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## **Prometheus Unbound**

*The Regeneration of a Fallen God*

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## **Abstract**

Percy Bysshe Shelleys lyriske drama *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), skrevet mot slutten av forfatterens liv, er et av hans hovedverker. I den omskriver Shelley Prometevs-myten og inkorporerer den i en større mytisk visjon om menneskehetens potensiale til å skape en ny gullalder. Selv om verkets tittel leder en til å tro at hele stykket handler om Prometevs, er det bare i den første akten av dramaet at Prometevs kan regnes som protagonisten. Den følgende studie av Shelleys Prometevs-skikkelse har altså form av en nærlesning av dramaets første akt, og setter seg fore å vise at Prometevs gjennomgår en karakterutvikling hvor han mister sin guddommelighet, og må streve for å gjenopprette den. I resepsjonshistorien har det blitt vanlig å lese Shelleys Prometevs i lys av to andre figurer: Miltons Satan (fra *Paradise Lost*) og Jesus Kristus. Dermed postuleres det at Prometevs' transformasjon er fra en satanisk skikkelse til en kristus-lignende skikkelse. I tillegg er det også vanlig å se Prometevs' transformasjon iverksatt og fullbyrdet i løpet av kort tid i begynnelsen av akten. I denne analysen tar jeg et oppgjør med begge disse måtene å tolke Prometevs og hans utvikling på, og gjennom en nærlesning av første akt vil jeg presentere en alternativ tolkning av Shelleys Prometevs. For det første vil jeg argumentere for at det ikke er nødvendig, og at det til og med kan være ufordelaktig, å basere ens forståelse av Shelleys Prometevs på de mange allusjonene i verket til *Paradise Lost* og Bibelen. For det andre vil jeg gjennom min analyse vise at Prometevs' utvikling er en moralsk, følelsesmessig og intellektuell restaurasjonsprosess som spenner over hele først akt.

## **Acknowledgments**

In many ways I owe my present interest in and love for Shelley and his poetry, and this thesis by extension, to Frode Helmich Pedersen's seminar on European Romantic poetry and poetics, which I attended in the spring of 2010. Through this seminar I discovered a movement in poetry and philosophy, which spoke to me on much deeper level than I expected. I must extend further a more personal thank you to Frode Helmich Pedersen for his friendship and mentorship in the early stages of this project.

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## I. Introduction

I was initially drawn to Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) while exploring satanic imagery in Romantic poetry. While reading Peter A. Schock's *Romantic Satanism* (2003) I was introduced to the idea that Shelley's body of work was abound with satanic imagery, which developed along a steady arch between a demonic, aggressive and "evil" Satan, into an image of a illuminating, humanitarian, light-bearing Lucifer. In this interpretation of Shelley's developing satanic imagery, *Prometheus Unbound* was singled out by Schock as the work by Shelley where this transformation, and struggle between these two satanic images convened. Intrigued, I decided to take a closer look, and what I found was far more interesting and complicated than I expected. While delving further into the drama's critical reception I found that the more I read the more the poem opened up, yet all the more confused I became. There were so many inconsistencies within the critical reception, and few scholars explicitly explored an issue I felt was problematic, and at the same time crucial to understanding the drama as a whole – namely Prometheus' character development in Act I.

Another factor that enticed me to further explore Shelley and *Prometheus Unbound* was because it appeared to be a challenge; a challenge in part because of the great complexity of this work and in part because of the history of criticism surrounding Shelley and *Prometheus Unbound*. Despite being considered one of the major English Romantic poets, research done on Shelley in recent years is sparse. Since his death, the critical reception of Shelley has been haphazard. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there have been many biographies published, and some scholarly work written about him, but despite Harold Bloom's high esteem of the poet, Shelley still seems to be a marginal poet within contemporary criticism. Even more so his lyrical drama *Prometheus Unbound*. Since the turn of the century there have been published a handful of dissertations on Prometheus Unbound and a total of one book focusing on the poem.<sup>1</sup> Maybe the extensive work done by Wasserman, Grabo and Curran has deterred recent scholars from attempting to approach this massive work. Maybe the general consensus is that what needs be said about it has been said by these scholarly giants. Or maybe our generation of literary critics is still under the influence of

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<sup>1</sup> There are several annotated editions of *Prometheus Unbound* that have been published in recent years, and the drama has been featured in a number of anthologies, but Edward T. Duffy's *The Constitution of Shelley's Poetry: the argument of language in Prometheus Unbound* (2009) is the only academic book written in the 21<sup>st</sup> century focusing primarily on *Prometheus Unbound*.

those schools of literary critics who actively discouraged their students and colleagues from reading Shelley.

In *Shelley's Mythmaking* (1959) Harold Bloom laments the state of Shelley criticism, and claims that "if Shelley's poetry dies in our age it will not be because we have read it and found it wanting but because we have allowed ourselves to be persuaded into not reading it at all" (Bloom: 110). According to Kenneth Neill Cameron, speaking ca. two decades later, Shelley still seems to suffer from a critical reception that aims to dissuade readers from taking him seriously. This tradition of critical reception, which Bloom and Cameron are referring to, would have us believe that the majority of Shelley's work is adolescent in its ideals and lyrically of poor quality. This hostile tendency is not so prevalent today, but research on Shelley is still somewhat marginal. I would not be so bold as to suggest that the research I have done in this thesis will inspire a resurgence of interest in Shelley and his poetry. However, it has been my pleasure to spend the last few years exploring a poet who deserves far more attention and appraisal than he has received.

### **I.i. Summary of Prometheus Unbound<sup>2</sup>**

#### *Act I*

The poem begins *in media res* with Prometheus chained to a precipice in the Indian Caucasus. Shelley gives no explicit reason for this change in scenery from Aeschylus' setting in Scythia (the European Caucasus). However, contemporary anthropology placed the origin of human life in central Asia, and it is possible to understand this placement of Prometheus in India as an attempt to transform the Greek myth into a more universal human myth (Curran 1975: 479). Attending Prometheus are two Oceanides: Ione and Panthea. They are the sisters of Asia who throughout the poem is associated with Aphrodite/Venus and called Love by Prometheus. She is Prometheus' wife, but was exiled to the Vale of Cashmere by Jupiter when Prometheus was bound.

As the drama begins, Prometheus explains that he has been bound and tortured for three

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<sup>2</sup> I am aware that it is common practice to put a summary such as this at the end of an introductory chapter. However, *Prometheus Unbound* is such a long and rich text, I would like to present this summary first so that my readers can keep the drama fresh in mind while reading my hypothesis and the rest of the introduction.

thousand years because he defied Jupiter's rule and gave mankind gifts they had been denied by Jupiter. He explains how day after day Jupiter's "winged hound" eats his heart and he is denied any sleep or rest. By day he is scorched and parched and by night he is frozen, glaciers spear him with ice and earthquakes cause his flesh to tear apart. Toward the end of his soliloquy, Prometheus claims that he no longer hates, but instead pities Jupiter, and wishes to "recall" the curse he placed on Jupiter when he was bound. He cannot remember the curse himself, and therefore asks the Earth and the elements to repeat the curse for him. No one dares repeat Prometheus' curse out of fear for Jupiter's retribution, but the Earth tells Prometheus that he can command a shadow from the world "beneath the grave" to say the dread words. Prometheus calls upon the Phantasm of Jupiter to repeat the curse. After hearing the curse repeated, Prometheus laments and claims that he no longer wishes any living thing to suffer pain.

Mercury then enters the stage leading a score of Furies who Jupiter has sent to wreak new tortures upon Prometheus. Before releasing the Furies, Mercury tries to convince Prometheus to end his suffering and give in to Jupiter. Prometheus remains steadfast in his defiance, and the Furies are released. Instead of the physical torture Prometheus has been enduring, the Furies have been sent to inflict psychological torture. They show him visions of mankind's futile attempts to better themselves and how even historical events that were initiated with the best intentions easily become corrupted and end up unleashing new evils upon mankind. This is demonstrated in particular by two events: the corruption of the teachings of Jesus Christ, which created an oppressive institution of churches, and the failure of the French Revolution. After the Furies have administered their torture, the Earth summons Spirits who live in the "dim caves of human thought". These Spirits comfort Prometheus and tell him that hope and love still survive and struggle to claim dominion in the hearts and minds of mankind. Prometheus takes this consolation to heart and concludes that all hope is vain except love. This prompts Panthea to leave Prometheus and go to Asia in her exile.

## *Act II*

Upon arriving Panthea tells Asia that she has had two dreams; one where she saw Prometheus radiant and unbound, but the second she cannot remember. An echo of the unremembered dream calls out to the sisters to follow, and it leads them down into the realm of Demogorgon. Demogorgon is an eternal and omnipresent figure who is most often interpreted as the Romantic

conception of Necessity.<sup>3</sup> Asia asks Demogorgon to reveal the source of the world's evil so that he may be held accountable. Demogorgon answers Asia elusively, leading Asia to reflect on the history of Prometheus and mankind. She relates how mankind suffered for want of knowledge in their primitive state under Saturn's rule, and how Prometheus endowed Jupiter with the power and means to usurp his father Saturn. Asia explains that Prometheus helped Jupiter on the condition that once Jupiter had claimed the throne he would "Let man be free" (II. iv. 45)<sup>4</sup>. Jupiter did not live up to his end of the deal, and not only did he not grant mankind's freedom, he expected all living things, gods and mankind alike, to subject themselves to him. Prometheus refused to accept Jupiter's authoritarian rule and decided to help mankind's self-advancement toward "freedom" by bestowing them with proverbial gift of fire. For Prometheus' rebellion, in not showing supplication and for helping mankind, he is punished by Jupiter and sentenced to an eternity of torture bound to the precipice.

By the end of her tale, Asia realizes that Jupiter is not the original source of evil in the world, but is himself a slave to evil. Asia still wants Demogorgon to reveal the creator of the world and the source of all that is good and evil, but Demogorgon answers that "the deep truth is imageless" (II.iv. 116) and that all that can be known is that all things are subject to chance and change, except "eternal Love" (II.iv. 120). Asia admits that she has known this to be true in her heart all along. Prometheus' moment of realization at the end of Act I enabled Panthea to travel to Asia with her dream and lead her out of exile. Similarly, Asia's moment of realization here signals "the destined hour" and Demogorgon rises from his throne toward heaven to dethrone Jupiter.

### *Act III*

Seated upon his throne and surrounded by the other deities, Jupiter boasts of his omnipotence and how he has begot a child who will finally quell the lingering rebellious notions that still survive in mankind's hearts. As Demogorgon approaches the throne, Jupiter mistakes him for his offspring, but Demogorgon tells him (and everyone present) that from now on the throne of heaven must remain vacant, and drags Jupiter with him into the abyss. In the second scene Ocean and Apollon discuss the fall of Jupiter and what the world will be like henceforth; they claim

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<sup>3</sup> "The greatest equally with the smallest motions of the Universe are subject to the rigid necessity of inevitable laws. These laws are the unknown causes of the known effects perceivable in the Universe." From Shelley's *A Refutation of Deism* (Cameron: 514)

<sup>4</sup> All citations of *Prometheus Unbound* are taken from *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*. Ed. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers. New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977.



there will be no hardship, bloodshed or evil. The third scene begins with Hercules unchaining Prometheus, who then tells Asia and her sisters about a cave where they will now live and witness the growth and progression of mankind, now free to create the world anew. In the last scene they are in this cave and a spirit who has been travelling throughout the world relates to them what he saw. He tells that the changes in mankind didn't happen as immediately as he expected, but eventually he saw mankind abandon the old symbols and institutions of power. Free from the influence of Jupiter's tyranny, mankind has united to create a classless and nationless global society.

#### *Act IV*

The Hours of Jupiter's reign and influence are seen to pass by in a funeral march as they disappear into the past. The rest of Act IV is a series of hymnic descriptions of the effects of Prometheus' and Asia' union have had on the celestial and corporeal world. There is a dialogic passage between a chorus of hours and spirits of human thought, and the spirits of the Earth and Moon are also united. The Earth relates how mankind has become one: "one harmonious Soul of many a soul" (IV. 400), and how their unified efforts have raised them godlike so they can minister themselves and the world with forethought and compassion. At the end Demogorgon visits them to impart some last words of wisdom and forewarning. He tells them that although tyranny has been vanquished and love permeates the world, this happy state might not always last. As Asia learned from him earlier, all things are subject to change, and that change might lead the world backwards as well as forwards. But the world is now equipped with certain qualities gained through Prometheus' and Asia' enlightenment and union, and these are the tools that can be utilized to either ward off evil or vanquish it if it returns:

Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom and Endurance, —  
These are the seals of that most firm assurance  
Which bars the pit over Destruction's strength;  
And if, with infirm hand, Eternity,  
Mother of many acts and hours, should free  
The serpent that would clasp her with his length—  
These are the spells by which to reassume  
An empire o'er the disentangled Doom. (IV. 562-569)

## I.ii. My Hypothesis

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the *dramatis persona* Prometheus and his character development through Act I of *Prometheus Unbound*. The reason I will only be focusing on Act I (and briefly discussing a part of the first scene in Act II) is because this is where the pertinent action in the drama takes place. Some critics have even claimed that the first act is the only part of the drama in which any significant action takes place.<sup>5</sup> This I find to be a grave exaggeration, but for the purpose of this analysis, it is only necessary to examine the first act. The first act of this drama is centered around Prometheus, and after the first act, Prometheus recedes somewhat into the background for the rest of the drama. Although he is often present on stage, his role is minor, or at least no bigger than the other characters. Most importantly for the case at hand, Prometheus' character development ends with the end of Act I, and he is very much a static figure after this.

In the following thesis I will be discussing the figure of Prometheus and propose that within the first act Prometheus undergoes a process of regeneration from a fallen, degenerate god-figure into a transcendent, superlative character within Shelley's mythos. Every critic who has read *Prometheus Unbound* has commented on this regeneration, and there appears to be two overlaying trends regarding this within the critical reception of *Prometheus Unbound*. On the one hand, the numerous allusions and literary references to both Milton's Satan and Christianity's Jesus Christ have lead many critics to view Prometheus' regeneration as a transition from a Satanic to a Messianic figure. On the other hand, many critics tend to view this regeneration as happening quickly and at the beginning of the drama. I take issue, to some degree, with both of these trends, and in the following thesis I will propose an alternative interpretation of Prometheus' development throughout Act I.

While it has become exceedingly common to view Prometheus' character-development as a transition from an unregenerate Satanic figure into a Christ-like savior, I wish to prove that it is more complicated than this. In *The Apocalyptic Vision in the Poetry of Shelley* (1964), Ross Greig Woodman posits an interesting observation, which I find enlightening and useful when

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<sup>5</sup> "As nearly every critic of *Prometheus Unbound* has observed, the only dramatic struggles take place in Act I, and all the subsequent action, including Demorogon's explosive overthrow of Jupiter, proceeds without worthy opposition and hence without dramatic tension" (Wasserman: 306).

analyzing Prometheus' development. It is not so much the transformation from one type of figure into another, but the *regeneration of a fallen god*. If one were to compare Prometheus with another mythic figure, Woodman proposes comparing Prometheus to Dionysus: "The Promethean myth is a variation of the myth of Dionysus. Its fundamental assertion is that the creative power of the gods properly belongs to man and that through the recovery of this power man can restore his lost divinity" (Woodman: 70). *Prometheus Unbound* as a whole is very much a vision of mankind restoring a lost sense of divinity through love and creating a new golden age. This larger scale of regeneration and transformation is, within the universe of Shelley's drama, dependent on Prometheus' own recovery of his divinity.

If Prometheus' character development is to be viewed as a restoration of divinity, we must first define the conditions of Prometheus' divinity, how it can be said to have been lost and how it is regained. In the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley claims: "Prometheus is, as it were, the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature impelled by the purest and truest motives to the best and noblest ends" (R & P: 133). If one is speaking of Prometheus as a mythic figure in general, this statement could be called into question. However, considering that with this drama, Shelley is not retelling, but rewriting the Prometheus myth, I would argue that we must take this statement at face value. Some critics do take this statement quite literally, like Richard Fogle who claims: "Shelley will admit no imperfection whatever into his conception of the hero: a flaw would be not merely immoral but inartistic" (Fogle: 24). If this were the case, then there would be neither conflict nor action in the first act of the drama. As is the case, and as the following analysis of Act I will prove, through the majority of Act I Prometheus is *not* "the type of highest perfection etc.". Therefore, I propose we consider Shelley's claim of Prometheus' character here as descriptive of the divine Prometheus.

In the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley compares Prometheus to Milton's Satan, but claims that Prometheus is exempt from the character traits that taint Satan's moral and poetical character:

The only imaginary being resembling in any degree Prometheus, is Satan; and Prometheus is, in my judgement, a more poetical character than Satan, because, in addition to courage, and majesty, and firm and patient opposition to omnipotent force, he is susceptible of being described as exempt from the taints of ambition, envy, revenge, and a desire for personal aggrandisement, which, in the Hero of Paradise Lost, interfere with the interest. (R & P: 133)

However, it will be shown in my analysis, that within Shelley's drama Prometheus exhibits his own array of vices which inhibit him from becoming the champion of mankind (which Shelley also claims him to be in the Preface). Unlike Milton's Satan, Prometheus' initial motives and intentions were purely in the interest of mankind. Similar to Milton's Satan, however, once scorned by his sovereign, Prometheus decides to wreak the worst possible vengeance upon his enemy, even if it means bringing down mankind along with him. Although Prometheus is still technically a god, he loses his divinity and *falls from grace* when he allows himself to be overcome by hatred and lust for revenge. When the drama opens, Prometheus is still the fallen god, claiming that his empire (metaphorically, mentally, and literally) is that of torture, solitude, scorn, and despair. The purpose of the analysis of Act I is to show that these are the traits which taint Prometheus' character, and which he must purge before his divinity can be restored.

Prometheus must become "the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature" before mankind can begin to create a new golden age. In Shelley's philosophy, it was necessary for mankind to perform an inner spiritual transformation of heart and mind, before any attempt to reform society could be attempted. Therefore, Prometheus, either as an individual or a mythic analogy for mankind (a popular interpretation among critics), must fully transform before the rest of the world can begin to transform. The need for Prometheus' reformation is expressed by Shelley himself in the preface: "aware that until the mind can love, and admire, and trust, and hope, and endure, reasoned principles of moral conduct are seeds cast upon the highway of life which the unconscious passenger tramples into dust" (R & P: 135).

Many critics view the iconographic relationship between Prometheus and Christ as "central to Shelley's depiction of Prometheus as savior of humankind" (Lewis: 172). It is also exceedingly common for critics to refer to Prometheus' declaration of pity for Jupiter in the opening soliloquy as Prometheus' conversion to Christian ethics. Although the allusions to Satan and Christ are many, and to some extent seem to follow Prometheus' progress of regeneration, it will be argued in this thesis that it is not necessary (and can even at times distract and lead to confusion) to rely on extra-textual material in order to understand Prometheus' transformation from a fallen god to mankind's savior. Shelley has given us more than enough to work with in the Preface and within the drama itself in order to understand Prometheus' development from a fallen god to "the type of highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature".

Therefore, not only do I suggest that we not view Prometheus' conversion as contingent on his similarity to Christ, I believe we must re-examine when and how Prometheus achieves the restoration of his divinity. The second point addressed in my analysis is the duration of Prometheus' transformation. There is an overwhelming tendency in the critical reception of *Prometheus Unbound* to view Prometheus' regeneration as having either already happened off stage before the drama begins, in the middle of Prometheus' opening soliloquy when he claims to pity Jupiter, or after the recalling of the curse when Prometheus says that he no longer wishes any living thing to suffer pain. In any case, Prometheus' conversion from hate to pity is viewed as relatively abrupt, leading some critics to conclude that Shelley, although a fine lyricist, had no understanding, philosophically or literally, of the theme he was attempting to explore: "Shelley had no knowledge either of the nature of evil, or of the means by which evil can be abolished; therefore he could not represent either" (Rader: 103). Such grave misunderstandings and simplifications of Shelley's philosophy have unfortunately, albeit understandably, been supported by Mary Shelley's unfortunate over-simplification of her husband's philosophy in her note to *Prometheus Unbound*: "The prominent feature of Shelley's theory of the destiny of the human species was that evil is not inherent in the system of creation, but an accident that might be expelled [...] Shelley believed that mankind had only to will that there would be no evil, and there would be none" (Shelley 2011: 17).

The purpose of the following analysis is to elaborate on another view, which is only briefly touched upon or alluded to by a few critics - that the restoration of Prometheus' divinity is a process that spans the whole first act, and cannot be viewed as complete until it is confirmed by Panthea's vision at the beginning of Act II. In my analysis I will show that the instances in which Prometheus expresses pity for Jupiter, and regret for his actions as a fallen god, are steps Prometheus takes toward the restoration of his divinity, but are not in themselves proof of his being regenerate. I will also discuss how his pity, regret, and rejection of his fallen character-flaws are not enough to restore Prometheus' divinity. Despite these steps Prometheus still struggles to fend off despair and become mankind's champion and savior. It is at the end of Act I, after the Spirits have visited him, Prometheus learns to accept that love is the only viable solution to overcoming the evils that plague the world. With this knowledge, Prometheus fully transcends his fallen state, restores his divinity and becomes "the type of highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature".

To sum up: In this thesis I will be examining the portrayal of Prometheus' character development as it unfolds in Act I. I will admit that a study of Prometheus' character can be illuminated and enriched by extra-textual references, but for the purpose of exploring Prometheus' development in Act I, it is viable to treat Prometheus as an autonomous mythic figure in Shelley's mythopoesis.<sup>6</sup> The restoration of Prometheus' divinity is conditioned only by Shelley's description of him in the Preface, and the narrative of the drama itself. It is also the purpose of this thesis' analysis to prove that Prometheus' regeneration is neither concluded early in the drama, or one that happens quickly without struggle, thereby challenging a major tendency in the critical reception of *Prometheus Unbound*.

### **I.iii. Critical Reception**

In his own lifetime Shelley was a somewhat of a controversial figure, and was well known for his scandalous love affairs and political radicalism - possibly more so than for his writing. Because of Shelley's rather unorthodox social, political and especially religious views, the history of critical reception surrounding Shelley's poetry is plagued with biases based on opinions of his person. As renowned Shelley scholar Kenneth Neill Cameron puts it: "Few writers have provoked such hostility or inspired such affection" (Cameron: vii). After Shelley's death there was a long period, well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in which many critics (and poets) actively sought to degrade the image of Shelley's person and thereby affected much of the mainstream approach to his poetry. This is somewhat understandable, Cameron explains, because "the reactionary, the conservative, or the "common sense" pragmatist is not going to be sympathetic toward the iconoclast, the revolutionary, or the romantic" (Cameron: viii). The sculpting of Shelley's image as an indolent man-child, with deplorable morals and no discernable talent, was partly made possible by the fact that much material evidence such as letters, diaries, and minor prose works which could have illuminated and contextualized much of Shelley's poetry was unavailable. Despite this effort, or possibly in some cases because of it, Shelley and his works continued to inspire political and intellectual radicals throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> - and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some of the

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<sup>6</sup> The term "mythopoesis" literally means mythmaking, but is used with various connotations by literary critics. Throughout this analysis I will be using the term to mean that the author is creating his own individual, and inherently original, mythology, while at the same time including elements that are familiar from previously established mythologies, religious narratives, and literary works. This will be elaborated on in chapter *I.iv. Reading Shelley's Mythopoesis*.

most notable figures that claimed inspiration from Shelley were Oscar Wilde, W. B. Yeats, Henry David Thoreau and Friedrich Engels.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Shelley was surprisingly wide-read, despite the harsh criticism he received from the leading schools of literary criticism, which viewed his poetry and ideals as adolescent. There were of course exceptions like Carlos Baker's *Shelley's Major Poetry* (1948), which was the first thorough analysis of Shelley's works since the Victorian period. Here the author praises Shelley for his "qualities of vision and insight", but ultimately concludes that Shelley was more the prophet than the poet. However, during the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century attitudes toward Shelley have gradually changed. Today Shelley is no longer quite so problematic a figure among literary scholars, due to the incredible amount of historic-biographical and critical work done by Kenneth Neill Cameron, and the high praise Shelley has received from such authorities as Harold Bloom and M. H. Abrams.

However, this does not detract from the fact that Shelley's philosophical prose and poetry are still considered enigmatic and immensely difficult to approach and understand. The complex character of Shelley's poetry has lead scholars either to confusion or over-simplified and contradictory interpretations of Shelley's works. In *The Mutiny Within* (1967) James Rieger compares Shelley's obscurity to that of Scripture: "[Shelley] has been cited to nearly every purpose, many of them distinctly ill-advised. He invites critical synecdoche" (Rieger: 16). In a critical work that brings to light many interesting comparisons between Shelley's poetry and Gnostic mythology, but is fundamentally hostile towards the young poet, this is likely the only statement by Rieger I agree wholeheartedly with. That is to say that many interpretations of Shelley's works, and *Prometheus Unbound* in particular, have been "ill-advised" by predetermined notions about Shelley's person, his political and religious views and his poetics.

In his immense work *Shelley - The Golden Years* (1974), Kenneth Neil Cameron says: "No work by Shelley has been more "guessed at" than *Prometheus Unbound*. And the field for guessing is endless. There seem, in fact, to be very few suggestions that have not been made, many of them patently ridiculous" (Cameron: 485). True as this assessment by Cameron is, what becomes clear while sifting through the critical tradition surrounding *Prometheus Unbound*, is that the major, overlaying themes found in this myriad of interpretations are often similar. However, as soon as one starts to go into detail and examine particulates in the poem, that is

when the, if not “ridiculous”, the limited, biased, and inattentive interpretations show themselves en masse. There is no room in this discussion to treat the myriad of problematic interpretations, because they are all very individualistic and particular to certain aspects of the drama. Some of these however, will be addressed later in the analysis. For the time being, we can take a look at the most common overlaying themes that present a feeling of consensus in the critical reception of the drama.

Most critics agree to some extent that Prometheus is meant to represent “Humanity, the Mind of Man, the Good in Man or something similar” (Butter: 171). This mode of interpretation is the most common because it is firstly the most obvious, and secondly can easily be argued to have been Shelley’s intention for his mythic drama. Shelley himself gives us no such explicit clues as how to interpret his poem other than designating Prometheus as the “Champion” and Jupiter as the “Oppressor” of mankind in the Preface. There can be no doubt however that Shelley’s poetry in general tends to be layered with symbolic meaning. As his wife Mary Shelley explains in her notes to *Prometheus Unbound*:

More popular poets clothe the ideal with familiar and sensible imagery. Shelley loved to idealize the real — to gift the mechanism of the material universe with a soul and a voice, and to bestow such also on the most delicate and abstract emotions and thoughts of the mind (Shelley 2011: 18).

When viewed in the broadest sense, there can be no doubt that there are parallels, similarities and analogies between Prometheus and mankind (both in Shelley and elsewhere), and that in *Prometheus Unbound* Prometheus’ (and Asia’s) transformation and enlightenment mirror the transcendental movement Shelley thought was necessary to create a better future. Within this broader understanding of the allegorical meaning of *Prometheus Unbound* there are a few common variations that bear mentioning.

The first of these interprets the mythological aspect of Shelley’s drama as a more or less purely metaphysical allegory. In this view the mythical drama that unfolds is viewed as a cosmic allegory or an illustration of the change in mankind’s condition and evolution toward a new golden age. M. H. Abrams’ analysis of *Prometheus Unbound* in *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971) is an example of this type of reading. Abrams compares Shelley’s drama to “the popular eighteenth-century genre of universal history”, where the protagonist is “Man” or “Mankind” (Abrams: 300). Prometheus, as the protagonist of Shelley’s drama, is also the symbolic “Man”



who represents “the intellectual and moral vanguard among human beings, who develops through history toward his perfected human condition” (Abrams: 300). Among these interpretations, a lot of weight is put on the fact that Prometheus is the one who gave Jupiter his power. Jupiter therefore represents the evil that mankind itself creates. Another common interpretation of *Prometheus Unbound* is to view the drama as a psychomachia. Here Prometheus still represents Man or Mankind, but instead of viewing the drama as a cosmic allegory, *Prometheus Unbound* is read as an internalized drama where the only real character is Prometheus. Jupiter and the rest of the characters are just projections of Prometheus’ troubled mind, and the events that take place “are really mental, taking place in the mind of Prometheus, and are made manifest to us by his words and by the Furies and Spirits which embody his thoughts” (Butter: 171).

It has also become common, especially in the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to read *Prometheus Unbound* in a historical-biographical context. Many critics claim that this drama is the pinnacle of Shelley’s social and political speculations, and that it was written with clear political agenda. For some (for example Peter A. Schock) this agenda was Shelley’s effort to clarify his own stance on whether political and social change could and/or should come about through gradual evolution of ideas or be instigated by revolution. For others (for example Linda M. Lewis) the agenda is seen as an attempt on Shelley’s part to inspire subversive feelings in his reader. A common trend among these interpretations is to acknowledge other modes of interpretation, such as allegorical or psychological, but view these types of readings as secondary and supportive of an interpretation of *Prometheus Unbound* as “a political statement” (Lewis: 178).

When, decade after decade, critics continue to produce a myriad of often contradicting analyses, James Rieger is convinced that the fault lies with Shelley who “wished to be imperfectly understood by a public he could not love” (Rieger: 13). The picture Rieger paints of Shelley is that of an arrogant, cynical and pedantic young “scribbler with sloppy personal habits, a fondness for chemical stench and bangs, and no discernible talent” (Rieger: 21). He insists on Shelley’s pedantry and obscurity, and suggests, “the present unpopularity of his work would not have displeased him” (Rieger: 13). Shelley has continuously been criticized, although seldom as harshly and bluntly as Rieger, by critics who nonetheless spend time and effort trying to squeeze meaning from his poetry. It is true Shelley said of *Prometheus Unbound* that “it is written only

for the elect” (Cameron: 652), but this does not mean that he wrote with mischievous intent to confound his reader, but rather he was afraid that few would be able to grasp the full scope of his poetry. Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound* has not been easily, or succinctly, understood even by “the elect” (i.e. the intellectual elite Shelley imagined as his ideal reader) - which is perfectly understandable for such a complex work.

The complexity of *Prometheus Unbound* stems in part from the abundant references to other narratives and myths. The allusions and references in the drama do not always follow their source-material strictly, and this has caused many critics to become confused by their appearances and claim the drama is riddled with inconsistencies. Tilottama Rajan postulates that the reason for so many seemingly inconsistencies in *Prometheus Unbound* is that Shelley had trouble moving from the realm of thought to the realm of actuality when attempting to construct his own mythology (Rajan: 320). I would argue against this and claim that the impression of Shelley’s inconsistency stems from critics taking Shelley’s allusions and references too literally. I therefore propose a short discussion on Shelley’s mythmaking before we proceed any further.

#### **I.iv. Reading Shelley’s Mythopoesis**

Harold Bloom states in *Shelley’s Mythmaking* (1959): “the contemporary danger this poem faces is that of readers crediting a very subtle poet with too little awareness of what he was doing” (Bloom: 95). On the other hand, however, there are those critics who almost overestimate Shelley. I say “almost” because the failure is not an overestimation of Shelley’s capabilities as a “subtle” poet, but the overestimation of their own abilities to fully explain what Shelley was doing. The effort to catalogue, analyze, and distill the immense array of mythic, historic, and literary layers of reference that Shelley uses to build his mythology is destined to be a futile effort. The richness and complexity of Shelley’s poetry has proven problematic for scholars through the ages, resulting in a myriad of interpretations in which, struggle to contain and tame Shelley’s extremely fluid, subtle and individualized philosophy and mythopoesis.

George M. Ridenour, however, presents a refreshingly synthetic attitude toward Shelley’s complexity and offers that we view Shelley as a *pluralist*: “With all his ardor for unified experience, Shelley is unexpectedly patient in working out systems that make no pretense to

being comprehensive statements” (Ridenour: 10). Ridenour sets Shelley up as the greatest example of “romantic irony” in the English language, because he presents us with numerous, even contradicting, visions, yet refuses to “choose between them”(ibid). In extension of this approach one can view Shelley’s mythic drama as a *heterocosm* in the sense that he mixes mythologies in order to create a *new mythology*. This is a term that stems from the German Idealists - a philosophic trend that preceded and strongly influenced Romanticism.<sup>7</sup>

Idealist philosophy sought an alternative to Enlightenment rationality and theology, an alternative in which our relationship to the unconditioned does not depend on something that transcends human reason, i.e. a deity. One could imagine that mythology just replaced a deity with another set of transcendental categories. However, it is important to clarify that although mythology often resembles religion, for the Idealists mythology was not treated as supernatural belief, but as an illustration of the uneasy space between our knowing and the unknowable (Bowie: 50). For the Idealists, as well as for the Romantics, mythology and art were essentially the same in the sense that they are parallel wefts in the same fabric of our understanding. They both offer access to an insight not grasped by philosophy or religion (Bowie: 51). Romantic art and feeling are therefore infused with a sense of “longing” that stems from an “inherent dissatisfaction with any claim to have attained the final truth via something in the transient empirical world” (Bowie: 52). How this longing manifests itself in Romantic poetry will not be discussed in this thesis, but this does lead us toward a factor of Romantic poetry that needs clarification. The Romantics often rejected allegory in their poetics, because allegorical poetry was traditionally confined and finite in its symbolism, but they also saw the value in allegorical poetry. As Schlegel put it: “The impossibility of positively reaching the Highest by reflection leads to allegory”, because what cannot be directly represented is represented by the symbol (Bowie: 52). The symbol, however, is not inherently bound to its referent and only loosely implies meaning associated with the thing it represents.

With this in mind, one must therefore be careful to attach too much meaning to the myriad of extra-textual references in Shelley’s work. This provides the critic with a two-fold problem when interpreting Romantic mythopoesis. On the one hand it would be naive to disregard the tradition,

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<sup>7</sup> In this thesis I will be continually referring to ”Romanticism” and ”Romantic” poetry. By this I am referring to the period of European literature (and culture), which is generally considered to span from ca. 1790 to the 1830’s. In this thesis, much of what is said about Romanticism is characteristic of English Romanticism in particular.

context and original meanings of symbols and figures referred to in the work. On the other hand, one cannot depend on the inherited meanings and associations of these symbols and figures. Shelley addresses this himself in his essay “Speculations on Metaphysics”: “our whole style of expression and sentiment is infected with the tritest plagiarisms. Our words are dead, our thoughts are cold and borrowed” (Shelley 1994: vii). The use of familiar figures presents the reader with a challenge because it would be so easy to be content believing one already knows the meaning behind the allusion. Similar to the Greek tragic poets who relied on their audience knowing the story beforehand, Shelley also expects us to automatically associate in certain ways with the figures he presents us. However he intends to take these allusions and associations and deconstruct them in order to free them from themselves. In the *Defence of Poetry* Shelley claims that poetry

reproduces the common universe of which we are portions and percipients, and it purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being. [...] It creates anew the universe after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration (R & P: 505-506).

I must therefore agree with Earl R. Wasserman in *Shelley – A Critical Reading* (1971), when he concludes in his chapter on Shelley’s use of myth, that according to Shelley’s own poetics “the myths that appear in his poetry, however traditional, are to be understood as really having no inherited contexts at all” (Wasserman: 273). Shelley himself says something similar in his Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*:

Poetical abstractions are beautiful and new, not because the portions of which they are composed had no previous existence in the mind of man or in nature, but because the whole produced by their combination has some intelligible and beautiful analogy with those sources of emotion and thought, and with the contemporary condition of them (R & P: 134).

Shelley’s, and our, mythical and poetical inheritance has become a cold dead landscape of borrowed and thoughtlessly repeated words and symbols. What the critic must do, then, is to acknowledge and incorporate the inherited meaning of these symbols while at the same time staying true to the life they live within the universe of the work they are written into. In fact Wasserman suggests the *only* way to deal with Shelley’s mythopoesis is to sustain a certain cognitive dissonance while reading the poem:

At one level the reader is to accept the various formulations in the play as non-referential embodiments of archetypal arrangements and combinations, as though only Shelley's myth exists; at the other, conscious of the prior history of the myths, he is to experience the irony directed against the erroneous, evil, partial, imperfect, and distorted orderings that Shelley is reforming (Wasserman: 282).

I intend to follow Wasserman's advice here while exploring Prometheus as a mythic figure in Shelley's particular myth. I also intend to treat Prometheus as a *dramatis persona* in Shelley's mythic drama, and not focus on any allegorical implications the figure may have outside the dramatic scope of the work. Critical readings discovering the political, psychological, religious, etc. allegories/analogies in Shelley's work are abundant and often insightful. One of the issues that arise for critics bent on allegorical readings, however, is Shelley's extremely heterogeneous philosophy, which can cause confusion when trying to read a solid, harmonious allegoric vision out of his poetry. I am by no means saying that this is a wrong approach, for undoubtedly Shelley knew well what he was doing and intended for there to be many layers of analogy for discovery. I would, however, like to approach the work and the character of Prometheus in a way that I feel has not been given very much attention; that is treating the work as myth qua myth. This approach is often overlooked because critics have been preoccupied with finding the hidden meanings behind the veil of symbolism and myth. As Olwen Campbell points out, many critics "have tried the most elaborate allegorical, philosophical and moonstruck interpretations, seemingly oblivious of the fact that even here 'the play's the thing.'" (Campbell: 203). In my discussion on the development of Prometheus throughout the first act, I intend to treat Prometheus as a dramatic character within the mythic universe of Shelley's drama.

Although I will at times mention other modes of interpretation, and take into consideration particular analogies between Prometheus and extra-textual material, this will be done to further illuminate my own interpretation of Prometheus' transformation. In my analysis I do use extra-textual material to aid my understanding, and clarify my interpretation of *Prometheus Unbound*. However, instead of letting extra-textual allusions within the poem condition my interpretation, I intend to bring these sources into my discussion to help convey and explain factors and elements which are exclusively present within the work itself.

## I.v. Methodological Considerations

My analysis presents a close reading of the first act of *Prometheus Unbound*, but at the same time I allow for some contextual consciousness in my interpretation. I have taken into consideration extra-textual sources, such as Shelley's comments in the Preface, his essay "On Love", and general knowledge of Shelley's views on various topics gleaned from my research. While interpreting Shelley's drama, I have sought to stick as close as possible to the text at hand and not let my interpretation be informed or conditioned by material outside the text itself. However, while reading *Prometheus Unbound*, it is hard to not take into consideration, or at least let oneself be informed by, the many historical, cultural, and literary references in the poem.

James Rieger is one critic who finds the wealth of influences, allusions, and references in Shelley's poem to be discouraging: "What are we to make of poetry which cannot be enjoyed in an intelligent way without a detailed knowledge of its sources?" (Rieger: 17). Although I will admit that insight into the historical and cultural context from which this poem emerged does help the critic to understand the poem better, I disagree that the poem cannot be enjoyed, or understood, without *detailed knowledge* of these sources. One of the tendencies I have noticed in much of the critical reception of *Prometheus Unbound* is that much time is spent trying to find, distill, and explain these sources. This effort by many learned scholars has been of great use to me during my research; because at this point in my education, or at least when I started this project, I still have a somewhat limited knowledge of the incredibly large amount of sources and references that are included in the drama. However, I feel that the effort to divulge these references is sometimes spent at the expense of the actual text itself. In my analysis I have found it useful to be aware of these extra-textual references, sources, and allusions, but in my interpretation I feel it is important to let the text speak for itself.

As one critic has claimed, *Prometheus Unbound* "seems to invite deconstruction" (Rajan: 320). I do not disagree with this statement and as aforementioned, Ridenour points out that Shelley's style of writing presents us with many "systems" with no guidance or indication of how we should prioritize and understand them. The task of exploring the many levels of symbolism, allegory, and allusion Shelley presents us with in this drama, would be too difficult and extensive for a thesis at this level. I have therefore had to contain my interpretation within an approachable scope. When I, in this analysis, only focus on Prometheus as a *dramatis persona*, a lot of the

depth and complexity of Shelley's mythopoesis (as an allegorical vision for humanity's potential perfectibility) is unfortunately, albeit necessarily, omitted. However, these are aspects of the drama that have been granted extensive research by other critics. Instead of trying to make sense of the myriad of allusions and references that Shelley's mythopoesis is made of, I intend to focus primarily on the portrayal of Prometheus and his actions as they are presented to the reader in the drama. In this way I believe we can explore Shelley's Prometheus as the original and autonomous character he is within Shelley's "new-mythology".

I have also decided to not consider *Prometheus Unbound* in light of drama theory, and the formal and structural qualities of the drama will not be explored in this analysis. In the following analysis I will be looking at Prometheus as a mythic figure and his existence within Shelley's mythopoesis. In doing so, I have decided to treat the text as a source of mythical narrative rather than focus on the structure of Shelley's poetry. Although there is undoubtedly much to be learned from a closer examination of the lyricism and dramatic construction of this drama, for the purpose of this analysis it is not pertinent to do so at this time. My intention with this analysis is to explore Shelley's recreation of Prometheus as a mythic figure, and there is more than enough material to be explored in the basic mythic narrative that is presented, without delving into a discussion of structural and poetic details.

## II. Historical context

Shelley said of his *Prometheus Unbound* that it had "no resemblance to the Greek drama" (Campbell: 197). This is true if he was talking about his play having little resemblance to Greek drama in style and form. However, *no* resemblance to Aeschylus' play is far from being true. The entire dramatic plot of Act I is lifted straight from Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* and much of the inner struggle of Shelley's Prometheus is similar to the ambiguity of the Prometheus figure which Aeschylus introduced.

In Greek and Roman mythology and literature, the myth of Prometheus had a few common factors that remained constant through each retelling of the story, and can be summed up by the following: Prometheus was a Titan who after siding with Zeus/Jupiter against Cronos/Saturn, betrayed Zeus/Jupiter by granting mankind divine fire. As punishment Prometheus was chained to a rock for an indefinite amount of time and Zeus/Jupiter released all the evils of the world upon mankind. Depending on cultural, social and political circumstances, two opposing interpretations of this myth were explored by the poets of antiquity. On the one hand Prometheus was perceived as a trickster and a thief whose acts to subvert divine authority damned mankind. On the other hand, Prometheus was viewed as mankind's benefactor and a martyr on behalf of humanity. This image of Prometheus as a heroic rebel, standing up to tyranny and sacrificing himself for mankind, was to experience renewed popularity during the Romantic era. The following chapter will explore the development of the myth and figure of Prometheus in antiquity, specifically its genesis in Hesiod and its portrayal in Aeschylus. Thereafter we will jump ahead to the Romantic period and contextualize the contemporary perception of Prometheus Shelley wrote his drama within.

### II.i. Antiquity

The oldest written record we have of the Prometheus myth is in the *Theogony* and *Works and Days* by Hesiod, who is presumed to have lived between the seventh and eighth century B.C. Hesiod's depiction of the Prometheus myth presents us with an example of the trickster-Prometheus, although Hesiod is surprisingly (for a modern reader at least) ambivalent in his representation of the gods. Prometheus is first referenced to in *Theogony*, which catalogues the



origin and organization of all the various local Greek gods compiling them into one universal mythology. Prometheus' story here is not really the story of Prometheus, but serves as a narrative frame to the story of Pandora and the introduction of women and evil into the world. A decisive moment in Hesiod's compilation of local mythologies is what is referred to as "a settlement in Mecone" in *Theogony*, but is also related in *Works and Days*. Before this time, during the reign of Kronos, it is presumed that the gods and mankind coexisted with certain arrangements that were being reconstituted during this settlement.

During this settlement, Prometheus tricks Zeus into accepting an offering of dry bones hidden in glistening fat, instead of the offering of good meat that Prometheus hides in the ox's stomach. Hesiod comments that this is the reason why "the tribes of men upon earth burn white bones to the deathless gods upon fragrant alters" (Hesiod: 119). It can therefore be inferred that Prometheus was seen as being a benefactor of mankind, more of mankind's party than the god's, already before he stole the divine fire. However, this interpretation of Prometheus actively working for mankind's benefit at the settlement in Mecone becomes problematic and a bit ironic if we are to take Prometheus' epithet of *forethought* too literally. One would therefore have to conclude that Prometheus knew what his actions would lead to; in giving mankind the benefit during sacrifice, he in turn damns them from the Golden Age. In *Works and Days*, Hesiod attributes the trick with the ox to the reason why Zeus kept "hidden from men the means of life" (Hesiod: 5). Under the reign of Kronos, nature yielded abundantly without the need for farming. This would have still been the case if Zeus, angry with Prometheus, hadn't "planned sorrow and mischief against men" (Hesiod: 5-7). As punishment for Prometheus' deception, Zeus decides to not give "the power of unwearying fire" to mankind (Hesiod: 121). Prometheus again deceives Zeus by hiding fire in a fennel-stalk and bestows this gift upon mankind. Further enraged by Prometheus' actions Zeus decides to give mankind a great evil to balance out Prometheus' good gift. This evil gift is the woman Pandora, mother of all women. In addition to being an evil in herself and propagating evil amongst men in the form of woman, she unleashed from her jar all the evils and sorrows of the world.

Shelley's own version of the events leading up to Prometheus' fire stealing contains striking similarities to Hesiod's, albeit with some decidedly important variations. Jupiter does not conceal "the means of life" from mankind because of Prometheus' trickery. On the contrary, in Shelley's

view of human evolution, it was Saturn who “refused / The birthright of their being” (II.iv. 38-39). With mankind’s best interests at heart, Prometheus aided Jupiter in his conquest of the throne with the condition that Jupiter “Let man be free” (II.iv. 45). In Jupiter however power became corrupt and he went back on his promise to alleviate mankind’s condition, not only denying them “the means of life”, but actively sought to corrupt and degrade mankind further:

And in their desert hearts fierce wants he sent  
And mad disquietudes, and shadows idle  
Of unreal good, which levied mutual war,  
So ruining the lair wherein they raged” (II.iv. 55-58).

Prometheus then decides to take matters into his own hands and endows mankind with the proverbial fire. What we see here though is the same pattern as in Hesiod of an initial act of benefaction which backfires and leads to a degradation of mankind’s condition, followed by Prometheus’ ultimate sacrifice to insure that mankind will have the means to better his own condition.

Ancient Greece was no stranger to tyranny and the irony of the fact that many, if not most, tyrants were originally rebels themselves who, with the pretense of fighting for liberty, wrestled their power by deposing other tyrants. Aeschylus was writing in the forefront of a political and philosophical movement, culminating in his succeeding generation with Plato and Aristotle, which was highly concerned with the concepts of ideal rule and tyranny. These poets and philosophers had a clearly defined conception of tyranny, which was not equated with, but a strand of, omnipotent rule. For them tyrants were severe, merciless and quick to accuse, judge and punish without deliberation or just cause. They were also envious, lustful, petty, and extremely arrogant because they were above the law (Lewis: 15). Although Prometheus as a rebel-hero was not uncommon before Aeschylus, it was in *Prometheus Bound* that the conflict between Prometheus and Zeus became polarized to the extent that Zeus is portrayed as a vile tyrant with no redeeming qualities whatsoever, and Prometheus is portrayed as an (nearly) untainted hero.

Aeschylus adopted the details and structure of his myth from Hesiod, but introduced the explicit connection between fire and knowledge (Lewis: 18). Although one can assume that the

divine fire that Prometheus steals had, to an extent, always been viewed symbolically, Aeschylus was the first to embellish upon this symbolism and had Prometheus bestow a cornucopia of gifts upon mankind. In Aeschylus the gift of fire is meant in the most literal way, and is the first of Prometheus' many gifts to mankind. However, the foundation is laid by Aeschylus that the gift of fire, whether literal or symbolic, paves the way for mankind's further development as a race:

Prometheus: I planted blind hopes within them.

Chorus: That was a great benefit you gave to mortals.

Prometheus: And what is more, I gave them fire.

Chorus: You mean those short-lived being now possess flaming fire?

Prometheus: From which they will learn many skills. (Aeschylus: 471-473)

One could also draw a connection between the meaning of Prometheus' name, Forethought, and the essential meaning of the gifts he gives mankind. Prometheus bestows on mankind not only a handful of specific skills, but implants in their minds the foundation for further developing new skills (*technai*). In a sense he gives mankind the power of *forethought*; meaning creativity and the imagination's potentiality.

Shelley's version treats Prometheus' gifts as extensions of the symbolic fire, fire as knowledge and power. In fact, in Asia's retelling of this myth in Act II, Prometheus does not actually steal any sort of fire, for the qualities which fire represents did not, according to Shelley, belong to the gods but were qualities inherent in Prometheus. Instead of stealing from the gods, Shelley's Prometheus

waked the legioned hopes

Which sleep within folded Elysian flowers,

[...] and Love he sent to bind

The disunited tendrils of that vine

Which bears the wine of life, the human heart" (II.iv. 59-65)

For Shelley, this is Prometheus' initial act of benevolence toward mankind and rebellion against Jupiter. The "taming" of fire which leads to other technologies such as agriculture, metalworking and navigation come after, and secondary to, the awakening of "the human heart".

One of the main differences between Aeschylus' and Shelley's dramas is that Aeschylus' is a

tragedy by classic Aristotelian as well as Hegelian terms. In Aeschylus' drama we have two opposing but similarly justifiable forces: 1) Divine law and 2) Prometheus' benevolence and sympathy for mankind. Shelley's drama is obviously not a tragedy, if anything it is more of the *comedia á la Dante*. There is no divine law, and therefore no equal, but opposing forces. In Aeschylus, and within the structure of Greek myth in general, Zeus'/Jupiter's will is law, and is considered just and divine because it is instigated by Him. In Shelley's mythos, Jupiter does not have the same divine right to law and power. Although he is omnipotent, his power came from Prometheus (not de jure from his status as chief god). Asia clarifies in her retelling of the classic myth: "Then Prometheus / Gave wisdom, which is strength, to Jupiter / And [...] Clothed him with the dominion of wide Heaven" (II. iv 43-46). In addition, the other gods do not accept Jupiter's rule in the same way as they do in Aeschylus. In *Prometheus Bound* the other gods see Zeus' tyranny as an unavoidable, yet natural, part of the shifting of power, whereas in Shelley the other gods accept Jupiter's rule solely out of fear and view it as inevitable and inescapable. Both the Earth and Mercury insinuate that they would gladly join Prometheus in his open defiance of Jupiter's tyranny, if they were not so frightened of his wrath or if they believed it would be of any use.

A common view of Romanticism today is that it developed as a cultural revolt against the Enlightenment, particularly what is seen as characteristic of Neo-Classicism. It can, however, be said (as Henry A. Burd does) that Romanticism was a much truer form of Classicism than was practiced in the preceding centuries. The Neo-Classicism of the 17th and 18th centuries imitated the masters of antiquity in style and subject matter. The Romantics on the other hand revived the spirit of antiquity, especially in regards to their ideals, view of nature and use of mythology. This understanding of Romantic mythopoesis can be found in Shelley's preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, where he seeks to legitimize the freedoms he has taken in his own interpretation of the Prometheus myth: "The Greek tragic writers [...] by no means conceived themselves bound to adhere to the common interpretation or to imitate in story as in title their rivals and predecessors. [...] I have presumed to employ a similar licence" (R & P: 132). He makes it very clear that he in no way wishes to revive Aeschylus' lost play by the same name, which presumably focused on the reconciliation of Prometheus and Jupiter. Keeping with the spirit of English Romanticism and the idealization of Prometheus as a rebel and unwavering force against tyranny, Shelley abhorred the idea of any form of reconciliation between "the Champion [and] the Oppressor of mankind"

(R & P:133). According to him characteristic flaws in the hero, such as self-interested supplication, would taint the “moral interest” of the poem.

## II.ii. Romanticism

The Neo-Classicists of the eighteenth century largely viewed mythology as trite and irrelevant, or the subject of childhood’s poetic exercises (Kuhn: 1097). In addition to this attitude, any serious research into the mythologies of ancient cultures was syncretic and aimed to prove the unity of all myths and strengthen Christianity as the ultimate and one true religion (Kuhn: 1094). These studies in syncretic mythology, however, contributed to an increase in knowledge about these myths, and can be seen as an important factor in the resurgence of interest for myth in the Romantic period. The Romantics adapted a fresh new approach to mythology, and especially the myths and culture of ancient Greece. Instead of a syncretic approach to myth, they found poetic inspiration and a weld of “universal truths” that could be rewritten and reinterpreted for the modern age (Kuhn: 1107). It should be noted that across Europe this resurgence of interest in Grecian culture resulted in a broad range of philosophical and aesthetic production (for example Schiller’s view of Grecian culture as “naive”, or Goethe’s own strand of Neo-Classicism). For the purpose of this discussion, however, we must focus on Shelley and his circle. In England the incorporation of myth in poetry was in many ways an active form of rebellion and attempt at subversion of the standing order and what was viewed as the tyrannical/oppressive institution of Church and State.

In *The Romantic Reformation* (1997), Robert M. Ryan suggests that the Romantic's "ostentatious nostalgia for classical civilization" was a subtle way of undermining the standing religious and political order in contemporary Britain (Ryan: 153). Many thinkers of the Enlightenment and Romantic periods hailed the ancient Greeks for demonstrating a successful, humanitarian system of rule, which they could refer to in their search for an alternative to the oppressive and totalitarian British Church and State. David Hume argued in *The Natural History of Religion* (1757) that the polytheism of the ancient Greeks was tolerant of religious diversity and sought to improve and aggrandize humanity, rather than scare it into submission with "devils, or seas of brimstone, or any object that could much terrify the imagination" (Ryan: 153-154). Within Shelley’s circle of intellectuals, Leigh Hunt was the most publically outspoken

“advocates of the superiority of Greek religion over Christian” (Ryan: 154). Hunt saw Greek mythology as the most poetic expression of religion and asserted that the admiration of Greek myth was the sign of a true poet. The admiration and interweaving of Greek myth into their own poetry set, in Hunt's opinion, Shelley and Keats above Wordsworth in poetic appeal (Ryan: 156).

In their use of myth as a poetic rebellion, these poets did not only adapt Greek myth into their poetry. One of the first, and possibly the most famous, examples of subversive mythmaking amongst the Romantics was William Blake and his re-sculpting of Christian myth in *The Book of Urizen* (1794). It will be pointed out later in the analysis that despite being an outspoken atheist, Shelley also incorporates Christian elements into his new-mythology. A common factor among these poets is that they did not directly adapt the myths as they already existed. Instead of interpreting these myths and mythic figures as strict allegories, they viewed them as empty vessels that could be utilized for whatever purpose the artist called for in a particular work. However, when dealing with Christian sources it was common to adapt a Gnostic approach and view the fall as an action of mankind's liberation and enlightenment (Cantor: x). When interpreting Milton's *Paradise Lost*, they tended to view Satan as the tragic hero of the poem. Concerning the myth of Prometheus, the Romantics generally adapted the Aeschylian view of Prometheus as the rebellious and humanitarian hero. In the following we will take a short, closer look at the attitudes toward Prometheus and Satan in English Romantic aesthetics and culture.

### **II.ii.a Prometheus**

One of the reasons for, or evidence of, an increased interest in Prometheus during the Romantic period was that Aeschylus' drama had recently been translated into English. The first English version of Aeschylus' play was *Prometheus in Chains* by T. Morrell in 1773, and by the time Shelley wrote his drama there were numerous English translations. Toward the turn of the century, the interest in Prometheus as a mythic figure grew, and as the Romantics often did with any mythological source material, they adapted and sculpted Prometheus to their own liking. The most common Romantic interpretation of this figure was that of a demigod who, armed with knowledge (as power), disrupts and shatters an old, stagnant system and suffers for a noble, humanitarian cause. Seen in this light, the story of Prometheus became a popular narrative among the liberal Romantics and revolutionaries of the turn of the century (Lewis: 163). The myth and

figure of Prometheus resonated with the political, philosophical, and aesthetic attitudes at the time, and became a pliable tool for the expression of these feelings.

In addition to literary expressions depicting, or inspired by, Prometheus, Prometheus was also a figure for philosophical, theological and political thought at the time. In his essay “On the Prometheus of Aeschylus”, Coleridge explores the allegorical implications the myth has on understanding theology. According to Coleridge, Jove represents the divine Law and is “rationalism personified” (Lewis: 164). Prometheus then, is Idea and “divine humanity”, stealing part of this divine spark, representing cognitive application, and bestowing it upon “the heretofore ignorant and un-speculative creatures of the earth” (Lewis: 165). Similarly Goethe sees Prometheus as the source of creative thought, although his implications are poetic rather than theological and rational. Prometheus, for Goethe, is not essentially divine, but represents human creativity that in spite of mankind’s limitations, is empowered by the freedom “to act and to create” (Lewis: 165).

Stuart Curran proposes that the abundant interest in Prometheus was because “Prometheus is a fundamentally political icon” (Curran 1986: 431). In contemporary politics there arose a mythos around Napoleon that was largely connected to the myth of Prometheus, influenced largely by Goethe’s own proclaimed association of himself and Napoleon with the fire-stealing Titan. Political poetry of the time was abound with portrayals of political figures, Napoleon in particular, clad in Promethean imagery. Lord Byron was particularly fascinated by the figure of Prometheus and in his writings there can be found seventeen allusions to Prometheus, several of which compare and contrast him to Napoleon (Lewis: 166). In “Prometheus and Napoleon”, Byron juxtaposes through contrast the two Titans:

Unlike offence, though like would be thy fate,  
His to give life, but thine to desolate;  
He stole from Heaven the flame, for which he fell,  
Whilst thine was stolen from thy native Hell.” (Lewis: 165).

At the same time as Morrell was translating his version of Aeschylus’ drama, Goethe wrote his own short version of Prometheus’ tribulation. In Goethe’s own comments on his reworking of the Prometheus myth, we can find evidence of that Romantic attitude that these myths were

treated as organic and pliable tropes: “The fable of Prometheus became living in me. The old Titan web I cut up according to my measurements” (Lewis: 2). Linda M. Lewis points out in *The Promethean Politics* (1992) that Prometheus’ narrative was especially attractive and relevant to the Romantics, because its essence reflected the period’s increasingly popular tradition of “revisionist” poetry. Prometheus’ tale is that of creativity and liberty triumphing over an outdated and oppressive system of thought and rule. In a similar fashion this is exactly what the Romantic poets were doing with their mythmaking:

[A] revisionist poem both reconstructs the version of truth held by its predecessor and retextualizes [sic] a new work from the old—both complementing and subverting the work of the predecessors. A radical poet adapts, revises, truncates, extends, or overturns the hierarchies, beliefs, and paradigms of the very work or tradition that inspired the revisionist poem (Lewis: 3).

In *The Ringers in the Tower* (1971), Bloom sees two modes of psychic maturation in English Romanticism: 1) that of Prometheus, and 2) that of “the Real Man, the Imagination”. Lewis provides some important insight by reading Shelley’s Prometheus as a parallel between these two modes, and posits two Promethean figures. The first is Prometheus bound, who is the Prometheus of action, rebellion and aggressive defiance. This Prometheus figure is the most common in Romanticism, as a figure for social, political and cultural rebellion. The second is Prometheus unbound, the “divine” Prometheus, who has transcended his former earth-bound state and represents stoic resolution, harmony and love. While the rebellious Prometheus only promises hope and change, the “divine” Prometheus enacts and ensures hope for the future through love and suffering (Lewis: 193). The transformation of Prometheus in Act I of *Prometheus Unbound* is precisely a transformation from the first of these modes into the second. Prometheus unbinds himself, although not literally, by transcending his former self who was bound by hatred and self-pity and becomes a passive Prometheus whose submission to the power of love is the first step toward a new golden age.

### **II.ii.b Satan**

While we are on the topic of historical contextualization, I feel it is necessary to present and clarify the significance of another figure who, alongside Prometheus, was a predominant heroic emblem for the Romantics - namely Satan, or more specifically Milton’s Satan from *Paradise*



*Lost* (1667). In his Preface, Shelley claims that the “only imaginary being resembling in any degree Prometheus, is Satan”, and points out that the most basic similarity between these figures is their “courage and majesty and firm and patient opposition to omnipotent force”. While a reader unacquainted with the aesthetic and political culture of English Romanticism might find this high praise of Satan slightly confusing or off-putting, the similarity Shelley is referring to here becomes clear if one considers the general attitude toward both these figures in English Romanticism.

According to Peter A. Schock in *Romantic Satanism* (2003), among the educated classes belief in the devil, demons and a “demonic world” waned in congruence with the rise of rationalism during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. By Shelley’s time, these ideas had lost so much of their superstitious and religious potency that God’s adversary had become purely a rhetorical trope (Schock: 12). Peter A. Schock explains how the “attack on Christianity” by liberal intellectuals in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century “defamiliarized” Satan and wrenched the figure out of its religious context. This figure then became a tool for exploring other “modern” issues such as psychology, politics and social reform (Schock: 16-17). As a rhetorical trope used in political propaganda at the time, Satan retained some of his religious characteristics as the ultimate adversary. Whether used by the revolutionists or the reactionaries, Satan was utilized as a personification of the enemy (Schock: 18).

As a mythic/poetic figure, however, Satan underwent a gradual transformation in connection with the general defamiliarization of the figure, but with specific and strange results. Before Shelley and his contemporary poets could utilize Satan as an idolized figure in their idealist and/or political poetry, the figure of Satan had to be reinterpreted from scourge of humanity, to the hero of *Paradise Lost*. Throughout the reception of *Paradise Lost* the figure of Satan underwent a “metamorphosis” in which “the fallen archangel gradually assumed heroic, sublime, and human aspects in the criticism and illustration of Milton” (Schock: 26). This was a process that started shortly after the poem was first published, although the shift in interpretation relied on more general shifts in moral, religious and political attitudes in England during the following centuries.

The first signs of Satan proving to be an interpretive challenge can be seen in the illustrations of *Paradise Lost* around the time of its publication. The first illustrations of the poem in 1688

depict Satan with clear heroic traits, as well as just enough grotesqueness to confirm this is a demon we are looking at. This ambiguous mixture of heroism and grotesqueness would prove to be a continuing tradition amongst the illustrators of Milton's poem. The inception of the idea of Satan as "hero" in literary criticism can be said to have started with the poet and critic John Dryden (1631-1700) in his comments on *Paradise Lost*. He found that in a strictly formal sense, Satan was a heroic figure, but was eager to ensure his readers that this fact did not effect the moral implications of the poem (Schock: 26-27).

For a while after Dryden's observation, the figure of Satan continued to elicit critical responses that forced the critic to clearly differentiate between aesthetic and moral judgments. It did not take long, however, before a new approach to the figure of Satan emerged, causing the strict divide between moral and aesthetic interpretations to dissolve: Satan as the embodiment of the sublime (Schock: 29). Although not yet a true hero, Satan was often cited as the highest example of poetic sublimity. When viewing these critics' arguments, one cannot dismiss the admiration that, consciously or not, seeps through these interpretations. Slowly but surely the general attitude toward Satan grew more and more fond during the eighteenth century. According to Schock, by the mid-eighteenth century, interpretations focusing on the heroic, human and sublime aspects of Satan had completely overshadowed moral and religious discussions of the poem (Schock: 29). Joseph Addison's *Spectator* comments on *Paradise Lost* (1712) is an example of an early crossover between attitudes in the development of the heroic Satan, when he praises the sublimity in the depiction of Satan and ranks Milton's Satan above Homer's Odysseus in heroic stature (Schock: 29). At the turn of the century, Milton's Satan had become almost completely displaced from the moral and theological context of his genesis, and became "the apotheosis of human will and consciousness" (Schock: 26).<sup>8</sup>

In the 1790's there arose yet another strand of interpretation developed by Mary Wollstonecraft, William Goodwin and Edward Blake, amongst others. These critics no longer focused solely on interpreting Milton's work, but used Milton's Satan as a mode of expression for their own "transgressive values" (Schock: 31). In their reinterpretation of Satan, they weeded

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<sup>8</sup> I say "almost" because although what Schock says about the defamiliarizing and humanizing of Milton's Satan is correct and telling for the general attitude toward this character, at least amongst the liberal intellectuals, which is our focus here, it must be noted that throughout the critical reception of *Paradise Lost*, there was always a school of "Christian" Miltonists who stood steadfastly in opposition to what they called the "Satanists" and sought to defend Milton as a poetic prophet.

out any base or negative aspects of the figure and molded a vision of Satan as hero and martyr who “perceives truth independently and struggles benevolently for a just order” (Schock: 34). Satan’s rebellion against Jehovah became a celestial allegory for these intellectuals’ rebellion against an oppressive authority they deemed arbitrary. This trend of remolding Satan in the 1790’s developed through the Romantic period as a widespread trend of reimagining. From peripheral allusions to poetic re-imaginings of Milton’s Satan, they all had one thing in common: Satan’s connection to his original context in *Paradise Lost* had become secondary, if not completely transparent, and he was assimilated with other figures and given different roles to suit whichever narrative and agenda he was being placed within (Schock: 36).

In the critical reception of *Prometheus Unbound* the seemingly loose and varied allusions to Satan and Milton’s *Paradise Lost* in the drama have been granted copious attention. While some critics approach these allusions as a natural part of Shelley’s syncretic mythmaking, others have found the issue more problematic. This is particularly the case for those critics who find it difficult to synthesize within Prometheus’ character the simultaneous allusions to both Milton’s Satan and Jesus Christ: “The shock lies not only in Shelley’s construction of a Satanic hero but also in the fact that the Prometheus who is the unrelenting Satanic rebel against God is also the mild and suffering Christ” (Wasserman: 295). With the history of Satan’s interpretive evolution, however, Shelley’s very liberal incorporation of this figure (indeed both these figures) needs not seem so strange. There are two factors to this issue that need to be kept in mind: Firstly, as I have just pointed out, Satan had become an exceedingly plastic literary figure when Shelley was writing. In connection with this - but more importantly I feel because it applies to any extra-textual figure alluded to in the drama - we must consider Shelley’s unique mode of mythmaking as was discussed in the chapter *I.iv. Reading Shelley’s Mythopoesis*. As will become evident in the following analysis, the un-regenerate Prometheus is often portrayed similarly to Milton’s Satan. However, it is important to remember that any similarity to Satan is secondary and Prometheus is his own character, with his own range of heroic traits and vices.

### III. Prometheus' Regeneration

The subject of it is the transition of Prometheus from a state of suffering to a state of happiness [...] but no distinct account is given of either of these states. - William Sidney Walker in Quarterly Review (1821), Shelley - The Critical Heritage p. 262

William Sidney Walker is correct in recognizing that the subject of Act I is Prometheus' transition, but he is very wrong that Shelley gives no account of his fallen or resurrected state, or the process Prometheus undergoes between these states. The Prometheus that is portrayed in the last two acts<sup>9</sup> is most definitely a "happy" Prometheus, and in the first act (which is the range of our concern here) we are witness to both an unregenerate and regenerate Prometheus and his progress the whole way through. The purpose of the following analysis is to examine how Prometheus is portrayed in Act I, and more thoroughly than has been attempted previously, to uncover the progress and struggle which Prometheus must go through in this act to regain his divinity.

In scene four of Act II, Asia provides a description of the events and Prometheus' actions prior to the drama's opening.<sup>10</sup> If we are to believe Asia's version of these accounts, it is easy to consider Prometheus' character and actions as corresponding to Shelley's comment in the Preface that he is "the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and truest motives to the best and noblest ends" (R & P: 133). However, Shelley's drama begins *in media res* and when the drama begins, Prometheus' portrayal cannot be considered to correspond with this description of him. When the drama begins, the Prometheus who is "discovered bound to the Precipice" is a fallen Prometheus. When Prometheus was bound by Jupiter, he was so overcome with rage and vengeance that he became a fallen god. The transformation that Prometheus must go through is not only "from a state of suffering to a state of happiness", but a moral and intellectual regeneration through which his divinity is restored.

The first chapter of this analysis will discuss the curse Prometheus put on Jupiter when he was bound, and how this event, although told in the middle of the drama, is the narrative setup for the necessity for Prometheus' regeneration throughout this act. This was the moment when

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<sup>9</sup> Prometheus does not appear in Act II – see *I.i. Summary of Prometheus Unbound*

<sup>10</sup> These events have been related and discussed previously in this thesis in chapters *I.i. Summary of Prometheus Unbound* and *II.i. Antiquity*.

Prometheus' moral and intellectual character became degraded, and although he stands defiant against Jupiter, he has lost the ability and knowledge to become mankind's champion and savior.

When the drama begins, we find Prometheus at the end of a long period of torture in which his hatred has had time to cool off and misery has made him wise. In the second chapter we will see that Prometheus is eventually able to break out of his long habit of execrating Jupiter and lamenting his own situation. At line 53, Prometheus suddenly claims to no longer hate Jupiter and wishes to "recall" the curse. It will be shown that this is the first step Prometheus must take toward restoring his divinity.

After the Phantasm of Jupiter has repeated the curse to him, he repents the curse and claims that he no longer wishes any living thing to suffer pain. Many critics view this claim as a revocation of the curse and proof that Prometheus is fully regenerate.<sup>11</sup> I disagree with both these assessments, and chapter three will explore why some critics believe this to be so, and why I propose that Prometheus' regenerate character is still emerging.

After the curse is recalled, Mercury and the Furies enter the scene and proceed to tempt and torture Prometheus. Chapter four will discuss Mercury's attempt to convince Prometheus to surrender. This chapter will show that Prometheus appears to be making progress in his regeneration. However, the purpose of this chapter is also to juxtapose the confidence Prometheus' shows in confrontation with Mercury with the turmoil he faces when tortured by the Furies.

When the Furies enact their torture on Prometheus, he is not able to retain his composure and teeters on the verge of despair. In chapter five, the psychological torment of the Furies will be discussed, and it will be shown that Prometheus struggles to defeat them and has still not succeeded in restoring his divinity completely.

After the Furies have dispensed their torture, Prometheus is visited by Spirits from the caves of human thought. They have been sent by the Earth to cheer Prometheus up, but as chapter six will show, it is from these Spirits that Prometheus finally, albeit unintentionally, learns his final

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<sup>11</sup> Both Carlos Baker and Wilson Milton make this claim emphatically and explicitly in their interpretations. Both of these critics are considered authorities on Shelley and *Prometheus Unbound* in much of the critical reception of *Prometheus Unbound* since, and their conclusions seem to have been carried on as foundations for further interpretive work.

lesson – that all hope is vain, except love. In achieving this enlightenment, Prometheus completes his regeneration and restores his divinity. It will be shown that it is first at this point that Prometheus has regained his stature as “the type of highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature” and the ability to be the champion and savior of mankind.

The final chapter in this analysis will discuss the two dreams that Panthea conveys to her sister Asia in scene one of Act II. One of these dreams compels the sisters to travel to Demogorgon, thus propelling the action of the drama forward. In Panthea’s other dream she saw Prometheus fully regenerate and divine. It will be argued in this last chapter that Panthea’s dream confirms Prometheus’ regeneration as finally being complete.

### **III.i. The Curse**

but O how fall’n! how changed  
From him who in the happy realms of light  
Clothed with transcendent brightness didst outshine  
Myriads, though bright! (PL I. 84-87)

Although the recital of the curse happens almost halfway through the first act, I find it convenient, if not necessary to discuss this passage first. When the Phantasm of Jupiter repeats the curse under Prometheus’ command, the reader is given a glimpse into the past and insight into a crucial question concerning Prometheus’ transformation in this drama. What happened when Prometheus (morally) fell and became degenerate? Even though Jupiter physically chained Prometheus to the precipice, it would seem that Prometheus’ real downfall was in succumbing to hatred. When the drama opens, Prometheus has been chained for three thousand years and has had time to cool down - and to forget his initial feelings of hatred. Since the purpose of this analysis is to show Prometheus’ regeneration from a fallen to a resurrected state, it is natural to start at the beginning - not the beginning of the drama, but the beginning of the character development currently under inspection.

The following curse, although spoken by the Phantasm of Jupiter in the drama, are the words spoken by Prometheus when Jupiter had him bound to the precipice. Prometheus has been twice betrayed by Jupiter; first in not granting mankind their freedom and secondly by binding him to

endless torture for bestowing gifts that were rightfully his to give upon mankind. There is an interesting inverted parallel to the original myth here. In the original myth Jupiter punishes Prometheus because he twice deceived him and disturbed the balance between gods and mankind negotiated at Mecone. In Shelley's version it is Jupiter who is the deceiver and the disrupter of balance, and the binding of Prometheus is not so much punishment, as an act of evil by a power-hungry megalomaniac. It would seem that Prometheus' patience with Jupiter's shortcomings has run out, and this is an act of injustice he just cannot stand for. Although he can be physically chained and kept from granting any more gifts upon mankind, he cannot be completely subdued. The only weapon he has against Jupiter's tyranny is his defiance and his words.

The first part of Prometheus' curse is a tirade against Jupiter, which we shall see in the next chapter, is echoed in his lamentation during the opening soliloquy:

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

Aye, do thy worst. Thou art Omnipotent.  
O'er all things but thyself I gave thee power,  
And my own will. Be thy swift mischiefs sent  
To blast mankind, from yon ethereal tower.  
Let thy malignant spirit move  
Its darkness over those I love:  
On me and mine I imprecate  
The utmost torture of thy hate  
And thus devote to sleepless agony

This undecending head while thou must reign on high. (I. 262-281)

The curse begins with recognizable satanic rhetoric of defiance, where Prometheus brazenly incites Jupiter's wrath. The first two lines of the curse immediately conjure associations to Milton's Satan who, with a "fixed mind / And high disdain, from sense of injured merit" stands defiant against "what the potent Victor in His rage / Can else inflict" (PL I. 95-98). This allusion to Satan's rhetoric in *Paradise Lost* is one of several allusions to "the Hero of *Paradise Lost*", which critics have put forth as proof of Prometheus' satanic, and thereby fallen, character. The allusion is undeniably there, but I would argue that it is not necessary to view Prometheus as similar to Satan in order to understand that he is fallen. Not only is Prometheus not always like Satan (as we shall see shortly, he is also like Milton's God) in his fallen state, but a close examination of his attitude and actions provide ample proof of his moral and intellectual degeneration.

Prometheus claims here to have a "calm, fixed mind", but this is not the self-possessed attitude of one who rises above the situation and is excepting of his fate and sacrifice on behalf of mankind. According to Reiman and Powers, Shelley often used the word "calm" to mean "unmoved" or "insensitive" (R & P: 13). It will be shown in a later subchapter (The Phantasm of Jupiter) that Shelley also gives the epithet "calm" to Jupiter, and in that case this understanding of the word calm is apparent. Jupiter's "calm hate" is characterized as insensitive, ruthless and completely without reason or regard for anyone but himself. However, I find there is just too much emotion in Prometheus' rhetoric to interpret this as the words of one who is calm, regardless of which meaning one chooses. Prometheus does not appear to have a "calm, fixed mind", but rather an enraged mind that is so filled with anger, hate, and lust for revenge that he comes across a bit crazed.

Prometheus maniacally rants off a list of all the torments he is willing to suffer rather than surrender to Jupiter, but in a surprising increase in malevolence he invites Jupiter to do his worst to mankind as well. One would like to believe that his hatred toward Jupiter has blinded him to the consequences of his actions. It is true his hatred has blinded him, a point he makes himself several times throughout the act, and which we will return to shortly. It is therefore all the more disturbing that in *this* instance Prometheus is in fact fully aware of what he is doing. He is enticing Jupiter to effect as much evil as possible on the world, so that when Jupiter must



inevitably face judgment for his crimes, his retribution will be all the more severe:

I curse thee! let a sufferer's curse  
Clasp thee, his torturer, like remorse;  
Till thine Infinity shall be  
A robe of envenomed agony;  
And thine Omnipotence a crown of pain  
To cling like burning gold round thy dissolving brain.

Heap on thy soul, by virtue of this Curse,  
Ill deeds, then be thou damned, beholding good,  
Both infinite as is the Universe,  
And thou, and thy self-torturing solitude.  
An awful Image of calm power  
Though now thou sittest, let the hour  
Come, when thou must appear to be  
That which thou art internally.  
And after many a false and fruitless crime  
Scorn track thy lagging fall through boundless space and time. (I. 286-301)

Prometheus is supposed to be the champion of mankind, but we see now that he has fallen from this state. In this moment Prometheus is not exempt from the moral taint of revenge, as Shelley claimed in the Preface. To the contrary, Prometheus' lust for revenge is so great that he is willing to sacrifice those he swore to protect. Prometheus could have cursed Jupiter in any other way, or even vainly entreated Jupiter to spare mankind, but instead he willfully implicates those he loves along with himself.

Despite Prometheus being aware of what he is doing, there is still a sense of blindness that factors in here. His blindness lies in the fact that at this moment he thinks he is doing the right thing by reacting with evil to evil. Paul A. Cantor provides an interesting interpretation of why Prometheus is capable of falling (as a god) and acting so recklessly evil at this point. He points out that when Prometheus was bound, Asia was exiled by Jupiter, and that in losing Asia, Prometheus lost the ability to love and was susceptible of being consumed with hatred: "Hatred

narrows and distorts the soul by restricting perception [...] gradually destroying the very power of sympathy he most needs to undo the tyrant's evil" (Cantor: 82). Without Asia's love to keep him in check, Prometheus is unable to see the truth he eventually learns at the end of the first act (that pity and love will inevitably conquer evil), and all his energies are focused on ensuring revenge and destruction for Jupiter.

It is clear now that we are dealing with a fallen god, who in no way resembles Shelley's description of Prometheus in the Preface: "Prometheus is, as it were, the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends" (R & P: 133). No matter how one could try to twist and turn the issue, Prometheus' reckless sacrifice of mankind to further damn Jupiter can not be said to have been acted out of the truest motives or toward any noble end. As for the perfection of his moral and intellectual nature, this cannot be said to be the case of the enraged and hateful mind, and impulsive reaction to evil, displayed by Prometheus in this curse.

In addition to the aforementioned allusion to Milton's Satan, there is another reference to *Paradise Lost* in the curse. However, instead of the rhetoric of Satan, here Prometheus echoes the rhetoric of Milton's God. Prometheus damns Jupiter to a similar fate as Milton's God damns Satan:

That with reiterated crimes he might  
Heap on himself damnation while he sought  
Evil to others and enraged might see  
How all his malice served but to bring forth  
Infinite goodness (PL I. 214-18)

When this allusion is commented on by critics it is usually not granted any deeper meaning, and is written off as just another literary reference, or homage, to a poet Shelley greatly admired. Stuart Curran, however, proposes that because Shelley draws this parallel between Prometheus and Milton's God, one can therefore draw a parallel between Jupiter and the persecuted Christ (Curran 1975: 57-58). It is hard to imagine Shelley implying that we view Jupiter as a victimized Christ; the only sympathy Jupiter elicits in the drama is Prometheus' pity, but none such affection is sought from the reader. However, Curran does touch upon an issue that is in fact quite

interesting and relevant to understanding this passage - that in Shelley's view of orthodox Christianity, Jehovah is considered the ruling power of evil.

In the *Defence of Poetry*, Shelley claims that Milton's Satan is morally superior to his God, because flawed character traits such as hate and a desire to "inflict the extremest anguish on an enemy" can be forgiven, or at least justified, in the oppressed, but are irredeemable traits in a tyrant (R & P: 498). Shelley claims the "magnificence" of Milton's Satan comes from being "one who perseveres in some purpose which he has conceived to be excellent in spite of adversity and torture" (ibid). Milton's God on the other hand is base because he "inflicts the most horrible revenge upon an enemy, not from any mistaken notion of inducing him to repent of a perseverance in enmity, but with the alleged design of exasperating him to deserve new torments" (ibid). It would not be right or reasonable to try to draw a clean parallel between Milton's Satan and God and Shelley's Prometheus and Jupiter. The circumstances under which each pair find themselves are too different and the characters themselves too complex. It is easy to see the similarity between Prometheus and Satan as being someone who "perseveres [...] in spite of adversity and torture". However, this is not characteristic of the curse-uttering Prometheus. He is not persevering in his excellent purpose, i.e. the progression of mankind. On the contrary he has abandoned his post as protector and benefactor of mankind and throws mankind under the proverbial bus. In this sense he is much more like Milton's God (as Shelley sees him): He incites Jupiter to do his worst, to exacerbate the limits of his torture, with the sole intent that when Jupiter's day of reckoning inevitably comes, his suffering will effectively be all the greater.

Now that we have observed Prometheus at the moment of his "fall in grace" as it were, and established that Prometheus has lost his divinity (being the type of highest morals and intellectual nature), we can begin to assay the process by which Prometheus regains this divinity through the first act. When the drama begins, Prometheus has been suffering Jupiter's torment for three thousand years and claims that his misery has made him wise. This has led some critics to believe that Prometheus is no longer the same degenerate character that we are shown in the curse.<sup>12</sup> However the similarities between Prometheus' opening soliloquy and the curse are too obvious to ignore. Even without these similarities I aim to show that Prometheus is neither regenerate when the drama opens, or by the end of his soliloquy.

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<sup>12</sup> For example David Bromwich who says of Prometheus' soliloquy: "In these opening lines, Prometheus has already triumphed over his misery" (Bromwich: 249)

### III.ii. Prometheus' Soliloquy

Although some critics place Prometheus' transformation as having happened before the drama begins, I would argue that we are witness to an unregenerate Prometheus in his opening soliloquy. However, shortly after the drama begins, Prometheus claims to no longer hate Jupiter, but to pity him. Prometheus' conversion from hate to pity happens seemingly abruptly at line 53, leading some critics (for example Abrams) to interpret Prometheus' moral and intellectual reformation as happening instantaneously. In this chapter it will be shown that Prometheus is still blinded by hatred when the drama opens. However, we are witnessing the last remnants of this hatred, because at line 53 Prometheus has a moment of inspiration and enlightenment. Although he claims, and appears, to no longer hate, this is only his first step toward regaining his divinity.

The general attitude of Prometheus' rhetoric is similar to his rhetoric in the curse, although the hostile tone steadily diminishes and turns more into a lamentation than a malediction:

PROMETHEUS. Monarch of Gods and Dæmons, and all Spirits  
But One, who throng those bright and rolling Worlds  
Which Thou and I alone of living things  
Behold with sleepless eyes! regard this Earth  
Made multitudinous with thy slaves, whom thou  
Requitest for knee-worship, prayer and praise,  
And toil, and hecatombs of broken hearts,  
With fear and self-contempt and barren hope;  
Whilst me, who am thy foe, eyeless in hate,  
Hast thou made reign and triumph, to thy scorn,  
O'er mine own misery and thy vain revenge. –  
Three thousand years of sleep-unsheltered hours  
And moments – aye divided by keen pangs  
Till they seemed years, torture and solitude,  
Scorn and despair, – these are mine empire: –  
More glorious far than that which thou surveyest  
From thine unenvied throne, O Mighty God!

Almighty, had I deigned to share the shame  
Of thine ill tyranny, and hung not here  
Nailed to this wall of eagle-baffling mountain,  
Black, wintry, dead, unmeasured; without herb,  
Insect, or beast, or shape or sound of life.  
Ah me, alas, pain, pain ever, for ever! (I. 1-23)

I will not provide a detailed comparative analysis of the soliloquy and the curse, but rather point out further elements in the soliloquy that prove Prometheus is still unreformed. Those critics who claim that Prometheus is already regenerate when the drama begins would suggest we read this first part of Prometheus' soliloquy as just setting the scene for the reader of what has been Prometheus' condition in the past. However, I would argue that we cannot overlook the fact that the soliloquy is being uttered in the present tense (with several imperatives). If Prometheus was already reformed at the opening, he would be reflecting back on his "eyeless hate" and tortured solitude. As is the case, the Prometheus we meet when the drama opens is still plagued by hate and other sentiments which show him to be unregenerate.

Prometheus' rhetoric is filled with self-pity and self-deprecation, which serve to enforce our impression of him at this point as the fallen Prometheus. There is also a sense of bitter irony and self-righteousness in Prometheus' claim that his "empire" of "torture and solitude, / Scorn and despair" is more "glorious" than Jupiter's Heaven; a claim that musters clear associations to Satan's assertion that it is "better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven" (PL I. 263). What is also important to take note of here is a more subtle comparison to *Paradise Lost*. Milton's Satan also proclaims: "The mind is its own place and in itself / Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven" (PL. I 254-255).<sup>13</sup> Although these lines are not directly alluded to within the drama, they can help us to better understand Prometheus, his situation and his following regeneration. Prometheus is suffering in his own private Hell, but not only because he is chained, tortured and separated from his wife and the world. In the way he emotionally deals with his situation, he creates his own internalized Hell. The mind is its own place and instead of creating a Heaven of Hell through the justification of his cause, as Milton's Satan does, Prometheus has created a

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<sup>13</sup> In addition to there being a thematic parallel between *Paradise Lost* and *Prometheus Unbound*, this was an idea that Shelley was generally preoccupied with. He quotes this passage and elaborates on its application to poetics in the *Defence of Poetry*.

worse Hell for himself; the “empire” of his mind is a place of solitude, scorn, and despair. These self-characterizations cannot be overlooked when judging Prometheus’ character development through the first act, because these are the particular elements of his self which must be rejected, tested and purged throughout the first act before he becomes fully regenerate.

As Prometheus continues his soliloquy he describes in detail the extent of his torture and continues to wallow in self-pity repeating the phrase: “Ah me, alas, pain, pain ever, for ever!”. He even asks the Earth, the Sea, and the Sun if they have not witness his agony, almost as if asking the world to indulge him in his self-deprecation. I find this an example of Prometheus’ blindness and unregenerate state. He is fully aware, and always has been, that his torment will not last and Jupiter will inevitably fall. Despite this knowledge, Prometheus continues to lament the hopelessness of his situation. Some critics would say that this apparent inconsistency is the product of poor writing or that “Shelley cannot make the transition from the sphere of thought to that of actuality” (Rajan: 320). I suggest that we not view this as an inconsistency in Shelley’s writing, but as evidence of Prometheus’ rattled and unregenerate mind. It shows that Prometheus is still blinded by hate and grief, and lacks insight into himself and into the means to defeat Jupiter. He blames all his suffering on Jupiter and does not realize that he has the power within himself to endure the physical torture without succumbing to despair.

Prometheus explains that one of the reasons he is able to endure his torture is because each day and night brings him closer to Jupiter’s final hour:

And yet to me welcome is Day and Night,  
Whether one breaks the hoar frost of the morn,  
Or starry, dim, and slow, the other climbs  
The leaden-coloured East; for then they lead  
The wingless, crawling Hours, one among whom  
– As some dark Priest hales the reluctant victim–  
Shall drag thee, cruel King, to kiss the blood  
From these pale feet, which then might trample thee  
If they disdained not such a prostrate slave” (I. 44-52).

Until this point in the soliloquy, Prometheus’ attitude has been turned inward and focused on his

own suffering and self-pity. Here the tone escalates in malevolence and, with the intensity and wrath of the curse, Prometheus lashes out once more at Jupiter. If there is any doubt as to whether Prometheus is unregenerate at the opening of the drama, I think this should sufficiently prove that he still is so. He eagerly anticipates the idea of Jupiter being forcefully and violently dethroned and flung at his feet. When Prometheus says that his feet “might trample” Jupiter if they “disdained not such a prostrate slave”, it is not out of pity and forgiveness that Prometheus envisions he will sustain from crushing Jupiter, but out of hatred and disgust. Prometheus’ soliloquy has been building up momentum in its aggressive rhetoric and it can be seen to culminate in this outburst of vengefulness.

It is therefore all the more startling, and potentially confusing for readers approaching the poem for the first time, when in the next line Prometheus says:

Disdain? Ah no! I pity thee. – What Ruin  
Will hunt thee undefended through wide Heaven!  
How will thy soul, cloven to its depth with terror,  
Gape like a Hell within! I speak in grief,  
Not exultation, for I hate no more,  
As then, ere misery made me wise. (I. 53-58)

This apparently abrupt pivot in Prometheus’ emotions and attitude toward Jupiter has, to put it mildly, caused some confusion and speculation among critics throughout the ages. There are those who (again) consider this poor writing etc., but for the purpose of this discussion we must ignore the myriad of interpretations and opinions that do not pertain to the point. That point being that many critics view this as either the moment of Prometheus’ conversion, or solid proof of it already having happened. Carlos Baker, for example, views Prometheus’ regeneration as having already happened off-stage before the drama opens, and dismisses Prometheus’ soliloquy up to this point as a temporary relapse: “as if he had momentarily forgotten himself into the past and given way once more to a pride intellectually but not emotionally abjured” (Baker: 97). When Prometheus proclaims: “Disdain? Ah no! I pity thee”, Baker interprets this as Prometheus catching himself in this emotional relapse and “immediately denies that he has spoken in exultation or in proud disdain” (Baker: 97).

I do not agree with Baker's assessment of Prometheus' soliloquy as just a "relapse" which he immediately denies, because this would mean dismissing too much of Shelley's craft in portraying for us a degenerate Prometheus - a Prometheus who is so obviously not "the type" he describes in the Preface. Milton Wilson also takes issue with Baker's interpretation here, and argues that it is a common fallacy of modern readers to react dismissively or negatively to such sudden "moments of conversion" (Wilson: 57). He claims that such misinterpretations could be avoided if one were to take into consideration that while sudden damnation/retribution is often seen as a motif belonging to Renaissance literature, it exists as a valuable topos throughout Romanticism and even into Modernism (Wilson: 57-58). I would also suggest that we take Prometheus' soliloquy at face value, but at the same time remember that those words, and these spoken at his apparent moment of conversion, are spoken by one who has not yet fully regained his divinity. Prometheus is still suffering from an addled mind, and although he realizes that he pities Jupiter, he is still struggling with his emotions.

James R. Bennett is one critic who acknowledges the active struggle to overcome his fallen state that Prometheus goes through in Act I, and suggests we view this moment not as a conversion, but evidence that Prometheus is "someone whose character is emerging" (Bennett: 38). I agree that we must not view Prometheus' turn of sentiment as a definitive conversion, but rather as a culminating point in a long process. Prometheus claims to no longer hate because misery has made him wise. The "then" of line 58 is perhaps one factor that makes critics view Prometheus' transformation as having already happened off stage. Despite my claim that Prometheus is still fallen at this point, it is possible to see that part of his regeneration had already started before the drama begins. The beginning of the soliloquy shows us the status quo of Prometheus' physical and mental state as it has been since he was chained, and one gets the impression that this rant, and variations on it, has been repeated innumerable times. Yet all the while Prometheus' misery has been making him wise, but this is a subtle and subconscious wisdom that has been building beneath the surface. Like snow slowly collecting on a mountaintop and eventually causing an avalanche, Prometheus' pain, not just the physical pain from his torture, but also his internal pain from being hateful, has been slowly building up until it



reaches a breaking point.<sup>14</sup>

This is what we see in the abrupt emotional pivot between line 52 and 53: The ages of hate and misery have been building up inside him, until he finally, and suddenly, realizes the futility of his hatred. Prometheus seems taken aback by his own wrath and vengeance, as if he is really hearing his own hateful words/thoughts for the first time. This is emphasized by the question mark after the word “disdain”, as if he is unsure if that is what he really feels. Stuart Curran also reads this line in a similar way: “The word “disdain” – implying pride, elitism, sanctimoniousness, moral rigidity, denial of community–tolls Prometheus back from his fantasies [...] propelling the suddenly awakened hero into self-analysis” (Curran 1975: 97-98). The “Ah no!” of this line is not a denial of the hatred he has felt and expressed, but rather a moment of realization and introspection that he is able to achieve for the first time.

Prometheus’ claim to pity Jupiter is therefore not a conversion from a Satanic to a Messianic figure, as many critics would have it, but rather the first instance in the process of enlightenment he must go through in order to restore his divinity. Despite this moment of self-analysis and explicit effort to relinquish hatred, much more is required of Prometheus before he becomes fully regenerate. As will be discovered through this analysis, Prometheus is still susceptible of despairing and has not acquired the serenity and strength of mind required of the champion of mankind. This moment of insight in which he realizes that he no longer hates Jupiter, but pities him, is only a small fracture of the greater truth which he learns at the end of the act, that “most vain all hope but love” (I. 808). However, this small insight is the spark that sets his regeneration into motion. Prometheus no longer focuses all his energy on berating Jupiter, and with his newfound self-awareness he can for the first time actively choose “thought’s empire over thought” and to “rule the mutiny within”.

These quotes are taken from another of Shelley’s later poems, *The Triumph of Life*, but can help us understand this theme, which Shelley explores in both poems (albeit not so explicitly in *Prometheus Unbound*). Before we move on to examine Prometheus’ process of regeneration, let us examine the relevant passage so that it can be used as a reference point later. In *The Triumph of Life* the figure Rousseau explains to the poet how many of the great thinkers and rulers of

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<sup>14</sup> This image is one Shelley uses elsewhere in the poem to illustrate how thoughts and ideals (both good and evil) accumulate in the minds of mankind until “some great truth / Is loosened, and the nations echo round / Shaken to their roots: as do the mountains now” (II.iii. 40-42), i.e. an intellectual paradigm shift.

history are chained like slaves to the chariot of Life:

The Wise,  
The great, the unforgotten: they who wore  
Mitres and helms and crowns, or wreaths of light,  
Signs of thought's empire over thought; their lore  
Taught them not this—to know themselves; their might  
Could not repress the mutiny within (208-213)

This passage can be better understood in the context of a contemporary letter Shelley wrote to his friend Horace Smith. In this letter he expressed his disillusion on trying to affect political and social reform through appeals to Parliament and other institutions. He had come to realize that these efforts were, if not ineffectual, only temporary and that people in possession of power, even despite their good intentions, “subdue themselves to the element that surrounds them, and contribute to the evils they lament by the hypocrisy that springs from them” (Cameron: 452). Not only does Prometheus have to replace hate with pity, but he must learn what the great leaders and thinkers of history could not - to fully and truly know himself and overcome “the mutiny within”.

### **III.iii. The Curse Recalled**

The majority of critics agree that the recalling of the curse is crucial to Prometheus' regeneration, and they see this as an extension of the “conversion” at line 53. As Cameron puts it: “Resolved to expel “hate” from his heart, [Prometheus] decides that he must “recall” the curse which he vented on Jupiter” (Cameron: 502). The general idea is that Prometheus' personal conversion is not enough to ensure Jupiter's downfall. In order for the succeeding events of the drama to be put into effect Prometheus must revoke the curse placed on him. As was the case with Prometheus' declaration of pity, I am afraid things are not that simple. In order for Prometheus to truly transcend his “fallen” state, he must confront, acknowledge and repent what was said and done out of hatred. This chapter will explore the issue of Prometheus' need to confront his former fallen state and the curse he placed on Jupiter. It will also be discussed whether it can be said that in “recalling” the curse Prometheus is revoking the curse, or merely regrets having said the curse at all.

Immediately after lamenting Jupiter's fate, Prometheus claims to no longer hate and wishes to "recall" the curse: "The curse / Once breathed on thee I would recall" (I. 58-59). There is a subtle ambiguity in Shelley's use of the word "recall" here. On the one hand, Prometheus literally cannot remember what the actual curse was. On the other hand it also suggests that Prometheus wishes to revoke said curse. It is quite common among critics to grant weight to the latter meaning, and regard the former as a dramatic ploy on Shelley's part as an excuse for having the curse revealed to the reader.

While some critics interpret Prometheus' forgetfulness as a dramatic ploy, I find there is relevance to Prometheus' character development in his not remembering the curse. He has realized that he no longer hates, but now he cannot remember the words that were spoken in hate. In order to be sure that he has vanquished hate from his heart and mind, Prometheus must be reminded of those words and come to terms with them. I agree therefore to some extent with the critics who say it is not enough for Prometheus to claim to no longer hate. However, I see the recalling of the curse neither as the completion of Prometheus' regeneration, nor as detrimental to Jupiter's fall. Rather I see the recalling as the next necessary step in Prometheus' development and restoration of his divinity. The saying of the curse was the epitome of his fall and in order to be able to move on, he must remember and confront this part of himself.

The question we must ask ourselves is which meaning of the word "recall" is supported by the words and actions of Prometheus within the drama? When keeping strictly to the text before us, I find it difficult to agree with critics who view Prometheus' words "I would recall" as a "promise to recall his curse upon Jupiter" (Baker: 97). At no point in the drama does Prometheus claim that he wishes to annul the curse he placed upon Jupiter. Although Prometheus has had a moment of revelation and pities Jupiter the fate that awaits him, there is no evidence that Prometheus wishes Jupiter could escape that fate. On the contrary, Prometheus still seems to believe in the justice of his curse:

*If then my words had power,*

Though I am changed so that aught evil wish

Is dead within; although no memory be

Of what is hate, *let them not lose it now!* (I. 69-72 my italics)

Prometheus cannot remember how he cursed Jupiter and wants to be reminded of the specifics of that curse. Apparently Prometheus has successfully relinquished hate from his heart, but he still bears a begrudging attitude toward Jupiter. His mind and heart are no longer tainted by hatred, but there is still a sense of vengeance in Prometheus' hope that his words have not lost their force and effect.

Prometheus calls upon the Mountains, the Springs, the Air, and the Whirlwinds to repeat his curse, because he knows they all heard him speak it. These elements answer elusively, not actually repeating the curse, but instead relating how they in turn were devastated upon hearing the curse. The Earth chimes in at the end to add that the whole world cried "Misery!" as Prometheus' curse traversed the world. The Earth explains that they dare not repeat the curse in fear of invoking the wrath of Jupiter: "We meditate / In secret joy and hope those dreadful words, / But dare not speak them" (I. 184-186). She explains, however, that there is a world inhabited by the shadows of all living things, and Prometheus can call upon one of these shadows to repeat the curse. Prometheus is aware that although his intentions were initially good, his curse was said out of hate and his words are therefore tainted by evil. Prometheus therefore decides to summon the Phantasm of Jupiter to say the nefarious curse:

"Mother, let not aught  
Of that which may be evil, pass again  
My lips, or those of aught resembling me.  
Phantasm of Jupiter, arise, appear!" (I. 218-221)

### *The Phantasm of Jupiter*

At this time I must digress slightly from the trail of evidence I would consider directly relevant to Prometheus' regeneration in the first act. However, so many critics have spent, in my opinion, an unusually large amount of time analyzing the Phantasm of Jupiter, it has become necessary to address this point. This is especially necessary since there is a certain case of over-interpretation concerning this figure that has become practically canon among critics, without there being any adequate critical response to this interpretation.

As the Phantasm of Jupiter materializes before the assembly at the precipice, he is described

by both Oceanids and Prometheus. To Ione, the Phantasm is both dreadful and sublime, “A Shape, a throng of sounds” too terrible to look upon directly. Panthea, the braver of the two sisters, looks forth and describes the Phantasm of Jupiter:

The sound is of whirlwind underground,  
Earthquake and fire, and mountains cloven;  
The Shape is awful like the sound,  
Clothed in dark purple, star-inwoven.

A sceptre of pale gold  
To stay steps proud, o'er the slow cloud  
His veined hand doth hold.

Cruel he looks but calm and strong  
Like one who does, not suffers wrong. (I. 231-239)

Shelley's Jupiter is not given much time on stage, so this description of the Phantasm of Jupiter is an opportune moment to have this character portrayed for the reader. However, there is an overwhelming tendency amongst critics to view the summoning of the Phantasm of Jupiter as a doppelgänger motif in which the Phantasm is seen as *Prometheus*' doppelgänger. I have to disagree with this interpretation, which will be addressed shortly, and instead suggest that the Phantasm of Jupiter be understood for what he is - an emblem of Shelley's conception of a tyrant.

In my opinion this is one of the greatest poetic descriptions Shelley ever wrote on the nature of tyranny. This passage is short, but is rich and concise in its description. The majesty and pride of Jupiter is overwhelming, and the implications of his cruel nature are chilling. Jupiter is cruel, but his cruelty does not come from a diseased mind, nor is it aggressive and full of rage. He inflicts pain, misery and cruelty upon others, but unlike those who react with evil to an evil suffered, Jupiter's cruelty is even more evil in a sense because it is unprovoked. It is in his nature to do wrong, not because he has ever experienced any wrong. Jupiter is “calm” in his cruelty, meaning he is emotionally unaffected by his own cruel actions. Amongst those who do wrong toward their fellow man, Shelley distinguished between those in power and those who were oppressed: “Implacable hate, patient cunning and a sleepless refinement of device to inflict the extremist anguish on an enemy, these things are evil: and, although venial in a slave, are not to be forgiven in a tyrant” (P & R: 498). In Shelley's mind the one form of evil is redeemable while the

other is not.

As was discussed in the chapter *III.i. The Curse*, Prometheus was filled with hate and vengefulness when he cursed Jupiter. Prometheus then, in his unregenerate state, was (temporarily) evil, and it is therefore tempting to draw parallels between the fallen Prometheus and Jupiter. Both Carlos Baker and Milton Wilson agree that the purpose of summoning The Phantasm of Jupiter to recall the curse, is not so much to give the reader an insight into the character of Jupiter, but rather to illustrate and emphasize the difference between the former Prometheus and the renewed Prometheus. Baker claims that the Phantasm repeats not only the curse, but Prometheus' "original gestures" (Baker: 97). The notion among these and other critics is that in this conjured specter, Prometheus, like Zoroaster, "met his own image", and as Wasserman claims: "the implication is that when Prometheus first spoke [the curse] he was, in a very real sense, Jupiter" (Wasserman: 259).

This mode of interpretation lays most of its weight on the description Prometheus gives of the Phantasm as it is about to repeat the curse:

I see the curse on gestures proud and cold,  
And looks of firm defiance, and calm hate,  
And such despair as mocks itself with smiles,  
Written as on a scroll[...] (I. 258-261)

Milton Wilson claims that these words more aptly describe the curse-uttering Prometheus than Jupiter (Wilson: 64). He supports his argument by finding the "firm defiance, and calm hate" repeated in the first lines of Prometheus' curse: "Fiend, I defy thee! with a calm, fixed mind, / All that thou canst inflict I bit thee do;" (I. 262-3). I must disagree with the notion that the Phantom of Jupiter is literally the shadow of the former Prometheus, a perverted mirror image of himself, which he must face. Undeniably Prometheus must face his former self, but this he does when he hears his own words repeated to him. Although Prometheus himself claims to have a "calm, fixed mind" while uttering the curse, it has been shown that Prometheus' state of mind while saying the curse is not the same type of hatred that characterizes Jupiter here. Wilson claims that the only part of this description that might *not* apply to Prometheus is "cold", but counters his own argument by saying that Prometheus' former lack of pity for Jupiter is a sign of his "coldness"

(Wilson: 64). I would argue that no part of this verse uttered by Prometheus is directly describing the fallen Prometheus. It is true that some of the characteristics here could be said to apply to Prometheus; pride and firm defiance are undoubtedly characteristics of Prometheus. They are, however, also characteristic of Jupiter. I am not denying that there are similarities between the hateful, unregenerate Prometheus and Jupiter, but these similarities are circumstantial. The unregenerate Prometheus and Jupiter are both corrupted moral characters, and will inevitably share certain character traits. However, the implication that Prometheus is confronting his former self, and not Jupiter, in the Phantasm is often taken too far and too literally.

It is important, therefore, to observe the structure of the verse and account for it in full. Prometheus' observation begins with "I see the curse" and ends with "Written *as* on a scroll" (my italics). The simile in this last line cannot be overlooked. Prometheus does not see the curse *in* the gestures or features of the Phantasm, but *on* them as if the curse was transferred on to an alien mold. Prometheus sees the curse "*on*" the gestures of the Phantasm, which are the gestures of "one who does, not suffers wrong", which is Jupiter and can in no way be interpreted as characteristic of Prometheus. The Phantasm says of himself that he is "a frail and empty phantom" (I. 241), but this does not mean that he is void of being the shadow of Jupiter and embodying his characteristics. Prometheus identifies the Phantasm as that of Jupiter: "Tremendous Image, as thou art must be / He whom thou shadowest forth. I am his foe, / The Titan" (I. 246-248). When Prometheus demands the shadow to speak the curse, he is filled with another "spirit"; that spirit is the memory of Prometheus uttering the curse. The Phantasm cries: "A spirit seizes me, and speaks within: / It tears me as a fire tears a thunder-cloud!" (I. 254-255). The curse is this spirit that animates the hollow form of the Phantasm, or to use Prometheus' analogy, the curse is filling the empty shell of the Phantasm like ink fills a blank sheet of paper. The shape before them is still the shadow of Jupiter, but he is speaking the words of the fallen Prometheus. As was made clear while discussing the curse, the words of the curse are sufficient to show us the unregenerate Prometheus. It is in hearing *those words* that Prometheus confronts his fallen state, not in seeing the Phantasm of Jupiter. If such a visualized confrontation with his former self were in any way necessary, he would have called upon his own shadow. Instead Shelley has Prometheus explicitly go out of his way to avoid hearing the words issue again from his own mouth: "let not aught / Of that which may be evil, pass again / My lips, or those of aught resembling me" (I. 218-220).

Writing shortly after Wilson's interpretation was published, Harold Bloom acknowledges Wilson's (and Baker's) interpretation while commenting on the "dramatic irony" of Jupiter's shadow being the one called upon to voice the curse placed upon himself. Bloom concludes however, and I have to agree, that this "device is a causal connection" which, although entertaining and effective, "will not sustain extensive analysis" (Bloom: 104). The only reason I have allowed this digression, is because this interpretation, apparently already common by the mid-twentieth century, has evidently become taken for granted in critical reception since. Baker's initial interpretation, and Wilson's comments on it, are frequently referred to, taken for granted and stated as common fact amongst later critics. The recalling of the curse is of crucial importance when exploring the regeneration of Prometheus. However, it has apparently become common practice among critics to exert a lot of effort discussing the Phantasm of Jupiter, at the expense of the real substance in this scene. The actual curse and the implications on Prometheus' character that can be weaned from it are unfortunately often granted less attention.<sup>15</sup>

Now let us return to our consideration of Prometheus' process of regeneration and discuss Prometheus' reaction to hearing his former hateful words. As soon as the Phantasm disappears, Prometheus asks the Earth if those really were the words he spoke. This points back to the fact that Prometheus could not remember the curse, and even after hearing his words repeated to him, it is almost as if he cannot believe what he has heard. As I have mentioned, I do not see this element of Prometheus' lack of memory as just a poetic device, but an important implication for his regeneration. Prometheus needed to be reminded of his former hate and lust for revenge in order to distance himself from it and take an active stance against it. When the Earth confirms that these were indeed his words, Prometheus responds:

It doth repent me: words are quick and vain;

Grief for awhile is blind, and so was mine.

I wish no living thing to suffer pain. (I. 303-305)

It is with these words a large majority of critics conclude that Prometheus' regeneration has come to fruition. As with the "I pity thee" of line 53, Prometheus' wish that no living thing should

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<sup>15</sup> Even in interpretations that do not focus on the doppelgänger motif have a tendency to spend an enormous amount of time on the Phantasm of Jupiter and hardly any on the actual curse. For example in Carl Grabo's 200 page analysis of *Prometheus Unbound*, the world of shadows and the Phantasm of Jupiter are granted nigh eight pages, while the actual curse is discussed in two paragraphs.



suffer is read as a proof of Prometheus' conversion from a Satanic to a Messianic figure: "The moral reformation of Prometheus is now complete" (Baker: 98). Some critics see this as not only proof of Prometheus' completed regeneration, but proof that Prometheus' victory over Jupiter is now ensured: "It is these words which mark the overthrow of Jupiter" (Grabo: 32). I find these interpretations problematic for several reasons, which will be discussed forthwith. First, as a side note, I would like to point out that considering this the consequential moment that ensures Jupiter's downfall, completely disregards the necessity for Asia's enlightenment and the dramatic development connected to it in Act II.

While on the one hand many critics view Prometheus' words "I wish no living thing to suffer pain" as proof of his victory over Jupiter, the Earth interprets these words as proof of Prometheus' failure to stand defiant against Jupiter and cries: "Misery, O misery to me, / That Jove at length should vanquish thee" (I. 306-307). Prometheus does not respond to this outburst, but Ione tries to comfort her by saying: "Fear not: 'tis but some passing spasm" (I. 314). It is clear that they both believe that the reiteration of the curse has somehow prompted a change in Prometheus, but they do not understand the implications of this change. Ione and the Earth have not experienced the revelation that Prometheus has had by learning the futility of hatred. They ignorantly believe that in order to stand up against Jupiter, Prometheus must continue his aggressive defiance. Similar to many critics, Ione and the Earth interpret Prometheus' words here as a repudiation of the curse.<sup>16</sup> In either case, the general understanding is that in his response, Prometheus is somehow annulling the curse he placed on Jupiter.

Many critics say that Prometheus' regeneration and triumph over Jupiter stems from his conversion to Christian ethics. In the same way that Prometheus' response to hearing the curse is referred to as a "revocation" and "repudiation", the word "forgive" is constantly applied to Prometheus' change in attitude toward Jupiter: "Thus, in Act I, Prometheus withdraws his curse on Jupiter, and in so doing shows his generous character and foreshadows the ultimate triumph of love. His reasons for this are that the only way to treat an enemy is to forgive him" (Butter: 176). Even among critics who find it strange that Shelley merges his Prometheus with Christ, there is a continuous insistence on viewing Prometheus' sentiment as forgiveness: "The most interesting and alien element assimilated to this philosophy is, however, the definitely Christian concept of

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<sup>16</sup> In fact in the majority of interpretations I have come across in my research, the terms "revoke" and "repudiate" are exclusively used when discussing Prometheus' regeneration and this passage in particular.

the conquest of evil through forgiveness” (Grabo: 15). But nowhere does Shelley give any implication that Prometheus *forgives* Jupiter. He pities him, yes, and although pity and forgiveness are two aspects of love (and Christian ethics) they are not the same. Although Prometheus repents his curse, he makes no effort to try to help Jupiter avoid his fate; he only pities him for being evil and the suffering this necessarily implies.

Not only am I not convinced that Prometheus forgives Jupiter, I would argue that Prometheus does not in fact *revoke* the curse at all. Prometheus says that he repents, but what part of the curse is he referring to and what does he mean by repenting? It is true that Prometheus has managed to vanquish the hate that plagued him, for in the rest of the act (and the drama of course) Prometheus shows no signs of feeling hate (toward Jupiter, or at all). However, he continues to berate Jupiter for the corruption of mankind and is steadfast in his determination that Jupiter must eventually fall. His attitude may have changed from hate and vengeance to pity and grief, but the curse and its consequences are still valid. He may no longer wish any living thing to suffer pain, Jupiter included, but his words still have power. He does nothing to try to mend the damage he has done, toward Jupiter or mankind. This is either because he still feels as he did in the soliloquy - that he does not want his words to lose power, or because he is in fact powerless to retract the curse.

I suggest that we understand Prometheus’ repentance, not as repudiation, but as regret. In his response to the curse, Prometheus claims that grief had made him blind and his words were “quick and vain”. He now understands that the evil he enacted when cursing Jupiter was vain and not a viable response to the injustice dealt by Jupiter, and that any action taken out of hate and spite will inevitably cause more harm than good. He *no longer* wishes any living thing to suffer pain, but in his regret he acknowledges that he once did wish pain and suffering on Jupiter. In addition to regretting the fact that he himself succumbed to hatred, it is possible that he is also speaking of the unnecessary imprecation of mankind along with himself. If Jupiter’s reign was inevitably limited, which Prometheus must have known it was, his decision to sacrifice mankind along with himself was not “impelled by the purest and truest motives to the best and noblest ends”. The way I see it, in order for Prometheus to regain his divinity, it was necessary for him to admit that he had fallen in the first place. Prometheus’ regeneration does not depend on his forgiveness of Jupiter, but on the atonement with his fallen past and being able to forgive himself.

The text at this point is perhaps not intentionally enigmatic, but is nonetheless frustratingly elusive. This passage is short and Prometheus' words here are given no time or space to be expanded or explained. As soon as Ione claims that it is "just a passing spasm", Mercury and the Furies appear and the drama shifts focus completely away from the curse, never to address it again. We cannot know for sure how much or which parts of the curse Prometheus "repents". We only know now that he acknowledges that he reacted wrongly because grief had made him blind, and he no longer wishes any living thing to suffer pain. Are we then to understand that Prometheus is fully regenerate and transcended to become "the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature"? If all that was required of Prometheus was to replace hate with pity and avoid wanting or causing anyone pain, then it could be said that he has achieved his goals. Many critics do take this view, and like Carlos Baker view Prometheus as now fully prepared to withstand the Furies' torture with "equanimity" and be reunited with Asia (Baker: 98). It is true, as I have mentioned, that Prometheus is now free from hate and vengeance, but there is more required of him before he has completely regained his divinity. Prometheus has yet to fully realize the importance and implication of love's triumph over evil. Also, as will be shown in the next chapters, the trials Prometheus must face in the remainder of Act I are not endured *equanimously*.

### **III.iv. The Temptation of Prometheus**

Although Prometheus has relinquished hate, he still struggles with other emotions that characterize him as unregenerate. In the following confrontation with Mercury, Prometheus shows signs of still struggling to rid himself of the spite and vengeance he has so long felt toward Jupiter. Throughout most of this scene however, Prometheus seems to retain a sense of serenity and steadfastness, which has undoubtedly lead critics to believe he is reformed at this point. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to explore the stance that Prometheus takes against Mercury's temptation, before he is exposed to the tortures of the Furies.

Mercury, messenger of the gods, appears leading a score of Furies. Bennett claims that the appearance of Mercury and the Furies comes at a "psychologically precise moment" because it proves that Jupiter has also misunderstood Prometheus' "rejection of the curse" (Bennett: 41-42). Jupiter, thinking that he has finally broken Prometheus' spirit, sends Mercury to "negotiate the

capitulation terms” (Bennett: 42). Whether or not Jupiter heard Prometheus’ words and how he interpreted them can only be speculation. However I find more likely that the appearance of Mercury and the Furies is prompted by the reiteration of the curse, which the Earth warned Prometheus there would be repercussions for. Mercury informs Prometheus that he has been sent by Jupiter to “execute a doom of new revenge” by releasing the Furies who have been armed with “the strange might of unimagined pains” (I. 355, 366). Of his own volition, however, Mercury stays the Furies and threatens to send them back to Hell if they don’t stay quite while he pleads with Prometheus to surrender so that he will not have to endure this new wave of torture.

Unlike Hermes in Aeschylus’ play who harasses Prometheus, Shelley’s Mercury plays a role more similar to Job’s friends and argues for “acceptance of guilt and compromise with power” (Bennett: 42). He praises Prometheus for his resistance against Jupiter’s rule, but claims that it is in vain and pleads with Prometheus to end his own suffering. He reminds Prometheus (and the reader) that there is some secret knowledge concerning the end of Jupiter’s reign that only Prometheus knows.<sup>17</sup> Mercury entreats Prometheus to reveal this secret, so that he can once again return to Heaven and live “Lapped in voluptuous joy” (I. 426). Mercury believes that Prometheus’ supplication will not only end Prometheus’ suffering, but the reign of terror that Jupiter holds over the world and the other gods:

bend thy soul in prayer,  
And like a suppliant in some gorgeous fane,  
Let the will kneel within thy haughty heart;  
For benefits and meek submission tame  
The fiercest and the mightiest. (I. 376-380)

Prometheus is not swayed by Mercury’s plea because he knows all too well Jupiter’s nature, having learned of Jupiter’s treacherous nature the hard way when he was betrayed the first time. If he gives in, Jupiter might release him from his torture, but what is to say he would keep his promise this time? Therefore Prometheus answers:

Such is the tyrant’s recompense: ’tis just:

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<sup>17</sup> In the tradition of the Prometheus myth in Antiquity, Prometheus had the foreknowledge that Jupiter would beget a son more powerful than he, who would usurp him just as Jupiter had his father. In Shelley’s myth, as will be discussed shortly, the contents of the secret Prometheus knows is more enigmatic.

He who is evil can receive no good;  
And for a world bestowed, or a friend lost,  
He can feel hate, fear, shame—not gratitude:  
He but requites me for his own misdeed.  
Kindness to such is keen reproach, which breaks  
With bitter stings the light sleep of Revenge (I. 388-394)

This response shows that Prometheus, although free from hate, still harbors feelings of bitterness and vengeance. On the one hand Prometheus' claim that "evil can receive no good" means that Jupiter, being evil, is incapable of feeling the gratitude he feigns to promise. On the other hand it would also seem that Prometheus feels that Jupiter does not *deserve* to "receive" the goodness toward him, which the act of revealing the secret would be. These are not the words of one who has embraced love as the solution to evil, but one who is bitter, spiteful and would not grant his enemy any kindness. This I feel also proves that Prometheus' repentance upon hearing the curse was neither a revocation of the curse, nor proof that he now forgives Jupiter. Prometheus still anticipates Jupiter's downfall and will do nothing that might lessen the revenge he will endure.<sup>18</sup>

Despite this outburst of bitterness and vengeance toward Jupiter, Prometheus continues to explain that he cannot submit for the sake of mankind. Even if he were released from his imprisonment, Jupiter would continue to be the tyrant that he is now toward mankind:

Submission, thou dost know I cannot try:  
For what submission but that fatal word,  
The death-seal of mankind's captivity,  
Like the Sicilian's hair-suspended sword,  
Which trembles o'er his crown, would he accept,  
Or could I yield? Which yet I will not yield. (I. 395-400)

Several critics have pointed out that in this passage there is yet another allusion to Milton's Satan who also ponders the possibility of submitting:

Is there no place

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<sup>18</sup> The duality of Prometheus' sentiment here is also present in another of Shelley's poems, *Lines written among the Euganean Hills* (1818-1819): "but 'tis bitter woe / That love or reason cannot change / The despot's rage, the slave's revenge."

Left for repentance, none for pardon left?  
None left but by submission and that word  
Disdain forbids me (PL. IV. 79-81)

Some critics, like Peter A. Schock, claim that this proves Prometheus is not regenerate and should exclusively be considered a satanic figure. Schock's argument is that Prometheus remains satanic throughout the first act because "the antagonism which defines his relationship with Jupiter remains" to the very end (Schock: 131). Although I agree that Prometheus is not yet divine at this point, it is not enough to ground this view on an allusion to Milton's Satan. As aforementioned, I interpret Prometheus as still unregenerate because the conscious knowledge of love's triumph over evil has not come to fruition. Despite the slight paraphrasing of Milton's poetry, there is little resemblance between Satan and Prometheus in this specific passage. To the contrary, Prometheus here appears very much the champion of mankind, and in a sense a Messianic figure, because of his refusal to yield. He does so not only out of pride and "disdain" for his enemy, but out of concern for mankind; making himself a martyr because his submission would obliterate mankind's chances for freedom.

As I discussed in my chapter *I.iv Reading Shelley's Mythopoesis*, complications may arise when treating the allusions to extra-textual material in the drama too seriously. While I on the one hand find Prometheus more of a Messianic figure in a passage that alludes to Milton's Satan, it is also possible to discover an antipodal interpretation of this scene. I have named this chapter "The Temptation of Prometheus", because Mercury tries to tempt Prometheus into submission by arguing that this would be better for everyone involved and reminding him of the wonderful life he could have reunited with the rest of the gods. This title also carries an allusion to a certain interpretation which is common in the drama's critical reception; that is to see a parallel between Mercury's temptation of Prometheus and the Biblical account of the temptation of Christ: Christ is first tempted by an adversary and thereafter ministered to by angels, and similarly Prometheus is first tempted and afterward ministered to by the Spirits. The dramatic similarity is undoubtedly there, but does a comparison between the figures Prometheus and Christ really hold up to scrutiny?

Critics point out that Mercury's pleading with Prometheus to give in and bend "thy soul in prayer" echoes the words of the Biblical devil: "if thou wilt fall down and worship me" (Matt.

4:8-9). Although Mercury is promising Prometheus life in the kingdom of heaven, and the devil is promising the kingdoms of the world, the parallel is admittedly striking. However, in his response Prometheus shows himself to be in fact more like Milton's Satan than Jesus Christ. It can be said there is a similarity between Christ and Prometheus because they both reject temptations and promises of joys, which in their respective mythologies are deemed arbitrary and false by the hero. However, while Christ answers his tempter: "It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matt. 4:10), Prometheus takes on the attitude of Milton's Satan and refuses to serve anyone, especially an authoritarian Lord. The reason for bringing this under discussion is not to conclude one way or the other which figure Prometheus is most like. On the contrary, I bring this up to illustrate that although viewing extra-textual parallels and allusions can often enrich our view of a character, too much focus on extra-textual material can also distract the critic from what is really happening to the character.

If we therefore draw our focus back to Prometheus as he operates within the drama, we can now see that he has begun to make progress in his regeneration. Instead of condemning mankind to suffer along with him, as he did with the curse, Prometheus is determined to suffer alone on behalf of mankind. There is also a difference in Prometheus' rhetoric here compared to the curse and the soliloquy. His stance is still defiant, but there is less of the aggression, self-pity and despair that tainted his previous declamations. Throughout his dialogue with Mercury, Prometheus appears calm and secure in his position:

I wait,

Enduring thus, the retributive hour

Which since we spake is even nearer now. (I. 405-407)

Inspired by this admission of knowledge concerning Jupiter's end, Mercury continues to insist and beg Prometheus to reveal the "period of Jove's power" (I. 412). Prometheus is steadfast in his refusal to reveal the secret, but at the same time his answers are strangely elusive:

PROMETHEUS. I know but this, that it must come

MERCURY. Alas!

Thou canst not count thy years to come of pain?

PROMETHEUS. They last while Jove must reign: nor more nor less

[...]

Perchance no thought can count them—yet they pass. (I. 413-424).

It would appear that Prometheus does not actually know when or how Jupiter's reign will end, and is answering evasively out of ignorance as much as resistance. He is not saying that he knows but will not tell. He is saying that it cannot be known. It is very possible, as I see it, that Prometheus does not actually know the specific time or criteria for the end of Jupiter's reign, or if he once knew he has forgotten. As was mentioned in connection with the curse, Prometheus' hate made him blind; blind to his own nature and blind to the means to Jupiter's end. This is one of the reasons why I would argue that his transformation spans the whole of the first act. If he was completely regenerate at line 53 or 305, then he would already know that love is the condition on which Jupiter's downfall depends - and he would answer differently to Mercury's questions and insistence. At this point, however, all he says is that the time will come and that the hour is drawing ever nearer, but he gives no indication that he knows how near the hour actually is.

In confrontation with Mercury, Prometheus shows himself as the martyr and champion we wish he could have been at the time of the curse. Instead of being blinded by hate and speaking out of anger and vindictiveness, he stands unperturbed and secure in his position - both as Jupiter's foe and mankind's champion. But does this mean that he is regenerate? It would almost seem so, except that the temptation Mercury presents him with here is rather easy to withstand. The substance of Mercury's temptation is not actually tempting to Prometheus, and he has no trouble holding his ground. However, as we shall see in the following chapter(s), Prometheus' regeneration is not only dependent on being defiant and no longer hating. He cannot become the "type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature" if the ensuing psychological torture at the hands of the Furies can succeed in causing him to regress into despair.

### **III.v. A Doom of New Revenge**

Prometheus has overcome hatred and has withstood (a rather pathetic and futile) attempt on Mercury's part to tempt him with the glories of heaven. However, Prometheus has still not completely recovered his divinity. As Prometheus stands now, he can continue to pity and simultaneously defy Jupiter, but he has still not become the savior of mankind. Those critics who claim that Prometheus' transformation is complete at either line 53 or 305, claim proof of this



because Prometheus stands defiant against the Furies.<sup>19</sup> When Mercury and the Furies first approach, Panthea comments that Prometheus “looks as ever, firm” (I. 337), but sheer defiance is not enough if Prometheus is to become fully regenerate. Prometheus was always defiant; he never wavered in his stance against Jupiter. The issue of his transformation, and his struggles to obtain it, is subtler.

It is clear that Prometheus will not surrender to Jupiter, but now he is in danger of failing as champion of mankind by succumbing, not to Jupiter’s rule, but to despair. As we shall see, Prometheus’ confrontation with the Furies illustrates that to overcome the evil in the world one cannot just fight against external enemies, one must confront “the mutiny within” oneself. Prometheus must face an emotional trial that was familiar to Shelley and his contemporaries when opposing their reactionary predecessors (for example Wordsworth, Coleridge and even to some extent Godwin<sup>20</sup>), and trying to maintain their optimism and idealism when faced with the social and political turmoil that plagued Europe at the time: “Confronted with the evil in the world, the apparent futility of efforts to combat it, and, above all, with evidence within themselves of their own weakness and imperfection, they are tempted to despair” (Butter: 177-178). This is the “doom of new revenge” that Jupiter has concocted in order to break Prometheus; if he will not surrender willingly, than he will suffer psychological torment until he suffers a mental breakdown.

The Furies are agents of Jupiter who traverse the world and fill it, and the minds of mankind, with corruption, hate, pain, and fear:

We are the ministers of pain and fear,  
And disappointment and mistrust and hate  
And clinging crime; and as lean dogs pursue  
Through wood and lake some struck and sobbing fawn,

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<sup>19</sup> This is most explicitly stated by Carlos Baker: “The moral transformation of Prometheus is now complete, and the way for his reunion with Asia has been prepared, so that he is able to endure with equanimity almost all the remaining tortures” (Baker: 98).

<sup>20</sup> As a young man, and while actively writing political and philosophical treatises, William Godwin (1756-1836) was one of the most eminent liberal and radical thinkers of his generation. While still in school, Shelley read Godwin’s *Political Justice* (1793) and was enamored by the author’s proclamations and ideals. However, when Shelley finally met his hero and spent many years in close, albeit sometimes tumultuous, company with Godwin and his family, Shelley became disillusioned with the old philosopher and ridiculed him for not living up to and practicing the ideals presented in his philosophical works. Godwin responded by claiming that there was a difference between philosophy and real life, and in turn chastised Shelley for being naive and too radical for his own good.

We track all things that weep and bleed and live  
When the great King betrays them to our will. (I. 452-457)

It is in this capacity that they have also been sent to torture Prometheus - to sow within his mind the seeds of doubt, fear and disappointment/disillusionment, which should lead him to despair. This confrontation between the Furies and Prometheus is richly laden with imagery and meditations that showcase Shelley's view on religious, social, and political issues, the nature of good and evil in mankind, and the development of human history. These are however on the fringe of what is important for our current discussion, and will only be mentioned in brief when it is relevant. What is necessary to focus on at this time is Prometheus' reaction to the Furies torture, and how it is evident that Prometheus is not able to face the Furies' torture equanimously, but struggles to maintain his faith while not succumbing to despair.

The Furies' attack upon Prometheus consists of several waves in which the army of Furies gathers from around the world. In exploring Prometheus' development through the first act, it is interesting to see the contrast between Prometheus' self-assurance in his position when confronting Mercury, and his immediate reaction to the legion of Furies surrounding him. Already at the first onslaught of Furies, Prometheus is shaken and caught off guard by these new "unimagined pains" (as Mercury called them):

Horrible forms,  
What and who are ye? Never yet there came  
Phantasms so foul through monster-teeming Hell  
From the all-miscreative brain of Jove;  
Whilst I behold such execrable shapes,  
Methinks I grow like what I contemplate  
And laugh and stare in loathsome sympathy. (I. 445-451)

Here we see Prometheus struggling to keep from being overcome with hatred again. As he observes the aggregating Furies, he is in danger of becoming what he contemplates. This is a notion that was explored around this time by other poets such as Blake and Coleridge, and which Shelley would have been familiar with through his interest in Plato and more contemporary philosophy (e.g. empiricism): "It is the faculty of the human mind to become what it

contemplates, and to act in accordance with its object” (Wilson: 73, 309). A person can therefore be influenced and changed, even unconsciously, by what he observes around him; and if what he observes is evil, he can become morally corrupted by it. This is apparently even true of someone like Prometheus, who has supposedly relinquished his evil ways, and is even trying to take an active stance against evil. I take this therefore as evidence that Prometheus has not yet completed the restoration of his divinity. He has clearly not achieved “thought’s empire over thought” if he is still susceptible to the danger of becoming like the Furies and regressing back into a fallen state.

However, as more and more Furies appear, Prometheus seems to recover somewhat from this moral precipice, and regains a feeling of assurance that he can withstand the torture Jupiter dispenses:

PROMETHEUS. I laugh your power and his who sent you here  
To lowest scorn.— Pour forth the cup of pain. (I. 473-474)

Prometheus thinks that the Furies have come to torture him in the same way he has been tortured for the past three thousand years, with physical pain, and is confident that he will be able to withstand it. However, the Furies do not actually torture Prometheus, at least not at first, but instead taunt him with rhetorical questions, which playfully tease Prometheus with his ignorance of the new torture to come:

FIRST FURY. Thou thinkest we will rend thee bone from bone?  
And nerve from nerve, working like fire within?  
PROMETHEUS. Pain is my element as hate is thine;  
Ye rend me now: I care not. (I. 475-478)

When Prometheus responds with such confidence and disregard for the Furies as he does here, it is understandable that one could see this as proof of his steadfastness against, and immunity to, the Furies’ torture. However, this taunting by the Furies is not the actual torture they have been sent by Jupiter to administer. Here Prometheus shows himself once again ignorant of both his own situation and the path ahead of him, which can either lead to defeat and despair or the full effulgence of his divine character. At this time Prometheus feels confident in his defiant stance, but we cannot consider these words as spoken by the divine Prometheus. On the one hand Prometheus does not realize that the Furies’ derisions are not the prescribed torture. More

important, though, by claiming that pain is his element, Prometheus shows himself to still be immured in the same unregenerate state he was in during the soliloquy.

The Furies then proceed to taunt him by implying that Prometheus also thinks the torture will consist of an emotional and moral trial of having them reside around his person and within his mind:

Thou think'st we will live through thee, one by one,  
Like animal life; and though we can obscure not  
The soul which burns within, that we will dwell  
Beside it, like a vain loud multitude  
Vexing the self-content of wisest men—  
That we will be dread thought beneath thy brain  
And foul desire round thine astonished heart  
And blood within thy labyrinthine veins  
Crawling like agony. (I. 483-491)

This touches back to the initial danger Prometheus faced when they first appeared; that the continuing presence of evil will make its way into Prometheus' being until it corrodes at his moral fiber. Although they perhaps cannot completely corrupt Prometheus' soul, they will live around and through him, constantly plaguing him with the evils of the world. Having already faced this danger within himself and succeeded in averting it, Prometheus is confident that he will be able to continue to hold his own against their corrupting influence:

Why, ye are thus now;  
Yet I am king over myself, and rule  
The torturing and conflicting throngs within (I. 491-493)

This could be taken to understand, as it has by many, that Prometheus proves unperturbed by the Furies' torture. At this time, Prometheus appears to have achieved "thought's empire over thought" and is able to quell "the mutiny within". He was able to withstand the first test in which he felt himself becoming like the Furies and has successfully distanced himself from them. He also believes that he can withstand the pain and torment of having the Furies, and the evils of the world they represent, surrounding him, because he is confident that he has the power to keep their influence at bay. However, the real torture of the Furies has not yet begun, and we shall see that

Prometheus' rule over his emotions is not as secure as he believes it to be.

The Furies, however, are threatened by Prometheus' steadfastness and defiance of their taunting, for they call forth even more of their kin. These new Furies travel to the scene boasting of their cruel deeds among mankind, until one Fury bids them be quite:

A FURY. Speak not— whisper not!  
I know all that ye would tell,  
But to speak might break the spell  
Which must bend the Invincible,  
The stern of thought;  
He yet defies the deepest power of Hell. (I. 533-538)

The Furies have realized that their taunting rhetoric has had no effect upon the Titan, and must increase the severity of their torture by applying a new approach. They now seek to break his spirit by *showing* him the bare truth of the condition of the world, and cry "Tear the veil!" (I. 539).

The image of the veil is commonly used by Shelley, and is explained by Peter Butter in *Shelley's Idols of the Cave* (1954): "False beliefs, especially false religious beliefs, prevent man from seeing things as they truly are; what he calls life is not reality, but a painted veil projected from his own mind; but he can, by throwing aside false beliefs, tear the veil, and so free himself and see the truth" (Butter: 111). This image of the tearing of the veil also appears later in the drama after Jupiter has been overthrown. The Spirit of the Hour relates:

The painted veil, by those who were, called life,  
Which mimicked, as with colours idly spread,  
All men believed and hoped, is torn aside—  
The loathsome mask has fallen, the man remains  
Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed— (III.iv. 190-194)

With Jupiter's throne vacant, mankind is able to see past the veil and is free from the dogma, superstition and tradition that bound them. However, when the Furies tear the veil, Jupiter's tyranny still permeates the world, and the truth behind the veil is that any endeavor by mankind toward good, necessarily breeds evil in its wake. The truth, which they intend to break

Prometheus' spirit with, is that evil dominates mankind, even when they do not realize it, and prohibits and crushes any hope of alleviation:

In each human heart terror survives  
The ravin it has gorged: the loftiest fear  
All that they would disdain to think were true:  
Hypocrisy and custom make their minds  
The fanes of many a worship, now outworn.  
They dare not devise good for man's estate  
And yet they know not that they do not dare. (I. 618-624)

The Furies begin their torment where it hits closest to home; Prometheus will surely lose hope and despair if he sees that even *his* gifts to mankind became tainted and have caused corruption and suffering among mankind:

Dost thou boast the clear knowledge thou waken'dst for man?  
Then was kindled within him a thirst which outran  
Those perishing waters; a thirst of fierce fever,  
Hope, love, doubt, desire—which consume him for ever. (I. 542-545)

They aim to prove to Prometheus that the gifts he bestowed upon mankind have caused mankind's fall, rather than alleviate them; or at least that the elevation of mankind has inevitably lead to its degradation as well.<sup>21</sup> By tearing the veil they reveal how mankind continues to fail in every attempt to elevate themselves and progress toward a better future. They continue to do so by showing him two specific examples that are emblematic the futility of humanitarian endeavors. The first vision the Furies show Prometheus is that of the perversion of Christ's teachings by institutionalized religion:

One came forth, of gentle worth,  
Smiling on the sanguine earth;  
His words outlived him, like swift poison

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<sup>21</sup> This reflects a common interpretation of the Promethean myth both in Antiquity and since: Mankind began in a paradisiacal state, either Biblical or natural (e.g. Rousseau's natural man), and the increase in knowledge was the cause of mankind's Fall.

Withering up truth, peace and pity. (I. 546-549)

The second is of the French Revolution and how the ideals of radicals and revolutionaries are useless when applied with force. Shelley strongly believed that violence could never solve the issue of tyranny and inequality, but only breed more violence:

SEMICHORUS I. [...]

See! a disenchanted nation  
Spirits like day from desolation;  
To Truth its state, is dedicate,  
And Freedom leads it forth, her mate;  
A legioned band of linked brothers  
Whom Love calls children—

SEMICHORUS II.

'Tis another's:

See how kindred murder kin!  
'Tis the vintage-time for Death and Sin:  
Blood, like new wine, bubbles within  
Till Despair smothers  
The struggling World, which slaves and tyrants win. (I. 567-577)

At first Prometheus has no retort or comment regarding the visions he has been shown. However, it is clear he is greatly distraught, because Ione relates:

Hark, sister! what a low yet dreadful groan  
Quite unsuppressed is tearing up the heart  
Of the good Titan (I. 578-580)

This shows the dramatic irony in the self-assured rhetoric Prometheus had when speaking to Mercury. Mercury, unable to understand Prometheus' refusal to submit, says he pities him. Prometheus responds by saying "Pity the self-despising slaves of Heaven, / Not me, within *whose mind sits peace serene*" (I. 429-430 my italics). It may have been easy for Prometheus to feel self-assured and serene while resisting the temptation of Mercury, but faced with the brutal truth

of the world, Prometheus' mind is anything but serene and composed.

Having ministered their torture, all the Furies leave except one who remains to continue to taunt Prometheus. The remaining Fury attempts to push Prometheus further into despair by drawing a parallel between the vision of Christ and the consequences of Prometheus' own actions:

Behold an emblem— those who do endure  
Deep wrongs for man, and scorn and chains, but heap  
Thousand-fold torment on themselves and him. (I. 594-596)

Prometheus then turns his attention toward Christ, laments over the suffering of mankind and advises Christ to seek the peace that is in the grave that he, being immortal, cannot find:

fix those tortured orbs in peace and death,  
So thy sick throes shake not that crucifix,  
[...]  
Peace is in the grave.  
The grave hides all things beautiful and good:  
I am a God and cannot find it there (I. 600-601, 638-640)

After Prometheus' lamentation and address to Christ, the last Fury seeks to drive home the underlying point that these visions prove:

The good want power, but to weep barren tears.  
The powerful goodness want: worse need for them.  
The wise want love, and those who love want wisdom;  
And all best things are thus confused to ill. (I. 625-628)

Prometheus is clearly disturbed by what he has witnessed, but has no rebuttal against the Furies' visions and words. The genius of the Furies' torture is that what they show Prometheus are not lies and deceit, but the tragic truth of mankind's condition. As Peter Butter points out: "The subtlety of the temptation consists precisely in its apparent reasonableness, in the fact that there really do seem to be good reasons for despair" (Butter: 178). Despite the efforts of great



thinkers and humanitarians, evil still survives and mankind's progress seems to be going nowhere slowly. Prometheus even admits that this is the case, both in his lamentation addressed to Christ, and afterwards when speaking addressing Ione and Panthea. With no argument against the Furies' torture, how does Prometheus succeed in triumphing / fending them off?

Fitting with the theme of Prometheus' regeneration, Prometheus manages to scare off the last Fury by another expression of pity:

PROMETHEUS. Thy words are like a cloud of winged snakes

And yet, I pity those they torture not.

FURY. Thou pitiest them? I speak no more! (I. 632-634)

Those, which Prometheus here claims to pity, are not those who have fallen into despair, but those who have become indifferent, ceased to care and/or have accepted the situation. These are, for example, the reactionaries in Shelley's own time, such as Coleridge, Wordsworth and Southey, who were disillusioned by the failure of the French revolution, and "ceased to dedicate themselves to humanitarian effort and supported an exploitive, corrupt system" (Cameron: 488). Prometheus (and indirectly Shelley) pities them, like he does Jupiter, because they have relinquished the freedom of their minds and, to some extent unwittingly, perpetuate a system of evil and oppression. But Prometheus has not given into apathy, and is clearly tortured by the Furies' visions. So who is the victor in this trial? The Furies succeed in torturing Prometheus, and yet this is also the reason he is successful in withstanding their torment. Because most critics view Prometheus as already reformed at this point, many view this expression of pity as just another instance in which Prometheus' regenerate state eclipses the evil he is up against: "He no longer hates, but he still feels as much abhorrence for evil as before, and he still retains faith in the ultimate triumph of good" (Butter: 179).

I would argue that Prometheus is still struggling to retain his faith and is far from being fully transformed. Although Prometheus manages to fend off the Furies, he still appears to be on the brink of despair. Except for the aforementioned groans, Prometheus has kept his composure during the Furies' trial, but as soon as the last Fury vanishes, Prometheus breaks down in anguish:

Ah woe!

Ah woe! Alas! pain, pain ever, for ever!  
I close my tearless eyes, but see more clear  
Thy works within my woe-illumed mind,  
Thou subtle tyrant! (I. 634-638)

The reiteration of the line from Prometheus' soliloquy is highly significant and gives us a clear indication of Prometheus' state of mind. Prometheus has not endured his torture without affect, and even seems to have regressed into the state of mind he was in at the beginning of the act. His words of woe are not the words of one who is able "to rule the conflicting throngs within", but rather one who is once again self-pitying and on the verge of despair. Prometheus is struggling to come to terms with what has been revealed to him, and though not completely lost, does for a moment seem dangerously close to despairing. This proves, however, to be a "passing spasm", because Prometheus quickly pulls himself together and claims:

This is defeat, fierce King, not victory.  
The sights with which thou torturest gird my soul  
With new endurance, till the hour arrives  
When they shall be no types of things which are. (I. 642-645)

Are we then to take Prometheus at his word here, and conclude that he has finally triumphed? That depends on how we define Prometheus' "victory". Prometheus has proven victorious against the temptations of Mercury and the Furies, but he still has not actually defeated Jupiter. Before the Furies' torture he was able to endure the physical pain because each day brought him closer to Jupiter's downfall. Here as well Prometheus echoes this by saying that the Furies' torture has given him more cause to endure "till the hour arrives". This hour of Jupiter's downfall is still in the undetermined future, and we cannot interpret Prometheus' declaration of victory as proof that the conditions necessary to this have been fulfilled.<sup>22</sup>

In some ways Prometheus has made significant progress in his regeneration. He is no longer blinded by hatred and as self-centered as he was in both the curse and the soliloquy. He remains defiant against Jupiter, but it is no longer out of "a sense of injured merit" or spite, but rather out of concern and pity for mankind's condition. Many critics, as we have seen, view this as enough

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<sup>22</sup> It should also be noted that Prometheus is technically not the one who *defeats* Jupiter anyway.

to interpret Prometheus as being reformed. The purpose of this chapter, however, was to show that Prometheus, although victorious in the end, was still pertinently challenged by the Furies attack. He could therefore not have been fully regenerate before this scene, or he would not have been in danger of becoming like the Furies. Neither would he have had the emotional relapse after the Furies left. Most importantly however, in order for Prometheus to restore his divinity and triumph over Jupiter, the knowledge of love's supremacy, which since his expression of pity in the soliloquy has only been intuitive, must become a full and conscious realization. The culmination of this knowledge and of Prometheus' regeneration is the topic for the next chapter.

#### **IV.vi. The Saviour and the Strength**

As has been mentioned before, there is a tendency in the critical reception of *Prometheus Unbound* to view Prometheus' conversion from hate to pity as the focal point of his regeneration. This is seen as happening either at line 53 when Prometheus claims to pity Jupiter, or at line 305 when Prometheus claims that he wishes no living thing to suffer pain. After the Furies leave him, Prometheus claims that Jupiter is defeated because the torture of the Furies has only given him all the more reason to stand defiant and wait for the destined hour. It has been my goal through the previous chapters to prove why I find it premature to view Prometheus' conversion taking place in the soliloquy or after the recalling of the curse. It is also my purpose now, to show that when the Furies leave Prometheus, and the next "scene" starts, Prometheus' divinity is still emerging.

The Earth tells Prometheus that she could feel the pain he suffered under the torture of the Furies, and it filled her with a "mixed joy" to feel his virtuous resilience against the torment. She apparently believes that he has overcome his "passing spasm" of pity after the recital of the curse, and has fully recovered his defiant stance. This is only partially true. Prometheus stood defiant against the Furies, but as has been remarked earlier, his ability to defy Jupiter has never really been under question. More importantly, however, Prometheus has in fact regressed (to a certain degree) back into feeling hopeless. His last words after the Furies left were disheartened and despairing:

The nations thronged around, and cried aloud  
As with one voice, "Truth, liberty, and love!"

Suddenly fierce confusion fell from Heaven  
Among them— there was strife, deceit, and fear;  
Tyrants rushed in, and did divide the spoil.  
This was the shadow of truth I saw. (I. 650-655)

In order for Prometheus to regain his divinity and become the champion of mankind he must learn that despite the evidence, mankind's condition is not completely hopeless. Prometheus' restoration depends on his ability to become king over himself and control "the mutiny within". In this chapter we will see how Prometheus, being shown examples of love in mankind, comes to the realization that "most vain is all hope, but love" and how this knowledge can be seen to transform him.

The Earth, believing Prometheus to have recovered his position as Jupiter's bane, decides to cheer Prometheus up by calling upon some Spirits:

To cheer thy state  
I bid ascend those subtle and fair spirits  
Whose homes are in the dim caves of human thought  
And who inhabit, as birds wing the wind,  
Its world-surrounding ether; they behold  
Beyond that twilight realm, as in a glass,  
The future— may they speak comfort to thee! (I. 657-663)

The Earth, as we have seen, is rather ignorant, and also in this instance it seems she does not understand the significance of her actions. She means only to comfort Prometheus in his perpetual torment, when in fact these Spirits are the agents of Prometheus' restoration. How this is so relies on the difference in nature between the Spirits, Prometheus, and the Furies. While torturing Prometheus, the Furies said of him:

Past ages crowd on thee, but each one remembers,  
And the future is dark, and the present is spread  
Like a pillow of thorns for thy slumberless head. (I. 561-563)

In Shelley's construction of the Prometheus figure, he has apparently discarded Prometheus'

epithet of “foresight”. For Prometheus the future is impenetrable, and while the Furies torture him with their visions of mankind’s calamity the past and the present is painful to observe. Although what they show Prometheus is undeniably the truth, they only show him one side of the coin, and Prometheus lacks the ability to know better. These Spirits, however, pervade the world through time and are able to see the future (even though the future is not strictly determined and they are only able to see it “as in a glass”). When they are called upon by the Earth to comfort Prometheus, they appear to be the angels to the Furies devils. However, unlike the Furies who actively act to corrupt and plague mankind, the Spirits are more observers of humanity. What they observe in mankind does not only serve to cheer up Prometheus, but they are able to show him another, equally valid, truth about the nature and state of mankind - namely that love is still active and unquenchable in the hearts and minds of mankind.

In order to understand the Spirit’s message of love, one must have an understanding of Shelley’s own definition of love; which does not differ from, but expands upon our common notion of love as compassion and desire. In his essay “On Love” Shelley explains that love is:

that powerful attraction towards all that we conceive or fear or hope beyond ourselves when we find within our own thoughts the chasm of an insufficient void and seek to awaken in all things that are, a community with what we experience within ourselves. If we reason, we would be understood; if we imagine, we would that the airy children of our brain were born anew within another’s; if we feel, we would that another’s nerves should vibrate to our own (R & P: 473).

He goes on to explain that this is an attraction, and consequently a bond, that exists not only between people, but also between a person and “every thing which exists” (ibid). If we are so unfortunate, as it often seemed Shelley himself was, that we cannot find any reciprocation for this “powerful attraction” in other people, we seek it in nature:

Hence in solitude, or in that deserted state when we are surrounded by human beings and yet they sympathize not with us, we love the flowers, the grass and the waters and the sky. In the motion of the very leaves of spring in the blue air there is then found a secret correspondence with our heart (R & P: 474).

It must therefore be understood that the love that the Spirits describe, and that Shelley felt to be the solution to mankind’s degradation, is a feeling of, and longing for, correspondence and community among mankind. It is not the common feeling of love which we feel toward family or a lover, nor the Christian conception of love for God, but a subtler feeling which encompasses the others, but is also a deeper need for finding common ground and similarity in others and the

world around us.

The Furies sought to prove that mankind's condition was hopeless because good intentions and humanitarian deeds "are confused to ill" (I. 628). In their examples of love, the Spirits prove that in fact not *all good things* are confused and corrupted, and that even when it seems mankind is suffering the most, love both survives and can be born out of evil as well. The first and second Spirits echo the visions of violence and warfare that the Furies related. The first explains that although uprisings, revolutions, etc. come and go with seemingly little advancement in society, the ideals of love still permeate these historical events:

There was mingled many a cry—  
Freedom! Hope! Death! Victory!  
Till they faded through the sky  
And one sound above, around,  
One sound beneath, around, above,  
Was moving; 'twas the soul of love (I. 700-705)

The second Spirit shows that even amidst war and in the face of death, mankind is capable of showing *agape* (neighborly love):

I alit  
On a great ship lightning-split  
And speeded hither on the sigh  
Of one who gave an enemy  
His plank— then plunged aside to die. (I. 718-722)

The third and fourth Spirit tell of a different way in which love survives the ages, despite whatever moral and/or intellectual set-back mankind might face. The third Spirit tells of a sage who falls asleep reading and is inspired by its wisdom written long ago:

When a Dream with plumes of flame  
To his pillow hovering came,  
And I knew it was the same  
Which had kindled long ago

Pity, eloquence and woe (I. 726-730)

Kenneth Neill Cameron suggests that this is descriptive of radical, such as William Goodwin and Thomas Paine, whose liberal philosophies were inspired by “the egalitarian and moral ideas of Socrates and Plato” (Cameron: 499). The point that can be said to have been made here by the Spirit is that even though certain wisdom and ideals seem neglected by the ages, they will still survive and be revived by new great minds who will try to do good by them. Another situation in which love is kindled in the minds of men, and can survive through the ages, is described by the fourth Spirit who speaks of a lonely poet who finds himself in the solitary situation described by Shelley in “On Love”:

Nor seeks nor finds he mortal blisses  
But feeds on the aerial kisses  
Of shapes that haunt thought's wildernesses.  
[...]  
But from these create he can  
Forms more real than living man,  
Nurslings of immortality! (I. 740-749)

The poet is able to find love in the nature around him and create poetry, which will survive after his death and inspire his readers. Through these examples the Spirits show Prometheus that despite the evil and corruption in the world, goodness and love still survive, and there is still hope for mankind.

However, when the last two Spirits enter the scene, they relate an almost disheartening observation. The Chorus of Spirits ask them if they have seen love in the world, to which they answer they have, but that “hollow Ruin yawned behind” (I. 768). They saw that throughout the world, wherever love traversed, ruin and desolation followed. The sixth Spirit tells how Desolation works subtly on human minds, so that mankind cannot see it for what it is “and call[s] the monster, Love” (I. 778). In the end, however, the Chorus tells Prometheus that although Ruin follows love through the world, and nothing can escape it, Prometheus will succeed in quelling it:

Though Ruin now Love's shadow be,  
Following him, destroyingly

On Death's white and winged steed,  
Which the fleetest cannot flee—  
Trampling down both flower and weed,  
Man and beast and foul and fair,  
Like a tempest through the air;  
Thou shalt quell this Horseman grim,  
Woundless though in heart or limb. (I. 780-788)

In this passage the Spirits admit the truth which the Furies showed Prometheus, that all human endeavor to alleviate themselves is necessarily followed by death and destruction. The fact that the "Horseman" Ruin is "woundless" pertains to Shelley's belief that oppression and injustice could not be fought with force. The evil that permeates the world is not something that can be fought, but must be *quelled*. The Spirits prophesy that Prometheus will be the one to quell the Ruin that ravages mankind, but the question remains - when and how? Prometheus proceeds to ask the Spirits: "Spirits! how know ye this shall be?" (I. 789). In Prometheus' response it is possible to see further proof that Prometheus does not yet know, and has ever known, how to defeat Jupiter. All he has known is how to be defiant, and even though he has proclaimed Jupiter's defeat, his defiance and ability to withstand both physical and psychological torture have only kept them in a stalemate. Although he does not ask explicitly, Prometheus wants the Spirits to help him understand how he can finally defeat Jupiter and alleviate mankind.

The Spirits answer Prometheus somewhat enigmatically, by explaining that they experience in the "atmosphere of human thought":

Wisdom, Justice, Love and Peace,  
When they struggle to increase,  
Are to us as soft winds be  
To shepherd-boys—the prophecy  
Which begins and ends in thee. (I. 796-800)

At first glance it would seem that the Spirits are not providing Prometheus with more of an answer than he already knows. The prophecy (of Jupiter's downfall and Good's triumph over Evil) "begins and ends" with Prometheus. The world's liberation and mankind's alleviation



began when Prometheus first decided to help Jupiter overthrow Saturn, but even more so when Prometheus gave the metaphorical gift of fire to mankind. But how will it end, and how is Prometheus to accomplish this? If we look closer at this verse a meaningful parallel seems to emerge. The prophecy, which begins and ends in Prometheus, also follows the dramatic structure of the first act of the drama. In the beginning of the drama Prometheus claimed his empire to be torture, solitude, scorn, and despair - and it has been shown that these are the vices, his moral “taints”, which he must purge. The prophecy ends when he is able to replace these with “Wisdom, Justice, Love and Peace”. These virtues, which the Spirits claim struggle to increase in mankind, have also struggled to increase in the mind of Prometheus throughout this act.

Although it would seem that Prometheus does not interpret the Spirits’ words as clearly or directly as we see here, there is no doubt that their words have had an effect on him. In his final speech in the act, we see Prometheus effectively shaking off the last feelings of compunction and completing his transformation of character:

How fair these airborne shapes! and yet I feel  
Most vain all hope but love, and thou art far,  
Asia! who when my being overflowed  
Wert like a golden chalice to bright wine  
Which else had sunk into the thirsty dust.  
All things are still—alas! how heavily  
This quiet morning weighs upon my heart;  
Though I should dream, I could even sleep with grief  
If slumber were denied not... I would fain  
Be what it is my destiny to be,  
The saviour and the strength of suffering man,  
Or sink into the original gulf of things....  
There is no agony and no solace left;  
Earth can console, Heaven can torment no more. (I. 807-820)

Prometheus has finally acquired the serenity of mind that he proclaimed to have earlier, and this is reflected in the mellow and easy tone of his rhetoric. The pinnacle of Prometheus’ regeneration is the moment of enlightenment in which he claims: “Most vain all hope but love”. On the one

hand this refers directly to Asia and her being the embodiment of love. Now she must go through a similar, albeit shorter, process of enlightenment before the destined hour of Jupiter's fall can come. That is on a practical and dramatic level, but more importantly it is this realization that enables him to rule the "conflicting throngs within". The grief that he feels at the world's suffering still weighs heavily upon him, but instead of raging against Jupiter or wallowing in self-pity, he gladly and serenely accepts his position as "the saviour and the strength" of mankind. Prometheus' physical torment has not ceased, but his own mind and attitude have changed. The Earth cannot console him, because he cannot deny the truth behind the veil that the Furies showed him. On the other hand Heaven (i.e. Jupiter and the Furies) cannot torment him, because he knows now that love is the sole hope and solution to mankind's decrepit situation. This proves that Prometheus has finally achieved "thought's empire over thought" and stilled "the mutiny within". Although he technically does not defeat Jupiter, Prometheus is victorious now in his rebellion against Jupiter's tyranny because instead of being a rebellious subordinate, he is finally king over himself. In this moment of clarity and peace, Prometheus' divinity is completely restored and he can once again be considered "the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature", which Shelley claimed him to be in the Preface.

### **III.vii. Panthea's Dream**

Although we can finally conclude that Prometheus' regeneration is complete, there is one last passage in the drama that confirms this. As aforementioned, many critics claim Prometheus' regeneration to have happened earlier in the drama. On the other hand, there are other critics (for example Woodman) who view Prometheus' restoration as prepared at this time, but do not interpret Prometheus as fully regenerate until later in the drama. I do not have strong remonstrations against these interpretations, because they include allegorical implications for Prometheus' character in connection with a broader scheme of humanity's progression toward a new golden age. In my interpretation, however, I have decided to keep strictly to the drama and Prometheus as a *dramatis persona*. I therefore propose there is clear evidence that Prometheus has, at this point in the drama, restored his divinity and completed what was necessary on his part to ensure the fall of Jupiter.

In Shelley's myth and drama, Prometheus is not the one who defeats Jupiter, nor is Jupiter's defeat solely dependent on him. The stage direction at the beginning of Act I states that "During the scene, Morning slowly breaks", and at the end of Act I Prometheus remarks that it is morning. This dawning of day is clearly metaphorical for the dawning of a new era, but is also of the transformation from a fallen character to an enlightened character, which Prometheus has gone through in this act. The metaphorical morning of a new era has broken, and Prometheus' divinity has been restored, but Jupiter stands nonetheless undefeated. In this final chapter of this analysis we will see how in the two dreams Panthea relates in beginning of Act II serve to show that on the one hand Prometheus' divinity has been restored, and on the other hand, that it is now up to Asia to continue the process of defeating Jupiter.

There is somewhat of an agreement among critics that while Asia is separated from Prometheus, her sister Panthea acts as a sort of surrogate for her and a messenger between the divine couple. Sometime between Panthea saying "Farewell!" as the last word of Act I, and her arrival in the Indian vale where Asia is impatiently waiting her arrival, Panthea has slept and dreamt two dreams. Kenneth Neill Cameron suggests we interpret Asia's impatience at Panthea's delay as evidence that Panthea regularly travels between Prometheus and Asia as an intermediary (Cameron: 511, 515). Therefore, one would expect Panthea to relate to Asia the events of the first act, but instead she tells of two dreams that she has had. The first dream recalls a vision of a radiant and regenerate Prometheus, while the second dream prompts the sisters to travel to Demogorgon's lair. Let us first shortly address the second dream, before we discuss the first, which is more important to our analysis of Prometheus' regeneration.

Of Panthea's two dreams, she can only remember the first, and we must ask ourselves what the significance of this might be? While many critics interpret both of Panthea's dreams as prophetic, I propose we consider only the second dream as prophetic. I suggest that the reason Panthea can remember the first dream is because it was a vision of something that had already happened and it is an emblematic vision of Prometheus' regeneration. Panthea is therefore able to relate the first dream to Asia, because it is as much a memory as a dream. When she first arrives in Asia's vale, she cannot remember the second dream because it was a prophetic vision of the future. However, the second dream is only momentarily forgotten, because the future foretold in that dream is soon reached and becomes the present. As it turns out, both Panthea and Asia have

had similar dreams, and as they recall them the prophetic dreams come to life and blend with the reality around them. Panthea's second dream then becomes an acting part in the drama, because it tells the sisters to "Follow, follow!" (II.i. 131), and then disappears. The echoes of the dream continue to linger and bid Panthea and Asia to follow them, and in enigmatic verse tells Asia of her coming role in Jupiter's fall:

In the world unknown  
Sleeps a voice unspoken;  
By thy step alone  
Can its rest be broken; (II.i. 190-193)

The "voice unspoken" refers to Demogorgon who is the one to actually dethrone Jupiter within the drama. However, it is up to Asia to visit him, and prove to him that the time has come for Jupiter's reign to end. I make this point about how the second dream is prophetic to support my interpretation of the first dream as an emblematic vision of what has already happened. As I mentioned, Panthea's second dream could not be remembered until the prophetic future in that dream started to become present events. Panthea's first dream however, is clear in her mind. The fact that Panthea remembers this dream so well, when she cannot remember her prophetic dream, I feels proves that this dream illustrates events that have already happened.

If we now turn to examine Panthea's first dream, we can see how her vision of Prometheus in this dream reflects the process of Prometheus' regeneration in the previous act:

[...] his pale, wound-worn limbs  
Fell from Prometheus, and the azure night  
Grew radiant with the glory of that form  
Which lives unchanged within, and his voice fell  
Like music which makes giddy the dim brain  
Faint with intoxication of keen joy:  
"Sister of her whose footsteps pave the world  
With loveliness—more fair than aught but her,  
Whose shadow thou art—lift thine eyes on me!"  
I lifted them—the overpowering light  
Of that immortal shape was shadowed o'er

By love; which, from his soft and flowing limbs,  
And passion-parted lips, and keen, faint eyes,  
Steam'd forth like vaporous fire; an atmosphere  
Which wrapped me in its all-dissolving power  
As the warm ether of the morning sun  
Wraps ere it drinks some cloud of wandering dew. (II.i. 62-78)

In this vision, Prometheus is figured as a radiant and resilient figure, whose light permeates through Panthea and the world. As aforementioned, many critics view this as a prophetic dream, signaling the awaited restoration of Prometheus' divinity. This is sometimes supported by once again seeing Prometheus' regeneration as connected to the iconographic allusions to Jesus Christ. Earl R. Wasserman, for example, finds in Panthea's dream "an elaborate assimilation of Christ's Transfiguration" (Wasserman: 298). He claims that Panthea's dream "fortells Prometheus' coming state of glory after Jupiter is removed and the titan is reunited with Asia", and that this is analogous to how when the Apostles saw Jesus upon the mountain it "prefigured his future state of glory and that of man after the Resurrection" (Wasserman: 298). The description of Prometheus as "radiant with the glory of that form / Which lives unchanged within" is, according to Wasserman, a direct reference to Jesus' "effulgence of the inner glory concealed beneath his human form" (Wasserman: 298). The comparison between Prometheus and Christ is not unjustified, but it is also not necessary to find parallels to Christ in order to understand Panthea's dream as an illustration of Prometheus' restoration of his divinity. I would argue, as I have in the previous chapter, that Prometheus has already obtained his "state of glory", i.e. the restoration of his divinity. It is precisely because he has succeeded in reclaiming his divinity, that the following events in the drama, which lead to Jupiter's downfall, can happen.

While Wasserman and other critics view Panthea's dream as prophetic, I would argue that Panthea's dream is not prophetic at all, but descriptive, albeit emblematically so. The first part of her vision refers to Prometheus' casting off of hate, vengeance and scorn and is here presented as a material change in Prometheus' figure:

his pale, wound-worn limbs  
Fell from Prometheus, and the azure night  
Grew radiant with the glory of that form

Which lives unchanged within (II.i. 62-65)

The image of Prometheus' wound-worn limbs being shed can also be seen as referring more literally to Prometheus' physical suffering, which was the primary focus of his torture until the Furies arrived, and the first part of his torture he was able to come to terms with. In the beginning of Act I, Prometheus stopped feeling sorry for himself and lamenting his everlasting pain, and started actively trying to overcome and relinquish his hatred. It was at this point that his regeneration began, and the "azure night" of Jupiter's reign began to fill with the light of Prometheus' soul. It is important to note the word "grew" here. The implied passage of time that this word indicates supports what we have observed in this analysis - that the restoration of Prometheus' divinity, like the gradual dawning of morning, developed and grew gradually throughout the previous act.

As Prometheus underwent the process of relinquishing the taints of his fallen character, the "form which lives unchanged within" was allowed to emerge and become glorious. On the surface it is easy to understand this as an image of the restoration of Prometheus' divinity. However, to better understand the implications of this line, we can once again turn to Shelley's essay "On Love". Here Shelley explains how love "tends" toward a "point" within each individual, which for lack of a better word can be called the soul:

We dimly see within our intellectual nature a miniature as it were of our entire self, yet deprived of all that we condemn or despise, the ideal prototype of every thing excellent or lovely that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man. Not only the portrait of our external being, but an assemblage of the minutest particulars of which our nature is composed:<sup>23</sup> a mirror whose surface reflects only the forms of purity and brightness: a soul within our soul that describes a circle around its proper Paradise which pain and sorrow and evil dare not overleap. (R & P: 473-474)

When the Furies were torturing Prometheus, they admitted that they "can obscure not / The soul which burns within", and it becomes clear now that Shelley meant them to be speaking of the "soul within our soul", which pain and sorrow cannot infringe upon. However, while Prometheus was fallen, and before he was able to fully restore his divinity, this soul, "which lives unchanged within" was clouded by his hate for Jupiter, his spiteful vengeance, and his self-pity and despair. Through the process of his regeneration, Prometheus succeeds in cleansing himself of these taints, replacing them with wisdom and love, and the "form which lives unchanged within" becomes

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<sup>23</sup> "These words are inefficent and metaphorical—Most words so—No help—" (Shelley's note).

gradually revealed. This form, or “soul”, which is allowed to illuminate the world, is “the ideal prototype of every thing excellent”, and with his soul cleansed of the taints from his fallen character, Prometheus’ divinity is restored and he has finally become (once again) “the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature”.

Although Prometheus’ soul is no longer obscured by the taints of his fallen character, it is still overshadowed by love:

the overpowering light  
Of that immortal shape was shadowed o'er  
By love; (II.i. 71-73)

However, this overshadowing love does not detract from Prometheus’ divinity, but amplifies it and flows through his being. In the climax of his regeneration, Prometheus acknowledged that love was the utmost power that could save him and the world from (Jupiter’s) evil. In Panthea’s dream there is also another allusion to this moment of enlightenment that Prometheus has at the end of the first act. Panthea explains that she could hear his voice, but was not able to discern the words, except Asia’s name:

I could hear  
His voice, whose accents lingered ere they died  
Like footsteps of far melody. Thy name,  
Among the many sounds alone I heard  
Of what might be articulate; though still  
I listened through the night when sound was none. (II.i. 87-92)

The fact that Panthea was only able to understand or hear Asia’s name among Prometheus’ words, alludes back to Prometheus’ proclamation: “Most vain all hope but love; and thou art far, / Asia!” (I. 808-809). Anything else Prometheus could say, either in woe or in consolation, would be in vain and unintelligible.

After hearing Panthea’s tell of her dream, Asia insists she see the dream for herself:

Thou speakest, but thy words  
Are as the air. I feel them not.... oh, lift  
Thine eyes that I may read his written soul! (II.i. 108-110)

Asia can read Prometheus' soul "written" within Panthea's eyes, and I therefore view this as yet more evidence that Panthea's dream was not prophetic. Panthea's dream provided her with a vision of the condensed accounts of what happened to Prometheus through the first act. This is confirmed by Asia's reaction upon looking in Panthea's eyes, where she sees that Prometheus is now different:

There is a change: beyond their inmost depth  
I see a shade—a shape—'tis He, arrayed  
In the soft light of his own smiles which spread  
Like radiance from the cloud-surrounded moon.  
Prometheus, it is thou—depart not yet!  
Say not those smiles that we shall meet again  
Within that bright pavilion which their beams  
Shall build o'er the waste world? (II.i. 119-126)

As Asia can see through Panthea's eyes, there is a change - a change in Prometheus and from this there will come a change in the world. Although Prometheus' corporal body is still chained and tortured, Panthea's dream shows Prometheus to be unbound in a spiritual sense. He has gone through a process of enlightenment and self-awakening, learning to stand defiant against his enemy, but also how to do so without reflecting the hatred and aggression of his antagonist. In the beginning of Act I the fallen Prometheus was consumed with self-pity, hopelessness, and despair. The regenerate Prometheus that Asia sees through Panthea's eyes is effulgent and smiling, and his smiles promise hope for the divine couple and the world. The image of Prometheus portrayed here in the beginning of Act II, is the regenerate and divine Prometheus, who can once again be described as "the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature".



## IV. Conclusion

It has been my purpose in this analysis to show that Prometheus' character development from a fallen to a resurrected state of divinity spans the whole of the first act of *Prometheus Unbound*. This interpretation challenges a common trend in the critical reception of *Prometheus Unbound*, which views Prometheus' conversion from hate to pity (and thereby his moral, intellectual, etc. reformation) as happening quickly and early in the act. In my analysis I have sought to provide evidence supporting my interpretation that Prometheus' process of regeneration was achieved through laborious efforts of the mind. In summation let us now look once again at some of the variations on this general trend and how I feel my interpretation contradicts or compliments them.

Some critics, like Milton Wilson, view the change in Prometheus' character to have initially happened off stage before the drama opens: "The act of will has already been made, and the regeneration which ultimately follows will, despite superficial appearances, simply be the revelation of a *fait accompli*" (Wilson: 47). In my analysis, I have argued that Prometheus' transformation does, to some extent, begin before the play opens in the sense that his centuries of torture have mellowed his aggressive feelings of hate and vengeance. However, the development of Prometheus' character through Act I is not the portrayal of a *fait accompli*, but rather the portrayal of both his fall and his efforts to regain his stature. The way Wilson, and others, interpret Prometheus' expression of pity in the soliloquy is to see this as proof and confirmation of Prometheus' already reformed character. As I have argued in my analysis, I interpret this declaration of pity as the instigative and intuitive moment of insight, which prompts Prometheus' following maturation of knowledge.

Similarly to Wilson, M. H. Abrams also sees the majority of Prometheus' progress to have happened off-stage. According to Abrams, the drama does not begin *in media res*, but at the narrative's conclusion. This he supports with the claim that "the reversal occurs in the opening soliloquy", in which Prometheus' degenerate attitude *suddenly dissipates* and he consequently "substitutes a unifying sentiment for the separative sentiment: pity for hate" (Abrams: 303). As I have mentioned, one must assume that Prometheus' transformation of character was building in potentiality for a long time before the drama begins. However, it has been my intention in this analysis to show that whatever change happened in Prometheus before the soliloquy was likely subconscious. When the drama opens we see a Prometheus who is near the end of his torment,

but only at the beginning of his moral and intellectual regeneration.

The idea presented by Abrams (and present in others) is that Prometheus' reformation has happened prior to the contained action of the drama, and that Prometheus' expression of pity is the climax of this process. This leads us to another aspect of this interpretive trend, which Abrams touches upon in the abovementioned quote: That Prometheus' conversion, as it is presented to us in the drama, happens abruptly and is quickly resolved. As I mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Abrams compares *Prometheus Unbound* to the "genre of universal history" and sees Shelley's Prometheus as cast in the same role as Man. However, Abrams claims that Shelley breaks with the tradition of the genre, which sees the ascension of Man's perfectibility as gradual evolution, and instead Shelley presents a Biblical solution with "a sudden, right-angled breakthrough from misery to felicity" (Abrams: 300).

I find this to be a narrow interpretation, which gravely simplifies the nuances and complexity of Shelley's character and mythopoesis. Firstly I would suggest Prometheus is perhaps more like the "protagonist" of universal history because, as I have shown in the later chapters of my analysis, it is precisely through witnessing the history and nature of mankind in a larger perspective that Prometheus is able to fully relinquish his antagonistic attitude and become the champion and savior of mankind. In addition, I have also shown, in my analysis of Prometheus' soliloquy (in particular) and the rest of the first act, Prometheus does not make a clean break with his feelings of hate and vengefulness, and struggles to relinquish them. Unfortunately, it would seem that many critics, possibly misled by Mary Shelley's comments (as mentioned in the introduction), end up focusing on the apparently abrupt change in sentiment between lines 52 and 53 at the expense of the development of the rest of the act:

Thus it requires but a small amount of self-assertion to get rid of an accident or a mere error and to attain to perfectibility. There is no purifying, developing, and enriching of the personality in the process. In fact, it can hardly be spoken of as a process, but rather as a mere instantaneous change (Rader: 107).

However, Shelley himself did not believe in the immediacy of any transformation, least so of the transformation from evil to good. Despite Peter A. Schock's claim that Shelley struggled to discriminate between revolution and evolution, it is generally accepted among critics (and fairly evident from Shelley's prose, journals, and letters) that Shelley adhered to gradualism and social evolution. In the Preface to *Laon and Cynthia* (1817), another poem in which gradual reform is

condensed for dramatic purposes, Shelley speculates: “Can he who the day before was a trampled slave, suddenly become liberal-minded, forbearing, and independent?” (Rader: 106). This is obviously meant as a rhetorical question, but the answer becomes clear, I feel, in the development of Prometheus through Act I of *Prometheus Unbound*.

As this analysis has shown, it was not enough for Prometheus to only feel pity and regret in order to resurrect his divinity. These two moments in the drama (line 53 and 305), which many critics feel mark the end of Prometheus transition from hate to love, are not the end of a cycle, but the beginning of a renewal. Carl Grabo is one critic who reads *Prometheus Unbound* in light of Shelley’s interest in Platonism and Neo-Platonism. Although he does not interpret Prometheus’ character development the way I do, he at one point brings up an interesting concept within Neo-Platonism, which I feel is applicable to Prometheus’ regeneration: “The reason achieves laboriously, if at all, the truth which intuition knows in a flash” (Grabo: 48). The truth that Prometheus knew in a flash was the recognition of pity that he felt for Jupiter, and later the love he felt in not wanting anything, including Jupiter, to suffer. These moments are sparks and glimpses of the ultimate truth of love’s power, while the conscious and complete knowledge of that truth is *achieved laboriously* by the end of the act.

Shelley’s recreation of the Prometheus myth is only a part of a larger mythology in which Shelley envisions and explores the means by which mankind can transcend its current condition of oppression and inequality and create a better future. The purpose of Act I of *Prometheus Unbound* is to show Prometheus’ mental, spiritual, and emotional unbinding, which within the universe of Shelley’s myth was the first necessary condition for the dawning of a new golden age. Through the course of this analysis we have seen Prometheus fall from grace, struggle to become king over himself, and finally succeed in reclaiming his divine nature as “the type of the highest perfection”.

As has been mentioned, the divine Prometheus, both before his fall and after his regeneration, is portrayed for the reader in the following acts. In Asia’s depiction of the events leading up to Prometheus’ binding, we are shown that Prometheus started out “impelled by the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends”. It has been my purpose with this analysis to show that in the first act of this drama, we are witness to a fallen and degenerate Prometheus who struggles to reclaim his divinity and deserve the epithet Shelley grants him in the Preface.

When Prometheus was bound, he was not only physically bound by an external force, but he bound himself emotionally and spiritually by letting himself be overcome by hatred and vengefulness. I have commented on the fact that I feel the curse has been granted an unfortunate lack of attention in the critical reception of *Prometheus Unbound*. Through a close examination of the curse we can better understand how Prometheus became a fallen god, and why it is so important for him to transcend his degenerate state. The Prometheus that is portrayed throughout the first act is not only physically bound by Jupiter, but has bound himself by succumbing to his own emotional turmoil. In the *Defence of Poetry* (1820) Shelley explores this idea of psychological binding and quotes Milton's Satan: "All things exist as they are perceived: at least in relation to the percipient. The mind is its own place, and of itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven" (R & P: 505). The degenerate Prometheus we see at the beginning of the drama, and portrayed in the recital of the curse, has bound himself more severely than Jupiter could, because he creates his own hell by claiming his empire to be of torture, solitude, scorn, and despair.

Prometheus' transformation through the first act is essentially the psychological journey he goes through to make a heaven of hell in his own mind. His physical hell is very real, and Heaven would undoubtedly be a psychological hell to him, so he must learn to find inner peace. This he accomplishes by the introspection he gains during his soliloquy, and by facing and learning the truths that are presented to him by the Furies and the Spirits. In the context of the myth, both the Furies and the Spirits are external forces that are meant to either torment or console him. At the same time they present Prometheus with a psychological and spiritual predicament, which he must work out for himself. Prometheus can view the corruption and evil in the world and despair, or he can view the hope, progress and potentiality of mankind and stay strong in his defiance of evil with the knowledge that its cycle is ending. The choice is essentially his, and it is up to Prometheus to unbind himself (emotionally and spiritually) by choosing whether he will "make of heaven a hell, or a hell of heaven". As we have seen, Prometheus does in the end succeed in restoring his divinity by cleansing his mind and soul of the destructive and inhibiting emotions that bound his potentiality as the intellectual vanguard and champion of mankind. Prometheus has finally unbound the chains he placed around himself, when he is able to fully accept that all hope is vain, except love. With this clarity of mind, Prometheus is spiritually and emotionally free. Panthea's dream vision of him confirms that he has once again become a serene, smiling

and effulgent divinity, whose light (like the metaphoric fire he once granted to mankind) can once again shine through the world.

The questions which now arises, after having confirmed that Prometheus is the divine being Shelley described him as in the Preface, are: How is this divine Prometheus portrayed in the last two acts? What are the consequences for the rest of the drama, (and even for the allegorical implications for humanity's future) that Prometheus' divinity has been restored? It is clear at the end of Act I that Prometheus' restoration is what prompts the rest of the drama's action, and most directly Asia's descent into Demogorgon's lair. Prometheus' declaration of pity and love do not directly cause the end of Jupiter's reign (despite some critics, like Baker, claiming this to be the case). Asia's quest, however, does complete the necessary preparation for Jupiter's fall. As soon as she claims that she knew in her heart all along the (enigmatic) wisdom Demogorgon relates, the destined hour of Jupiter's fall is at hand. Now that we have established that Prometheus's ultimate lesson was that of love, it remains to discover what Asia's complementary journey of enlightenment consists of, and what are the implications of this for Jupiter's fall and mankind's alleviation.

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