

# **FIRE OF HEAVEN, FIRE OF HELL**

**MARY SHELLEY, BYRON,  
'THE VAMPYRE' AND 'FRANKENSTEIN'**

**A PLAY IN TWO ACTS  
BY**

**Darvell ST-IRVYNE**

**EXTRACT FROM ACT II SCENE 24:**

**VILLA DIODATI; JUNE 1816; NIGHT**

**Mary Shelley, P.B. Shelley, Byron, Claire Clairmont & Dr. Polidori drinking and talking by candlelight as thunderstorm rages outside.**

POLIDORI: Dr. Mesmer has shown that we are subject to the ebb and flow of magnetic forces emanating from the heavenly bodies - and to walk to the cadence of cosmic magnetic tides is to walk in health and happiness...

BYRON: Oh good God, not Rousseau under another name - 'We are the children of a benevolent Nature...'

POLIDORI: If my lord will indulge me a moment: Dr. Mesmer shows that each person generates his or her own animal magnetism - the force of attraction and repulsion - from the median point of our bodies.

SHELLEY: Exactly. Plato teaches in the *'Symposium'* that the guiding force of nature is Love. Science calls it electricity, magnetism: the energy of the universe, of heaven and earth, of Life itself - it is Divine Love. And that is what Mesmer means too - animal magnetism is Love.

BYRON: Sounds more like sex to me, Shiloh. A force of attraction and repulsion emanating from our midriffs?

CLAIRE: That's what de Sade says: we are driven by sex.

*[Lightning and thunder]*

BYRON: Look at the lightning, Shiloh. Your pure universal energy. Look at the raw ferocity of its power. You tell me that's Love?

CLAIRE: When lightning strikes, the heavens fuck the earth as fiercely as a man fucks a woman!

BYRON: Claire's right, Shiloh. That's where the quest for the Sublime leads.

SHELLEY: But sex is the physical manifestation of Love!

BYRON: Even that old bore Burke realised that the most intense of all Sublime feelings is not Love but Terror...

CLAIRE: And Pain.

BYRON: But he was too *British* to realise what that meant.

MARY: And what does it mean?

CLAIRE: It means that Terror and Pain are the height of the Sublime - because they amplify sex beyond mere orgasm - beyond imagination!

MARY: The sleep of reason truly brings forth monsters.

BYRON: If it's the Sublime you're after - its into the realms of Terror and Pain we must go. Are you game, Shiloh?

CLAIRE: We know the Tempestuous Loveliness of Terror well, don't we, Shiloh? Many's the night he's petrified Mary and I half to death with his tales and phantasms! Shelley sees ghosts, you know. And I have fits!

BYRON: Fits of sublime ecstasy, eh? Excellent.

Then let us seize the opportunity of this magnificent night to scale the heights of the Sublime!

MARY: Or plunge the depths? *[BYRON picks up a book]*

BYRON: I bought this the other day. 'Phantasmogoriana', German tales of Terror. A classic of its kind. Pure Gothic. The ancestral ghost who haunts the generations, blighting his descendents with a cursed kiss. The man who clasps his bride only to find he is holding a putrefying corpse...

*[SHELLEY looks into the shadows and starts in horror]*

SHELLEY: It was as if a dead and a living body had been haled together in loathsome and horrid communion...

MARY: Bysshe?

SHELLEY: Harriet - I saw her - there - just now - she was -  
*rotting...*

MARY: My God, Albé, stop it - leave us alone!

BYRON: It is too late to stop - the séance has begun and no-one can leave the circle. In each one of us our most horrific fantasy is collecting, like a pearl around a grain of sand. What do we need of these yarns? *[BYRON throws the book aside]*  
Our own nightmares are infinitely more potent. Yes, let us create our own stories to terrify the world - to prove that, in their way, the astrologers were right! You, Mary, I know will not disappoint.

MARY: Why are you doing this? Shelley's Sublime soars to the heavens - exalted - illuminated. Yours...

CLAIRE: Plunges the delirious darkness of Hell!

MARY: Terror and pain!

CLAIRE: Yes!

SHELLEY: No, not pain. There your philosophy is wrong, Albé. The Sublime uplifts us - takes us beyond. Pain merely degrades.

BYRON: Have you ever inflicted gratuitous pain, Shiloh?

SHELLEY: No, of course not. Never!

BYRON: Then let me tell you - the pleasure of causing pain *is* Sublime. The lash of the whip; the vampire's bite!

SHELLEY: Sublime for you perhaps. But what of your victim? No-one delights in receiving pain.

MARY *[looking at CLAIRE]*: I think you may be wrong there, Bysshe... My God, how far are you prepared to go?

CLAIRE: All the way! Further! To the limits! Beyond!

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**DRAMATIS PERSONAE** (in order of appearance)

Mary Shelley  
Lord Byron  
Claire Clairmont  
Percy Bysshe Shelley  
Dr. John Polidori

Genevan *Soirée* 1816: Mme. Chatelain  
Also: Lady; 3 Gentlemen; Young Lady; Guests.

In *The Vampyre*: [presented as projected stills]  
Aubrey (played by 'Polidori')  
Lord Ruthven (played by 'Byron')  
Ianthe (played by 'Claire')  
Miss Aubrey (played by 'Mary')  
Also: Villagers; Priest; Wedding Guests; Maid.

In *Frankenstein*: Victor Frankenstein (played by 'Shelley')  
Monster (played by 'Byron')  
Elizabeth Lavenza (played by 'Mary')  
Justine (played by 'Claire')  
Also: Servants; Soldiers.

Italy 1822: Teresa Guiccioli  
Edward Trelawny  
Ned Williams  
Jane Williams  
Leigh Hunt  
Also: Militia soldiers.

Florence 1876: Paula Clairmont  
Edward Silsbee

## SCENES:

ACT 1: Scene: 1: London 1838: Mary's lodgings  
2 – 13B: Geneva 1816: Lakeside/ Hotel/  
Villa Diodati

ACT 2: Scene: 14A-15G: Geneva 1816: Villa Diodati  
16: London 1838 (as scene 1)  
17 – 23C: Italy 1822: Pisa/ Lerici/ Via Reggio  
24: London 1838 (as scenes 1 & 28)  
25: Italy 1876: a *pensione* in Florence  
26: Italy 1822: Via Reggio (as scene 40)

## MUSIC:

The director may find the following pieces appropriate (for use as indicated in the script):

- (I) Beethoven: Symphony No. 7 in A Major, Op. 92  
2nd Movement, *Allegretto* (1812)
- (II) Beethoven: Piano Concerto No. 5 in E flat, Op. 73  
(*Imperatore*) 2nd Movement, *Adagio un Poco Mosso* (1809)
- (III) Mozart: Piano Concerto No. 21 in C, K.467  
3rd Movement *Allegro Vivace Assai* (1785)
- (IV) Rossini: *Mosè in Egitto*, Act IV,  
*Preghiera: Dal Tuo Stellato Soglio* (1818-1819)

## SOME BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON MARY SHELLEY

- 1797: Mary born in London. Her mother is feminist writer Mary Wollstonecraft (who dies giving birth), her father is radical political economist William Godwin.
- 1814: As-yet-unknown poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (21) visits Godwin household. He and Mary become lovers.
- 1815: Mary and Shelley's first baby born prematurely and dies.
- 1816: Mary and Shelley, with new baby William (Wilmouse), elope across France, accompanied by Mary's step-sister Claire Clairmont (18). In Geneva they meet the celebrated poet Lord Byron (28), who is accompanied by his doctor John Polidori (20). They spend the summer together, and during stormy nights in mid June hold a ghost story competition which provides the basis for Mary's *Frankenstein* and Polidori's *The Vampyre*.  
Shelleys return to England. Byron goes to Italy.
- 1817: Claire gives birth to Allegra, her daughter by Byron. Mary gives birth to her third child, Clara.
- 1818: *Frankenstein* published. Shelleys move to Italy. Clara dies.
- 1819: *The Vampyre* published. Wilmouse dies. Mary gives birth to her fourth child, Percy Florence (the only one to survive infancy).
- 1821: Polidori dies in England, aged 25. Shelleys and Byron neighbours in Pisa.
- 1822: Claire's daughter Allegra dies. Mary miscarries her fifth child. Shelley drowns in boating accident off Livorno (Leghorn), aged 29.
- 1823: Byron goes to fight in the Greek war of independence against the Turks. Mary returns to England with her son Percy Florence.
- 1824: Byron dies of malaria in Greece, aged 36.
- 1838: Mary edits Shelley's work for publication.
- 1839: *Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* published. Mary's health collapses.
- 1851: Mary Shelley dies in London, aged 53.