Prometheus Unbound:

A Lyrical Drama in Four Acts.

By Percy Bysshe Shelley

The text is drawn from the old Cambridge edition.

Audisne haec amphiarae, sub terram abdite!1

Preface

The Greek tragic writers, in selecting as their subject any portion of their national history or mythology, employed in their treatment of it a certain arbitrary discretion. They by no means conceived themselves bound to adhere to the common interpretation or to imitate in story as in title their rivals and predecessors. Such a system would have amounted to a resignation of those claims to preference over their competitors which incited the composition. The Agamemnonian story was exhibited on the Athenian theatre with as many variations as dramas.

I have presumed to employ a similar license. The Prometheus Unbound of Aeschylus supposed the reconciliation of Jupiter with his victim2 as the price of the disclosure of the danger threatened to his empire by the consummation of his marriage with Thetis. Thetis, according to this view of the subject, was given in marriage to Peleus, and Prometheus, by the permission of Jupiter, delivered from his captivity by Hercules. Had I framed my story on this model, I should have done no more than have attempted to restore the lost drama of Aeschylus; an ambition which, if my preference to this mode of treating the subject had incited me to cherish, the recollection of the high comparison such an attempt would challenge might well abate. But, in truth, I was averse from a catastrophe so feeble as that of reconciling the Champion with the Oppressor of mankind. The moral interest of the fable, which is so powerfully sustained by

1 Cicero: “Do you hear this, O Amphiaras, concealed under the earth?” Amphiaras was a prophet, saved by Jupiter from pursuers by being miraculously swallowed by the earth, after which he became an oracular god. Shelley directs the comment to Aeschylus, asking him to hear this reworking of the Prometheus myth.

2 his victim: Prometheus, whom he nailed to the rock of the Caucasus for 3,000 years.

the sufferings and endurance of Prometheus, would be annihilated if we could conceive of him as unsaying his high language and quailing before his successful and perfidious adversary. The only imaginary being, resembling in any degree Prometheus, is Satan; and Prometheus is, in my judgment, 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 aggrandizement, which, in the hero of Paradise Lost, interfere with the interest. The character of Satan engenders in the mind a pernicious casuistry which leads us to weigh his faults with his wrongs, and to excuse the former because the latter exceed all measure. In the minds of those who consider that magnificent fiction with a religious feeling it engenders something worse. But 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.

This Poem was chiefly written upon the mountainous ruins of the Baths of Caracalla,3 among the flowery glades and thickets of odoriferous blossoming trees, which are extended in ever winding labyrinths upon its immense platforms and dizzy arches suspended in the air. The bright blue sky of Rome, and the effect of the vigorous awakening spring in that divinest climate, and the new life with which it drenches the spirits even to intoxication, awakening spring in that divinest climate, and the new life with which it drenches the spirits even to intoxication, were the inspiration of this drama.

The imagery which I have employed will be found, in many instances, to have been drawn from the operations of the human mind, or from those external actions by which they are expressed. This is unusual in modern poetry, although Dante and Shakespeare are full of instances of the same kind; Dante indeed more than any other poet, and with greater success. But the Greek poets, as writers to whom no resource of awakening the sympathy of their contemporaries was unknown, were in the habitual use of this power; and it is the study of their works (since a higher merit would probably be denied me) to which I am willing that my readers should impute this singularity.

One word is due in candor to the degree in which the study of contemporary writings may have tinged my composition, for such has been a topic of censure with regard to poems far more popular, and indeed more deservedly popular, than mine. It is impossible that any one, who inhabits the same age with such writers4 as those who stand in the foremost ranks of our own, can conscientiously assure himself that his language and tone of thought may not have been modified by the study of the productions of those extraordinary intellects. It is true that, not the spirit of their genius, but the forms in which it has manifested itself, are due less to the peculiarities of their own minds than to the peculiarity of the moral and intellectual condition of the minds among which they have been produced. Thus a number of writers possess the form, whilst they want the spirit of those whom, it is alleged, they imitate: because the former is the endowment of the age in which they live, and the latter must be the uncommunicated lightning of their own mind.

The peculiar style of intense and comprehensive imagery which distinguishes the modern literature of England has not been, as a general power, the product of the imitation of any particular writer. The mass of capabilities remains at every period materially the same; the circumstances which awaken it to action perpetually change. If England were divided into forty republics, each equal in population and extent to Athens, there is no reason to suppose but that, under institutions not more perfect than those of Athens, each would produce philosophers and poets equal to those who (if we except Shakespeare) have never been surpassed. We owe the great writers of the golden age of our literature5 to that fervid awakening of the public mind which shook to dust the oldest and most oppressive form of the Christian religion.6 We owe Milton to the progress and development of the same spirit: the sacred Milton was, let it ever be remembered, a republican and a bold inquirer into morals and religion. The great writers of our own age are, we have reason to suppose, the companions and forerunners of some unimagined change in our social condition or the opinions which cement it. The cloud of mind is discharging its collected lightning, and the equilibrium between institutions and opinions is now restoring or is about to be restored.

As to imitation, poetry is a mimetic art. It creates, but it creates by combination and representation. Poetical abstractions are beautiful and new, not because the

4 such writers: identified in the MS as Wordsworth, Coleridge and Byron.

5 golden age of our literature: according to Shelley, the Elizabethan age of Spenser and Sidney.

6 the oldest and most oppressive form of the Christian religion: Roman Catholicism.
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. One great poet is a masterpiece of Nature which another not only ought to study but must study. He might as wisely and as easily determine that his mind should no longer be the mirror of all that is lovely in the visible universe as exclude from his contemplation the beautiful which exists in the writings of a great contemporary. The pretence of doing it would be a presumption in any but the greatest; the effect, even in him, would be strained, unnatural and ineffectual. A poet is the combined product of such internal powers as modify the nature of others, and of such external influences as excite and sustain these powers; he is not one, but both. Every man's mind is, in this respect, modified by all the objects of Nature and art; by every word and every suggestion which he ever admitted to act upon his consciousness; it is the mirror upon which all forms are reflected and in which they compose one form. Poets, not otherwise than philosophers, painters, sculptors and musicians, are, in one sense, the creators, and, in another, the creations, of their age. From this subjection the loftiest do not escape. There is a similarity between Homer and Hesiod, between Æschylus and Euripides, between Virgil and Horace, between Dante and Petrarch, between Shakespeare and Fletcher, between Dryden and Pope; each has a generic resemblance under which their specific distinctions are arranged. If this similarity be the result of imitation, I am willing to confess that I have imitated.

Let this opportunity be conceded to me of acknowledging that I have what a Scotch philosopher characteristically terms a 'passion for reforming the world:' what passion incited him to write and publish his book he omits to explain. For my part I had rather be damned with Plato and Lord Bacon than go to Heaven with Paley and Malthus. But it is a mistake to suppose that I dedicate my poetical compositions solely to the direct enforcement of reform, or that I consider them in any degree as containing a reasoned system on the theory of human life. Didactic poetry is my abhorrence; nothing can be equally well expressed in prose that is not tedious and supererogatory in verse. My purpose has hitherto been simply to familiarize the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical readers with beautiful idealisms of moral excellence; 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, although they would bear the harvest of his happiness. Should I live to accomplish what I purpose, that is, produce a systematical history of what appear to me to be the genuine elements of human society, let not the advocates of injustice and superstition flatter themselves that I should take Æschylus rather than Plato as my model.

The having spoken of myself with unaffected freedom will need little apology with the candid; and let the uncandid consider that they injure me less than their own hearts and minds by misrepresentation. Whatever talents a person may possess to amuse and instruct others, be they ever so considerable, he is yet bound to exert them: if his attempt be ineffectual, let the punishment of an unaccomplished purpose have been sufficient; let none trouble themselves to heap the dust of oblivion upon his efforts; the pile they raise will betray his grave which might otherwise have been unknown.

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Dramatis Personae

Prometheus. Asia

Demogorgon. Panthea Oceanides.

Jupiter. Ione

The Earth. The Phantasm of Jupiter.

Ocean. The Spirit of the Earth.

Apollo. The Spirit of the Moon.

Mercury. Spirits of the Hours.


Furies.

[Summary—Prometheus is chained to a mountain, where he is daily punished by Jupiter's eagle, while the two daughters of Ocean, Panthea and Ione sit silently at his feet. The excerpt below opens the play and reveals the depth of Prometheus' suffering. Later in the first act, aided by his mother, the Earth, he starts to recall his curse of Jupiter: the Phantasm of Jupiter is summoned and repeats Prometheus' curse. Upon hearing his own hatred repeated back to him, Prometheus' hatred for his adversary turns to pity. Mercury is sent by Jupiter with a vast chorus of Furies who tempt him to despair with visions of human inadequacy: war, famine, industrial urbanization, the failure of the French Revolution, and Christ's crucifixion. Panthea reminds Prometheus of his own eternal love Asia, whom he has forgotten. Panthea also proclaims her own love for Asia and goes off to "the far Indian vale" to waken Asia.]

ACT I

Scene. — A Ravine of Icy Rocks in the Indian Caucasus. Prometheus is discovered bound to the Precipice. Panthea and Ione are seated at his feet. Time, night. During the Scene, morning slowly breaks.

Prometheus.

Monarch of Gods and Daemons, 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 [1.5] Requistet 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, [1.10] O'er mine own misery and thy vain revenge. Three thousand years of sleep-unseltered hours, And moments aye divided by keen pangs Till they seemed years, torture and solitude, Scorn and despair, — these are mine empire: — [1.15] More glorious far than that which thou surveyest From thine unenvied throne, O Mighty God!]

1 Francis Bacon (1561-1626), great English political figure and man of letters, renowned especially for the style of his prose; William Paley (1743-1805), theologian and author of Moral and Political Philosophy (1785), Evidences of Christianity (1794), and Natural Theology (1802), which opens with the analogy of a watch found on the heath permitting the inference that "as the watch must have had a maker" so must the natural world; Thomas Malthus (1766-1834), political economist and author of Essay on Population (1798).

2 Prometheus: "foothinker" in Greek

3 Monarch of Gods and Daemons: Jupiter (Jove). In Shelley's terms, a symbol of political and religious tyranny. Daemons: intermediate beings between gods and mankind.

4 hecatombs: numerous sacrifices.

5 continually

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Almighty, had I deigned to share the shame
Of thine ill tyranny, and hung not here
Nailed to this wall of eagle-baffling mountain. [1.20]
Black, wintry, dead, unmeasured; without herb,
Insect, or beast, or shape or sound of life.
Ah me! alas, pain, pain ever, for ever!

No change, no pause, no hope! Yet I endure,
I ask the Earth, have not the mountains felt? [1.25]
I ask ye Heaven, the all-beholding Sun,
Has it not seen? The Sea, in storm or calm.
Heaven’s ever-changing Shadow, spread below,
Have its deaf waves not heard my agony?
Ah me! alas, pain, pain ever, for ever! [1.30]

The crawling glaciers pierce me with the spears
Of their moon-freezing crystals, the bright chains
Eat with their burning cold into my bones.
Heaven’s winged hound, polluting from thy lips
His beak in poison not his own, tears up [1.35]
My heart; and shapeless sights come wandering by,
The ghastly people of the realm of dream,
Mocking me: and the Earthquake-fiends are charged
To wrench the rivets from my quivering wounds
While from their loud abysses howling throng
The genii of the storm, urging the rage
Of whirlwind, and afflict me with keen hail.

And yet to me welcome is day and night,
Whether one breaks the hoar frost of the morn, [1.45]
Or starry, dim, and slow, the other climbs
The leader-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. [1.50]
From these pale feet, which then might trample thee
If they disdained not such a prostrate slave.
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, [1.55]
Gape like a hell within! I speak in grief,
Not exultation, for I hate no more,
Nor form, nor outline; yet we feel it is
A living Spirit.

Demogorgon.
Ask what thou wouldst know.

Asia.
What canst thou tell?

Demogorgon.
All things thou dar’st demand.

Asia.
Who made the living world?

Demogorgon.
God.

Asia.
Who made all
That it contains? thought, passion, reason, will,
Imagination? [2.4.10]

Demogorgon.
God: Almighty God.

Asia.
Who made that sense which, when the winds of Spring
In rarest visitation, or the voice
Of one beloved heard in youth alone,
Fills the faint eyes with falling tears which dim
The radiant looks of unbewailing flowers.
And leaves this peopled earth a solitude
When it returns no more?

Demogorgon.
Merciful God.

Asia.
And who made terror, madness, crime, remorse,
Which from the links of the great chain of things,
To every thought within the mind of man
Sway and drag heavily, and each one reels
Under the load towards the pit of death; [2.4.20]
Abandoned hope, and love that turns to hate;
And self-contempt, bitterer to drink than blood; [2.4.25]
Pain, whose unheeded and familiar speech

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1 Hours: Latin ‘Horae’, female divinities supposed to preside over the changing of the seasons.
2 hales: drags.
3 Ah no, I pity thee: one of the pivotal statements of the play. Prometheus’s Christ-like pity for his torturer is his redemption.

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Act II.

[Summary—Panthea tells Asia of her dream, in which she sees Prometheus rejuvenated by love. Together the two sisters follow the mysterious echo of a second dream to the dark underworld of Demogorgon, whom Asia, in the scene included below (Act II, scene IV), rouses into action with her passionate declaration of love for suffering humanity. Later in the act, a stream of chariots of the Hours pours across the stage. One of these carries the grim fate of Jupiter, another the happy reunion of Asia and Prometheus.]

Scene IV.

— The Cave of Demogorgon.

Asia and Panthea.

Panthea.
What veiled form sits on that ebon throne?

Asia.
The veil has fallen.

Panthea.
I see a mighty darkness
Filling the seat of power, and rays of gloom
Dart round, as light from the meridian sun.

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4 recall: revoke.

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... Ungazed upon and shapeless; neither limb, [2.4.5]
Nor form, nor outline; yet we feel it is
A living Spirit.

Demogorgon.
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Asia.
What canst thou tell?

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Which from the links of the great chain of things,
To every thought within the mind of man
Sway and drag heavily, and each one reels
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5 Which from the links... death: the great chain of being was the doctrine by which England justified its monarchy and its rigidly hierarchical social system for centuries. The image may, as Peter Butter suggests, have been inspired by the sight of convicts chained together in Rome, which Shelley described in a letter to Peacock (6 April 1819).
Is howling, and keen shrieks, day after day;
And Hell, or the sharp fear of Hell?

Demogorgon.
He reigns.

Asia.
Utter his name: a world pining in pain
Asks but his name: curses shall drag him down. [2.4.30]

Demogorgon.
He reigns.

Asia.
I feel, I know it: who?

Demogorgon.
He reigns.1

Asia.
Who reigns? There was the Heaven and Earth at first,
And Light and Love; then Saturn,2 from whose throne
Time fell, an envious shadow: such the state
Of the earth's primal spirits beneath his sway, [2.4.35]
As the calm joy of flowers and living leaves
Before the wind or sun has withered them
And semivital worms; but he3 refused
The birthright of their being, knowledge, power,
The skill which wields the elements, the thought [2.4.40]
Which pierces this dim universe like light,
Self-empire, and the mastery of love;
For thirst of which they fainted. Then Prometheus
Gave wisdom, which is strength, to Jupiter,
And with this law alone, "Let man be free," [2.4.45]
Clothed him with the dominion of wide Heaven.
To know nor faith, nor love, nor law; to be
Omnipotent but friendless is to reign;
And Jove now reigned; for on the race of man
Who is the master of the slave? Is he too a slave?

Demogorgon.
All spirits are enslaved which serve things evil: [2.4.110]
Thou knowest if Jupiter be such or no.

Asia.
Whom calledest thou God?

Demogorgon.
I spoke but as ye speak,
For Jove is the supreme of living things.

Asia.
Who is the master of the slave?

Demogorgon.
If the abyss
Could vomit forth its secrets . . . But a voice [2.4.115]
Is wanting, the deep truth is imageless;
For what would it avail to bid thee gaze
On the revolving world? What to bid speak
Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance, and Change? To these
All things are subject but eternal Love. [2.4.120]

Asia.
So much I asked before, and my heart gave
The response thou hast given; and of such truths
Each to itself must be the oracle.
One more demand; and do thou answer me
As mine own soul would answer, did it know [2.4.125]
That which I ask. Prometheus shall arise
Henceforth the sun of this rejoicing world:
When shall the destined hour arrive?

Demogorgon.
Behold!

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5 Nepenthe is a grief-banishing drug; moly is the magic herb given by Hermes to Odysseus to counteract the poison of the Circe; amaranth is an unfading flower.
6 mimicked . . . mocked: imitated . . . created forms more beautiful than the merely natural (i.e. idealized).
7 And mothers . . . race: pregnant women, gazing at the statues, gave birth to children like them, whose features reflect the passion with which the statues were made. Yeats reworks this idea in his poem, The Statues.
Asia.
The rocks are cloven, and through the purple night
I see cars drawn by rainbow-wingèd steeds [2.4.130]
Which trample the dim winds: in each there stands
A wild-eyed charioteer urging their flight.
Some look behind, as fiends pursued them there,
And yet I see no shapes but the keen stars:
Others, with burning eyes, lean forth, and drink [2.4.135]
With eager lips the wind of their own speed,
As if the thing they loved fled on before,
And now, even now, they clasped it. Their bright locks
Stream like a comet’s flashing hair: they all
Sweep onward.

Demogorgon.
These are the immortal Hours, [2.4.140]
Of whom thou didst demand. One waits for thee.

Asia.
A spirit with a dreadful countenance
Checks its dark chariot by the craggy gulf.
Unlike thy brethren, ghastly charioteer,
Who art thou? Whither wouldst thou bear me? Speak! [2.4.145]

Spirit.
I am the shadow of a destiny
More dread than is my aspect: ere yon planet
Has set, the darkness which ascends with me
Shall wrap in lasting night heaven’s kingless throne.

Asia.
What meanest thou?

Panthea.
That terrible shadow⁴ floats [2.4.150]
Up from its throne, as may the lurid smoke
Of earthquake-ruined cities o’er the sea.
Lo! it ascends the car; the coursers fly
Terrified: watch its path among the stars
Blackening the night!

Asia.
Thus I am answered: strange! [2.4.155]

Panthea.
See, near the verge, another chariot stays;
An ivory shell inlaid with crimson fire,
Which comes and goes within its sculptured rim
Of delicate strange tracery; the young spirit
That guides it has the dove-like eyes of hope; [2.4.160]
How its soft smiles attract the soul! as light
Lures wingèd insects through the lampless air.

Spirit.
My coursers are fed with the lightning,
They drink of the whirlwind’s stream,
And when the red morning is bright’ning [2.4.165]
They bathe in the fresh sunbeam;
They have strength for their swiftness I deem,
Then ascend with me, daughter of Ocean.

I desire: and their speed makes night kindle;
I fear: they outstrip the Typhoon; [2.4.170]
Ere the cloud piled on Atlas can dwindle
We encircle the earth and the moon:
We shall rest from long labours at noon;
Then ascend with me, daughter of Ocean.

ACT III

[Summary— Jupiter is overthrown by Demogorgon, and
the unchained Prometheus is reunited with Asia in a forest
cave. Later in the act, the Spirit of the Hour describes the
universal liberation after the fall of kings and the end of
social classes, nations and racial distinctions.]

Scene I.
— Heaven. Jupiter on his Throne; Thetis and the other
Deities assembled.

Jupiter.
Ye congregated powers of heaven, who share
The glory and the strength of him ye serve,
Rejoice! henceforth I am omnipotent.
All else had been subdued to me; alone
The soul of man, like unextinguished fire, [3.1.5]
Yet burns towards heaven with fierce reproach, and doubt,
And lamentation, and reluctant prayer,
Hurling up insurrection, which might make
Our antique empire insecure, though built
On eldest faith, and hell’s coeval: 
Aspiring, unrepressed, yet soon to fall:
The glory and the strength of him ye serve,
Jupiter.

— Olympus?

And thou
Ascend beside me, veiled in the light
Of the desire which makes thee one with me, [3.1.35]
Thetis, bright image of eternity!
When thou didst cry, "Insufferable might!
God! Spare me! I sustain not the quick flames,
The penetrating presence; all my being,
Like him whom the Numidian seps ⁵ did thaw [3.1.40]
Into a dew with poison, is dissolved,
Sinking through its foundations; even then
Two mighty spirits, mingling, made a third
Mightier than either, which, unbodied now,
Between us floats, felt, although unbeheld,
Waiting the incarnation, which ascends,
(Hear ye the thunder of the fiery wheels
Griding⁶ the winds?) from Demogorgon’s throne.
Victory! victory! Feel’st thou not, O world,
The earthquake of his chariot thundering up [3.1.50]
Olympus?

1. terrible shadow: Demogorgon.
2. pendulous: wavering
3. coeval: contemporary. Fear and faith allow Jupiter to retain power.
4. That fatal child, the terror of the earth: Jupiter’s rape of Thetis produced Demogorgon.
5. Ganymede: a shepherd-boy from Mt. Ida, abducted to serve as Zeus’ cupbearer.
6. Daedalus: intricately adorned, as if by the mythical craftsman Daedalus.
8. griding: piercing, wounding
The Car of the Hour arrives.  
Demogorgon descends, and moves  
towards the Throne of Jupiter.  

Awful shape, what art thou? Speak!

Demogorgon.  
Eternity. Demand no direr name.  
Descend, and follow me down the abyss.  
I am thy child, as thou wert Saturn's child;  
Mightier than thee: and we must dwell together [3.1.55]  
Henceforth in darkness. Lift thy lightnings not.  
The tyranny of heaven none may retain,  
Or reassume, or hold, succeeding thee:  
Yet if thou wilt, as 'tis the destiny  
Of trodden worms to writhe till they are dead, [3.1.60]  
Put forth thy might.

Jupiter.  
Detested prodigy!  
Even thus beneath the deep Titanian prisons¹  
I trample thee! thou lingerest?

Mercy! mercy!  
No pity, no release, no respite! Oh,  
That thou wouldest make mine enemy my judge, [3.1.65]  
Even where he hangs, seared by my long revenge,  
On Caucasus! he would not doom me thus.  
Gentle, and just, and dreadful, is he not  
The monarch of the world? What then art thou?  
No refuge! no appeal!

Sink with me then, [3.1.70]  
We two will sink on the wide waves of ruin,  
Even as a vulture and a snake outspent  
Drop, twisted in inextricable fight,  
Into a shoreless sea. Let hell unlock  
Demogorgon, and moves  
[The Car of the Hour arrives.  

Scene III.  
— Caucasus. Prometheus, Hercules, Ione, the Earth,  
Spirits, Asia, and Panthea, borne in the Car with the Spirit  
of the Hour. Hercules unbinds Prometheus, who  
descends.²

Hercules.  
Most glorious among Spirits, thus doth strength  
To wisdom, courage, and long-suffering love,  
And thee, who art the form they animate,  
Minister like a slave.

Prometheus.  
Thy gentle words  
Are sweeter even than freedom long desired [3.3.5]  
And long delayed.

Asia, thou light of life,  
Shadow of beauty unbeheld: and ye,  
Fair sister nymphs, who made long years of pain  
Sweet to remember, through your love and care:  
Henceforth we will not part. There is a cave, [3.3.10]  
All overgrown with trailing odorous plants,  
Which curtain out the day with leaves and flowers,  
And paved with veiled emerald, and a fountain  
Leaps in the midst with an awakening sound.  
From its curved roof the mountain's frozen tears [3.3.15]  
Like snow, or silver, or long diamond spires,  
Hang downward, raining forth a doubtful light:  
And there is heard the ever-moving air,  
Whispering without from tree to tree, and birds,  
And bees; and all around are mossy seats, [3.3.20]  
And the rough walls are clothed with long soft grass;  
A simple dwelling, which shall be our own;  
Where will we sit and talk of time and change,  
As the world ebbs and flows, ourselves unchanged. ³  
What can hide man from mutability? [3.3.25]  
And if ye sigh, then I will smile; and thou,  
Ione, shalt chant fragments of sea-music,  
Until I weep, when ye shall smile away  
The tears she brought, which yet were sweet to shed.  
We will entangle buds and flowers and beams [3.3.30]  
Which twinkle on the fountain's brim, and make  
Strange combinations out of common things;  

Scene II. (omitted)

¹ deep Titanian prisons: after their overthrow by Jupiter, the Titans were imprisoned in Tartarus, far below the earth.

² According to legend, Hercules killed the eagle torturing Prometheus and freed him after Prometheus made his peace with Jupiter.

³ we will sit . . . ourselves unchanged: King Lear, V.iii.8-19: “We two alone will sing like birds I’ th’ cage” and talk with rogues of “Who loses and who wins; who’s in, who’s out . . .”

Like human babes in their brief innocence;  
And we will search, with looks and words of love,  
For hidden thoughts, each lovelier than the last, [3.3.35]  
Our unexhausted spirits; and like lutes  
Touched by the skill of the enamoured wind,  
Weave harmonies divine, yet ever new,  
From difference sweet where discord cannot be;  
And hither come, sped on the charmed winds, [3.3.40]  
Which meet from all the points of heaven, as bees  
From every flower aerial Enna⁴ feeds,  
At their known island-homes in Himera;⁵  
The echoes of the human world, which tell  
Of the low voice of love, almost unheard, [3.3.45]  
And dove-eyed pity's murmured pain, and music,  
Itself the echo of the heart, and all  
That tempers or improves man's life, now free;  
And lovely apparitions, — dim at first,  
Then radiant, as the mind, arising bright [3.3.50]  
From the embrace of beauty (whence the forms  
Of which these are the phantoms) casts on them  
The gathered rays which are reality —  
Shall visit us, the progeny immortal  
Of Painting, Sculpture, and rapt Poesy, [3.3.55]  
And arts, though unimagined, yet to be.  
The wandering voices and the shadows these  
Of all that man becomes, the mediators⁶  
Of that best worship love, by him and us  
Given and returned; swift shapes and sounds, which grow [3.3.60]  
More fair and soft as man grows wise and kind,  
And, veil by veil, evil and error fall;⁷  
Such virtue has the cave and place around.  

[Turning to the Spirit of the Hour.  
For thee, fair Spirit, one toil remains. Ione,  
Give her that curvèd shell, which Proteus old [3.3.65]  
Made Asia's nuptial boon, breathing within it  
A voice to be accomplished, and which thou  
Didst hide in grass under the hollow rock.  

⁴ Enna: plain in the middle of Sicily often regarded as an earthly paradise.  
⁵ Himera: river which nearly bisects Sicily.  
⁶ mediators: man’s works of art are the mediators of love between him and Prometheus.  
⁷ evil and error fall: Shelley regards human nature as progressive.
Ione.
Thou most desired Hour, more loved and lovely
Than all thy sisters, this is the mystic shell; [3.3.70]
See the pale azure fading into silver
Lining it with a soft yet glowing light:
Looks it not like lulled music sleeping there?

Spirit.
It seems in truth the fairest shell of Ocean:
Its sound must be at once both sweet and strange. [3.3.75]

Prometheus.
Go, borne over the cities of mankind
On whirlwind-footed courser: once again
Outspeed the sun around the orbèd world;
And as thy chariot cleaves the kindling air,
Thou breathe into the many-folded shell, [3.3.80]
Loosening its mighty music; it shall be
As thunder mingled with clear echoes: then
Return; and thou shalt dwell beside our cave.
And thou, O, Mother Earth! —

The Earth.
I hear, I feel;
Thy lips are on me, and their touch runs down [3.3.85]
Even to the adamantine central gloom
Along these marble nerves; 'tis life, 'tis joy,
And through my withered, old, and icy frame
The warmth of an immortal youth shoots down
Circling. Henceforth the many children fair [3.3.90]
Folded in my sustaining arms; all plants,
And creeping forms, and insects rainbow
Folded in my sustaining arms; all plants,
Circling. Henceforth the many children fair [3.3.90]

ACT IV.
Scene. — A Part of the Forest near the Cave of Prometheus.

1 They sleep . . . lifted: cf. Mont Blanc 50: ‘death is slumber’
2 And thou: Earth turns from Asia to Prometheus.
3 a temple . . . oracular: perhaps the temple at Delphi, where
the priestess uttered prophecies in a state of ecstasy—
although Shelley’s meaning could be metaphorical.

On eyes from which he kindled it anew [3.3.150]
With love, which is as fire, sweet daughter mine,
For such is that within thine own. Run, wayward,
And guide this company beyond the peak
Of Bacchic Nysa. 5 Menad-haunted mountain,
And beyond Indus and its tribute rivers, [3.3.155]
Trampling the torrent streams and glassy lakes
With feet unwet, unwearied, undelaying,
And up the green ravine, across the vale,
Beside the windless and crystalline pool,
Where ever lies, on unerasing waves, [3.3.160]
The image of a temple, 6 built above,
Distinct with column, arch, and architrave,
And palm-like capital, and over-wrought,
And populous with most living imagery,
Praxitelean 7 shapes, whose marble smiles [3.3.165]
Fill the hushed air with everlasting love.
It is deserted now, but once it bore
Thy name, Prometheus; there the emulous youths
Bore to thy honour through the divine gloom
The lamp which was thine emblem; 8 even as those
[3.3.170]
Who bear the untransmitted torch of hope
Into the grave, across the night of life,
As thou hast borne it most triumphantly
To this far goal of Time. Depart, farewell.
Beside that temple is the destined cave. [3.3.175]
The final act, added a few months later by Shelley, is a cosmic coda or epiphalmium sung first by a chorus of Spirits of the Hour and another chorus of the Spirits of the Human Mind, then by the Spirit of the Earth and of the Moon, which is included below.

The Earth.1
The joy, the triumph, the delight, the madness!
The boundless, overflowing, bursting gladness.
The vaporous exultation not to be confined!
Ha! ha! the animation of delight
Which wraps me, like an atmosphere of light,
And bears me as a cloud is borne by its own wind.

The Moon.
Brother mine, calm wanderer,
Happy globe of land and air,
Some Spirit is darted like a beam from thee,
Which penetrates my frozen frame,
And passes with the warmth of flame,
With love, and odour, and deep melody
Through me, through me!

The Earth.
Ha! ha! the caverns of my hollow mountains,
My cloven fire-crags, sound-exulting fountains
Laugh with a vast and inextinguishable laughter.
The oceans, and the deserts, and the abysses,
And the deep air's unmeasured wildernesses,
Answer from all their clouds and billows, echoing after.

They cry aloud as I do. Sceptred Curse, 3
Who all our green and azure universe
Threateningst to muffle round with black destruction,
sending
A solid cloud to rain hot thunderstones,
And splinter and knead down my children's bones,
All I bring forth, to one void mass battering and blending.

Until each crag-like tower, and storied column,
Palace, and obelisk, and temple solemn,
My imperial mountains crowned with cloud, and snow, and fire;
My sea-like forests, every blade and blossom

Which finds a grave or cradle in my bosom,
Were stamped by thy strong hate into a lifeless mire:

How art thou sunk, withdrawn, covered, drunk up
By thirsty nothing, as the brackish cup
Drained by a desert-troop, a little drop for all;
And from beneath, around, within, above,
Filling thy void annihilation, love
Burst in like light on coves cloven by the thunder-hall.

The Moon.
The snow upon my lifeless mountains
Is loosened into living fountains,
My solid oceans flow, and sing, and shine:
A spirit from my heart bursts forth.
It clothes with unexpected birth
My cold bare bosom: Oh! it must be thine
On mine, on mine!
Gazing on thee I feel, I know
Green stalks burst forth, and bright flowers grow,
And living shapes upon my bosom move;
Music is in the sea and air,
Winged clouds soar here and there,
Dark with the rain new buds are dreaming of:
'Tis love, all love!

The Earth.
It interpenetrates my granite mass,
Through tangled roots and trodden clay doth pass
Into the utmost leaves and delicest flowers;
Upon the winds, among the clouds 'tis spread,
It wakes a life in the forgotten dead,
They breathe a spirit up from their obscurest bowers.

And like a storm bursting its cloudy prison
With thunder, and with whirlwind, has arisen
Out of the lampless caves of unimagined being:
With earthquake shock and swiftness making shiver
Thought's stagnant chaos, unremoved for ever,
Till hate, and fear, and pain, light-vanquished shadows, fleeing,
Leave Man, who was a many-sided mirror,
Which could distort to many a shape of error,
This true fair world of things, a sea reflecting love;

Which over all his kind, 7 as the sun's heaven
Gliding o'er ocean, smooth, serene, and even,
Darting from starry depths radiance and life, doth move:

Leave Man, even as a leprous child is left,
Who follows a sick beast to some warm cleft
Of rocks, through which the might of healing springs is poured;
Then when it wanders home with rosy smile,
Unconscious, and its mother fears awhile
It is a spirit, then, weeps on her child restored. 8

Man, oh, not men! a chain of linkèd thought,
Of love and might to be divided not,
Compelling the elements with adamantine stress;
As the sun rules, even with a tyrant's gaze,
The unquiet republic of the maze
Of planets, struggling fierce towards heaven's free wilderness.

Man, one harmonious soul of many a soul,
Whose nature is its own divine control,
Where all things flow to all, as rivers to the sea;
Familiar acts are beautiful through love;
Labour, and pain, and grief, in life's green grove
Sport like tame beasts, none knew how gentle they could be!

His will, with all mean passions, bad delights,
And selfish cares, its trembling satellites,
A spirit ill to guide, but mighty to obey,
Is as a tempest-winged ship, whose helm
Love rules, through waves which dare not overwhelm,
Forcing life's wildest shores to own its sovereign sway.

All things confess his strength. Through the cold mass
Of marble and of colour his dreams pass;
Bright threads whence mothers weave the robes their children wear;
Language is a perpetual Orphic song.

6 Which: i.e. Love.
7 his kind: i.e. humankind.
8 Leave man . . . restored: Shelley refers to the legend of King Bladud of Britain, a leper who followed a lost pig to the hot springs of Bath, by which he was cured.
9 Language is a perpetual Orphic song: i.e. it governs our morals and actions. Orpheus tamed wild beasts and stopped the tortures of Hades with his music.

1 Where the Earth of Acts I and III iv was a Hellenic goddess and earth-mother, that which appears here is brother and lover of the moon.
2 my cloven fire-crags: volcanoes.
3 Sceptred Curse: Jupiter.
4 has arisen: Love is the subject that governs this verb.
5 unremoved for ever: i.e. hitherto not removed.
Which rules with Dædal harmony a throng
Of thoughts and forms, which else senseless and shapeless were.

The lightning is his slave:¹ heaven's utmost deep
Gives up her stars, and like a flock of sheep
They pass before his eye, are numbered, and roll on!
[4.420]

The tempest is his steed, he strides the air:²
And the abyss shouts from her depth laid bare,
Heaven, hast thou secrets? Man unveils me; I have none.
The Moon.
The shadow of white death has passed
From my path in heaven at last. [4.425]
A half unfrozen dew-globe, green, and gold,
And crystalline, till it becomes a wingèd mist,
Wander happy paramours.³
Less mighty, but as mild as those who keep
Thy vales more deep. [4.430]
The Earth.
As the dissolving warmth of dawn may fold
A clinging shroud of solid frost and sleep;
And through my newly-woven bowers,
Hangs o' the sea, a fleece of fire and amethyst.
The Moon.
Thou art folded, thou art lying
In the light which is undying
Of thine own joy, and heaven's smile divine;
All suns and constellations shower [4.440]
On thee a light, a life, a power
Which doth array thy sphere; thou pourest thine
On mine, on mine!

The Earth.
I spin beneath my pyramid of night,⁴
Which points into the heavens dreaming delight. [4.445]
Murmuring victorious joy in my enchanted sleep;
As a youth lulled in love-dreams faintly sighing,
Under the shadow of his beauty lying,⁵
Which round his rest a watch of light and warmth doth keep.
The Moon.
As in the soft and sweet eclipse. [4.450]
When soul meets soul on lovers' lips,
High hearts are calm, and brightest eyes are dull;
So when thy shadow falls on me,
Then am I mute and still, by thee
Covered; of thy love, Orb most beautiful, [4.455]
Full, oh, too full!
Thou art speeding round the sun
Brightest world of many a one;
Green and azure sphere which shinest
With a light which is divinest [4.460]
Among all the lamps of Heaven
To whom life and light is given;
I, thy crystal paramour
Borne beside thee by a power
Like the polar Paradise. [4.465]
Magnet-like of lovers' eyes;
I, a most enamoured maiden
Whose weak brain is overladen
With the pleasure of her love,
Maniac-like around thee move [4.470]
Gazing, an insatiate bride,
On thy form from every side
Like a Mænad, round the cup
Which Agave⁶ lifted up
In the weird Cadmaean forest.⁷ [4.475]

¹ the lightning is his slave: in the sense that man was discovering how electricity could be harnessed to his purposes.
² he strides the air: Ballooning became all the rage in London only months after the Montgolfier brothers made the first flight in 1783.
³ paramours: lovers.
⁴ my pyramid of night: as with the 'shadowy cone' at Paradise Lost iv 776. Shelley refers to the idea that the earth's shadow is a cone or pyramid of darkness that circles round it in diametrical opposition to the sun.
⁵ As a youth . . . lying: The youth lies under the halo ('shadow') cast by the light of his beauty into the air above him.
⁶ Agave: daughter of Cadmus who became a maenad.
⁷ Cadmaean forest: forest of Cadmus. Cadmus: in Greek legend, son of Agenor and founder of Thebes. Misfortune followed his family because he killed the sacred dragon that guarded the spring of Ares. Athena told him to sow the dragon's teeth, and from these sprang the Sparti [sown men], ancestors of the noble families of Thebes.
Wherein the singing spirits rode and shone. [4.515]
Gleam like pale meteors through a watery night.

Ione.
There is a sense of words upon mine ear.

Panthea.
An universal sound like words: Oh, list!

Demogorgon.
Thou, Earth, calm empire of a happy soul, 
Sphere of divinest shapes and harmonies, [4.520]
Beautiful orb! gathering as thou dost roll 
The love which paves thy path along the skies:

The Earth.
I hear: I am as a drop of dew that dies.

Demogorgon.
Thou, Moon, which gazest on the nightly Earth
With wonder, as it gazes upon thee; [4.525]
Whilst each to men, and beasts, and the swift birth
Of birds, is beauty, love, calm, harmony:

The Moon.
I hear: I am a leaf shaken by thee!

Demogorgon.
Ye Kings of suns and stars, Demons and Gods, 
Aetherial Dominations, who possess [4.530]
Elysian, windless, fortunate abodes Beyond Heaven's constellated wilderness:

A Voice from above.
Our great Republic hears, we are blest, and bless.

Demogorgon.
Ye happy Dead, whom beams of brightest verse 
Are clouds to hide, not colours to portray, [4.535]
Whether your nature is that universe Which once ye saw and suffered —

A Voice from beneath. 
Or as they 
Whom we have left, we change and pass away.

Demogorgon.
Ye elemental Genii, who have homes 
From man's high mind even to the central stone [4.540]

Of sullen lead; from heaven's star-fretted domes
To the dull weed some sea-worm battens on:

A confused Voice.
We hear: thy words waken Oblivion.

Demogorgon.
Spirits, whose homes are flesh: ye beasts and birds,
Ye worms, and fish; ye living leaves and buds; [4.545]
Lightning and wind; and ye untameable herds,
Meteors and mists, which throng air's solitudes: —

A Voice.
Thy voice to us is wind among still woods.

Demogorgon.
Man, who wert once a despot and a slave; 
A dupe and a deceiver; a decay; [4.550]
A traveller from the cradle to the grave 
Through the dim night 6 of this immortal day:

All.
Speak: thy strong words may never pass away.

Demogorgon.
This is the day, which down the void abyss
At the Earth-born's spell 6 yawns for Heaven's despotism, [4.555]
And Conquest is dragged captive through the deep:
Love, from its awful throne of patient power
In the wise heart, from the last giddy hour
Of dread endurance, from the slippery, steep,
And narrow verge of crag-like agony, springs [4.560]
And folds over the world its healing wings.

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, [4.565]
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.

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite; [4.570]
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;
To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;

To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent; [4.575]
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory.

1 birth: race.
2 Dominations: the fourth of the nine orders of angels, as at Paradis Lost iii 392.
3 elemental Genii: the elements.
4 battens: feeds gluttonously.
5 dim night: i.e. the period preceding the eternal day.
6 the Earth-born’s spell: i.e. Prometheus’ revocation of his curse.