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The Connecting Threads of War, Torture, and Pain in Mary Shelley's *Valperga*

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This essay examines Mary Shelley's *Valperga: Or, the Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca* (1823) in terms of how Shelley weaves together issues of violence, war, torture, and pain. In order to develop my claims, the author analyzes three important sequences of events in the novel: Castruccio's passage from hero to tyrant, Euthanasia's critique of warfare, and Beatrice's account of her imprisonment and torture. Against the backdrop of war and power that marks Castruccio's rise to "glory," Euthanasia's condemnation of war and Beatrice's captivity tale read as counter-narratives that locate the ways in which power can be abused when unrestrained and unchecked. Additionally, Shelley's own observations about Europe, recorded in *History of a Six Weeks' Tour*, pre-figure one of the central themes of *Valperga*, the devastation of war, while also allowing her to comment on the destruction left in Napoleon's wake. Shelley essentially demonstrates a more pacifist stance on war than critics have previously attributed to her. While *Valperga* presents violence in its manifold forms, each form is questioned and ultimately presented as unsanctioned and illegitimate; there is, in *Valperga*, no form of violence or conflict that is legitimized by the narrative itself or by the characters within it.

Although Mary Shelley's 1823 novel *Valperga: Or, the Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca* has drawn much critical attention during recent years, not enough attention has been paid to the ways that Shelley weaves together issues of violence, war, torture, and pain in the novel. This is a story about one man's rise to power, but it is also a novel about the pain and violence that that power inflicts on others. In the earlier sections of *Valperga*, we follow Castruccio's ascent to princedom and witness the large numbers of those slain in his war efforts. Yet the people who are killed in the wars that Castruccio brings to Tuscany are given no voice of their own and little representational space. As the novel progresses, however, we do see and hear the individual body in pain.¹ It emerges largely through the narratives of the female characters: through Euthanasia's descriptions of war, its atrocities, and the price of it in terms of human life, and through the broken, tortured body of Beatrice.

Yet *Valperga* is more than just an anti-war novel; it is a novel that asks its readers to explore the connections between torture and war; between heroic ideology and tyranny; between pleasure and pain; and, perhaps most importantly, between physical and emotional suffering. War functions as a backdrop to the scenes taking place before us, but that representation of war is grounded in an investigation of the role violence serves in European society and of our fascination with and fetishization of it. While

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Valperga offers a critique of violence and war, it also ultimately asks us to heed the shifting line between sanctioned and unsanctioned violence, while forcing us to see that the horror we feel when confronted with images of violence is a tenuous sensation, at best.

From Hero to Tyrant: Castruccio's Rise to Power

The first volume of *Valperga* details the early influences on Castruccio's life and the trail he follows in his ascent to power and to his position as warlord and tyrant. Yet Shelley's narrator makes it clear that the path that Castruccio ultimately follows leads to a destiny that he chooses for himself. Described for the reader are those influences that formed Castruccio's character, ultimately for the worse because of his interest in obtaining power and glory. One of the earliest lessons that Castruccio fails to learn – being the errant student that he is – is the strong connection between humans and the natural world. Early on, we are told about how war destroys the natural world, and Castruccio's refusal to believe this fact mirrors his increasing drive for domination. When his father dies and Castruccio falls under the tutelage of his father's old, wise friend Guinigi, the older man attempts to open Castruccio's eyes as to the truly destructive nature of war. In one scene, the two men are gazing out across the crops that Guinigi now owns, having traded his life as a soldier for that of a farmer, with "his sword [turned] to a ploughshare" (25). When Guinigi comments on the "Paradise" he sees before him, "he wished to impress on the mind of his pupil a love of peace, and a taste for rural pleasures" (28), since he often "could not drive from his recollection the varieties of death, and the groans of torture that occasion such exultation to the privileged murderers of the earth" (27). The wording of this last phrase contains an important ambiguity: the soldiers not only represent those who are legitimately sanctioned to murder, but they also represent those who kill the land itself in order to manifest their power. They destroy not only the natural world as an aesthetic object, but, equally important, the peasantry's means of earning a living through the cultivation of that land. To make that point clear, Guinigi paints for Castruccio the portrait of the changes he has observed between the time of war and the current time of peace and prosperity:

How different was this some years ago! You have heard of Ezzelino the tyrant of Padua, under whose auspices the rivers ran blood, and the unfortunate peasant found his harvests reaped by the sword of the invading soldier! ... A few years ago, instead of peasants, soldiers marched along that road: their close ranks shewed their excellent discipline; their instruments filled the air with triumphant sounds; the knights pricked their steeds forward, who arching their proud necks, seemed to exult in their destination. What were they about to do? to burn a town, to murder the old, and the helpless, the women, and the children; to destroy the dwellings of peace; so that, when they left their cruel work, the miserable wretches who survived had nothing to shelter them but the bare, black walls, where before their neat cottages had stood. (28)

Guinigi's account of the soldiers' march questions the heroic nature of war; the "triumphant sounds" and the "proud" steeds that the knights ride herald not their engagement in a battle with equal opponents, but rather their brutality towards the innocent peasants who depend upon the land for their livelihood. Instead of fighting the enemy, they wreak havoc on the poor – "the old, and the helpless, the women, and the children." Guinigi exposes the vainglorious nature of war by presenting these truthful images of what war really involves, and yet his message is completely lost

upon his young companion, who responds by saying, “Yet who would not rather be a knight, than one of those peasants, whose minds are as grovelling as their occupations?” (28). At this point in his development, Castruccio remains oblivious to ways in which war ravages both the people and the land, and yet he has not started down the path toward reckless and indiscriminate violence that he will soon follow.

Despite these early admonitions against war, Castruccio continues his quest for power.² As Castruccio becomes ruler of the Lucchese territory, he attains the glory that he seeks on the battlefield, and the narrator recounts passages that echo the strains of heroic literature and its ancient tradition. Castruccio’s fate as a born leader is sealed during the chapter that recounts the Battle of Montecatini between Ugucione’s army (for whom Castruccio fights) and the Florentines. Although Ugucione’s eldest son Francesco is expected to lead the men into battle, the soldiers “all looked up to Castruccio as their real leader” (98). When Castruccio sees that Francesco has been killed, he steps in as leader of the men:

[I]nstantly feeling that the command devolved upon him, he galloped to the front of the lines, he threw off his casque that he might be distinguished, and, bidding the trumpets sound, he led his troops to a fresh assault ... Castruccio had seen service in France; but with far different feelings did he now engage in battle. He was surrounded by his friends; he saw those he loved advance with a steady eye to the danger towards which he led them; he looked up, and saw above the high seated castle that he must storm; he saw the closely set ranks of the enemy; he beheld all this with one glance, one feeling quicker than a look, and the trumpets sounded while he waved his sword; his spirits were exhilarated, his heart swelled, – tears – tears of high and uncontrolable emotion, filled his eyes, as he dashed through the ranks of the enemy, and cried, “Victory, or death!” None dared disobey his voice. (98–99)

Castruccio’s words to his soldiers, although obviously not as eloquent, are reminiscent of the famous speech with which Shakespeare’s Henry V rallies his troops at the Battle of Agincourt. Tied into Castruccio’s heroism is his sense of patriotism, which lends a new tint to his feelings of valor. In battles past, Castruccio had been moved by “far different feelings” from those that move him now. Even after being wounded, “his triumph and extacy rose almost to frenzy” as he climbs up Montecatini to place the Ghibelline banner on top, and his efforts are said to be such that “The victory was due to him alone ...” (99). In this passage, Shelley gives us a traditional portrait of the soldier in battle, one that she would have been familiar with, as Betty T. Bennett notes, from her readings of Machiavelli and Rousseau.³ The tears that spring, unbidden, to his eyes are obviously genuine and sincere, as Castruccio is moved by the sentiment of how he is fighting for his land and people. After the battle, as he meets with Euthanasia, his very countenance has changed, and “Truly did he look a hero; for power sat on his brow, and victory seemed to have made itself a home among the smiles of his lips” (100).

Yet also at work in *Valperga* is a tension between this heroic ideology and passages that call the very nature of that ideology into question through a sustained critique of war and Castruccio’s actions. In fact, and this is important to emphasize, the scene that describes Castruccio’s victory at the Battle of Montecatini is the only positive representation of war attached to Castruccio’s character in the entire novel; the only other times when this heroic strain appears in descriptions of war is, as I discuss later on, in descriptions of Euthanasia’s self-less actions during the assault on Valperga. Castruccio’s representation as a hero during the Battle of Montecatini thus connects the novel to the strands of heroism that run through older texts such as the

Iliad and *The Battle of Maldon*, celebrating the accomplishments of heroes from ages past, and yet Castruccio's rise to power becomes ever more closely linked to his abuse of power. He uses war to achieve fame and glory, but at the cost of a character that, the novel suggests, should have been made for nobler purposes. The battle of Montecatini therefore marks a turning point in Castruccio's life: while he could have chosen the path of noble hero, he instead chooses to let the power and victory that sat on his brow and lips after his first victory find a permanent home. As the novel continues, Castruccio becomes but a:

tyrant; a slave to his own passions, the avenger of those of others. Castruccio was ever at war ... he deluged the country in blood, and obtained that which he desired, dominion and fame.

It were curious to mark the changes that now operated in his character ... He became all in all to himself; his creed seemed to contain no article but the end and aim of his ambition; and that he swore before heaven to attain. Accustomed to see men die in battle for his cause, he became callous to blood, and felt no more whether it flowed for his security on a scaffold, or in the field of honour; and every new act of cruelty hardened his heart for those to come.

And yet all good feelings were not dead within him. An increased ardour in friendship seemed to have taken the place of innocence and general benevolence ... Ambition had become the ruling passion of his soul ... (210–11)

Although the germs of love and friendship are still present in Castruccio's mind, they remain secondary to Castruccio's goals of conquest, power, and domination. Like Shelley's earlier creation Victor Frankenstein, Castruccio is no longer alive to the human sensations that would connect him to those who suffer most at his hands. Instead, his ambition overrules feelings of "innocence and general benevolence," and Shelley makes it clear that that ambition is reprehensible, even if Castruccio was a product of his times.

Shelley's meticulous research into the time period that Castruccio lived in was, of course, tempered by her understanding of a figure from her own times – the self-proclaimed emperor who had decimated much of Europe by the time she wrote *Valperga*. As Theresa M. Kelley notes, "Shelley's presentation of the story of Castruccio repeatedly marks this character's proleptic resemblance to Napoleon" (627), a figure who cannot help but inflect Shelley's portrayal of Castruccio. To Shelley, Stuart Curran observes, "the Ghibellines represented an oppressive centralized authority exerted over all of Europe and embodied in a single man. When Mary Shelley was writing [*Valperga*], one such figure had just been overthrown and sent into exile – Napoleon Bonaparte – and another, the Hapsburg Emperor of Austria, had succeeded to Napoleon's dominion over Italy, imposing an even stricter authoritarianism" (108). The figure of Castruccio is therefore used not only to critique the war project, but also, as I will argue in greater depth in my discussion of Euthanasia, to critique the "legacy" of the Napoleonic wars.

As Castruccio's tyrannical and war-like nature manifests itself to a greater and greater extent, the disconnect between his victims and him becomes ever more evident; additionally, Castruccio's escalating use of torture is closely connected to the torture of Beatrice. Only a few pages before Beatrice is re-introduced to the story, after having gone missing for several years, Castruccio's degeneracy reaches its nadir, as made evident in his destruction of the castle of Valperga. Although Euthanasia

promises to retain a neutral position in the politically charged wars so that she can retain her mother's inheritance and continue to govern her own people, Castruccio ignores her arguments and uses his knowledge of the privy entrance to the castle to seize it. After razing Valperga, "He had in truth become a tyrant ... He put to death remorselessly those whom he suspected, and would even use torture, either to discover other victims, or to satisfy his desire of revenge" (267). What is especially important about this passage is that, as mentioned, it closes a scene that symbolically ends a chapter in Castruccio's life, before literally starting a new chapter only paragraphs later that opens with Beatrice's imprisonment in a prison of the Inquisition, an imprisonment that leads to the narration of her captivity in another prison that pre-dates time spent in the current one. The time she spent being tortured in the Campagna di Roma is, I will later argue, one of the most significant passages in the novel in terms of Shelley's representation of violence and pain.

While Volumes I and II of *Valperga* narrate Castruccio's rise to power and the battles he fights to ensure that rise, after Beatrice's death, his crimes become worse and worse. Far from having a beneficent or softening influence on him, Beatrice's death seems to serve only as a catalyst for Castruccio's greater decline into tyranny and even torture, the very things that led to Beatrice's own final descent into madness and her eventual demise.⁴ After Beatrice dies, Castruccio's use of torture escalates, and the novel is increasingly littered with examples of how Castruccio conveys his power through barbaric and questionable means. After "honoring" Beatrice through the pompous, stately funeral he gives her, Castruccio manifests changes in both looks and deeds: "he was cruel and unrelenting; and the death of his victim did not satisfy him; several were starved to death by his command, and worse tortures were inflicted upon others: – something of this was to be attributed to the usage of the times; but cruelty had become an elemental feature of Castruccio's character ... [he was] daring, artful, bounteous and cruel; evil predominated in his character; and, if he were loved by a few, he was hated by most, and feared by all" (335). Machiavelli's ideal prince⁵ has become "a merciless barbarian" (343) who uses whatever means are within his grasp to reach his ends, going so far as to encourage his soldiers to demolish the houses and lands of the innocent peasants and to rape the townswomen. The political strife of the larger world enters into the peasants' lives here through the vehicle of war, as the soldiers extend Castruccio's policy of destruction, torturing, killing, and raping any innocent Florentines who fall onto their path. Castruccio's onslaught therefore most immediately affects the peasant population, innocent victims of the wars Castruccio mounts. His policies are ultimately said to have obliterated the "terrestrial paradise" (337) of the Tuscan region, in a phrase that echoes Guinigi's earlier warning to Castruccio about the ways in which war destroys the "Paradise" (28) that is the Italian landscape and its people's means of survival.⁶

It is at this point in the novel, I want to emphasize, that Castruccio truly crosses the line from noble prince to barbaric tyrant. Earlier in his story, even back at the battle at Montecatini, Castruccio had participated in war and fighting for fairly noble purposes, but his descent into tyranny also marks his descent into murder and depravity. The work of Shannon E. French, an ethics professor at the US Naval Academy, clarifies the stakes at issue in Castruccio's behavior. In her article "Teaching the Ethics of War," French explains how a fine line separates the soldier from the murderer. As French explains, in all civilizations, both ancient and modern – from the heroes in Homer's *Iliad* to Japanese samurai to medieval knights – a warrior's code exists to "set definite limits on what warriors can and cannot do if they want to

continue to be regarded as warriors, not murderers or cowards” (B7). Each civilization and culture, of course, retains a slightly different view of those limits, but all of the “warrior codes tend to share one point of agreement: the insistence that what distinguishes warriors from murderers is that warriors accept a set of rules governing when and how they kill. When they are trained for war, warriors are given a mandate by their society to take lives. But they must learn to take only certain lives in certain ways, at certain times, and for certain reasons” (B7–B8). When viewed through this critical lens, Castruccio’s behavior in scenes like the above speaks to the dangerous line so easily crossed between warrior and murderer; by torturing and raping their enemies, Castruccio’s soldiers refuse to abide by the warrior’s code of conduct that should govern their actions. In not only sanctioning their actions but in participating in such actions himself, Castruccio has clearly crossed the line from hero to murderer. Additionally, since we have already seen the effects of torture and rape on Beatrice by this point in the novel – and I discuss these scenes in greater depth later in this essay – it may also be surprising that Castruccio initiates policies that so clearly violate the soldier’s code of ethics. Yet Castruccio’s own use of these vile measures forces us to ask a key question: Is there actually any difference between Castruccio’s use of torture in the political realm and Tripalda’s use of torture in the sexual and psychological ones? Shelley’s answer seems to be “no.” By juxtaposing these two realms of torture, Shelley’s narrative underscores the links between power, violence, and torture, whether committed for state-sanctioned reasons or not, and suggests that all forms of violence are equally deplorable. Castruccio’s victims may be nameless and depersonalized, and so their pain might be easier to push away and view from a distance, but Beatrice’s pain, we shall see, makes her victimization all too present and clear. The heroic ideal that Castruccio once represented is brief and fleeting, its shine tarnished by his inhumane treatment of his fallen enemies.

Euthanasia’s Anti-War Sentiments

While Castruccio represents the warlord, ever eager to engage in battles that destroy not only other human beings, but also the land, Euthanasia represents the promoter of peace, giving voice to the victimized and abused.⁷ Some of the longest, most sustained passages in *Valperga* on the wreckage of war, in fact, come from Euthanasia, who, after his first major victory in the battle of Montecatini, informs Castruccio that “A hatred and fear of war is therefore a strong and ruling passion in my heart ... Florence is my native city; its citizens are bound to me by the ties of consanguinity and friendship ...” (113). Euthanasia’s use of the word “consanguinity” signals the blood connections that are so important as human ties – blood that Castruccio so easily spills, with little thought as to the human lives sacrificed in the battles he continues to wage. Although her focus is on the language and economics of contracts that inform the novel, Sharon M. Twigg also makes note of this, remarking that “Castruccio’s culturally normative rhetoric hides the complexities and costs of war, as well as the need for Euthanasia’s submission to his plans” (486). Euthanasia’s emphasis on the cost of war in terms of human blood is present later on in the novel as well, when she must decide whether or not she will ask her people to go to war to defend the castle of Valperga against Castruccio’s advances. Ever philosophical, “Now again she paused, and thought that all the shows this world presents were dearly bought at the price of one drop of human blood” (246). When she tries to comfort her kinsman’s widow Lauretta before the siege begins, Euthanasia reveals to

the younger woman that the bloodthirsty ravages of a soldier during war knows no bounds of decency: “Even if Castruccio were at the head of the troops, he would in vain endeavour to restrain their fury; a triumphant soldier is worse than the buffalo of the forest, and no humanity can check his thirst for blood and outrage ...” (250). Once again, Euthanasia presents one of the more realistic views of war and the barbarism of the common soldier. Her words create an image that is contrasted sharply with the passage that earlier described Castruccio’s glorious ascent up Montecatini. Even though one of her men tells her that “every drop of blood that warms my heart ... [is] devoted to your cause” (247), when the battle ends, “Euthanasia wept when she heard of the blood that had been spilt for her” and she says to herself, “I have done infinite evil, in spilling blood whose each precious drop was of more worth than the jewels of a kingly crown ...” (258). Whereas Castruccio ignores the human cost of war, Euthanasia is the only character who reflects on the burden of these costs, and who provides spaces within the novel for sustained critiques of war. As Elaine Scarry has noted, the language used to describe war usually renders the bodies invisible: “the structure of war itself will require that injuring be partially eclipsed from view and will invariably bring about that eclipse by one constellation of motives or another ... it requires both the reciprocal infliction of massive injury and the eventual disowning of the injury so that its attributes can be transferred elsewhere, as they cannot if they are permitted to cling to the original site of the wound, the human body” (64). Castruccio’s actions have no space for the “massive injury” that he inflicts on his enemies; if he gives any sort of thought to the injured bodies of war, we, as readers, do not see it. Euthanasia, on the other hand, renders the body visible, in ways that war, according to Elaine Scarry, otherwise does not. Michael Rossington has convincingly shown that the sense of time and history presented in Euthanasia’s narrative marks her “as a refuge from, and an alternative to, the destructive and exhausting march of recorded events that attach to Castruccio’s ‘Life and Adventures’” (“The Republican Tradition” 105). In Rossington’s analysis, *Valperga* ultimately “questions the way that history is to be made and written ... *Valperga* can be seen to function as a revisionary, feminist critique of the kind of overtly masculine politics and rhetoric” of other texts and historical documents (“The Republican Tradition” 107). I would extend that analysis further, suggesting that Euthanasia’s words essentially provide an alternative perspective on – and critique of – the masculine drama of war.

Betty T. Bennett has argued that the Shelleys believed that war should be used as a last resort when confronted with a tyrannical regime. “Though she abhorred war,” Bennett remarks, “Mary Shelley understood and echoed Machiavelli’s call to arms in the name of freedom, inspired by the struggles taking place in Spain, Naples, and Greece. Both Shelleys celebrated these ‘just’ wars: he, with the ‘Ode to Naples’ and *Hellas*; she, in her public and private letters and, unquestionably, in *Valperga*” (“Machiavelli’s and Mary Shelley’s Castruccio” 147).⁸ While I agree that the Shelleys, like Byron, upheld the value of war in certain cases, my reading of this particular novel differs greatly from Bennett’s, for I am hard-pressed to locate any passages, except for the passage on the Battle of Montecatini, that view war in anything but a negative light.⁹ Shelley, I want to suggest, is essentially presenting a more pacifist stance on war than critics have previously attributed to her.

As Castruccio’s power and war-mongering become increasingly prominent parts of the narrative and of his character, in fact, Euthanasia continues her attempts to convince him of the destructive nature of war. When Castruccio is about to attack

Florence, for instance, Euthanasia chastises his plans, offering herself as a bargaining chip in her desire to avoid war:

fight the Florentines with words only, and I am still yours. But more than I love Florence, or myself, or you, Castruccio, do I love peace; and my heart bleeds to think that the cessation of bloodshed and devastation which our poor distracted country now enjoys is to be of short duration ... Have you not lived in a country suffering from war? Have you not seen the peasants driven from their happy cottages, their vines torn up, their crops destroyed, often a poor child lost, or haplessly wounded, whose every drop of blood is of more worth than the power of the Cæsars? ... The bubble is yours, Castruccio. – What would you have? Honour, fame, dominion? What are these if peace do not purchase them, but contempt, infamy, and despotism! ...

As the enemy of Florence I will never be yours; as the deliberate murderer of the playmates of my infancy, of the friends of my youth, of those to whom I am allied by every tie of relationship and hospitality that binds mankind, as such, I will never be yours. Here then is the crown of your work ... do not follow these; do not be sanguinary like them ... (205–6)

Euthanasia essentially sacrifices her own happiness by refusing to marry Castruccio unless he gives up his destructive plans. As Ann M. Frank Wake explains, “Euthanasia rejects marriage altogether when it means that she must sacrifice fidelity to her own political and social values to those of her future husband, Castruccio ... she rejects the domestic realm when it does not coincide with her politics ...” (250). Although Castruccio desires to wed Euthanasia even though her political views do not coincide with his, Euthanasia remains firm in her decision to not attach herself to someone whose beliefs and practices are anathema to her own. This strength of character is also evident in her invectives against war and her warnings to Castruccio. It is striking that the longest anti-war tirade, and one of the most realistic portraits of war in the entire novel, comes from a female character. Except for Guinigi, no other character attempts to reason with Castruccio or point out the “bloodshed and devastation” that his practices cause. We cannot underestimate the subversive nature of Euthanasia’s words, coming as they do at this point in the novel, when Castruccio is at a turning point: he has the choice of waging war against Florence, or leaving its citizens in peace.

Euthanasia’s commentary on war, in fact, bears a remarkable similarity to the young Shelley’s own first view of a war-torn land, as recorded in her earliest work. As Bennett has pointed out, Shelley’s interest in the destructive nature of war can be traced to her first travels through Europe during the Napoleonic wars. In 1814, at the age of sixteen, after eloping with Percy and her step-sister Jane (later Claire) Clairmont, Shelley began work on what would eventually be published as *History of a Six Weeks’ Tour through a Part of France, Switzerland, Germany, and Holland, with Letters Descriptive of a Sail Round the Lake of Geneva, and of the Glaciers of Chamouni*. Although the book itself was not published for three more years and was, at that point, expanded to include information from the Shelleys’ second visit to Europe in 1816 with their son William to meet up with Byron in Switzerland, the first part of the *History* records Shelley’s first encounter in 1814 with the decimation of war.¹⁰ It is here that we can see more clearly some of the connections that Shelley makes between Castruccio and Napoleon. As Jeanne Moskal explains, “The defeated Napoleon had abdicated and gone into exile in April 1814, just a few months before the Shelley party’s visit” (244). When the Shelley circle arrived in France, its members witnessed firsthand the damage that a tyrant – one like Napoleon *and*

Castruccio – could bring to a large region. As Bennett notes, “The detestation of war and the concern for the abuse of power that one sees in her novels may well have been first inspired by their visit to Nogent” (*Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley* 28). Upon the travelers’ arrival, Shelley comments on the devastation that the recent war has wrought not only upon the people, but also upon the land. Shelley writes:

We now approached scenes that reminded us of what we had nearly forgotten, that France had lately been the country in which great and extraordinary events had taken place. Nogent, a town we entered about noon the following day, had been entirely desolated by the Cossacs. Nothing could be more entire than the ruins which these barbarians had spread as they advanced; perhaps they remembered Moscow and the destruction of the Russian villages; but we were now in France, and the distress of the inhabitants, whose houses had been burned, their cattle killed, and all their wealth destroyed, has given a sting to my detestation of war, which none can feel who have not traveled through a country pillaged and wasted by this plague, which, in his pride, man inflicts upon his fellow. (*History* 18–19)

Shelley had started working on *Valperga* in 1817, the same year that the *History* came out in print (Rossington, Introduction xii), and the connections between the two texts are striking. Euthanasia’s portrait of “the peasants driven from their happy cottages, their vines torn up, their crops destroyed, often a poor child lost, or haplessly wounded” echoes Shelley’s own earlier description of “the distress of the inhabitants, whose houses had been burned, their cattle killed, and all their wealth destroyed” by the Napoleonic wars. Shelley had already forged a connection between the barbarians’ treatment of the land and how that treatment indicated their own depraved natures, and we later see that connection in Guinigi’s and Euthanasia’s commentary. Euthanasia also calls into question Castruccio’s desire for “Honour, fame, [and] dominion,” characteristics of power that the 16-year-old Shelley had attributed to the “pride, [that] man inflicts upon his fellow.” In another passage from the *History*, Shelley records how a French woman “represented to us that a large army had been recently disbanded, that the soldiers and officers wandered idle about the country, and that *les Dames seroient certainement enlevées [sic]*” (14). The threat of rape by Napoleon’s former soldiers that hangs over Shelley’s and Clairmont’s heads bears a remarkable similarity to the policy of rape and murder that Castruccio promotes among his own soldiers. When read alongside Euthanasia’s account, then, we can see how Shelley’s own observations pre-figure one of the central themes of *Valperga*, the devastation of war, while also allowing her to comment on the destruction that was Napoleon’s legacy in Europe. In Shelley’s portrayal of them, Castruccio’s war-torn Italy mirrors Napoleon’s war-torn France.

While Euthanasia is ultimately unsuccessful in her attempt to convince Castruccio not to forge ahead with his plans, she continues to monitor his progress and repair any damage that she can: “she felt as if, bound to him by an indissoluble chain, it was her business to follow, like an angel, in his track, to heal the wounds that he inflicted ... An heroic sentiment possessed her mind, and lifted her above humanity; she must atone for the crimes of him she had loved” (339). Rossington has convincingly suggested that, in the character of Euthanasia, the novel offers “a strong alternative to patriarchal republicanism” (118), while Curran has noted that through Euthanasia, Shelley could “see in those local medieval city-states such as Florence the beginnings of an essentially republican vision of civic polity that pointed the way for a new political order in post-Napoleonic Europe” (109). While I agree with these assessments, I also believe that Shelley is doing something even more radical in Euthanasia: offering

a revised version of heroism. After the battle of Montecatini, Castruccio is never again referred to in heroic terms, but rather is repeatedly called a “tyrant.” Heroism attaches itself instead to Euthanasia, who is possessed by “[a]n heroic sentiment” that governs her successive actions and that is not grounded in war and fighting, but rather in peace and healing. Not only does she literally and metaphorically mend any tears that Castruccio leaves in his wake, but she also makes visible the injured bodies that the rhetoric surrounding war tries to hide or minimize. In the process, Shelley essentially re-defines typical conceptions of heroism, especially significant since her hero is a woman. In word and action, Euthanasia offers a critique of the war project, becoming a new kind of heroine in her own right.

Emotional and Mental Pain in Beatrice’s Tale

The earlier parts of *Valperga*, then, focus more on the suffering that those affected by war experience in its execution and sweeping aftermath. Castruccio’s rise to power takes place on top of the bodies of the victims that he climbs over in his ascent to principedom and supremacy, and yet Shelley does not let that ascent go unchecked. Through characters like Guinigi and Euthanasia, we see the bloodshed and devastation that war brings to the land and those who own it. When the character of Beatrice appears upon the stage of Italian politics, however, the focus shifts from this more generalized view of violence to a closer investigation of the ways in which pain renders its victims silent on a more personal and individualized level. Shelley uses Beatrice to explore further the nuances of pain and to make a case ultimately for the significance of mental and emotional anguish, showing her readers that this kind of suffering is as debilitating as that of the physical.

I open my analysis of Beatrice and the role that her suffering plays in the novel with the Judgment of God that she chooses to undergo since it sets up the larger issues of pain and violence that surround her character. She has asked the Inquisitors to test her because they have questioned her role as *Ancilla Dei*, as a handmaiden of God. While Beatrice’s intentions may be pure, she holds a power over the people that the Inquisitors fear since the Catholic Church does not sanction her prophecies. Like Euthanasia, who also wields power in an open manner, Beatrice becomes dangerous to the Inquisition because she represents public female power. On the day of the Judgment, the way in which this scene has been set up immediately calls our attention not only to the sway that Beatrice holds over the common people, but also to the violence that attaches itself to her character from the very beginning. The narrator describes the scene in a way that marks the potential of violence, held back from erupting by a taut line that is about to swell over the barriers that restrain it:

The square presented a busy, but awful scene ... the people were admitted, while it was guarded on the inside by Gascon soldiers, that with drawn swords kept in awe the eager spectators, whose fury of hope and fear approached madness ... their bodies and muscles were in perpetual motion; some foamed at the mouth, and others gazed with outstretched necks, and eyes starting from their sockets. (160)

The portrait is straight out of a Goya painting or, much more fittingly, Dante’s *Inferno*. The grotesquerie present amongst the crowd mirrors the horror of the event about to take place. And yet while the narrative dwells on the sensations leading up to the Judgment, the act itself passes quickly. The crowd’s near-mad frenzy is whipped into a heightened pitch by the appearance of the monks, who “bore ploughshares and

torches, mattocks and other instruments, that again spread a groan of horror through the multitude. The pyre was lighted; the shares thrown in among the blazing wood; while other monks threw up the soil of the inclosure [*sic*] with their mattocks, forming six furrows, two feet distant one from the other” (161). As readers, we know, of course, that Beatrice’s protectors have rigged the Judgment so that she will not be harmed, but the crowd’s ignorance as to the true state of affairs matters little here; the pitch and movement of the passage carries the reader along with the swell of emotions. If there is also any doubt in our minds as to whether or not this is a torture scene, it is cleared up by having the monks brandish weapons of torture; these implements highlight the torment that Beatrice is about to experience at the hands of the Inquisitors.

When Beatrice passes over the fiery ground, we experience the tension of this public spectacle through Castruccio’s eyes, a point that is important in how Shelley connects this scene to her exploration of pain and violence in *Valperga* as a whole. The day before the Judgment takes place, when the Bishop informs Castruccio that Beatrice will not be harmed since he and her supporters have taken care to ensure her safety, Castruccio still fears for her: “He thought of the beauty of the prophetic, her animation and numberless graces, until he almost believed in the divinity of her mission: but he shuddered with horror, when he reflected upon her danger, that her ivory feet should press the burning iron, that, if she fell, she would fall on the hot metal, and expire in misery, while the priests, the accursed, self-constituted distributors of God’s justice, would sing hymns of triumph over her untimely and miserable fate ...” (158). Shelley is already setting a mood of uncertainty and fear, creating a tone that opens up the potential risks of what Beatrice is about to do. We know that she should be safe when she walks across the hot wood, yet Castruccio’s reaction guarantees our similar reaction: what if something does go wrong, and Beatrice “expire[s] in misery”? On the day of the Judgment, when the monks finally command Beatrice to walk across the fire:

Every heart beat fast; Castruccio overcome by uncontrollable pity, would have darted forth to save her, but some one held him back; and in a moment, before the second beating of his heart, before he again drew breath, horror was converted to joy and wonder. Beatrice, her eyes covered, her arms bound, her feet bare, passed over the burning shares with a quick light step, and reaching the opposite barrier, fell on her knees, uttering an exclamation of thanksgiving to God. (161)

Shelley draws out Castruccio’s reaction, emphasizing the way in which time seems to stand still for him; the horror he feels takes place in the light pause between one in-breath and one out-breath, between one beat of the heart and the next. And why would Shelley do that? Why would she prolong the suffering that we know is not real, while having us experience it as if it were? A response exists in the connections Shelley asks us to make to the suffering of these fictional characters. In his article “Pleasure and Pain in Literature,” Oliver Conolly explains how readers of a novel often believe that “the depiction of a fictional horrible event is likely to be less painful than the depiction of an identical but real event. In other words, the mere fictionality of an event is liable, by itself, to diminish the pain we are liable to feel as its depiction in comparison with a real event ...” (306). Conolly goes on to note that this “fictionality gap” cannot, however, account for the identification that readers often feel with the characters in fictitious texts. In this particular scene from *Valperga*, the potential of pain would at first seem to be twice-removed: once because it is part of that “fictionality gap” that Conolly describes, and once more because the torture that Beatrice undergoes has

been falsified, unbeknownst to her, by her allies. Yet Shelley would have us feel the danger that the spectators at the Judgment experience by portraying Castruccio's reaction to the scene before him. Even though Castruccio knows that the Judgment has been rigged beforehand so that Beatrice will not fail, his worry and credibility mirror our position as readers and our reaction to the tortures that Beatrice undergoes. Although we also know that Beatrice will not fail, Castruccio's point of view creates an almost unbearable sense of anxiety and suspense necessary in order for us as readers to feel the horror of the torture experience. If we had read this scene through any other character's eyes, we would have disengaged from the moment, secure in the knowledge that the truth was in our possession – that Beatrice would not be harmed. Doubt in Castruccio's mind, however, creates doubt in our own minds. His reaction makes it clear that pain – whether existing in actuality or just in potential – is a considerable threat to the human psyche.

Castruccio's privy information – and ours – marks his power over Beatrice, and his increasing desire for her marks yet another manifestation of that power. After witnessing the Judgment, Castruccio is further drawn to Beatrice because she is universally admired and because he thinks that she remains out of his reach. When Beatrice gives herself over to Castruccio and initiates their affair, the power dynamic remains in Castruccio's favor. She believes that their dalliance is ordained by the will of God because she remains in the dark about the Judgment process, yet Castruccio knows that he is taking advantage of her innocence and naïveté. However, the power that Castruccio holds over Beatrice becomes more extreme and, ultimately, violent when he breaks off their relationship; his decision to leave Beatrice is described in terms of a painful rending of the connection between them. His decision to return to ruling his people accompanies his more drastic decision to leave Beatrice behind. Finally, “he was obliged to undeceive her; and the hand, that tore away the ties her trusting heart had bound round itself, at the same time tore away the veil which had for her invested all nature, and shewed her life as it was – naked and appalling” (174). Twice the word “torn” is used in this sentence, underscoring the destructive nature of his actions, and, as she responds to the emotional pain she feels, “she tore her tresses impatiently to disengage herself from him” (175). Although the pain that Beatrice suffers is emotional and mental in nature, Shelley portrays it in physical terms: as a tearing away from Beatrice's person. As Barbara Jane O'Sullivan notes, “The language of his passage is physical and traumatic. It describes Beatrice's painful initiation in terms of a sexually aggressive encounter. The veil of the hymen, the veil of the prophetess, the veil of self-delusion, and the veil which covers physical nakedness are concentrated in a single image which Castruccio rips to shreds” (148). It is the physicality of Castruccio's actions that Shelley emphasizes for a very important effect: by emphasizing the pain that Beatrice is in, I want to suggest, Shelley makes it clear that both forms of pain – physical and emotional – are equally forceful and equally debilitating.

After Castruccio breaks off his relationship with her, Beatrice, except for one brief appearance, essentially disappears from the narrative for nine chapters,¹¹ before returning to play a significant role in Shelley's meditations on violence and suffering in society. By analyzing the ways in which Beatrice's narrative is integrated into the novel more fully, we can see that Shelley's novel moves beyond being an anti-war text to a more profound reflection on pain and violence and on the ways in which war and torture reflect on society's connection to violence. Through characters like Guinigi and Euthanasia, Shelley advocates a pacifist position and a critique of the violence of

war and the tyranny of war-mongering leaders like Castruccio and Napoleon; through the character of Beatrice, we see an equally strong condemnation of gendered violence. The narrative moves us from a scene of political and religious torture that, while falsified, still horrifies the reader through its potential risks, then to a scene of the emotionally traumatic wounding of Beatrice at Castruccio's hands, and finally to a scene of sexualized torture so real that it ultimately erodes Beatrice's sanity. The trajectory that Beatrice's story follows, I want to emphasize, is a path that leads to greater and more traumatic pain, and yet that pain is hidden deeper in the shadows of the novel as her story progresses. Her first experience with pain, during the Judgment of God scene, is a falsified one that she nevertheless believes is real; the shadow of pain lies across her path, and the fact that she believes herself to have experienced real pain sets her up for the emotional suffering she will meet at Castruccio's hands. The pain that Beatrice then experiences when Castruccio abandons her is, as was suggested, an emotional agony that Shelley chooses to render as a physical tear that leaves Beatrice emotionally scarred. And yet that pain intensifies and becomes even more real, and yet also more shadowed, when Beatrice leaves her home in an attempt to leave her past with Castruccio, and the suffering she has experienced because of it, behind. At this point in the novel, the questions that haunt the narrative and that float around the subject of torture and pain become stronger: How does the torture of Beatrice connect to all the other images of war and violence that are linked to Castruccio in the novel? Why is it significant that Shelley would introduce actual, physical pain, and yet leave that most real experience of pain in the shadows by offering such a generalized and unvoiced description of it? The answers lie in the conclusion to Beatrice's tale.

The Language-Destroying Nature of Pain

After Castruccio terminates their relationship and Beatrice consequently leaves her homeland disguised as a pilgrim, it is significant that she marks herself through an act of self-inflicted violence. As she tells Euthanasia:

I was dressed as the meanest pilgrim, and I carefully hid my white hands and fair cheeks, which might have betrayed my way of life during the past; except indeed when I was alone, – then I loved to throw off my cloak, to bare my arms, my face, my neck to the scorching sun-beams, that I might the sooner destroy a delicacy I despised: the work was quickly done; a few hours exposure to the sun of noon burnt up my skin, and made it red and common.

The first day was one of unmixed pain; the sun parched my frame; my feet were blistered, my limbs ached; I walked all day, until bodily fatigue lulled my mental anguish, for I was unhappy beyond all words ... I felt the pain of utter and forced solitude ... Alas! I was a spoiled child, and I felt every pain as an agony. (295)

We see here one of the first indicators in the novel of the way that pain destroys language and how pain itself creates an inability to express that pain in any way that would bring relief. Language leaves Beatrice, for she is "unhappy beyond all words," and yet what is especially noteworthy here is that her pain comes not just from physical suffering, but also from her emotional suffering. As Elaine Scarry explains, "Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned" (4). Here we see not just how Beatrice's

physical pain – a result of her sunburned skin, her aching feet, and her “bodily fatigue” – creates that lack of language, but how most of her unhappiness stems from the “mental anguish” she is experiencing. By having her creation place an equal, if not greater, emphasis on her traumatized state of mind, Shelley accentuates her belief that emotional and mental suffering carry the same magnitude as physical pain.

However, it is not enough that Beatrice feels inward pain only; she must also, according to her own self-imposed logic, mark her outward appearance so that it, too, reflects her ravaged state of mind. Scarry’s work on pain is useful here again in its emphasis on how difficult it is to comprehend another person’s suffering: “When one hears about another person’s physical pain, the events happening within the interior of that person’s body may seem to have the remote character of some deep subterranean fact, belonging to an invisible geography that, however portentous, has no reality because it has not yet manifested itself on the visible surface of the earth” (3). Here we see that theory played out through the character of Beatrice. Her body must manifest outwardly the inward pain she is experiencing; she must create a sense of physical pain that mirrors her emotional anguish and makes visible to others that which is internal. In a sadomasochistic move that pre-figures the fate that is about to befall her, Beatrice also links her pain to pleasure – noting that she “loved” to “destroy” her own beauty – even as she seeks to lose her past trauma in present suffering. The reason why Beatrice chooses to mark her body in this way might at first seem odd, until we realize how it connects to the larger issues of pain and suffering in the novel. Although Castruccio’s abandonment of Beatrice had been rendered as physical pain, as a “tearing” away from her, that pain was, in actuality, an emotional and mental pain. Obviously, emotional suffering cannot in any way approach the pain that is the loss of a limb, the stab of a sword, or the infestation of a disease within the world that is the human body, but through Beatrice’s pain we are asked to re-consider how we think of pain and what qualifies as it. The emphasis that Shelley gives to Beatrice’s inner pain therefore also reveals the value that Shelley places on emotional suffering; pain, Beatrice’s story intimates, remains as real and debilitating on the psychic level as it does on the physical.

And yet Beatrice’s pain only deepens as her journey continues, as her emotional pain is joined by a physical pain that is no longer self-inflicted, and over which she has no control. After describing her early days as a pilgrim to Euthanasia, Beatrice recounts how she continued to feel “haunted as by a prophecy, or rather a sense of evil” (297); a recurring nightmare plagues her sleep, until one day her wanderings bring her face to face with the horrific vision she had been seeing. Beatrice’s story, of course, ends not just with the physical manifestation of that dream, but continues with her abduction and actual imprisonment, in what most scholars believe to be a brothel, for three years. While critics have written fleeting analyses of the significance that both Beatrice’s dream and her subsequent imprisonment holds, none have connected her imprisonment to the larger issues of violence in the novel.¹² I want to emphasize, however, that Beatrice’s narrative is one of the most significant passages in *Valperga* in how it asks us as readers to think about pain and torture, and their connection to language, the body, and voice.

Torture and Sadomasochism in the Campagna di Roma

Beatrice’s account of her time spent in captivity – brief as it is – is a touchstone passage that pulls together all these issues surrounding violence and its representation

in *Valperga*. After coming across the vision she had thought only existed in her cruellest nightmares, Beatrice tells Euthanasia that she ended up fainting from the terror, only to awaken as a prisoner. It is here that we see the only sustained description of what her life was like during those years of torture and rape:

and then I first saw my wicked and powerful enemy: he leaned against the wall, observing me; his eyes had a kind of fascination in them, and, unknowing what I did ... I gazed on his face, which became illuminated by a proud triumphant, fiendlike smile. – I felt sick at heart, and relapsed into a painful swoon.

Well: I promised to be brief, and I go on dwelling on the particulars of my tale, until your fair cheek is blanched still whiter by fear. But I have said enough, nor will I tell that which would chill your warm blood with horror. I remained three years in this house; and what I saw, and what I endured, is a tale for the unhallowed ears of infidels, or for those who have lost humanity in the sight of blood, and not for so tender a heart as yours. It has changed me, much changed me, to have been witness of these scenes; I entered young, I came out grey, old and withered; I went in innocent; and, if innocence consist in ignorance, I am now guilty of the knowledge of crime, which it would seem that fiends alone could contrive.

What was he, who was the author and mechanist of these crimes? he bore a human name; they say that his lineage was human; yet could he be a man? During the day he was absent; at night he returned, and his roofs rung with the sound of festivity, mingled with shrieks and imprecations. It was the carnival of devils, when we miserable victims were dragged out to –

Enough! enough! Euthanasia, do you wonder that I, who have been the slave of incarnate Evil, should have become a Paterin? (298–99)

Critic Jane Blumberg notes how this part of Beatrice's tale "hints at sexual depravity. In an episode which echoes the experiences of De Sade's Justine in the prison-monastery of Sante-Marie-des-Bois, Beatrice is imprisoned by a debauched and sadistic tyrant who keeps her and other young girls for nightly orgies. (Shelley may well have heard of de Sade's novel from Lewis and Byron, and PBS apparently read *Mémoires pour la vie de F. Petrarque*") (105). As Blumberg also points out, Shelley plays on Gothic tropes in this section of *Valperga*, "approaching 'Monk' Lewis in her suggestion of violation and sexual slavery" (105), and also on the Radcliffean Gothic in its emphasis on the abuses of male power.¹³ While Blumberg interprets this section of *Valperga* as relatively innocuous, stating that "Shelley was not adverse to treating her readers to a completely gothic interlude in her altogether serious work" (105), I would argue that there is a much more sinister element at work here. Shelley's adaptation of these Gothic themes accentuates the novel's critique of violence and abuse. That is, Beatrice's recollection of her imprisonment in the Campagna di Roma offers a profound meditation on Shelley's part of the connections between pain, power, and violence, and on their ability to strip away selfhood and any attempt at articulating the body in pain.¹⁴

The passage opens with an emphasis on the power that her captor's gaze has on her; the gaze here is the first indicator of the power that confines. Before she is even made aware of where exactly she is and what will happen to her, Beatrice is penetrated by a look that weakens her to the point of fainting. One should not dismiss, of course, the very real effect that the gaze has. As Dean MacCannell and Juliet Flower MacCannell point out in their article on rape, "Violence, Power, and Pleasure: A

Revisionist Reading of Foucault from the Victim Perspective,” non-corporeal power has just as much sway over its victims as the actual physical, violent manifestation of it. While they admit that “The cause of *subjective damage* is not as easily established as trauma from puncture wounds, burning, gun shots, strangulation, bludgeoning and other physical tortures. There is no point-for-point correspondence between the severity of physical injury and associated subjective response to it” (207), MacCannell and Flower MacCannell also explain that “In the realm of intra- and inter-subjective violence a word or a ‘look’ can do more lasting harm than physical violence ... The paradox of violence is that sometimes the subject can be ripped into by a glance, while at other times it holds tight against relentless brutality” (207, 209–10). In Foucault’s version of events during the eighteenth century, power was diffused, and “What is historically new is an effective mechanism for suppressing the apparent need for violence in the exercise of power. The use of force is unnecessary to the extent that individuals identify with and internalise the gaze of authority and nicely comport themselves exactly as their leaders and oppressors would want” (211). We see this in Beatrice’s reaction to her oppressor’s gaze and in her inability to resist the power that he has over her. Beatrice’s captor seems well aware of the fact that his gaze will render her speechless and powerless.¹⁵ Whereas earlier Beatrice had willingly given herself to Castruccio, believing their affair to be divinely sanctioned, here she is at the utter mercy of others, of a power that she never bequeathed to another. That power renders a change not only in Beatrice’s physical state of being – viewed when the “miserable victims” were made to perform unnamed sexual acts – but also a change in her psychological state of being – for is it any wonder, she asks Euthanasia, “that I, who have been the slave of incarnate Evil, should have become a Paterin?” Her decision to become a Paterin, to renounce the creeds of the Catholic faith,¹⁶ is linked to her experience of having been forced to live through the flesh as a sexual slave for several years. Ironically, her conversion to the Paterin belief system is a psychological reaction, manifested through religious faith (or lack thereof), to the corporeal – to the embodiment of vice, of what Shelley specifically deems an “*incarnate Evil*” (emphasis added).

While Shelley asks us in this passage to start with the power of the gaze, she moves on to asking us to think about the ways in which pain destroys language and our ability to make verbal that which begins with the corporeal. We had caught a glimpse of this idea earlier in Beatrice’s tale – in her phrase “I was unhappy beyond all words” – but here that idea becomes predominant. That is, as her story continues, Beatrice highlights the ways in which pain – and the memory of it – once again breaks down language. Her attempt to tell Euthanasia what has happened to her results in her inability to voice the suffering she has endured, as she is compelled to cut short her story. Scarry analyzes this phenomenon in greater detail, observing that “intense pain destroys a person’s self and world, a destruction experienced spatially as either the contraction of the universe down to the immediate vicinity of the body or as the body swelling to fill the entire universe” (35). A person in pain experiences the entire world and her or his subjectivity in it through – and only *as* – the body she or he possesses. The body becomes the sufferer’s entire world; experientially, the pain precludes any other consciousness of other people’s own subjectivities. Scarry later explains how “Intense pain is also language-destroying: as the contents of one’s world disintegrates, so the content of one’s language disintegrates; as the self disintegrates, so that which would express and project the self is robbed of its source and its subject” (35). Scarry emphasizes how pain displaces voice and language, and we witness that concept here to an even greater extent than we did earlier in Beatrice’s inability to bear witness to

her own suffering. Her narrative reveals, while it cloaks; it informs, while remaining obscure in its references. Ultimately, her inability to articulate the pain she has undergone, I want to suggest, connects to the novel's larger interest in pain, suffering, and war. In Beatrice's case, her body has become the hollow shell of what she once was, for when Euthanasia first finds her in the prisons of the Inquisition, before she tells Euthanasia her complete story, only a few aspects of Beatrice's visage bear the marks of her former beauty: "the rest was lost. Her complexion was sunburnt, her hands very thin and yellow, and care had already marked her sunken cheeks and brow with many lines; her jet black hair was mingled with grey; her long tresses had been cut, and now reached only to her neck; while, strait [*sic*] and thin, they were the shadow merely of what they had been; her face, her whole person was emaciated, worn and faded" (278). Although she is only 20, her appearance resembles that of an old woman, a "shadow" of the beautiful young woman she once was. This time, however, it is not at her own hands that she has suffered such changes to her exterior person; her captors have created such inner and outer turmoil that her appearance bears the marks of her tortured body and mind.

A last argument I would make about the significance of the passage where Beatrice describes her experience of being tortured is how this passage also asks its readers to question our own fascination with violence, especially when it is sexualized. That is, the suggestions of torture that Beatrice alludes to are problematized by our own fascination with wanting to hear her story. When she begins her tale, Beatrice warns not only Euthanasia, but also us as readers, that her story is one "for the unhallowed ears of infidels, or for those who have lost humanity in the sight of blood." If we want to hear more, if we are drawn in by the penetrating, titillating gaze of violence, then what does that say about us as readers of this novel – that we are "infidels" who have lost our humanity? Why does Shelley take us down this path, only to warn us away with a hasty explanation of why we should not look? And yet is it not also part of human nature to be fascinated by violence? After all, "There is an allure in violence," William Ian Miller has noted, and "Homer seemed to have known this, as indeed has every epic author and tragedian since" (53).

Further complicating that allure is the sexual nature of Beatrice's victimization. Although she has ended up in one when Euthanasia recovers her, Beatrice has not spent those three years of captivity in a prison of the Inquisition; she has spent those years in what Shelley has very clearly linked to a Sadean dungeon of sorts. Shelley piques our interest as to what has taken place in this chamber of horrors, only to snatch away any fuller glimpse of what we might see there. Extending Freud's theories on the links between pleasure and pain, Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit reflect on how "'sympathy' always includes a trace of sexual pleasure, and that this pleasure is, inescapably, masochistic. If this is the case, there is a certain risk in all sympathetic projections: the pleasure which accompanies them promotes a secret attachment to scenes of suffering or violence ... Our views of the human capacity for empathetic representations of the world should therefore take into account the possibility that a mimetic relation to violence necessarily includes a sexually induced fascination with violence" (38). In those earlier passages from *Valperga* marking Euthanasia's condemnation of war, the "risk" of sexually charged sympathy, I would argue, does not exist; our sympathy for the soldiers and farmers affected by the bloodshed remains untainted by masochistic desires. Shelley's goal in narrating Castruccio's rise to power is, as I have suggested, that of showing the horrors and devastation that war wreaks on both the land and its people. This passage, however, is much more problematic, almost wanton,

in its depiction of Beatrice's suffering. In his work on the links between the Marquis de Sade's stance on the Terror of the French Revolution and his literary texts, Marcel Hénaff explains that the libertine violence depicted in Sade's texts "remains completely gratuitous and even makes this gratuitousness the source of the pleasure it procures. It does not serve to found an order, to confirm a truth, or to carry out a law: it serves only to demonstrate their radical absence. It freely admits its criminality and revels in it ..." (10). The captivity of Beatrice would, at first, also seem to be gratuitous. As Shelley makes clear, her torture is not religious or political in nature, but is rather sexually charged.

And yet the idea of the Sadean text as denoting an absence of law, truth, and order provides a key as to what purpose Beatrice's imprisonment might serve in the text. Her affair with Castruccio has already made evident the ways in which emotional suffering can be as real and as language-destroying as any physical pain. Here we see Shelley revealing another truth about violence: that even when we condemn it and the "radical absence" of a social order or, in the case of a literary text, a narrative structure to contain it, we cannot help but sometimes "revel" in its presence. Located at the heart of Shelley's project is the truth that violence, even though abhorrent, will ever fascinate human kind. She might have aimed to re-write the ancient script of heroism and ask us to avert our gaze – or else be reckoned among the "infidels" who have lost their humanity – as the aggressor steps in to wield his power over his victim, but, in the same way that her captor's eyes hold a "fascination" for Beatrice, so, too, can we not help but be fascinated by Beatrice's tale? That story, however, is not a "treat" in the novel, and it should not be interpreted as such; it is rather a scene that brings forth our shifting allegiances to the power that violence possesses over each of us, whether victim or witness.

Weaving the Threads Together

Shelley may have purposefully set out to write a more critical account of the life and adventures of Castruccio than that contained within the pages of Machiavelli's earlier biography; she may also have unconsciously set out to write a pacifist, anti-war novel that was largely influenced by her observations as a young woman traveling through war-torn France. What she ended up with, however, is a novel that accomplishes even more than those already grand aims. Throughout the novel, I have argued, Shelley presents violence in manifold forms, and yet each of those forms is questioned and ultimately presented as unsanctioned and illegitimate; there is, in *Valperga*, no form of violence or conflict that is legitimized by the narrative itself or by the characters within it. The anti-war aspects of the novel reinforce the critiques of warlords and tyrants, and of those who torture innocent victims, that are also present in *Valperga*. The three narrative paths that the stories of Castruccio, Euthanasia, and Beatrice follow explore violence in its many guises, from war and physical pain, to emotional suffering and torture. Against the backdrop of war and power that marks Castruccio's rise to "glory," Euthanasia's striking condemnation of war and Beatrice's tale of her captivity read as counter-narratives that locate the ways in which power can be abused when unrestrained and unchecked. Shelley criticizes not just political and religious tyranny, but sexual and emotional tyranny as well. When read alongside the masculine story of domination, conquest, and tyranny, the more feminized tales of the victim carry a weight that cannot help but resonate with the novel's readers.

Ultimately, *Valperga* simultaneously offers a critique of violence, even as it asks us – through examples such as Beatrice’s narration of her time in the Campagna di Roma that draw us in only to push us away – to reflect on the larger philosophical issue of our fascination with violence and the illicit, and their connection to power. In so doing, the novel re-situates our understanding of the competing tensions between violence and pain, complicating what we might have otherwise assumed to be a straightforward sense of the connections between them. *Valperga* takes up the threads of war, pain, power, and torture, and weaves them together into a narrative that asks us as readers to question our own participation in the powerful spell encircling, and eventually entrapping, us.

Notes

1. My reading of *Valperga* is influenced by Elaine Scarry’s *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, a seminal text in mapping the ways in which pain manifests itself upon and within the human body. In Scarry’s words, “Physical pain has no voice, but when it at last finds a voice, it begins to tell a story” (3). In the subsection entitled “The Language-Destroying Nature of Pain,” I elaborate more explicitly on how Scarry’s theories elucidate our understanding of *Valperga*.
2. As a younger soldier, it appears as if Castruccio might take Guinigi’s lessons to heart. He is actually surprised, for instance, by the cruelty of the German Emperor Henry VII, under whom Castruccio serves and whose vengeance stretches to all those he has encountered in his battles. Castruccio “beheld with dismay the cruel effects of the conquest of the emperor over this city” (69), and is shocked when “the brutality of the conquerors” (70) unfolds before him, as Henry’s soldiers ravage both the land and the people. At this point in his life, Castruccio is still moved by the travesties he witnesses, and he ultimately chooses to leave Emperor Henry’s service since “his nature was shocked by the want of faith and cruelty of this monarch, who punished his enemies by the most frightful tortures, and treated his friends as if they had been his enemies. Castruccio therefore resolved to separate himself from the Imperial army ...” (75). The end result of the emperor’s incursion into Italy is to leave the various cities worse off than they were before, as the in-fighting among the Ghibelline and Guelph factions has only increased in magnitude and severity. Castruccio, unfortunately, does not recognize this, and ultimately replicates the very actions he once despised.
3. See Bennett’s “Machiavelli’s and Mary Shelley’s Castruccio: Biography as Metaphor.”
4. James P. Carson links this to the Shelley’s critique of contemporary power structures: “Even while Shelley is especially appalled by Castruccio’s frequent recourse to capital punishment and his increasing use of torture, Castruccio’s government also represents something new – namely, the disciplinary institutions of punishment, education, and industry that were being developed at the beginning of the nineteenth century in order to exert power over the masses by individualizing them. Like sadists and Machiavellian tyrants of earlier times, the new institutions that deploy demographic data and bureaucratic techniques conceptualize humanity in terms of instrumentality and utility. Thus, the various forms of imprisonment and tyranny to which the major female characters in Shelley’s novel are subjected reflect on modern as well as medieval institutions” (176).
5. See Betty T. Bennett’s “Machiavelli’s and Mary Shelley’s Castruccio: Biography as Metaphor” for the most thorough discussion of how Shelley re-wrote Machiavelli’s account of Castruccio.
6. Space precludes me from elaborating on this idea in further detail, but it is worth noting that Castruccio’s fall into tyranny is linked to his ignoring of nature and the natural world. When he returns to his native region after his years abroad in England and France, Castruccio finds that “heart was much softened, as he successively recognized objects, which he had forgotten for so many years, and with which he had been most intimately acquainted” (85). However, as he continues his journey up to the castle of Valperga, he is blind to the sublimity of the view before him, only noting that the “The path was steep, serpentine, and narrow; so that Castruccio, who now looked on nature with a soldier’s eye, remarked what

an excellent defense Valperga might make ...” (86). His changed perception marks his changed character; instead of appreciating the natural landscape for its intrinsic beauty, he only looks to how he could use it in his military plans. Castruccio’s disconnect from nature is similar to how Victor Frankenstein ignored the beauties of the natural world while obsessed with his desire to form his Creature. Euthanasia, of course, continues to seek solace in nature, and this difference in how they react to nature marks an essential difference in their characters. For instance, after she tries (and fails) to convince him to not attack Florence, Euthanasia leaves his company and “felt solace in the contemplation of nature alone” (209).

7. Kari E. Lokke also analyzes Euthanasia’s role in assessing the masculine power dynamics at work in *Valperga*, although Lokke’s focus is more on the political and social institutions represented in the novel: “In depicting the devastating effects of Castruccio’s egotistical drive for socio-political power on these three women, Shelley clearly asks the reader to reject this will to power utterly and thus opens the way for Euthanasia’s alternative and potentially healing vision of political leadership and spiritual transcendence that concludes the novel. *Valperga*, then, is a meditation on political, psychological, and sexual power, a meditation that formulates a vision of oppositional spirituality meant to enable women to resist and to transform existing masculinist structures of church and state” (58).
8. Jane Blumberg looks to the same texts as Bennett to show also the Shelleys’ shared belief in revolution. However, Blumberg suggests, as I do, that Mary may not have shared Percy’s commitment to violence. Concerning Percy’s 1820 essay “A Philosophical view of Reform,” Blumberg states, “It is clear from the essay’s ‘practical’ outlining of political liberty that PBS, if not Shelley herself, was convinced that the very same potential for productive revolution existed in Italy in the same way that it had in pre-revolutionary America and France” (79).
9. Bennett does, of course, also claim that Shelley “believed there was an alternative to war in the name of freedom ... [that in] *Valperga*, she opposes Castruccio, the symbol of the power structure, with Euthanasia as the symbol of a socio-political system structured on democratic governance and universal love” (“Machiavelli’s and Mary Shelley’s Castruccio” 148). My focus here, though, is on a new way of interpreting the war and violence in this novel.
10. See Jeanne Moskal’s “Travel Writing” for an excellent in-depth explanation of the writing and publication history of this text.
11. The events that take place during Beatrice’s absence from the storyline focus on Castruccio’s assault on Valperga. It is significant that the increased presence of Castruccio’s aggression occurs during Beatrice’s absence.
12. See, for instance, Brewer 143–44.
13. For interesting discussions of *Valperga*’s connection to the Gothic novel, see John Williams’ “Translating Mary Shelley’s *Valperga* into English: Historical Romance, Biography or Gothic Fiction?” and Chapter Four of Johanna M. Smith’s *Mary Shelley*, entitled “Historical Fiction: Short Stories, *Valperga*, Oriental Tales, and *Perkin Warbeck*.”
14. Other critics have interpreted Beatrice’s imprisonment in different ways. Lokke, for instance, believes that this scene demonstrates Beatrice’s “sado-masochistic death wish” (69), whereas Carson argues that in this scene “Shelley traces a parallel between contempt for women and sadistic sexual practices” (178).
15. Daniel E. White links this gaze and the power its bearer holds over Beatrice to Shelley’s critique of the masculine Romantic imagination: “In that he is all too clearly a man, Beatrice’s deification or demonization of him – the two are finally the same – leads to possibly the clearest account of how Shelley conceived the relation between one category of Romantic aesthetics and contemporary mechanisms of power ...” (86). While Beatrice is certainly fascinated by her captor, I would argue that her fascination is much more problematic because she is essentially being raped and tortured by this man.
16. For a thorough discussion of the Shelleys’ shared interest in the Paterins, see James Rieger’s article “Shelley’s Paterin Beatrice.” In his article “God’s Sister: History and Ideology in *Valperga*,” Joseph W. Lew explains how Shelley used the real figure of Joanna Southcott as inspiration for Beatrice’s mother Wilhelmina of Bohemia to explore the idea of a religious cult based on a female leader.

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