CHAPTER 8

Percy Shelley's Sad Exile

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This chapter examines Percy Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* as a play about exile, including how the condition remains an essential part of everyday life even after tyranny's defeat.[1] This surprising idea first comes into relief in the concluding eight lines of Act I when Panthea informs Prometheus about Asia's "scene of sad exile," an experience that only begins to take place in a remote part of the Indian Caucasus region:

> Asia waits in that far Indian vale,
> The *scene of her sad exile*; rugged once
> And desolate and frozen, like this ravine;
> But now invested with fair flowers and herbs,
> And haunted by sweet airs and sounds, which flow
> Among the woods and waters, from the ether
> Of her transforming presence, which would fade
> If it were mingled not with thine. Farewell!
> (I.824–833 [*SPP* 234–235], emphasis mine)

Contrary to what a reader or auditor might expect, these lines do not describe an exclusively dismal event. While Asia might feel forlorn in an environment that resembles the cold "ravine" where Prometheus is enchained, the scene's frigid setting has subsided in astonishing fashion: Asia's "rugged once / And desolate and frozen" surroundings have turned into a warm and inviting space. The vale's beauty abounds instead with greenery and flowers as well as sweet scents and music. According to the passage, spring's waking landscape is predicated on two phenomena. It corresponds with and reflects Asia's interior changes, while the glow that radiates her inner beauty – the "ether" – "would (also) fade / If it were mingled not with" Prometheus's own "transforming presence," a reference to the Titan's earlier decision to end his hatred and vengeance. Panthea's lines suggest, in other words, that Asia's altered interiority implicates other peoples and places beyond herself and her immediate surroundings. That is, what Shelley calls

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the "scene of sad exile" is a developing social and affective condition that involves both Asia's and Prometheus's independent and interdependent efforts, a process whose fruits take shape through and beyond the traumas of displacement and dispossession.

This chapter argues that, in addition to treating peaceful revolution, "love against revenge," "transitional justice," "unbinding forgiveness," and "radical suffering" (see James Chandler's chapter in this collection), *Prometheus Unbound* is also fundamentally about the existential and material state of exile, which neither ends nor anticipates a return to a former state or place.[2] Based on this logic, it is no wonder that the drama's major characters, alongside the human community, all evolve together from banished and alienated victims in the first two acts into agents and citizens who are actively ready to expel – to exile – social ill and antagonism as one unified society by the drama's conclusion. I therefore propose that, as a development that brings about the play's dramatic changes from complicity to collaboration, sad exile encompasses the vicissitudes and lessons from both winter and spring throughout and beyond the four acts. This ambivalent condition of literal and metaphorical modes of distancing and re-vision includes the endurance and resistance that Asia and Prometheus employ and Demogorgon ultimately embodies as the play's syncretic exilic spirit. As I show, sad exile is not a one-time removal but rather an invariable function of everyday self-inquiry and critical distancing. It is the necessary recalibration from ongoing withdrawal from Jupiter's system that will continue to ensure the redeemed society's mutually determined rewards and livelihood.

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Panthea's above-cited description of Asia's "scene" sums up the drama's overall narrative arc because her lines simultaneously recall the early state of pervasive tragedy as much as forecast the liberated condition of the future world. The evolution detailed in this critical passage thus appears to depend heavily on the word "sad," a term whose archaic usages would have permitted Shelley such flexibility.[3] In addition to its traditional meaning of being sorrowful, the adjective "sad" denotes a condition of being "settled, established in purpose […] steadfast" and "strong, firm, standing fast, esp. in battle."[4] As Panthea suggests, this exilic journey, which extends well beyond the drama's four acts, is bittersweet. Despite the eventual arrival of spring and "fare[ing] well," the final phrase of Act I, the path is neither easy nor effortless. It demands endurance, since Asia must "wait" in the cold and desolated valley.[5] It also requires "investment" and sacrifice, as Panthea informs us. In the end, the "spring" state of things will remain "haunted by sweet airs and sounds," a phrase that,

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like sad exile, signals its ambivalent registers. To be "haunted" could mean visited habitually, but its more gothic sense, which could include the presence of distracting or troubling ghosts or other disembodied spirits (potentially from times past, present, or future), cannot be dismissed.

To appreciate the protracted evolution and multivalence of sad exile in *Prometheus Unbound*, one must recognize that Shelley opens his mythic retelling in two important ways. The first is through depicting a fallen universe in a conventional state of exile. When the curtain rises, the whole world has already been suffering through the harsh winter under Jupiter's oppressive system, as the major characters have been physically banished, including Demogorgon who resides in isolation in the earth's dark depths. As we already know, Asia has been displaced to a remote, frigid valley of the Indian Caucasus region, presumably near the Hindu Kush mountain range.[6] At center stage in the opening act is Prometheus who has been exiled from heaven and subsequently suffers in chains in a frozen mountainous landscape. As a consequence of a beleaguered world where arbitrary power, rage, revenge, and retribution exist, humans are also sick and hungry. They dwell in deserted islands and dark caves, a representation through which Shelley recalls the state of ignorance from Plato's famous allegory in *The Republic*. We learn that, as Jupiter's "alternating shafts of frost and fire" have made "shelterless […] pale human tribes [retreat to] mountain caves" (II.iv.53–54 [*SPP* 248]), the natural world's disorder has caused rising ocean tides that have left "foodless men *wrecked* on some oozy isle" (II.iii.46 [244], emphasis mine).

Compounding the experience of these involuntary removals is the spiritual and emotional desolation caused by Jupiter's abandonment of his adherents. In Act II, when Asia memorably details to Demogorgon the history of injustice and oppression, she wonders who or what has caused this forsakenness. "Who made that sense," she ponders (in an echo of Shelley's earlier lyric, "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty"), that "leaves this peopled earth a solitude / when it returns no more?" (II.iv.12, 17–18 [*SPP* 247]). Asia later connects this neglect to exile explicitly, asking Demogorgon how man has become "the *wreck* of his own will, the scorn of the Earth, / The outcast, the abandoned, the alone?" (II.iv.103–105 [249], emphasis mine). At the end of Act I, moreover, we learn that the world's spirits of beauty and harmony have been figuratively sequestered in "homes [that] are the dim caves of human thought" (I.659 [230]). Since humans have been separated from the muses, the mind has also been wrecked under tyranny.

In the tragic world beset by all these literal and metaphorical "wrecks" of exile, such experiences might be agonizing yet not futile. The effects

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of sorrow's pervasiveness in these first two acts resemble the association that Edward Said later makes between exile and Wallace Stevens's phrase, "a mind of Winter" (from Stevens's "The Snow Man"); despite the characters' misfortune, they have developed "something" out of winter's "nothingness," a contradiction Stevens makes evident through doubling the negatives in his short lyric.[7] For Said, exile is no doubt a "crippling sorrow"; yet, in acknowledging that its "essential *sadness* can never be surmounted," Said appears aware of the experience's double-edged nature, especially since he later dwells in his meditation on exile's recuperative, if difficult, "achievements."[8] Although the rhetoric of nostalgia in *Prometheus Unbound* may, for instance, heighten the collective feeling of suffering, it also stresses the co-extensiveness of time and toleration. In what Stuart Curran has described as the play's "limbo of agony" and "promise not fulfilled but forestalled," the characters yearn for the state of love and wisdom that they once lived, which unexpectedly yields the relief brought about by waiting and longing (I.185; I.252–253 [*SPP* 215, 217]).[9] The Earth (Prometheus's mother) laments its present state of barrenness and error, recalling Prometheus's birth as a hopeful sign to humankind and finding joy in Jupiter's curse.[10] Later, amid the harsh, frozen environment in Act II, Asia desires the warmth of springtime, likening these wishes to "the memory of a dream / Which is now *sad* because it hath been sweet" (II.i.7–9 [235], emphasis mine). Having experienced the sweetness might accentuate the anguish of spring's absence, but it cannot discount the power of the recollection's vividness. The memory is at once painful and productive. As the "King of / sadness" himself, Prometheus may very well set the play's overall ambivalent tone, announcing early in the first act that he has no choice but to "endure" (I.24 [210]). Despite his continued suffering, he is ultimately able to recognize his own errors, including his part in having kept the world in its miserable condition.

These Shelleyan/Saidian mixed understandings, which tie winter's material conditions together with existential endurance, also speak to what I see as Shelley's second intention with the drama's opening. Indeed, the tragic state with which the play begins lays the groundwork for an intentional methodology tied to Shelley's retelling of the Promethean story, one that engages with and adapts several literary sources that are – unsurprisingly – all narratives of exile. These include the classical and "modern" Promethean myths, the history of Demogorgon's portrayal across centuries, the Book of Genesis, Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's epistolary novel, *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (all discussed later in the chapter).

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Through modifying these accounts, Shelley strategically transforms only those particular plot elements that would fruitfully align with a sustainable revolution predicated on a reimagined and redemptive exilic condition, one in which the disenfranchised reclaim and retain their grounding and well-being.

A few years before Shelley wrote *Prometheus Unbound*, he and Lord Byron took a tour of the French-Swiss landscapes made famous by Rousseau's epistolary novel, *Julie*.[11] On July 12, 1816, Shelley wrote a letter to Thomas Love Peacock, reporting on his travels as well as his experience with the book, identifying Meillerie, a French town near Lake Geneva, as the site of the "well-known *scene* of St. Preux's visionary exile" (*Letters* I: 483, emphasis mine).[12] Reading *Julie* for the first time, Shelley developed admiration for what Mary Shelley later characterized as St. Preux's "abnegation of self" and "worship he paid to Love."[13] To recall this moment in Rousseau's adaptation of the medieval legend of the tutor, Peter Abelard, and his pupil and mistress, Héloïse, St. Preux (Julie's former tutor and lover) returns to the French town of Meillerie following ten years of separation from Julie, a period during which she, in honoring her father's wishes and repressing her true love for St. Preux, had instead married someone from her own aristocratic circle (Monsieur de Wolmar). Toward the end of the book, the benefits of St. Preux's sabbatical have become clear. Despite his profound heartache, he managed to resist temptations of suicide, while also suppressing his longings to "penetrate" Julie's bedroom chamber and to "reunite the two halves of [their one] being."[14] Through his decade-long opportunity for self-reflection, St. Preux affirms in the end that his "keen agitations began to take another [more auspicious] course" because his "emotion overcame despair."[15] For him, the span of several years and his deliberate physical removal from his former familiar settings helped him negotiate the codes and expectations of his stratified society, since the difference in his and Julie's classes prevented the lovers from being together. While Shelley's plot will remove such hierarchical injustices altogether, the hard lessons of St. Preux's endurance and self-sacrifice make up some of *Prometheus Unbound*'s fundamental features. In Shelley's hands, the "scene of St. Preux's visionary exile" – one individual's persistence through his lamentable and unjust circumstances – sets the stage for the drama's ambitious "sad scene" of global emancipation.

Shelley's reading of *Paradise Lost* resonates indeed with his ambivalent treatment of Rousseau's novel. In Milton's adaptation of the Book of Genesis, which has divided the cosmos between good and evil, Satan and his minions create their exilic domain in Hell, having revolted against

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God's omnipotent power in heaven.[16] In Book V of the epic, Raphael relates the story of Satan's revolt to Adam, describing his personal storytelling as an onerous undertaking, a "sad task and hard."[17] Later, in Book VI, Raphael reemploys the same sense of the adjective as a description for Satan's stubborn and aggressive pursuits. During the second major battle between Heaven and Hell, after Satan and his army of devils have retreated, Zophiel informs his fellow angels that Hell's rebel army has returned to resume its combat:

> Arme, Warriors, Arme for fight, the foe at hand,
> Whom fled we thought, will save us long pursuit
> This day, fear not his flight; so thick a Cloud
> He comes, and settl'd in his face I see
> Sad resolution and secure[18]

Zophiel urges the angels to prepare for battle because Heaven's "foe," Satan, whom they had believed to have fled, has unexpectedly returned ready to fight. In reading Satan's "settl'd" demeanor, the angel detects the determination that the final two lines reinforce with their alliterative patterning. Of course, Zophiel employs "sad" as a double entendre; Satan's unyielding position against Heaven is partly responsible for one of the most famous and tragic banishments of all, the expulsion of humankind from Eden.

Shelley overtly lauds Milton's devil's intransigence in the preface to *Prometheus Unbound* as well as in *A Defence of Poetry*, even as he concedes that Satan's "ambition, envy, revenge, and […] desire for personal aggrandizement" have tarnished what might have otherwise been hell's redeeming revolution (*SPP* 207). Shelley thus appears to invest his own ambivalence for Satan as a heuristic within the play's recuperative and re-visionary objectives. When the first act opens to a state of oppositional and partisan politics between Jupiter and Prometheus for which the entire world suffers, Shelley has clearly modeled Prometheus's wrath and hatred for Jupiter on Satan's. As Madeleine Callaghan has pointed out, Prometheus is initially a "Satanic double" delivering "Satanic rhetoric," effectively mirroring his source of inspiration (Satan) as much as his enemy (Jupiter).[19] While Jupiter fills "this world of woe" with his antipathy, Prometheus has become complicit; like Satan (and Jupiter), he is "eyeless in hate" (I.283 [*SPP* 218]; I.15 [210]). Defiant, wrathful, and vengeful, he curses Jupiter, while delighting in his foreknowledge that the tyrant will eventually be overthrown. In response, Prometheus becomes Jupiter's victim of "torture and solitude / scorn and despair" through a bipartite structure that keeps the world in its static, frigid, and sorrowful state

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(I.14–15 [210]). Nevertheless, despite the suffering, the difficulties have not been altogether vain. As the first act shows, the Titan has mastered the art of being and becoming *steadfast* in the spirit of Milton's devil, even if the ends of Satan's – and Prometheus's – "sad resolution" must be changed.

Behind the Miltonic reimagining of religious and exilic divisiveness is, of course, Dante Alighieri's fourteenth-century epic, *The Divine Comedy*, a narrative from which Shelley also draws in various ways. Perhaps most apparently, Dante's poem has transformed its author's own tragic political exile from Florence into a poetic tale of emancipation. The Italian epic's plotline from exilic victimhood to victory, its reconfiguration of one person's tragedy in banishment into entirely new collective possibilities, is a central feature for Shelley because Dante does not, in fact, track a return to an original (Florentine) homeland. Nevertheless, Shelley took exception to the story of Christian redemption and communion with God in heaven, especially since Dante imagined his epic in part as an expression of vindictiveness. After all, he placed his political opponents throughout the varying layers of hell: in perpetual states of non-redemptive displacement and suffering. In his drama, however, Shelley adapts these key Dantean exilic motifs by conceiving a secularized and inclusive space of difference where living in a liberated state means existing outside the constraints of any one specified doctrinal or denominational order.

Yet, for Shelley, the literary legacy of hate, wrath, and vengeance does not stem exclusively from either *Paradise Lost* or *The Divine Comedy*. The problematic aspects of this archive date much further back to the ancient origins of the Promethean myth itself. According to *Prometheus Unbound*'s preface, Shelley criticized the myth as told by Aeschylus, who based much of his work on Hesiod's earlier version.[20] In Shelley's view, Aeschylus's account of the reconciliation between the "Champion (Prometheus) with the Oppressor of Mankind (Jupiter)" reinforced rather than resolved the problem of tyranny (*SPP* 206). Specifically, Shelley condemned how, in Aeschylus's version, Prometheus's disclosure of Zeus's imminent downfall allows the tyrant to retain his arbitrary power. What Shelley does not explain in his preface, however, is that at the heart of the classical Greek myth's plot lies a cyclical history of overthrows and exiles. In both Hesiod's and Aeschylus's versions, three generations of gods (led by Uranus, Kronos, and Zeus respectively) struggle for power; in each case, the conquered deities end up banished to Tartarus, the lowest and darkest level of the universe (located beneath even Hades). Tartarus becomes the site of exile not only for Uranus and the overthrown Titans but also for Prometheus as a consequence of his disobedience of Zeus.[21] According to this cyclical

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usurpation of power and sovereignty, exile begets exile through a continual series of downfalls and depositions. The intergenerational trauma of the myth persists, in fact, through Shelley's era with Promethean adaptations produced by many of his contemporaries, including Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Lord Byron, and his wife, Mary Shelley, all of whom depict the Titan as a defiant rebel against authority.[22] In the end, retellings of the myth across the millennia retained their exilic logic, especially in attending to the destructive partisan divisiveness at each of the narratives' core.

In reconceiving the Promethean accounts of his predecessors and contemporaries, Shelley seems to ask what might be gained when revenge and retribution are dropped from consideration. How do exilic subjectivity and intersubjectivity, in other words, retain their spirit of resistance, defiance, and disavowal without turning to the destructive, violent, and vengeful ends exhibited by Satan and the Titanic and Olympian deities? How might the collective mind of winter, even after experiencing all its sufferings and injustices, redirect the Dantean vindication of victimhood, the visionary endurance and self-sacrifice of St. Preux, and the virtues of Satanic survival and resolve toward achieving a truly common good? According to the drama's reconceptualized plot, moving beyond the impasses of the first two acts must involve thinking critically about the past and the present, as Asia and Prometheus must do in the spirit of their own author reimagining his chosen literary sources. The structure of *Prometheus Unbound* thus relies so fixedly on its reconceptualized "scene of sad exile" because this ongoing act removes the world repeatedly from the deleterious conditions that plague it. This shift from complicity to productive mutuality necessitates various forms of physical and metaphorical removal, resulting from the insightful, if difficult, re-visions of error that accompany the new world's long-term commitments.

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In keeping with the principles of collaborative withdrawal from Jupiter's tyranny, Prometheus's methodical distancing occurs with the help of those around him. The Earth has permitted him, for instance, to witness a former version of himself when the Phantasm of Jupiter reenacts Prometheus's earlier curse. From both a spatial and a temporal removal, he can finally "recall" his malediction by both remembering as much as retracting his hasty words, as scholars have contended (I.59 [*SPP* 211]).[23] When Prometheus can "see" his blindness, as it were, he is able to acknowledge his errors and his accountability. His *re-vision* leads to his change of heart and desire that "no living thing […] suffer pain" (I.304–305 [218]).[24] From this literal

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and figurative distance can Prometheus then shift his attention and effort further away from the tragic impasse with which he has been complicit. Callaghan has described this critical change as the shift from "Satanic rhetoric into Promethean poetry," and, more recently, Merrilees Roberts has theorized it as the disjunction between the "first" Prometheus and "second" Prometheus of the play, who is "both connected to and distanced from his prior self."[25] Through this process, Prometheus retreats far enough to recall/retract his hate but not his "resolution" toward attaining the drama's reformative ends.

Asia's simultaneous transformation, which involves her literal voyage to the depths of the earth and a metaphorically painful journey into the recesses of her psyche, unfolds similarly to Prometheus's.[26] During her introspective and mostly one-sided exchange with Demogorgon, she becomes as wrathful as the Titan does in Act I. When she meditates on the history of the "struggling world" – a "world pining in pain" – she exclaims "curses shall drag [Jupiter] down" (I.577 [*SPP* 227]; II.iv.29–30 [247]). In her transition out of this rage, Asia must, like Prometheus, directly face her past in a communal and dialogical setting, which includes in her case the immediate physical presence of Panthea and Demogorgon and the distant link to Prometheus and his community of supporters. In this assembly of near and far, she is able to recount what Kate Singer has called "revolutionary trauma," displaying the personal and interpersonal difficulties of working through the past.[27] As Singer has argued, "Asia's affect, her receptivity, and inquisitiveness stand as the inverse of Jupiter's colonizing aggression, and these qualities locate her outside the patriarchal history."[28] Like Prometheus, she will reach outside the Jupiterian system from the outside: her reflections have allowed her, as the allegorical embodiment of love, to rise above "all things [which, in fact,] are subject but eternal Love," a force that has also guided her toward knowledge and freedom (II.iv.120 [250]). Her exile turns from visionary to revisionary – from complicity to collaboration – when her grand exit becomes a joint *uprising* against tyranny, a *rising from* the wintry fallen condition, and a *rising toward* a continually transforming world.

Yet even as Asia and Prometheus withdraw from former selves and systems, these disavowals in the drama do not yield easy narrative shifts to fecundity and bliss. Instead, the work of liberation must persist, as Panthea predicts early on during the "scene of sad exile" passage. Asia's success must be ongoing because it depends on her and her counterpart's "transforming presence[s]," a process reinforced during Shelley's depiction of the avalanche's formation and discharge in Act II. According to this oft-cited passage, the literal route out of winter's stasis and misery, which will

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bring injustice, oppression, banishment, and desolation to their end, does not leave winter behind:

> Hark! the rushing snow!
> The sun-awakened avalanche! whose mass,
> Thrice sifted by the storm, had gathered there
> Flake after flake, in heaven-defying minds
> As thought by thought is piled, till some great truth
> Is loosened, and the nations echo round,
> Shaken to their roots, as do the mountains now.
> (II.iii.36–42 [*SPP* 244])

In these lines that scholars typically read as metaphor for political revolution, the snowy mountaintop recalls the landscapes of the unredeemed world once inhabited by Asia and Prometheus.[29] A figure for "mass" uprising, the avalanche forms slowly yet steadily, expanding its size physically through "flakes" and figuratively through "thoughts." The three marks of exclamation in the first two lines, along with the numerous enjambments, evoke the momentum of "heaven-defying minds" whose intractable force causes radical change – quite literally as roots are shaken (II.iii.39–40 [244]). Colin Jager has brought this passage into conversation with Shelley's "Mont Blanc," arguing for the social power that is "put into motion through the accretion of bodies that like snowflakes eventually become more than the sum of their parts."[30] Indeed, this onslaught will give way to the triumph of human will over victimhood and oppression. At the same time, the lines emphasize the fact that such "sun-awakened" cooperative action will repurpose rather than dismiss the lessons of winter altogether.

In practical terms, winter in the play becomes associated with the hardships and oppositions that simply will not go away. Prometheus might apologize and remove himself from an oppressive stalemate and system, yet he must still undergo the torment inflicted by the Furies, who, fittingly enough, take advantage of his removed, panoptic perspective that enables him to witness disturbing yet illuminating visions of Christ's crucifixion and the bloody French Revolution. Likewise, Asia's emergence from darkness, which has freed her from her solipsistic self-reflexivity at the volcanic depths, also involves its haunting dimensions. Though she reaches the "Cloud on the Top of a snowy Mountain" on her beautiful chariot, a "ghastly charioteer" accompanies her, as "darkness […] / Shall wrap in lasting night heaven's kingless throne" (*SPP* 252; II.iv.144, 148–149 [251]). The simultaneity of this representation aligns with the play's broader ambivalent spirit, the "long labours" of repeated resistance that will carry over into the new world (II.iv.173 [252]). Accordingly, the kind of critical

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self-inquiry and conditioning that Asia and Prometheus have learned and exhibited – those haunting processes that remove us from our own worst selves and our intergenerational traumas – can never go away if breaking with historical cycles remains a priority.

What I am proposing is that Shelley offers a methodology for encountering everyday hardship (even after the play's many transformations) by turning the exilic condition on its head, an inversion that is perhaps best understood through the depiction of Demogorgon across all four acts. Demogorgon is, I suggest, the play's syncretic exilic spirit, and its representation draws, in quintessential Shelleyan fashion, on yet another extensive literary tradition dating back to the classical age. Asia's first encounter with Demogorgon in Act II is consistent with Shelley's myth-making tactics, recalling works by Lucan, Boccaccio, Edmund Spenser, and Milton in which the spirit is typically consigned to the dark depths of an abyss.[31] According to its etymological roots, the "people's monster," Demogorgon initially reflects the alienated and tragic state of the greater populace – the pervasively fallen condition of which Asia's and Prometheus's experiences are also part. Pent in its cave, Demogorgon sits on the "remotest throne" of the earth in the "grey, void Abysm" (II.iii.61; II.iii.72 [*SPP* 245]). As we later learn in Act IV, Shelley describes Demogorgon's separation through the figure of a curtain. "Cover[ing] our being and darken[ing] our birth," the symbolic veil had concealed the light of truth and knowledge (IV.56–60 [271]).[32] Unsurprisingly, Demogorgon's pit of exile becomes associated with a conglomeration of problematic images in the play – dim caves, vacant spaces, precarious abysses – a tropological convergence that brings the world's passive and torpid state, as it were, into relief.[33]

Yet in keeping with Shelley's sequence of re-vision, Demogorgon's position changes alongside Asia's and Prometheus's transformations. Following the flight from its "vacant throne" in the lower depths, the spirit becomes the symbolic gatekeeper of new communal virtues, as exile has changed at last from a passive to an active state (III.i.21 [*SPP* 256]). Indeed, the victims of oppression and misrule have become the new world's victors through the success born out of the principles of methodical change. As Demogorgon informs us, "Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance" should continuously "seal" or "bar […] the pit over destruction's strength" (IV.562–564 [285]).[34] The "sceptreless […] uncircumscribed […] unclassed, tribeless, and nationless" community that adheres to these values will fend off its counterforces, especially since it can still "fall into imperfection," as Jeffrey Cox has argued, "even

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into tyranny, the moment we believe we have found an ideal state rather than perpetual reform" (III.iv.194–195 [269]).[35] Demogorgon symbolizes this protective force, and, in accordance with such self-preservationist practices, has peacefully removed the former sovereign to a site of metaphorical exile. The metonym for all things harmful and antithetical, Jupiter must be constantly disavowed or, to use Shelley's language, "unregarded," in order to keep at bay those ills associated with the former world, including hatred, vengeance, violence, and, perhaps most importantly, lack of critical self-distance (III.iv.179 [268]).

Alongside Demogorgon's tectonic displacement, which signals the shift toward communal empowerment, Asia and Prometheus transition to an alternative site and state of exile themselves as they withdraw symbolically to their reimagined Platonic cave in Act III. In their removed space, they repeatedly make art and love, producing "Painting, Sculpture, and rapt Poesy, / And arts […] yet to be" (III.iii.55–56 [*SPP* 260]). They help to generate "the discourses of science, of imaginative wonder, and of social and psychological anatomy" because of the rigor to which they commit, especially since they "search with looks and words of love, / For hidden thoughts each lovelier than the last" (III.iii.55–56 [260]).[36] As a result of their efforts, Asia and Prometheus are able to shut out "evil and error" simultaneously (III.iii.62 [260]). To no surprise, "man grows wise and kind" through these activities because "such virtue has the cave and place around" (III.iii.61–63 [262]). What is especially significant about this creative process, which removes things ill through the cultivation of things agreeable, is that the system sustains itself through the insights and protections that the distance of exile has afforded. Through their world-building industry, that is, Asia and Prometheus actively practice what Demogorgon has professed in principle.

By Act IV, then, it becomes evident that the measures and pleasures of the cave now function as the model for the greater world's successes. In symbolic fulfillment of Act I's prophetic "scene of sad exile" on which this chapter has dwelt, Panthea returns by the drama's closing act to offer another signature view of things from afar. Describing the intricacies of the new world – through a re-vision that she meaningfully acquires in a "wood of sweet *sad* thoughts" – she details a society that works together to expunge "evil and error" (IV.201 [*SPP* 275], emphasis mine). Such a collaborative community is, according to Panthea, like "ten thousand orbs" that make up one vast orb of varied colors and sizes – all of which spin, or "whirl," independently and in tandem (IV.241 [276]; IV.246 [277]). This "dynamic and differentiated totality," as William Keach has suggested, creates its ever-whirling motion through

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what Panthea calls the orbs' "inter-transpicuous" or inter-translucent relationality (IV.246 [277]).[37] The kaleidoscopic social body runs not only by remaining both clear and open but also through a "self-destroying swiftness," which indeed privileges the inclusive communal body above the individual. In the service of the common good, the previous sites of tragic exile (what once existed as dark, vacant caves and abysses where Demogorgon formerly resided) have evolved into active and purposeful spaces.[38] Withdrawing from their own damaging and solipsistic versions, the orbs lay themselves bare through the ongoing process of adjustment: the arduous effort through which the internal and external ultimately reflect one another (IV.249 [277]). As Demogorgon articulates by the final lines, hope is not tied to far-off fantasy but rather to transforming desire into reality continuously: "to hope till Hope creates / From its own *wreck* the thing it contemplates" (IV.573–574 [286], emphasis mine). Hope is directly connected to the play's methodology of action and possibility – linked back to those winters and "wrecks" of exile that are indelibly woven into the new Promethean model of freedom. Panthea's cosmic imaginings thus highlight how the revolution that realizes things like art, love, and justice must persist in the most literal and figurative of senses. Each orb must continue turning (out) by re-turning to those original traumas and wrecks, yet the individual and collective fruits of doing so, of fending off those antithetical forces, make the struggle worthwhile.

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In *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley has grounded his play's celebratory outcome on a historically punitive condition that has turned *outside in*, demonstrating how the ever-"revolutionizing" state draws from the records, knowledge, and experiences of the past and the present. As I have suggested, Shelley adapts his predecessors' and contemporaries' narratives of dislocation and loss, thereby putting the play's purported methodology of re-vision into practice firsthand. According to the drama's defamiliarized state of exile, the ever-new society's citizens overcome their tragic conditions through a preservationist dialectical model not unlike the Hegelian understanding of *Aufhebung* or sublation, which links surmounting obstacles and challenges with the willful gains of such empirical knowledges. In the twentieth century, several French philosophers, including Georges Bataille, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Maurice Blanchot, all drew on Hegel's ideas in order to theorize notions of ideal community in defense of Marxist and Communist principles. Even though they disagreed to a large extent about the particulars of such a society, they all

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explore the germane notion of "ecstasy": the literal idea of standing outside oneself – *ex-stasis* – in the "rapturous" service of privileging and promoting the collective body. That is, a community will form at the convergence of beings who have moved literally and metaphorically toward one common position and purpose. In Nancy's words specifically, community is the "being-ecstatic of Being itself";[39] it is "ecstatic consciousness" where "consciousness *of* self turns out to be outside the self of consciousness."[40] In his later treatise, *Being Singular Plural*, Nancy also argues that the essence of ontology is community: being is "being with"; singularity is plurality in the social state generated through vulnerable exposures and unveilings.[41] I highlight these complex metaphysical notions to suggest that Bataille and his followers might have also done well to draw on Shelley's "ecstatic" ontological framework. This is because, in his drama especially, Shelley elaborates on an evolving exilic condition to theorize how the avalanches of constant change, the "self-destructive" rewards of laying oneself bare, also yield those very privileges of being, as well as becoming, with.

While *Prometheus Unbound* stresses the radical power and privilege of separations created by time and space, those possibilities of seeing things fresh and anew in the world, the play's inspiring visions appear in tension with some of its author's own personal decisions. After all, Shelley lived in an "age of exile" and, despite his egalitarian reconceptualizations of Dante's, Milton's, and Rousseau's ideas, remained surprisingly quiet about one of the saddest and cruelest of exiles that occurred in his lifetime, the African slave trade.[42] Yet, as Amanda Blake Davis has recently and persuasively contended, "*Prometheus Unbound* strives […] to implicate the reader in its unbinding of hierarchical constructs."[43] Given the drama's engagement with and adaptation of artistic materials across the centuries, the play seemingly passes those same powers of re-vision down the generations. At minimum, then, we ought to acknowledge Shelley's ironic silences in light of the forced mass displacements in his day. At the same time, we might heed many of the drama's insights about attaining meaningful and lasting change, including but not limited to the power of going beyond the ambitions of one visionary exile; navigating our personal traumas with the support of others; acknowledging one's mistakes and complicity; and working tirelessly toward social freedom and equality. As we further interrogate the work that Shelley considered to be his greatest, we might recall that he grounded all these consequential messages on his most sophisticated understanding of a condition that he variously imagined, portrayed, and experienced throughout most of his life.[44] For the glorious evolutions and revolutions of *Prometheus Unbound* ultimately

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depend on the drama's ever-transformative "scene" through which we conjure the ghosts and wrecks of the past in order to re/turn our contemplations into the reality of the coming world.

Notes

1 I wish to thank Kate Singer for her careful attention to this essay's many iterations. I am also grateful to several others who have given me their suggestions over the years. This chapter has indeed taken shape through the very idea it discusses, especially through the opportunities that temporal and spatial distances have granted.

2 David Bromwich, "Love against Revenge in Shelley's Prometheus," *Philosophy and Literature* 26.2 (2002), 239–259; Colin Jager, "Transitional Justice in *Prometheus Unbound*," *The Workshop* 4 (2016), 26–31; Alexander Freer, "Unbinding Forgiveness: *Prometheus Unbound*," *European Romantic Review* 33.5 (2022), 697–711.

3 Shelley wrote the first act of *Prometheus Unbound* from his exile in Italy shortly following the death of his daughter, Clara. Naturally, while expanding the word's interpretive limits, he also employs the term "sad" in its conventional sense. See Stuart Curran, "Romanticism Displaced and Placeless," *European Romantic Review* 20.5 (2009), 637–650, 647.

4 Definitions two and three are taken from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed. These specific uses of "sad" went obsolete in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

5 For an alternative reading of Asia's more instantaneous and necessary transformation, see Kelvin Everest, "'Mechanism of a Kind Yet Unattempted': The Dramatic Action of *Prometheus Unbound*," *Durham University Journal* 54.2 (1993), 237–245.

6 See Joseph Raben, "Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*: Why the Indian Caucasus?" *Keats-Shelley Journal* 12 (1963), 95–106.

7 Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile," *Granta* 13 (Autumn 1984), 159–172, 172; Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954), 9–10.

8 Said, "Reflections on Exile," 159. Emphasis mine.

9 Stuart Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 199.

10 Mildred Sloan McGill, "The Role of Earth in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*," *Studies in Romanticism* 7.2 (1968), 117–128.

11 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie, or the New Heloise: Letters of Two Lovers Who Live in a Small Town at the Foot of the Alps*, trans. Phillip Stewart and Jean Vaché, in *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, Volume 6, eds. Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly (Hanover: Dartmouth College, 1997).

12 Shelley's visit to the scene is recounted in detail by Mary Shelley's *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* (1817). For further discussion on the subject, see Monika Lee,

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Rousseau's Impact on Shelley: Figuring the Written Self (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1999).

13 Mary Shelley, *Notes to the Complete Poetical Work of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Auckland: The Floating Press, 2010), 83.

14 Rousseau, *Julie*, 75–76.

15 Rousseau, *Julie*, 428.

16 In contrast to the biblical fall, in which mankind brings about its own exile from paradise, humans in *Prometheus Unbound* are victims of the social ill introduced by Saturn. Saturn (Kronos) "refused / the birthright of [human] being, knowledge, and power" (II.iv.38–39 [*SPP* 248]). He also deprived humans of "the skill […] the thought / Which pierces this dim Universe like light, / Self-empire, and majesty of love" (II.iv.40–42 [248]). By removing human independence (self-empire) and knowledge, Saturn created darkness across minds, which eventually made humans vulnerable to Jupiter's wrath.

17 John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Gorgon Teskey, Norton Critical Edition, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2021), V.564.

18 Milton, *Paradise Lost*, VI.537–541.

19 Madeleine Callaghan, "Shelley and Milton," in Michael O'Neill, Anthony Howe, and Madeleine Callaghan, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 478–494, 486.

20 Hesiod, *Theogony and Works and Days: A New Translation by M. L. West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). The Promethean story's earliest version dates back to Hesiod's *Theogony* (eighth century BCE), which describes the Titan as a trickster deity. Approximately three centuries later, Aeschylus turned the popular story into an elaborate dramatic trilogy, of which only its first part, *Prometheus Bound* (fifth century BCE), survives.

21 Hesiod's *Theogony* describes how Uranus (Heaven), the primordial god of the sky, exiles his children to "misty Tartara" out of fear that they would eventually overthrow him (6). Shortly after this expulsion, Kronos (Saturn), one of Uranus's sons, returns from banishment to overpower his father, castrating and exiling him instead into the darkness. Heaven's children, the Titans (including Prometheus), thereby rise to power, as Kronos becomes the predominant deity of the cosmos. Yet this generation, too, will succumb to the curse of Uranus. In Hesiod's account, Zeus decides to banish the Titans, just as their father Uranus had done, and they are "hidden away down in the misty gloom […] in a place of decay, at the end of the vast earth" (24–25). A few centuries later, Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound* describes the exile of the Titans quite similarly, adding how Prometheus plays a significant role in this dramatic event by participating not as an aide to his fellow Titans but to the Olympians. In one address to the Chorus, Prometheus tells how his own "strategy" sent "archaic Kronos and all his allies" to the "black hole of Tartaros," helping Zeus only after the Titans, believing in their power of might over knowledge, refused their brother's help (ll. 325–329). By the end of the play, Prometheus refuses to yield the secret knowledge of Zeus's downfall – information possessed only by him – and is himself cast down to "Tartaros." According to Prometheus's secret knowledge, Zeus's marriage to Thetis will cast the supreme deity "out of His throne and His

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tyranny" and he will "end up nowhere" (ll. 1397–1398). Aeschylus. *Prometheus Bound*. Translated by James Scully and C. John Herrington. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

22 Goethe's poem, "Prometheus" (1774), portrays a spiteful and vengeful Titan fueling the rigid opposition between him and Zeus. He vows to create "humans in [his own] image, a lineage resembling [him] [Menschen / Nach meinem Bilde, / Ein Geschlecht, das mir gleich sei]" (52–53, my translation). Implied here is that the human race will absorb Prometheus's spite, resentment, and vengeance because Zeus has imposed perpetual "Pain [Schmerzen]" (39) and "Slavery [Sklaverei]" (32). Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Selected Poetry of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*, trans. and ed. David Luke (London: Penguin Books, 2005). Byron's lyric, "Prometheus" (1816), is cast from the same mold, depicting the Titan as a suffering rebel under "inexorable Heaven" (18–19) who endures a "suffocating sense of woe" (10). His "firm will" (55) against Heaven make his deity comparable to Goethe's incontrovertibly "impenetrable" spirit (42). Lord George Gordon Byron, *Byron's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Alice Levine (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010). This retributive structure reappears in Mary Shelley's "modern Prometheus" narrative, *Frankenstein*, through the Faustian drive that leads to Victor's and the creature's individual exiles, despair, and doom. *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*, Norton Critical Edition, ed. J. Paul Hunter (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996).

23 See David Ferris, "The Time of Judgement: Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*," in *Silent Urns: Romanticism, Hellenism, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 134–157.

24 For further discussion on the dramatic action of the drama, see Note 5 as well as John Rieder, "The 'One' in *Prometheus Unbound*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 25.4 (1985), 775–800; Richard Isomaki, "Love as Cause in *Prometheus Unbound*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 29.4 (1989), 655–673.

25 Callaghan, "Shelley and Milton," 486; Merrilees Roberts, "*Prometheus Unbound*: Reconstitutive Poetics and the Promethean Poet," *The Keats-Shelley Review* 34.2 (2020), 178–193, 181.

26 See, for instance, Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, "The Source of Desire Seeks the End of Desire (*Prometheus Unbound*, Act II)," in *Shelley's Goddess: Maternity, Language, Subjectivity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

27 Katherine Singer, "Stoned Shelley: Revolutionary Tactics and Women under the Influence," *Studies in Romanticism* 48.4 (2009), 687–707, 698.

28 Singer, "Stoned Shelley," 696.

29 See, for instance, Kim Wheatley, "Paranoid Politics: Shelley and the *Quarterly Review*," in Orrin N. C. Wang, ed. *Romanticism and Conspiracy*, *Romantic Circles* Praxis Series (July 1997), https://romantic-circles.org/praxis/conspiracy/wheatley/kim2.html.

30 Colin Jager, "Shelley after Atheism," *Studies in Romanticism* 49.4 (2010), 611–631, 626.

31 For classic discussions of Shelley's syncretism, see Harold Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959); Stuart Curran, "The

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Political Prometheus," *Studies in Romanticism* 25.3 (1986), 429–455; Jerrold Hogle, *Shelley's Process: Radical Transference and the Development of His Major Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Daniel E. White, "'Mysterious Sanctity': Sectarianism and Syncretism from Volney to Hemans," *European Romantic Review* 15.2 (2004), 269–276.

32 Shelley often invokes the figure of the veil. In *A Defence of Poetry*, he describes how poetry "lifts the veil" of the world's hidden beauty (*SPP* 526). In "Mont Blanc," the speaker contemplates if "some unknown omnipotence [has] unfurled / The veil of life and death?" (53–54 [*SPP* 98]). In "On Life," Shelley discusses the "mist of familiarity" that hides us "from the wonder of our being" (*SPP* 476). All these images point to the harmful lack of knowledge associated with the pre-redeemed world of *Prometheus Unbound*.

33 As scholars have noted, Demogorgon resembles Milton's description of Death in *Paradise Lost* who has a "grim" and "dismal" cave (XI.469). While Milton's depiction of Death is shapeless and indistinguishable in "member, joint, or limb" (II.666–673), Demogorgon has "neither limb / nor form – nor outline" (II.iv.4–5 [*SPP* 246]).

34 For recent discussions on the philosophical underpinnings of "vacancy," see Colin Jager, *Unquiet Things: Secularism in the Romantic Age* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015) as well as Kate Singer, *Romantic Vacancy: The Politics of Gender, Affect, and Radical Speculation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019).

35 Jeffrey N. Cox, "The Dramatist," in Timothy Morton, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Shelley* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 65–84, 77. Singer also reminds us that "the revolutionaries […] cannot entirely forget Jupiter's reign but must continually recall that Promethean utopia must be continually recreated at every moment" (701).

36 Curran, *Poetic Form*, 201.

37 William Keach, "The Political Poet," in Morton, ed. *Cambridge Companion to Shelley*, 123–142, 123.

38 For some discussions on Shelley's skeptical philosophy, see Terence Allan Hoagwood, *Skepticism & Ideology: Shelley's Political Prose and Its Philosophical Context from Bacon to Marx* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1988); Forest Pyle, "'Frail Spells': Shelley and the Ironies of Exile," in Deborah Elise White, ed. *Irony and Clerisy*, *Romantic Circles* Praxis Series (August 1999), https://romantic-circles.org/praxis/irony/pyle/frail.html; Anthony Howe, "Shelley and Philosophy: 'On a Future State,' 'Speculations on Metaphysics and Morals,' 'On Life,'" in O'Neill, Howe, and Callaghan, eds. *Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 101–116; and Singer, *Romantic Vacancy*.

39 Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhey, *Theory and History of Literature* 76 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 6.

40 Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 19.

41 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O'Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

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42 See Omar F. Miranda, "The Age of Exile," *Keats-Shelley Journal* 68 (2019), 150–2; JoEllen DeLucia's and Juliet Shields's edited collection, *Migration and Modernities: The State of Being Stateless, 1750–1850* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019); Curran, "Romanticism Displaced and Placeless"; and Mathelinda Nabugodi's chapter in this volume.

43 Amanda Blake Davis, "Androgyny as Mental Revolution in Act 4 of *Prometheus Unbound*," *The Keats-Shelley Review* 34.2 (2020), 160–177, 163.

44 Many of Shelley's writings consider the divisions created between home and exile such as when he pits Platonic ideals against mundane earthly realities in *Adonais*, his tribute to John Keats, where the eponymous elegized hero has been stellified in the celestial "abode where the Eternal are" (495, [*SPP* 427]). Consider, too, the speaker in "To a Skylark" who arrives at "saddest thought" when contemplating the poem's "blithe" titular creature that exists in some immaterial realm "higher still and higher / From the earth" (6–7 [304]). In *The Sensitive Plant* (1820), the speaker also presents this polarity, distinguishing his mortal life from the immaterial state of beauty and immutability to where both the sensitive plant and the poem's beautiful lady have moved on. Significantly, in "Lines Written among the Euganean Hills" (1818), Shelley begins turning to the collective power of self-separation, imagining a "healing (island) paradise" that is located "far from passion, pain, and guilt" (345, 355 [118]). In the poem, the isle sustains a model community in refuge that nurtures the Earth and makes it "grow young again" (373 [118]).

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