell King / Should hear, and link me to some wheel of pain / More torturing than the one whereon I roll.—" (I.137-38, 140-42). The ensuing "dialogue" between Prometheus and the Earth is thus fraught with ambiguity. As Wasserman points out, "Obviously the reader is being asked to entertain a complex and paradoxical dramatic hypothesis" and that although "Prometheus questions and answers the Earth as though their communication were complete, the reader must assume that Prometheus is in fact speaking a soliloquy which, quite by chance, happens to form a coherent dialogue with Earth" (266). That Prometheus and the Earth *do* form a coherent dialogue despite a common frame of intelligibility, introduces an important, though subtle, complication

to our understanding of Prometheus's psychic economy and his relation to the Other, as such. What Prometheus encounters is not speech, but the *voice as object*. The object-voice (and object-gaze) are produced when the alterity of the Other exceeds intelligibility. The split subject, in other words, is expressed in the fields of sound and vision. The best example in Shelley's poetry of the subject confronted by gaze and voice as objects is in his great lyric "Mont Blanc," where

Thy caverns echoing to the Arve's commotion,
A loud, lone sound no other sound can tame;
Thou art pervaded with that ceaseless motion,
Thou art the path of that unresting sound—
Dizzy Ravine! and when I gaze on thee
I seem as in a trance sublime and strange
To muse on my own separate phantasy,
My own, my human mind, which passively
Now renders and receives fast influencings,
Holding an unremitting interchange
With the clear universe of things around;
One legion of wild thoughts, whose wandering wings
Now float above thy darkness, . . . (30-42)

The mind of the poet here is certainly not "passive." When confronted with the alterity of the Other in the modes of gaze and voice, the poet is compelled to fill the void with his "own separate phantasy." At the conclusion of the poem, the poet is left in a skeptical position regarding his phantasies, asking "And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea, / If to the human mind's imaginings / Silence and solitude were vacancy?" (142-44). Although Shelley is here articulating poetically his belief that "nothing exists but as it is perceived" and questioning whether an independent reality exists outside of the perceiving mind, we can reframe the question this way: if the object-voice

(silence) and object-gaze (solitude) index a constitutive void, then how reliable is the supplemental fantasy that fills in the void of these objects? The link between what John Pierce refers to as the “creation of a myth about silence” in “Mont Blanc” and the referential ambiguity that characterizes Promethean hermeneutics, leads us to ask of Prometheus, how reliable are *his* efforts to interpret the object-voice? When the Earth speaks, are we hearing her or are we hearing Prometheus’s interpretation of what he thinks he hears or desires to hear? The Earth tells him, although he cannot translate her language into his own, “Subtle thou art and good, and though the Gods / Hear not this voice—yet thou art more than God / Being wise and kind— . . .”

(I.143-45). To which Prometheus replies:

Obscurely through my brain like shadows dim
Sweep awful thoughts, rapid and thick.—I feel
Faint, like one mingled in entwining love,
Yet ’tis not pleasure. (I.146-49)

This experience of “entwining love” beyond “pleasure” signals an encounter with the *jouissance* of the Other. There are numerous moments in the drama where characters encounter indistinct sounds, voices, shadows, and spirits that materialize just beyond the edge of intelligibility and then thicken out of the mist of obscurity into a meaningful presence. For example, as the Spirits of the Human Mind approach to comfort Prometheus, Ione describes their “sweet, sad voices” as “despair / Mingled with love, and then dissolved in sound.—” (I.756-57).

The one feature that is common to all of these liminal encounters with the Other is the presence of “love,” even though this feeling of love is often

combined with sadness or pain. Although Shelley's purpose is to represent a shift in attitude in relation to an encounter with the Other, one that is receptive to and projects love rather than hate, we still must consider whether such an encounter can acknowledge the alterity of the Other without filling the void with fantasy objects. This is the first of many cruxes that call into question the possibility of actualizing a Promethean age without antagonism. Although Shelley's faith that the universe would ultimately appear benevolent when experienced without the "loathsome mask" of error that obscures one's view, beauty may actually blind one to antagonisms that have not been fully acknowledged. In *The Abyss of Freedom*, Žizek distinguishes between two subjective positions when confronted with the alterity of the Other:

The Lacanian proof of the Other's existence is the *jouissance* of the Other (in contrast to Christianity, for example, where this proof is Love). . . . This encounter of the real is always traumatic, there is something at least minimally obscene about it. I cannot simply integrate it into my universe, there is always a gap separating me from it. . . . without the element of the real of *jouissance*, the Other remains ultimately a fiction . . . (25)

I want to be careful here because the experience of "love" in Lacanian theory is usually conceptualized as an imaginary identification mediated through fantasy (i.e., "the Other remains a fiction"). The desire of the Other is enigmatic and opaque. Fantasy is what fills out this enigma, articulating it, giving it form, such that it embodies a determinate demand. For Alain Badiou, however, love is one of the possible modes through which the "real" of a "truth-event" can occur (the other three being science, politics, and art). And to maintain a "fidelity" to that truth-event is, for Badiou, a practice of

revolutionary politics. Betraying fidelity to the emergence of a truth-event is one of the definitions of evil for Badiou, as is attempting to name the event; that is, to fill the void of the “situation” from which the event emerges with a positive content or apply a structuring principle to it.⁴ *Prometheus Unbound*, although it shares many similarities with Badiou’s notion of love as event, nevertheless comes dangerously close to fulfilling Badiou’s definition of evil by positing a politics of the event in which antagonisms are mediated rather than recognized (Shelley’s “unity of oppositions”).

The implications are far reaching, because if Prometheus is filling in the object-voice with his own “separate phantasies” then that raises the possibility that those fantasies are delusions and that his subjective position is one of psychosis rather than one of neurosis. In chapter one, I argued that *Zastrozzi* was a study of reactionary paranoiac fantasy; but one could argue, conversely, that *Prometheus Unbound* is a study of revolutionary paranoiac fantasy. Let us revisit Peter Starr’s analysis that in a “logic of specular doubling . . . revolutionary action is doomed to repetition because revolutionaries invariably construct themselves as mirror images of their rivals” (2), which has the potential to lead to a “logic of structural repetition” (3). As many critics have noted, Prometheus and Jupiter share a number of similarities in Act I. The most notable example occurs when Prometheus summons the Phantasm of Jupiter to repeat the curse that Prometheus had spoken, thus condensing speaker and receiver into one image. Prometheus sees himself in the Phantasm:

I see the curse on gestures proud and cold,

And looks of firm defiance, and calm hate,
 And such despair as mocks itself with smiles,
 Written as on a scroll . . . yet speak—O speak! (I.258-61)

Prometheus too is described throughout Act I as being “proud,” “calm,” and “defiant,” echoes of which are part of the curse itself:

Fiend, I defy thee! with a calm, fixed mind,
 All that thou canst inflict I bid thee do;
 Foul Tyrant both of Gods and Humankind,
 One only being shalt thou not subdue.
 Rain then thy plagues upon me here,
 Ghastly disease and frenzying fear;
 And let alternate frost and fire
 Eat into me, and be thine ire
 Lightning and cutting hail and legioned forms
 Of furies, driving by upon the wondrous storms. (I.262-71)

As we learned from Prometheus’s opening dialogue, he suffers afflictions that the curse reveals he has brought upon himself, and indeed had demanded from Jupiter. Leon Waldoff, in his Freudian reading of the Oedipal dynamics at work in the drama, argues that Prometheus’s suffering is a self-imposed masochism and that his eventual release is a largely an unconscious realization that aggression only doubles back on the self in various forms of guilt and anxiety. Although Waldoff focuses on the dynamic between Prometheus and Jupiter, William Ulmer identifies another source of guilt, one that Shelley conveniently omits from the drama. In Act II when Asia descends to the realm of Demogorgon and chronicles the history of the Gods and human civilization, she informs us: “Then Prometheus / Gave wisdom, which is strength, to Jupiter / And with this Law alone: ‘Let man be free,’ / Clothed him with the dominion of wide Heaven” (II.iv.43-46). The crucial point here is

that in the battle to overthrow Saturn, Prometheus sided with the Olympian Jupiter rather than with his fellow Titans. Thus for Ulmer, “Prometheus is a son enormously imperfect in love, and it is Jupiter who does the real dirty work by deposing Saturn, the Titanic patriarch” (82n); and “Prometheus reconfirms Jupiter’s power with every refusal to internalize and confront his own Oedipal aggressions. As the reflex of that refusal, the punishment of Prometheus brings back the castration anxieties attendant on filial rebellion” (83). So not only does Prometheus provide Jupiter with the means of attaining power, he also betrays his fellow Titans in the process. Not surprisingly, Prometheus may be displaying a form of self-punishment paranoia where he strikes out at ideal-ego figures who possess the power and authority he wishes for himself. In this regard, Prometheus bears some resemblance to the self-satisfied Apollo from Shelley’s lyric “Song of Apollo” (1820):

The sunbeams are my shafts with which I kill
 Deceit, that loves the night and fears the day.
 All men who do, or even imagine ill
 Fly me; and from the glory of my ray
 Good minds, and open actions take new might
 Until diminished, by the reign of night. (33-38)

...

I am the eye with which the Universe
 Beholds itself, and knows it is divine.
 All harmony of instrument and verse,
 All prophecy and medicine are mine;
 All light of art or nature—to my song
 Victory and praise, in its own right, belong. (31-36)

For Asia tells us that Prometheus

. . . gave man speech, and speech created thought,

Which is the measure of the Universe;
 And Science struck the thrones of Earth and Heaven,
 Which shook but fell not; and the harmonious mind
 Poured itself forth in all-prophetic song.
 And music lifted up the listening spirit
 Until it walked, exempt from mortal care,
 Godlike, o'er the clear billows of sweet sound; (II.iv.72-79)

...
 He told the hidden power of herbs and springs,
 And Disease drank and slept—Death grew like sleep.— (II.iv.85-86)

...
 Such the alleviations of his state
 Prometheus gave to man—for which he hangs
 Withering in destined pain— . . . (II.iv.98-100)

Prometheus defines himself in terms of his suffering and expresses a desperate need for recognition. Prometheus has no signifier of his own outside of his relation to the Other, either in the form of Jupiter's "foe" or mankind's "saviour." Earlier in the Act, he pleads:

I ask yon Earth, have not the mountains felt?
 I ask yon Heaven—the all-beholding Sun,
 Has it not seen? The Sea, in storm or calm
 Heaven's ever-changing Shadow, spread below—
 Have its deaf waves not heard my agony?
 Ah me, alas, pain, pain ever, forever! (I.25-30)

...
 . . . Know ye not me,
 The Titan, he who made his agony
 The barrier to your else all-conquering foe? (I.117-19)

...
 . . . me alone, who checked—
 As one who checks a fiend-drawn charioteer—
 The falsehood and the force of Him who reigns
 Supreme, and with the groans of pining slaves
 Fills your dim glens and liquid wildernesses?
 Why answer ye not, still? brethren! (I.125-30)

And at the conclusion of Act I:

. . . I would fain
 Be what it is my destiny to be,

The saviour and the strength of suffering man,
 Or sink into the original gulf of things . . .
 There is no more agony and no solace left:
 Earth can console, Heaven can torment no more. (I.815-820)

Prometheus's desire is always framed in terms of the other's desire, and he positions himself as the object-instrument of the other's desire. And in his relation to Jupiter, he positions himself as the object of the *jouissance* of the Other. His suffering, therefore, is not a means to procure pleasure, as in masochism. His pain and suffering, rather, serve only to procure pleasure for the Other. In short, Prometheus is a perverse subject. The perverse logic of Prometheus's subject position is most clearly evident in his curse on Jupiter when he says:

Aye, do thy worst. Thou art Omnipotent
 O'er all things but thyself I gave thee power,
 And my own will. Be they swift mischiefs sent
 To blast mankind, from yon ethereal tower.
 Let the malignant spirit move
 In darkness over those I love:
 On me and mine I imprecate
 The utmost torture of they hate
 And thus devote to sleepless agony
 This undecending head while thou must reign on high. (I.272-81)

Not only does Prometheus demand Jupiter's wrath be inflicted upon himself, he also demands that "mankind" and "those" he loves also suffer the same inflictions. It is not enough that he alone suffers; those whom he loves must also suffer so as to fully establish his power over their desire and his own status as their benefactor. They *must* suffer or his own suffering would be meaningless. Prometheus's perverse desire, then, follows a similar logic to

that of a man who disfigures his wife in order to prove to her that he will love her under any circumstance.

The differences between neurosis, psychosis, and perversion can be understood in terms of the subject's structural relation to symbolic castration and access to or denial of *jouissance*.⁵ Each subject-position is characterized by a specific form of negation. In psychosis the negation takes the form of *foreclosure* of the castrating effects of the symbolic order. Metaphorical figurations, therefore, are interpreted literally because signifiers and referents are collapsed in the psychotic's experience of reality. There is no doubt produced when the psychotic encounters the alterity of the Other because the psychotic encounters others as imaginary objects, not as subjects of lack. Prometheus is trapped in a dual imaginary relationship with Jupiter, and he expresses none of the doubt or anxiety characteristic of the neurotic subject who has accepted his/her castration. Despite his enchainment, Prometheus refuses to accept his symbolic castration, claiming that Jupiter is "Monarch of Gods and Dæmons, and all Spirits / But One . . . (I.1-2)." The "One" he refers to here is himself, although he is no doubt mistaken since it is Demogorgon who will rise to overthrow Jupiter.⁶

In perversion, however, negation takes the form of a *disavowal* of castration. The perverse subject believes he or she can determine with certainty what the Other desires, what forms the Other's *jouissance* takes, and how to best relate to that form of *jouissance*. Prometheus claims with certainty that he possesses the secrets of Jupiter's desire, and Jupiter himself is convinced that Prometheus does indeed possess that knowledge. Mercury

asks Prometheus, “Thou knowest not the period of Jove’s power?” (I.412), and Prometheus responds: “I wait, / Enduring thus the retributive hour / Which since we spake is even nearer now.—” (I.405-407) Although he is the god of forethought, Prometheus only knows “that it must come” (I.413). In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan explains that perversion “is an inverted effect of the phantasy. It is the subject who determines himself as object, in his encounter with the division of subjectivity” (185). Freud established the points of contact between neurosis, psychosis, perversion, and disavowal, noting that:

In neurosis a piece of reality is avoided by a sort of flight, whereas in psychosis it is remodelled. Or we might say: in psychosis, the initial flight is succeeded by an active phase of remodelling; in neurosis the initial obedience is succeeded by a deferred attempt at flight. Or again, expressed in yet another way: neurosis does not disavow reality, it only ignores it; psychosis disavows it and tries to replace it.⁷

By interpreting Prometheus as a perverse subject who disavows castration rather than repressing or foreclosing it, we can now understand how it is he is able to simultaneously express pity and hatred. That is, the hatred he has harbored for three thousand years is disavowed rather than purified or repressed. Stuart Sperry, commenting on the implausibility of Prometheus’s sudden transformation asks: “. . . if Shelley really intended to dramatize man’s powers of self-regeneration through an act of inward recognition, repentance, and reform, why did he do his work so badly?” (242). Sperry likens Prometheus’s conversion to the one undergone by Coleridge’s *Ancient Mariner*, a text I have often pointed to as an exemplary case that demonstrates the split between the statement and the enunciation. When

Prometheus says “It doth repent me: words are quick and vain; / Grief for awhile is blind, and so was mine. / I wish no living thing to suffer pain” (I.303-305), he offers a moral platitude no more convincing as the Mariner’s because the sentiment “no living thing” does not apply to Jupiter, who is given no opportunity to reform or repent himself. Throughout the poem, Jupiter is never referred to as anything other than “evil,” or “tyrant,” or “slave.” Even after he recalls the curse, Prometheus still refers to the “retributive hour” of Jupiter’s overthrow. This is the antagonism that cannot be accounted for in the Promethean Age. This is the obscene, radical alterity of the Other that confronts the revolutionary subject not with love but with fear. And if Shelley’s theory of poetry indeed strives to “create unity out of oppositions” and create a space where “discord cannot be” then how does it account for the presence of an Other that resists unity? How does it account for the “silence” and “solitude” of the voice and gaze as objects? Jupiter is an extreme example, of course, but significant because he represents but one example of the “object” that resists the kind of transference drive that Hogle and others claim ushers in the renovation of the world. What gets lost in this endless series of metaphorical substitutions is the Lacanian “Real,” that which resists symbolization, the antagonism that cannot be articulated symbolically, nor accounted for in the subject’s fantasy space.

When we consider Prometheus’s actions and desires as those of a perverse subject, he becomes a far more plausible character, one whose physical and mental suffering give him a psychological complexity far greater than Shelley may have intended. Recalling a curse, resisting the temptation to

despair brought on by the Furies, reuniting with Asia after the overthrow of Jupiter, and then retiring to an oracular cave to cultivate the arts hardly does justice to his psychological complexity and the ambiguity of the drama at large. Granted, Shelley does condition the optimism of the play on several occasions, particularly at the conclusion of Act III where “chance and death and mutability” are the “clogs of that which else might oversoar / The loftiest star of unascended Heaven / Pinnacled dim in the intense inane” (III.iv.201-204). Although Shelley’s renovated man rules these contingencies “like slaves,” such a vision would require not only Demogorgon’s instructions to “defy Power,” “to love, and bear,” and “hope, till Hope creates / From it’s own wreck the thing it contemplates,” but more importantly, it assumes a subject who can rule his or her own unconscious and to fully identify with the desires of the Other. And this is possible only for the perverse subject because of the certainty he ascribes to his own fantasy.

The perverse subject position is one well suited to Shelley because it enables an interpretation of his works outside of the usual frame of “skeptical idealism” that has been so well established by Pulos and Wasserman.⁸ While I largely agree with their assessment of Shelley’s philosophical positions, I would also argue that we could reframe the skeptical/idealism binary in terms of the perverse structure, where Shelley disavows his skepticism when striving for idealism. In other words, the two positions are maintained in abeyance: i.e., “I know very well that the universe is an amoral void, but nevertheless I choose to believe in a benevolent spirit co-eternal with the universe.” Or, as Asia says in her dialogue with Demogorgon: “There was Heaven and Earth at

lament to that of Prometheus. The Maniac asks “What Power delights to torture us? I know / That to myself I do not wholly owe / What now I suffer, though in part I may. / Alas, none strewed sweet flowers upon the way / Where wandering heedlessly, I met pale Pain / My shadow, which will leave me not again—” (320-325). The Maniac lives “to shew / How much men bear and die not!” (459-60). The Maniac is a victim of unrequited love who cannot let go of the ideal image of the woman who left him. As he pleads to an imaginary image that haunts his mind, he exclaims: “Here I cast away / All human passions, all revenge, all pride; / I think, speak, act no ill I do but hide / Under these words like embers . . . (501-504). Shelley is well aware that unlike the metaphysics of *Prometheus Unbound* where “eternal Love” powers the machinery of necessity, love is subject to change, chance, and mutability, as it is experienced in debilitating despair for the Maniac.

The ideal union, the successful fulfillment of the sexual relationship, as embodied by the union of Asia and Prometheus, could be read as a realization of the fantasy of the Maniac. Furthermore, one could argue that Demogorgon’s overthrow of Jupiter stages the fantasy of Beatrice Cenci, for whom no escape is possible from the omnipotent phallic figures—father, church, community—which contain and abuse her. If, as I have argued, Prometheus obtains satisfaction by ensuring the enjoyment of the Other, thereby transforming himself into an instrument of the Other’s *jouissance*, then as a perverse subject, he creates an alternative symbolic order in which *jouissance* (“Love,” in the vocabulary of *Prometheus Unbound*) becomes a universal ideological principle. So when we leave Prometheus at the end of Act

I, at which point no change has yet taken place other than his own renewed capacity for love, we enter his newly created fantasy space. The difference being that he shifts his position as the object-instrument of Jupiter's *jouissance* to the object-instrument of Asia's *jouissance*, and by extension Panthea's and Ione's.

Before turning to Panthea's communication of her dreams to Asia, which sets in motion the action of Act II, I want to pause for a moment to consider a curious moment in the text that is quickly passed over. After telling Asia of her erotically charged dream of the transfigured Prometheus, Panthea relates Ione's own reaction when confronted by the ecstatic effects of the dream on Panthea:

“Canst thou divine what troubles me tonight?
I always knew what I desired before
Nor ever found delight to wish in vain.
But now I cannot tell thee what I seek;
I know not—something sweet since it is sweet
Even to desire—it is thy sport false sister!
Thou hast discovered some enchantment old
Whose spells have stolen my spirit as I slept
And mingled it with thine;—for when we just now
Kissed, I felt within they parted lips
The sweet air that sustained me, and the warmth
Of the life-blood for loss of which I faint
Quivered between our intertwining arms.” (II.i.94-106)

Panthea, rather than responding to Ione, immediately flees to Asia, leaving Ione's questions, and ours, unanswered. Judith Feher-Gurewicz points out that “the pervert can access psychic gratification only by becoming the agent of the other's fantasy . . . in order to expose the fundamental anxiety that such a fantasy camouflages. This no doubt explains why perverse desire produces

horror, fear, and dismay in those who witness its mode of operation” (192).

What Ione has “witnessed,” so to speak, is Prometheus’s perverse desire as it is experienced by Panthea, its “mode of operation,” as Feher-Gurewich puts it.

We can understand why this may have startled Ione when Panthea describes the content of her remembered dream:

Then two dreams came. One I remember not.
 But in the other, his pale, wound-worn limbs
 Fell from Prometheus, and the azure night
 Grew radiant with glory of that form
 Which lives unchanged within, and his voice fell
 Like music which makes giddy the dim brain
 Faint with intoxication of keen joy:
 “Sister of her whose footsteps pave the world
 With loveliness—more fair than aught but her
 Whose shadow thou art—lift thine eyes on me!”
 I lifted them—the overpowering light
 Of that immortal shape was shadowed o’er
 By love; which, from his soft and flowing limbs
 And passion-parted lips, and keen faint eyes
 Streamed forth like vaporous fire; an atmosphere
 Which wrapt me in its all dissolving power
 As the warm ether of the morning sun
 Wraps ere it drinks some cloud of wandering dew.
 I saw not—heard not—moved not—only felt
 His presence flow and mingle through my blood
 Till it became his life, and his grew mine
 And I was thus absorbed—. . . (II.i.61-82)

What frightens Ione and disturbs her “linked sleep” with Panthea is the introduction of a masculine, Promethean desire into a feminine economy of desire, to which Ione had become accustomed during Prometheus’s enchainment. That the glorious form of Prometheus’s “immortal shape” is clad only with his smile links his newfound desire to that of exhibitionist fantasy. The crucial point here is that we encounter this fantasy through Panthea’s desire, thus establishing the perverse subject’s certainty regarding

the *jouissance* of the Other. In other words, if, as Lacan repeatedly argues, one's "desire is always the desire of the Other," then the desire of Panthea and Asia, with the exception of Ione, is framed within Prometheus's perverse fantasy frame. They themselves become the object-instrument of Promethean desire, as it operates throughout the play. And in relation to Prometheus himself, Asia reassumes her status as the object-cause of his desire. To put it another way, Asia and Prometheus re-establish the normative hetero-sexual circuit of desire, but within a perverse fantasy space where the law of Jupiterian "Fear" is replaced by the law of Promethean "Love." One master signifier is replaced by another, through which the phenomenal reality of the play is mediated, from an injunction to "Obey!" to an injunction to "Enjoy!"—both of which constitute the impossible demand of the super-ego. Although only a masochist would prefer the Jupiterian world of servitude, the conditions of possibility for the Promethean age exact their own price, particularly for women.

In both his prose and poetry, Shelley consistently argues on behalf of equality for women, for which he has been rightfully commended. From *Queen Mab*, *Laon and Cythna*, *The Cenci*, *Prometheus Unbound*, and his essays "A Discourse on the Manners of the Ancient Greeks Relative to the Subject of Love," and "A Philosophical View of Reform," among others, Shelley eloquently exposes the patriarchal machinery that enslaves women to unwanted marriage, prostitution, inadequate educational and professional opportunities, and repressive reproductive customs. And yet, as much as he abhors the degradation of women, he consistently stages an inverse situation

where women are valorized as a mirror for the idealized aspirations and desires of degraded men. In a 12 January 1811 letter to his schoolmate and friend Thomas Jefferson Hogg, the young Shelley writes:

I here take God (if a God exists) to witness that I wish torments which beggar the futile description of a fancied Hell would fall upon me, provided thereby I could attain that happiness for what I love, which I fear can never be.—The question is What do I love? it is almost unnecessary to answer. Do I love the person, the embodied identity (if I may be allowed the ex[pressio]n No! I love what is superior what is excellent, or what I conceive to be so, & wish, ardently wish to be convinced of the existence of a God that so superior a spirit should derive happiness from my exertions—for Love is Heaven, & Heaven is Love. Oh! that it were. (*Letters*, 44)

We find a similar, though more abstract, description of love in Shelley's 1818 essay "On Love":

Thou demandest what is Love. It is that powerful attraction towards all that we conceive or fear or hope beyond ourselves when we find within our own thoughts the chasm of an insufficient void and seek to awaken in all things that are a community with what we experience within ourselves. . . . We dimly see within our intellectual nature a miniature as it were of our entire self, yet deprived of all that we condemn or despise, the ideal prototype of every thing excellent or lovely that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man. . . . a mirror whose surface reflects only the forms of purity and brightness: a soul within our soul that describes a circle around its proper Paradise which pain and sorrow or evil dare not overleap. (SPP, 503-504)

In both of these instances, there can be no better description of Lacan's *objet petit a*, or as Shelley would have known it from his translation of Plato's *Symposium*, the *agalma*, the secret treasure which the lover sees in his beloved but which is merely a fantasy screen for the lover's desire (as Socrates explains to Alcibiades). The lover loves what the beloved does not, in fact, possess, which is why the *objet petit a* is but a semblance of being. So when

Prometheus refers to Asia as the “Shadow of beauty unbeheld (III.iii.7), or exclaims “Asia! who when my being overflowed / Wert like a golden chalice to bright wine / Which else had sunk into the thirsty dust” (I.809-811), Asia assumes the impossible role of sustaining the masculine fantasy of a fully realized sexual relationship by masquerading herself as the object-cause of his desire. Asia is the shadow of a greater good, an ideal beauty beyond herself, and a chalice which preserves and gives form to an excess of being that would be lost if not for her “transforming presence” (I.832).

In either case—whether as screen or form—Asia’s own sense of identity intimately depends upon her status as an object of desire, whereas Prometheus’s identity depends upon his symbolic status as the “saviour and the strength of suffering man” (I.234). Or, as I’ve described by way of Lacan’s sexuation formulas elsewhere throughout my study, the masculine subject identifies with the object-cause of desire and the feminine subject identifies with the phallic object. The difference between this normative heterosexual relationship and the perverse structure I’ve discussed above lies in the fact that Prometheus disavows the castrating function of Jupiter, despite all empirical evidence to the contrary, and positions *himself* as its exception. Jupiter is monarch over all spirits but “One,” and Prometheus identifies himself with this “One.” According to Lacan, the two seemingly contradictory propositions that define the masculine subject—1) There is at least one X who is not submitted to the phallic function; and 2) All X’s are submitted to the phallic function—can be understood to mean that this exception to the phallic function is a fantasy that the masculine subject presupposes in order to

account for the fact that his full emergence into the symbolic evacuates *jouissance* and institutes the metonymic movement of desire. In other words, for the masculine subject full *jouissance* is prohibited. By disavowing this prohibition, Prometheus establishes a perverse relation to power, as such. And in this perverse relation he is able to exercise a degree of liberatory resistance, at least within the context of his fantasy frame.

We are now in a position to appreciate Asia's crucial role in the drama. Although she identifies with Prometheus as phallic signifier, as a feminine subject she has access to a mode of *jouissance* that is prohibited for Prometheus, although he has attempted to disavow his symbolic castration and split subjectivity. Lacan's formula for female sexuation introduces another set of propositions: 1) There is not one X that is not submitted to the phallic function; and 2) Not all X is submitted to the phallic function. Unlike the masculine sexuation formulas where the masculine subject constructs a fantasy of full *jouissance* that is prohibited, the feminine sexuated subject is confronted with the paradox that although this Other *jouissance* is not captured within language, there is no *jouissance* that is not subject to the castrating effects of language. The point being that the symbolic order is incomplete, and what escapes the symbolic exposes it as being "not-all." Lacan refers to this "not-all" as the "signifier of the barred Other," a signifier of lack that points to the fact that the "situation," to use Badiou's terminology, is non-totalizing and can be disrupted by an aleatory event. Shelley's name for this "not-all" that escapes totalization is Demogorgon. As a masculine sexuated subject, Prometheus's psychic economy does not have access to the

lack that Demogorgon signifies, but Asia does. Demogorgon signifies the lack that Jupiterian ideology, or any structure of power, seeks to conceal in order to maintain power.

Prometheus does not mention, nor does he interact with Demogorgon. In their dialogue in Act I, the Earth mentions Demogorgon (in one of the more complicated set of images in the play), but it is unclear if Prometheus has any conception of him or it (Demogorgon is, appropriately, not gendered).

The Earth explains to Prometheus:

For know there are two worlds of life and death:
 One that which thou beholdest, but the other
 Is underneath the grave, where do inhabit
 The shadows of all forms that think and live
 Till death unite them, and they part no more;
 Dreams and the light imaginings of men
 And all that faith creates, or love desires,
 Terrible, strange, sublime and beauteous shapes.
 There thou art, and dost hang, a writhing shade
 'Mid whirlwind-peopled mountains; all the Gods
 Are there, and all the Powers of nameless worlds,
 Vast, sceptered Phantoms; heroes, men, and beasts;
 And Demogorgon, a tremendous Gloom;
 And he, the Supreme Tyrant, on his throne
 Of burning Gold. . . . (I.195-209)

Apart from the metaphysical difficulty of this passage, which scholars have interpreted in terms of Platonic, Neo-Platonic, Paracelsian, and Porphyrian systems,⁹ my concern here is Demogorgon's presence in this mysterious shadow-world. I agree with Barbara Gelpi that what Shelley is attempting to represent is best described as the realm of the unconscious, or the Lacanian "space of the Other." Gelpi cites Lacan's observation in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* that "It is in the space of the Other

that he [the subject] sees himself and the point from which he looks at himself is also in that space" (144). The problem, however, is that this world "beneath the grave" contains shadows and mirrors of living beings, so who or what does Demogorgon shadow? Does he or it have a counterpart like the others mentioned in the passage? Demogorgon is another one of Shelley's famously over-determined images that reflects the theoretical perspective through which it is interpreted: from "necessity," to "potentiality," to "the One mind," to "effective causality," to "symbol of proletarian revolution," to "psychoanalyst," to "pre-Oedipal figure," to "a symbol of how tyranny breeds its own destruction," to "mystery incarnate," etc. We know only, however, that Demogorgon is a "tremendous Gloom," that has no counterpart anywhere else in the play. He certainly does not mirror Prometheus, who has his own shadowy counterpart "underneath the grave" (which also raises difficulties since Prometheus is immortal and knows nothing of the world of death). Here I agree with John Pierce, who writes: Demogorgon "seems to function outside the psychological drama of Prometheus" (125), calling into question Gelpi's reading that "the unconquered "One" is both Prometheus and Demogorgon, or Prometheus/Demogorgon" where "Demogorgon is that hidden but still vital aspect of Prometheus that holds potential for social change" (145). As I have argued, if anything Demogorgon is the sign of an aleatory rupture of the fabric of Jupiterian ideology, a shadowy site of potential resistance for Asia rather than for Prometheus.

But even so, Demogorgon's status remains ambiguous because throughout Asia's and Panthea's journey to his realm, what begins as an

aleatory rupture develops into a positive representation of being as Asia infuses her own desire into Panthea's second, forgotten dream. Demogorgon literally materializes out of the mist, an absence into a presence, a movement from the "signifier of the barred Other" to the "other of the barred Other." In other words, Asia identifies with Demogorgon first as lack and then as a positive materialization of that lack as her desire (and by extension Prometheus's) begins to give shape to Demogorgon as the "power" that manipulates the Other from behind the scenes, so that by the time they reach Demogorgon he is a formless presence, though replete with phallic authority. Asia's fascination and sublime respect for the awe that Demogorgon inspires is anticipated when she and Panthea arrive at the portal to his lair. Asia exclaims:

Fit throne for such a Power! Magnificent!
 How glorious art thou, Earth! and if thou be
 The shadow of some Spirit lovelier still,
 Though evil stain its work and it should be
 Like its creation, weak yet beautiful,
 I could fall down and worship that and thee.—
 Even now my heart adoreth.—Wonderful! (II.iii.11-16)

As Prometheus is tempted to despair by the Furies, Asia is tempted to attraction to phallic power. Panthea however, assumes a more skeptical approach, noting that the "oracular vapour" hurled up from Demogorgon's portal has been codified throughout history into systems of "truth, virtue, love, genius or joy—" by "lonely men wandering in their youth" (II.iii.4-6). As such, Panthea provides a warning against attempting to name the aleatory

event or to reinscribe it within the context of an existing ideological situation.

As Demogorgon tells Asia,

—If the Abyss
 Could vomit forth its secrets:—but a voice
 Is wanting, the deep truth is imageless;
 For what would it avail to bid thee gaze
 On the revolving world? what to bid speak
 Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance and Change?—To these
 All things are subject but eternal Love. (II.iv.114-120)

This passage best exemplifies the distinction I have made between Demogorgon as “signifier of the barred Other” and the “other of the big Other,” the latter of which Lacan insists does not exist. The transition from a signifier of lack to a materialization of lack corresponds to the shift from Demogorgon’s claim that the “deep truth is imageless” to an apparent formulation of that imageless truth as “All things are subject [to] “Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance and Change” except for “eternal Love.” The alterity of Demogorgon, and the rupture of indeterminacy he signifies, fuses into Asia’s fantasy that “light and love” are the primordial forces of the universe. Asia remarks that “So much I asked before, and my heart gave / The response thou hast given; and of such truths / Each to itself must be the oracle.—” (II.iv.121-23). The institution of Promethean law is accomplished the moment Asia betrays her fidelity to the “real” of the “truth-event” and invests Demogorgon with a fantasmatic agency to enact the change that she and Prometheus desire, which, as Prometheus describes it, is the reduction of their subjectivity to an instrumentalized passivity: “. . . we will sit and talk of time and change / As the world ebbs and flows, ourselves unchanged” (III.iii.23-24) . . . “where discord cannot be” (III.iii.39).

Barbara Gelpi wryly comments that Prometheus's reunion with Asia, Panthea, and Ione takes on "some of the characteristics of an infant with adoring baby-sitters" (247) and that in the epithalamion of Act IV, "Imagining the earth and moon joyously and harmoniously aspin presents nothing like the difficulty involved in imagining a world of harmonious, just, and equable human beings" (263). While one can agree that the regressive fantasy of returning to the dyadic mother-child relationship of a pre-symbolic imaginary characteristic of psychosis, I would argue that this fantasy itself is an illusion that is demystified throughout the drama as a product of impossibility.

Prometheus Unbound stages Shelley's version of "Twilight of the Idols," where icons like Prometheus and Asia are relegated to the cultural memory of history, along with the desire for a social contract without antagonism. This may not have been Shelley's likely intention, of course, but the emergent subject of modernity and psychoanalysis—the materiality of consciousness itself—conditions the utopian aims of the drama and introduces a series of obstacles to Romantic subjectivity. As Neil Fraistat has perceptively observed: ". . . over the course of "Prometheus Unbound" paradise is regained only to be unmade in "The Sensitive-Plant," the first poem to follow; once lost, this paradise will not appear in the [*Prometheus Unbound*] volume" (169). The "undefiled Paradise" (58) of "The Sensitive-Plant" is a "garden" whose beauty is a product of sexual difference, represented in the poem by flowers that need others to reproduce whereas the "sensitive-plant" is hermaphroditic, displaying none of the colors and fragrances of attraction:

For each one was interpenetrated
 With the light and the odour its neighbor shed
 Like young lovers, whom youth and love make dear,
 Wrapt and filled by their mutual atmosphere.

But the Sensitive-plant, which could give small fruit
 Of the love which it felt from the leaf to the root,
 Received more than all—it loved more than ever,
 Where none wanted but it, could belong to the giver.

For the Sensitive-Plant has no bright flower;
 Radiance and odour are not its dower—
 It loves—even like Love—its deep heart is full—
 It desires what it has not—the beautiful! (66-77)

Although the sensitive-plant yearns for sexual difference, to participate in the community of love and beauty, this paradise is made possible only because of an Asia-like “Lady” who protects the garden from “killing insects and gnawing worms / And all things of obscene and unlovely forms” (41-42). When the Lady dies:

The garden once fair became cold and foul
 Like the corpse of her who had been its soul
 Which at first was lovely as if in sleep,
 Then slowly changed, till it grew a hep
 To make men tremble who never weep. (II.16-21)

The garden becomes overrun by “loathliest weeds,” “course leaves,” and “. . . thistles, and nettles, and darnels rank, / And the dock, and henbane, and hemlock dank” (51-55) and fills “the place with a monstrous undergrowth, / Prickly, and pulpous, and blistering, and blue, / Livid and starred with a lurid dew” . . . “as if the decaying dead / With a spirit of growth had been animated!” (II.59-61). The gothic imagery of these lines mirrors that of the Jupitorean age as described by the Earth in Act I of *Prometheus Unbound*.

The difference, however, is that the corruption of the garden in the “Sensitive-Plant” explicitly points to the fictionality of paradise, that the “garden” is a fiction of “nature” itself that exists only because of a benevolent power that shields it from equally natural phenomena. In this sense, the Lady in addition to her resemblance to Asia, also functions as an “other of the big Other,” in much the same way Demogorgon does. The ugliness and destructiveness that corrupts the garden are not imperfect forms of nature that can be imaginatively transfigured through the performative powers of radical transference or metaphorical substitution. These Shelleyesque images of the antagonisms of “bare life” must be forcibly expelled to sustain the Shelleyan illusion of a harmonic fantasy of subjective plenitude. The poem concludes with a lesson drawn from *Prometheus Unbound*, staging yet another form of perverse disavowal:

That Garden sweet, that lady fair
 And all sweet shapes and odours there
 In truth have never past away—
 'Tis we, 'tis ours, are changed—not they.

For love, and beauty, and delight
 There is no death nor change: their might
 Exceeds our organs—which endure
 No light—being themselves obscure. (III.17-24)

Rather than accepting that antagonism is not subject to mediation, Shelleyan Romanticism again disavows the implications of Shelleyesque Gothicism, while the poem itself refuses such as a disavowal. We are once again in the perverse subject’s quest to frame his or her desire in such a way that falsifies experience. As Feher-Gurewich remarks, the perverse subject

strives “to get to the point where the enigma [of the other’s desire] can be formulated, yet they do not have the clues, the signifiers, with which to produce a theory/fantasy that could make sense of it” (202). Such a fantasy “Exceeds our organs—which endure / No light—being themselves obscure.” The Shelleyesque appears in all of its traumatic force when fantasy fails, as an aesthetic of impossibility. Shelley’s success as a poet is, paradoxically, a testament to the failure of imagination to “create from its own wreck the thing it contemplates.” For the poet of *Adonais*, the Romantic ego strives to imagine the “white radiance of Eternity” of an undifferentiated “One,” but the gothic subject is “borne darkly, fearfully, afar.” Even in a work as optimistic as *Prometheus Unbound*, the Gothic lurks in the mysterious shadows of the textual unconscious, an uncanny remainder of the trauma that Prometheus and Asia struggle to veil.

¹ See, for example, Chris Foss, “Shelley’s Revolution in Poetic Language: A Kristevan Reading of Act IV of *Prometheus Unbound*” and Susan Brisman, “‘Unsayings his High Language’: The Problem of Voice in *Prometheus Unbound*.”

² In his political writings, Shelley is often more pragmatic than his poetry would suggest. See, for example, his essay “A Philosophical View of Reform” where he argues for an incremental process of reform to achieve specific political goals.

³ See, for example, Leon Waldoff, “The Father-Son Conflict in *Prometheus Unbound*,” for a Freudian analysis of the Oedipal conflict in the drama.

⁴ See Alain Badiou’s *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* for a concise introduction to his theory of the “event” and the truth procedure it enables. “Truth,” writes Badiou, is the “process of a fidelity to an event: that which this fidelity *produces* in the situation. . . . It is thus an *immanent break*. ‘Immanent’ because a truth proceeds *in* the situation, and nowhere else—there is no heaven of truths. ‘Break’ because what enables the truth-process—the event—meant nothing according to the prevailing language and established knowledge of the situation” (pp. 42-43).

⁵ For the forms of negation that characterize psychosis, perversion, and neurosis, I rely upon Levi R. Bryant’s analysis in “Sexuation—The Logic of *Jouissance*” on his website *Larval Subjects*: <http://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2008/11/25/sexuation-2-the-logic-of-jouissance/#more-777>.

⁶ For an excellent summary of the body of criticism devoted to the significance of the “One” see John Rieder’s “The ‘One’ in *Prometheus Unbound*.”

⁷ Cited in Joel Whitebook, *Perversion and Utopia*, p. 43.

⁸ See C. E. Pulos’s *The Deep Truth: A Study of Shelley’s Scepticism* and Earl Wasserman’s *Shelley: A Critical Study* for their foundational work on Shelley’s skeptical idealism.

⁹ Here I rely upon Lawrence Zillman’s comprehensive presentation of *Prometheus Unbound* scholarship in his variorum edition of the play. Zillman summarizes the predominate criticism regarding this difficult passage on pages 361-62: “J. A. Cousins held that ‘Shelley’s idea of death as an incident of life . . . is not based on theological assumptions taken from others, but on his free intuitional responses to his universe. . . . [Here] he declares the existence of a super-physical habitat of the activities of the human psyche, the realm of imagination, faith and love . . . only reachable through the change of consciousness called death’” (*Work Promethean*, 59-61). (p. 361)

“For E. Ebeling, the idea could stem only from the Paracelsian doctrine ‘that there is an attendant spirit [Evestrum] born with everything, uniting the created being with the eternal. All Evestra issue from the same ultimate source and are of two kinds—mortal and immortal.’” (p. 362)

“Grabo thought that Porphyry, as cited by Proclus, offered the ‘most intelligible explanation of the soul residing as a shadow in Hades during the

mortal existence of its earthly counterpart,' and he summarized the difficult passage as follows:

[The] soul in its earthly incarnation takes to itself a humid dress or vehicle in which resides a spirit that is not the true soul at all, this latter being resident in the realm of intellective being. The soul presides over its earthly "vehicle" which awaits the spirit in the lower world until the decease of the earthly body. The "shadows of all forms that think and live" are the vehicles prepared for them, having no life of their own until inhabited by the spirits of the dead. Nor is this second existence or incarnation any more "real" than is earthly existence. From it ultimately the soul wholly withdraws to its true realm, that of mental existence, having in its incarnations acquired the experience it desired or which was demanded of it. (p. 362)

"J. A. Notopoulos, in his turn, held that there was no need to go beyond the Symposium and the *Phaedo* for the two Platonic notions involved. These he gave as:

... (1) the eternal versus the relative world, and (2) the immortality of the soul. The two notions are complementary in Shelley as in Plato. Shelley not only fuses these Platonic conceptions but also makes the habitation of the eternal beneath the grave a symbol of nether instead of upper transcendence, a conception probably inspired by the subterranean locus of Elysium, a word which Shelley used frequently. The phrase "shadows of all forms" is almost a Platonic formula for the shadowy manifestation of Platonic forms . . . in the relative world. (*Platonism of Shelley*, 242) (p. 362)

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