



Zastrozzi

Percy Bysshe Shelley , Germaine Greer (Foreword)

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Zastrozzi, Shelley's first published novel, is a work of pure Gothic fantasy, offering many glimpses of the author's nascent poetic genius. Zastrozzi, the arch-villain of the tale, is sworn to avenge the wrongs done to his mother. Prepared to go to any lengths to execute his horrific plans, he enlists the help of the willing Matilda. Together, they vow to destroy Verezzi and Julia, the subjects of their wrath, and embark upon a fateful chain of events that can lead only to catastrophe.

Zastrozzi Details

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Author : Percy Bysshe Shelley , Germaine Greer (Foreword)

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Maddy says

I thought “Z” might be one of the more difficult letters to cover for the classics challenge but it wasn’t. I wanted to read something actually written by Percy Bysshe Shelley since I’ve read a bit about him and his famous wife, Mary Shelley lately. I already read her *Frankenstein* a few years ago, for a university class, and it ended up being one of my favorite books. I have another of Percy Shelley’s books on my shelf but I wanted to start with this novella since it fit my classics reading challenge for this year. Also bonus for an accidentally hilarious sounding title, it sounds way more befitting a BDSM romance story or something more along those lines (sorry, but it’s not like that despite what the title sounds like).

There is literally no chill in this book. I’d rate this as one of the most emotionally intense and extreme stories that I’ve read in a long time (and recently I’ve read both a Nina La Cour novel and a novel where the main character has a manic episode– that’s a lot of feelings). Matilda is tripping out pretty much every five minutes (it gets a little repetitive with her scary-strong jealousy and then violent happiness whenever Verezzi acts interested in her remotely). Verezzi and Zastrozzi both have their moments too. Julia is probably the only sane character and she’s barely in the story at all. Mostly Matilda talks about how much she hates Julia or Verezzi cries about how virtuous and amazing Julia is. Julia isn’t really a character in her own right. The only time she appears on scene and does anything noteworthy is when she dies.

Matilda, an Italian countess, is insanely in love with Verezzi. She hires this assassin Zastrozzi to kill Julia, another rich Italian lady, because Verezzi loves her not Matilda. Zastrozzi, unbeknownst to Matilda, had been torturing Verezzi before she summons him to go after Julia. Verezzi escapes Zastrozzi but eventually falls into Matilda’s clutches any way. Zastrozzi ends up playing Matilda against herself and her rather violent feelings for Verezzi and against Julia. It becomes the story of a failed romance and a crime as both Verezzi and Julia are killed; Matilda and Zastrozzi are made to pay for their crimes.

The language of the story is highly poetic and shows the character’s every emotion in intense detail. Matilda and Verezzi were both constantly changing their feelings through out the narrative. Even though Zastrozzi was the criminal master mind, he appears to be the most emotionally stable character, in that he doesn’t change as often as Matilda and Verezzi do. I was actually in correct as to why Zastrozzi wanted to destroy Verezzi, originally when reading this, before I got to the trial scene, I believed that Zastrozzi was in love with Matilda but that isn’t the case since he brings her down with him. It’s for revenge; Zastrozzi is avenging the mistreatment and abandonment of his mother by Verezzi’s father (which makes him and Verezzi brothers, the plot twist at the end).

I rated this novella 3.5 stars! It’s kind of a lot to follow with characters (usually Matilda) having emotional outbursts at least once a page but I liked Shelley’s way with words; its pretty clear to me that he had a gift. If you like drama, crime, Gothic/Romantic writing or emotional writing, you’ll probably enjoy this book.

Francesca says

Every gothic novel I have read so far has seemed like a parody of itself. This said, and although it feels like Shelley took different gothic elements from different novels and patched them all together in here, they form a well written (nice descriptions, good atmosphere- would have needed some editing, for he repeats certain

phrases: humane physician, strained eyeballs- a lot) total. The ending was (seeexiiist) very good, even satisfactory. YES ZASTROZZI!

Alexander says

The most underrated book in the world, absolutely amazing read, I consider it my new favourite book. I just wish Shelley had wrote more Novellas.

Ubiquitousbastard says

I don't think I have any right to criticize anything written by Percy Shelley, which makes this a difficult review to write. Wait, that makes it sound as if there are several things wrong with this book. That's not true. My only little, tiny, bitty, insignificant mention of an imperfection, was that sometimes there was a tad too much repetition in regards to word choice. That's it. There.

Other than that, I really liked reading it. The ending was rather boss as well. I did not anticipate one of the twists at the end, and so it was an interesting surprise. I admit to loving revenge stories, and this one was pretty epic, especially in how Zastrozzi was far more committed to his revenge than most characters often tend to be. I started this book for the atheism angle, but that ended up being one of the least important aspects.

Lucy says

This juvenile tarradiddle would have been totally forgotten by now if it hadn't been written by Shelley. Repetitive, confusing, overblown - it's not even a good example of Gothic writing. I doubt if PBS would have wanted to be remembered for this.

??™ says

A man that studieth revenge keeps his own wounds green. - Francis Bacon

Zastrozzi, A Romance was first published in 1810 with only the author's initials "P.B.S." on its title page. Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote it when he was seventeen while at Eton College. it was the first of Shelley's two early Gothic novels and considered to be his first published prose work as well.

i like Shelley's writing. he is certainly one of the finest lyric poets in the English language and his poetic side shines throughout the narrative - in how he describes his characters, their emotions and the places around them.

i think that the romance referred to in the title, though, is a misnomer if it was referring to Contessa Matilda di Laurentini and Il Conte Verezzi's relationship. there was nothing romantic between them. it was really more of an obsession on Matilda's part and acquiescence on the latter. what led to Verezzi to succumb to Matilda's devious charms is one of the highlights of the book.

on the other hand, romance could be admitted if one were to speak of Verrezi's undying love for La Marchesa Julia de Strobazzo despite Matilda's machinations and duplicity.

i believe this book is more of a thriller than a "romance." i had no idea what was going on and why Pietro Zastrozzi was so fixated on revenge until the last few pages. although the conclusion was a little abrupt for me, it was still a surprisingly powerful one.

karen says

so i only read this because it was short and i knew i would be buying the new sarah waters book today (!) and i just wanted something to fill the gap until i could dive into ms waters.(twss) and it was fine. its full of swooning and wasting away over love and treachery and pining and villainy and hidden motives and poison and blah blah blah. its a gothic novel, to say it in two words. it seems to start in the middle of something that is happening and never explained...why is he so sleepy?? someone answer this for me please. we just like byron better.

Everett Darling says

A really unexpected twist with the title character being treated to second-billing, only fully coming to deserve the spotlight title during the last few pages, when his wiliness is explained, while Matilda is quite wretched, yet sympathetic, warranting recrimination, yet evoking compassion. Quite a good little read.

dathomira says

I'm going to have to go back and finish it because exams, but man Shelley is intolerable.

Janez says

Percy Bysshe Selley surely did not have a night of good rest when he started to write Zastrozzi. Exploiting the vogue of Gothic novels/romances that raged between the second half of the 18th and second half of the 19th centuries, his attempt was not quite as successful as that of the other authors... Certainly, there are the evil antagonists, bad to the core, each of them pursuing their different goals, and the (good) protagonists cannot but fall victims to their machinations. Throw in an Italian locale, with a touch or two of the Inquisition, and the reader arrives to the happy end (with two corpses)!!

Unless, of course, Shelley parodied the whole genre of Gothic novel, in which case he almost succeeded. Anyway, the novel is a short one, not a mastodon like Udolpho, and quite humorous at times.

CheshRCat says

Only part way through this one, and I have to admit, I am killing myself laughing over it. It is so, so, so deliciously ghastly. I would like to make the excuse that he did only write it in his late teens--but then, didn't

Mary write Frankenstein around the same age? Oh, Shelley, Shelley.... You are a brilliant man. Really. But....leave the prose work to your wife, okay?

Alicia says

I like when I find a book that I have never heard of by a classical author that I like. It's like getting an extra Christmas scheduled in the year.

Nick says

Three stars is really too many for this adolexcent effort of PBS. But I can't help but enjoy its derivitive nature, from Cahrlotte D'Acre especially, which shows how the romantic Gothic novel influenced Shelley to a large degree.

Carl Savich says

I would highly recommend the Gothic novel Zastrozzi (1810) by Percy Bysshe Shelley. It is a novel about obsession and a Promethean character, Zastrozzi, who seeks to transcend all morality and values, a Gothic Prometheus. The Hesperus Classics edition features a preface by Germaine Greer. She presents a good analysis of the plot but completely overlooks the themes of the novel. She even misspells the title of Shelley's second Gothic novel as St. Irvine. St. Irvyne (1811) is about an alchemist or scientist who seeks to impart the secret of immortality to Wolfstein, an outcast in the Swiss Alps. It has a horrific scene where a poem is read about the corpse of a nun, Rosa, who is reanimated. These novels are previews of Frankenstein (1818), which Percy Bysshe Shelley co-wrote with his wife Mary Shelley. All three novels are very similar in style and theme. The critics hated all three Gothic novels for the same reasons. Zastrozzi was adapted into a successful play by George F. Walker and was staged at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival and was turned into a 1986 mini-series on British TV starring Tilda Swinton. Percy Bysshe Shelley dominates all three novels. There is the same "Promethean narrative" and John Milton influence in all three novels. No one can deny Percy Bysshe Shelley's influence and impact. Zastrozzi is a vastly underrated Gothic masterpiece. You have to ignore the reviews and focus on the themes of the novel. Zastrozzi is a novel about a character that seeks to push the boundaries. He is a Gothic Prometheus.

Piyangie says

This Gothic novella tells the story of a masterfully executed horrific revenge which the titular character carries out against two innocent victims with the help of his partner in crime, Matilda, who blinded by her passionate obsession to one of the victims, fails to see the true motive of Zastrozzi.

This work is said to be the first prosaic endeavor by Shelley. And while Shelley is one of the most renowned Romantic poets of the time and to-date, I found his prose to be lacking the colour which is abundant in his poetry. The writing is repetitive and detached. It fails to arouse emotions in the reader. These types of Gothic horror stories are never my preference and I would have a hard time stomaching the horrific conduct of the

villains of the story. But nothing of that sort happened. Even the most gruesome passages, I read with passivity.

This was read as part of a challenge I have taken, and honestly, if it was not to complete the challenge, I wouldn't have seen it to the end.
