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Psyche and History in Shelley and Freud

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PSYCHE AND HISTORY IN SHELLEY AND FREUD

A Thesis
Presented to
The Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
English

by
Brent Robida
May 2009

Accepted by:
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ABSTRACT

The comfortable thought is over in our psychological relation to Percy Shelley and Sigmund Freud because the line of reasoning it invokes is chaotic, if only because trying to define psyche and history leads to chaotic conclusions, especially at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Shelley and Freud recognized this and were able to channel it into their art, myth, fable, allegory. The events of their lives, their History, produces itself from chaos (Freud writes across two World Wars, Shelley under the shadow of the French Revolution, Jacobin massacres and Napoleonic wars), which means its producer is chaotic, Divine Chaos, Miltonic Chaos, but chaos it still remains. There is no systematic order to their thought except that systematic order escapes all Thought, true thought, at least. Please bear this in mind when you read the confused pages that follow, which seek to tether chaos to coherence. Above all, this is an attempt to separate the wheat from chaff in Shelley and in Freud.

Percy Shelley's psychological poetry speaks a language less heard than read; the opposite holds true for Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. I argue that in order to *hear* Shelley and *read* Freud, it is necessary to first discover and then impose a grammatical architecture already present in their writings. Such mental scaffoldings occupy what Shelley calls *Love*, Freud, *Eros*. Each conceptual term demonstrates within and without its boundaries the same radical rebellion of thought: the sum of duty enjoined and buttressed by the artist's mind must always ruin the imaginary landscape, across and from which the mind imagines.

DEDICATION

For those with the courage to Teach, and reason to read something other than a master's thesis.

For Dr. Cynthia Haynes, who taught me the violence of quantification, in all its familiar guises.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you, Mom and Dad. You created me not once, but countless times. Gratitude, Love,

Things, all Words fall short.

Thank you, Leslie, great teacher and friend.

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Introduction

Go your way; behold, I send you out lambs among wolves.

—Luke 10:3

Our comfortable thought about Psyche and History is over. Our rested and repeated notions of Percy Shelley, over. We no longer think of Shelley as Sun-Treader, which Robert Browning called him. As regards Freud, the story is somewhat different in that we have yet to find any comfort in his thought.

Percy Shelley and Sigmund Freud deserve and merit our ears and eyes; their thought still speaks to us, and I understand why some could call them prophets; yet their writings deserve much more than we are able to read *right now*. The title seer, maker or *vates* is for the majority of people who hear it said absurd, ridiculous and puerile. So when I use the word prophet, I mean the OED's definition of it, a "Divinely inspired person, and *related senses*" (emphasis mine). Most critics, literary, historical, philosophical, psychological, scientific take what I have emphasized in the OED's definition of "prophet" and construe around it an argument or defense of the word, as if we can no longer call poet's prophets, prophets poets because we are beyond such cant. However, I choose to let "Divinely Inspired Person" stand alone without any qualifiers or semantic or semiotic challenges. I do this for two reasons: first, brevity; second, I once read a major twentieth century author¹ define it in a curious way. He reminds us that we are only vertebrae, nothing more. But he qualified that statement with this: we are vertebrae tipped with a divine spark.

¹ Nabokov, Vladimir. *Lectures on Literature*, 6.

The comfortable thought is over in our psychological relation to Percy Shelley and Sigmund Freud because the line of reasoning it invokes is chaotic, if only because trying to define psyche and history leads to chaotic conclusions, especially at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Shelley and Freud recognized this and were able to channel it into their art, myth, fable, allegory. The events of their lives, their History, produces itself from chaos (Freud writes across two World Wars, Shelley under the shadow the French Revolution, Jacobin massacres and Napoleonic wars), which means its producer is chaotic, Divine Chaos, Miltonic Chaos, but chaos it still remains. There is no systematic order to their thought except that systematic order escapes all Thought, true thought, at least. Please bear this in mind when you read the confused pages that follow, which seek to tether chaos to coherence. Above all, this is an attempt to separate the wheat from chaff in Shelley and in Freud.

Percy Shelley's psychological poetry speaks a language less heard than read; the opposite holds true for Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. I argue that in order to *hear* Shelley and *read* Freud, it is necessary to first discover and then impose a grammatical architecture already present in their writings. Such mental scaffoldings occupy what Shelley calls *Love*, Freud, *Eros*. Each conceptual term demonstrates within and without its boundaries the same radical rebellion of thought: the sum of duty enjoined and buttressed by the artist's mind must always ruin the imaginary landscape, across and from which the mind imagines.

Shelley interprets "Love" as he does poetry and Poet: a psychological condition out of which blooms—simultaneously—creation and destruction. Normally, an attempt is made to scavenge Shelley's truest construal of poetic aesthetics from the *Defense of Poetry*, something like poets

are the unacknowledged legislators of the world; but a more potent and revealing glimpse into Shelley's poetic project shows up in the preface to *Prometheus Unbound*: "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" (208; emphasis mine). Shelley implicitly suggests he is a member of the "loftiest," yet remembers to temper such elitism with figural absolutism, *subjection* and slavery (mental and material), and also a psychological declaration of *subjection*. Both paradigms would seem abhorrent to Shelley, yet Shelley possesses the mental agility to not only hold them but also versify them at once. Furthermore, Shelley's desire to escape becoming a creation of his age might not be as energetic as the preface leads us to believe. Actually, *Prometheus Unbound* can be read solely as a product of Shelley's contemporaneity, the historical and literary moment in which Shelley composed it. Reading the poem this way, however, is reductive and misses the mark of Shelley's aim, which is history and psyche as both interdependent and separate, the former text and latter reader of text. In making the distinction between creator and creation in the preface, Shelley acts the Platonic dualist, but he is at once also echoing Aristotle through the idea that what we cannot escape is our desire to *subject* order to stratification and materialism, groupings and quantifiers; in trying to make a slave out of order, we become order's slave. We see this happening in the first act to Prometheus, who is unwilling to imagine, let alone declare another order to things. With this in mind, the preface to *Prometheus* tells us one of its principle themes: order is perspectival; when you look at the world differently and speak to it differently, the world will change in turn.

The poet, so Shelley would have us believe, is a slave to subject rather than object, a slave *period*, whose master we shall see is Chaos. More than most British *Romantics*, Shelley

incorporates an allusory dance across the Greeks, Romans and Germans, Dante and Rousseau. Like Coleridge, who borrows incessantly from a diverse array of source material, Shelley's eclectic erudition is always working against the idea of the One Mind that he writes about in *Defense of Poetry*, against the Idealism to which critics often confine him. Yet what we could name Shelley's monistic tendencies, the Idealistic half of the title *Skeptical Idealist*, would better serve Shelleyan scholarship if "manacled" substituted for "monistic." Furthermore, that Shelley digests the tradition of the ancients (*Defense of Poetry* is an available example) simply demonstrates the impossibility of achieving such an ambitious goal as realizing in one poem or many the One Mind, One Poem. Shelley's language is always elastic and adaptable, in both meaning and formal presentation, always in doubt about itself. As Marc Redfield tells us, this doubt occurs as critical misreading in Shelley's *The Mask of Anarchy*, but I see his insights happening in *Prometheus Unbound* also:

The Mask is a dream that generates and destroys its dreamer both as a character and as a source of authority; it collapses into the stutter of "these words"—these words on the page that, as professional academics, we read again, again, again.²

(159)

Prometheus Unbound holds no claim to material reality, so calling it a dream is accurate, and it will collapse if what we, as professional academics, persist in doing wrongly, which is reading it wrongly. In the first act, Prometheus stutters again and again trying to recall "these words," and in the fourth, we as readers, stutter to recall the words of acts one, two and three. Redfield using the word dream because dreams are always already in doubt because we can never remember

² Redfield, Marc. *The Politics of Aesthetics*.

them wholly; they are partial inscriptions on the psyche.

A similar skepticism pervades Freud's writing, and rather than anticipating Freud's definition of *Eros*, which I contend is the brilliant casting of the mind's multi-colored shadow in struggle with itself against conscience and society, Shelley demonstrates it poetically in *Prometheus Unbound*. In Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*, in which "Eros" grapples with "Ananke" (*Necessity*) and "Thanatos" (Death drive) for control of self-control, Freud goes so far as to exalt Love above all other attribute of the mind's psychology, just as Shelley does. He says, "[a]t the height of being in Love, the boundary between ego and object threatens to melt away," and he also contends that although Love is a normal mental entity, most pathological processes rely on a false reading of the demarcation between self and society (13).

Freud's seminal work on man in society tells the story of what happens when we try to live independent of Fate, Chance and Destiny, when the wellspring of all happiness draws from the ego-subject; in other words, he writes against Idealism. Largely a treatise on doctrinal Religion, *Civilization and its Discontents* puts into play a disturbing notion: Civilization possesses a single pathology—*itself*—which, of course, can also cure itself. Freud says that happiness must always be an episodic phenomenon because the human species can only experience pleasure and pain through contraries: "We are so made that we can derive intense enjoyment only from a contrast and very little from a state of things" (25-6). And like Shelley, Freud understands the evolutionary progress of these civil contrasts (and contracts) carried forward within the psychical and individual development of the individual mind, which always posits, and only sometimes chooses to recall through memory the attributes of natural and civilized man, as History. I will show how *Prometheus Unbound* proleptically performs Freud's

interpretation of Self (ego, id, super-ego) up until its last line, “This is alone Life, Joy, Empire and Victory,” where it collapses in one final rebellion of exile and ecstasy (*IV.578*).

I mentioned above that in order to hear Shelley and read Freud, we first must discover and then impose a grammatical architecture already present in their thought and words. What we discover is presence is already not a possible condition for the intellect as soon as we recognize its *pastness*. I will adopt Freud’s name for this psychical entity, *Eternal City*, which stands already complete in *Prometheus Unbound*; in fact, I make the claim that the *Eternal Mind* is what *Prometheus* establishes, itself as poem. Therefore, when reading Shelley, we lay among the ruins, and while listening to Freud, among future excavations; finally, however, the conditions which dissociate the two postures, violently consume each other; as readers of Shelley and Freud, we bear witness to this almost ineffable sublime force, swerve them into our own contemporary, and therefore superannuated moment.

In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud chooses ancient and modern Rome as his analogue to what he describes as “preservation in the sphere of the mind,” or how “memory-traces” are drawn and annihilated in both individual and social realms (16). By this, he means simply that we do not understand how individuals *make* memories, sustain them or recall them intentionally or unintentionally. These psychological processes, in this instance, at least, herald an astonishing and self-replicating claim to the philosophy of History, one in which Shelley’s poetry sometimes transcends and is defeated. I examine this more closely in chapter two of this thesis, but for now it is important to know what Freud actually *says*: “If we want to represent historical sequence in spatial terms we can only do it by juxtaposition in space: the same space cannot have two different contents” (19). I quote Shelley to illustrate the versification of this

thought, and show how Freud is partly correct in saying we are far from “mastering the characteristics of mental life by representing them in pictorial terms” (19). The following lines are Shelley’s, and occur in the most desperate passage of *Prometheus Unbound*:

Yet pause, and plunge
Into Eternity, where recorded time,
Even all that we imagine, age on age,
Seems but a point, and the reluctant mind
Flags wearily in its unending flight
Till it sink, dizzy, blind, lost, shelterless;
Perchance it has not numbered the slow years
Which thou [Prometheus] must spend in torture, unreprieved. (I.17-23)

Mercury essentially explains to Prometheus in this passage why Freud contends we cannot color our vision long enough to see at once both the “scanty remains” of Republican Rome and the “great metropolis that has grown up in the last few centuries since the Renaissance” (19). Shelley recurs this idea, which center’s on a “point,” yet rather than realizing it, he submits to its dizzying power and blindness, which in the remainder of *Prometheus Unbound* is adapted towards pluralistic language and thought. As readers, the passage encourages us to follow its line of reasoning also and “pause” and “plunge” into each passage, suspend it and look at it from all available angles. The rewards for this kind of reading are great, and are paralleled in Prometheus’s recollection of his curse.

In the two chapters which follow, I argue that *H*istory, the story of our social progress and evolution as a social species, and *h*istory, the story of our individual psychological

development, our past, present and future are conditioned by the Psyche, by what we are not, and, paradoxically, what we once were and will become again. As regards the subject of this thesis, Shelley's poetry and Freud's prose, my methodology is tracing within Shelley the psychomachia, or struggle of the soul, that becomes so literal in Freud, and vice versa. Our past and future is always a struggle within the soul because we think we know where it abides, in the starry heavens above, and where it comes, from the moral duty within.³ Poetry and History are bondservants to the Psyche. The debt pays in full, more often than not.

³ This is a rough borrowing of Kant's epitaphal inscription on his tombstone.

Chapter One

Alas! I wonder at, yet pity thee.

—Mercury (*PU I.428*)

Prometheus Unbound enlists the linguistic and cultural inhibitions that authority imposes on and requires from the individual. My reading takes as its point of departure an analysis of the poem at its archetypal, psycho-cultural level, finding in Shelley's poem through Freud an expression of the sustained anxiety "of the superior power of Fate" (20). Arriving at Shelley's four-act lyrical drama by way of Freudian paradigms would seem arbitrary if this is all I wished to do; but I argue that in reading Freud we can *hear* Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*—Shelley becomes present in Freud's theses. My goal from reading Shelley's longest and most sustained composition, which is also his most complexly arranged, is double-minded: 1) to demystify the struggle staged in *Prometheus* of the individual and authoritative mind; and 2) to grasp the meaning, and the force and value drawn from this meaning, of Shelley's decision to render Prometheus and Jupiter their imaginary poetic embodiments. My goal from reading Freud is similarly divided: 1) to demonstrate how *Prometheus* affects a sense of the *uncanny* through Shelleyan Love; and 2) to show the value of directing Shelley's philosophical poetics toward Freud's.⁴ What I see happening in the writings of Shelley and Freud is a willing admittance of the limitations of the brokering power of the Psyche, which is represented at its highest level in Shelley by Love and in Freud by Eros.

⁴ Freud the modern Philosopher is to my understanding the mode of discourse that best delivers his theoretical project, and does not play into the double bind of proceeding from the proposition that Freud is the "Father of Psycho-analytic interpretation," wherein we as readers become another iteration of infantile helplessness, and our turn back to Freud, a substitutive satisfaction of paternal protection.

Each author exploits the limitations of the “affective nucleus” of their thought in order to yield a gain. If we are to believe Freud when he tells us that “we are so made that we can derive intense enjoyment only from a contrast and very little from a state of things,” then we are pressed to consider the knowledge of this contrast, its positive and negative side (25-6). Because in *Prometheus* Shelley tries to record the psychological revolutions of a model mind inhabiting a model civilized man, then the theories we attach to Freudian psychoanalysis offer the surest interruption to Shelley’s thought; Freud de-familiarizes Shelley, turns *Prometheus Unbound* into an *uncanny* poem. Similarly, the logical converse of “Freudianizing” Shelley admits a more poetic reading of Freud. Those moments while reading Freud in which disappear the psychoanalytic case histories of patients in pursuance of a greater story reproduce and revalue Freud as inheritor of a much more comprehensive record of philosophical inquiry than the once novel rubric, psychoanalytic interpretation. Shelley familiarizes Freud for us, turning our evolving notions of “literary history” and cultural criticism into a collective compulsion to repeat, and then refute or revalue, the meaning of Freud’s claims. In effect, the existence of Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound* demonstrates Freud’s persistent unintentional return; and in its windows we can see ourselves as onlookers, inhibited by the domestic comfort of the familiar. The question admits its answer only in reading Shelley’s best poem, *Prometheus Unbound*.

Because the works of Sigmund Freud are canonized texts in a similar sense to Percy Shelley’s, for each press their influence beyond the discourse they occasion as Modern and Romantic, each author distributes his most important claims according to a central theme: Freudian Eros and Shelleyan Love. The centrality of these guiding principles tasks itself the aim of soliciting and subverting the height and reach of the existential and cultural symptoms that

have determined Western philosophy and poetics since at least the French Revolution. “Poets,” Shelley tells us in the preface to *Prometheus Unbound* in a passage I quoted above in the Introduction, “not otherwise than philosophers, painters, sculptors and musicians, are in one sense the creators and in another the creations of their age” (208). Shelley’s poem, which tells its story along lines similar to what Freud calls the exposure myth of Moses, rigorously interrogates the truth of this claim, and, finally, operates against it. Drawing out from the poem two antagonistic ideas, one begins to breathe its air (or heir, so to speak): the misted clarity of Love as precondition for Shelley’s cultural ideals and the bitterant knowledge that this Love recognizes and brings about. The point of intersection between them represents the principle of difference the poem aims at: a restructuring of history and psyche, a “victory” of love, obtained at the psychological and political level. Freud’s contribution to this belated victory through the economics of the libido⁵ fixes itself firmly to our notions of what is scientific and philosophical inquiry, questioning the methodologies that produce the possibility for such. We can draw from this impact, which is the impact of fundamental shifts in human thinking and behavior, an analogue to the French Revolution and the moment of literary history that counterpoints it, Romanticism.

I want to call attention to one such shift in human thinking and behavior: the clash and pressure that occurs when writing about Shelley and Freud. It has its roots in two very different lines of reasoning: on the one hand, the question of what it means to be traditional or progressive,

⁵ Freud makes the distinction between erotic and procreant love. The term “economics” employs exchange values for each. One must pay dearly to the other in satisfying the demands of the pleasure-seeking ego.

and who, whether a poet like Shelley, or psychological theorist like Freud, best equips his audience with the knowledge to interpret their terms and our interpretive terms for them. On the other hand, and independent of all speculative spheres, whether traditional or modern, scientific or philosophical, the question of *what* is being tested when we say “science,” or “philosophy,” “history” or “psychological,” “traditional” or “modern.” What we discover is two vastly different ways of understanding the mental life of human existence: the one seeks a reconciliation of consistently diverging pieces into a whole, the other a whole that justifies itself in consistently diverging pieces. I call this binary opposition history versus psyche. To call this situation a clash of two “isms,” or some pressurized aneurism waiting to puncture into the remote sphere of the mind, or great thinkers enjoined by the very thing all great thinkers wish to conquer and reduce, the temporal, is to suggest somehow that the projects of Shelley and Freud demonstrate its collision. This is not the case; in fact, one could say that my choice to collide these two perspectives from the bi-polarity of Shelley’s thought to Freud’s only bears on the tendency to keep appointments we don’t remember making. However, because I see a clash of historical and psychological notions of discourse happening between the whole and the many pieces that make it up, drawing out its presence in Shelley and Freud seems a good enough occasion to argue that our notion of History is nothing other than a temporary dominance of one mental process over another.

Shelley’s decision to leave England for a nation that better conformed to his radical and revolutionary wishes parallels a mental need to free himself from the temporal demands of chance and necessity; he substitutes an undesirable relationship between the individual and his civilization with a poetic one. *Prometheus Unbound* records this substitution, but what merits

attention to Shelley's achievement and affects our own departure toward the twenty-first century is that this substitution turns out to be a re-duplication. He wishes both himself and civilization to be "[f]rom custom's evil taint exempt and pure" (*PU III.iv.155*). Both the weight and waiting of example and experience reveal in Shelley an aesthetics that wishes to be freed from custom, a wish born out of a need to live beyond history and politics. I think this explains the powerful monistic tendency in Shelley, as if each distinct and individuated poem prolongs the mind's exposure to the One poem; this prolongation which the writing of poetry affords also serves as protection from the mind's complete absorption, and therefore annihilation, into the One poem. The *Defense of Poetry* is just this: a simultaneous prolongation and delay of the evolutionary development of what Shelley self-consciously calls participation in the "eternal, the infinite and the one" (513). In its pursuit, he must draw from a source of great anxiety and unhappiness; he must invoke and sanction the very antithesis of "this indestructible order" Poetry, Chaos. And not surprisingly, the embodiment of chaos for Shelley discovers itself in *Prometheus* in a figure of much disputed entity in the poem: Demogorgon. Because of the impossibility of this ideal, gratifying within poetic discourse a wish that can only always be a reality at the end of poetic discourse, the desire and attempt to both recover and defend against the demands of this ideal gives shape to the main conflict of the poem, which is madness. This dramatic tension plays itself out in the reader's mind, which mirrors it back as a choice that values one attempt to reconcile and interpret the conflict, love and all that threatens and is opposed to it, over another.

Prometheus Unbound is a poem conceived and composed in exile. From fall 1818 to

winter 1819, Shelley wrote *Prometheus* in Italy.⁶ Several themes play this exile out in the poem, each tethered to the idea of the Family Romance. However, one consequence of exile presses itself more consistently throughout the poem than any other: repudiation. This repudiation takes on several guises, the most refined of which is artistic creation. One model of interpretation, then, for *Prometheus Unbound* is drawn forth from Shelley's need to recreate a world unthreatened by cultural demands while exiled. Adherence to custom, politics and history drive these demands. Turning away from them toward oneself shores the line of demarcation between the pleasure seeking ego and external world that threatens its access to pleasure.

Freud speaks of the hermit's method of repudiation against failed attempts to find happiness in society, who performs the role of exile:

One can try and re-create the world, to build up in its stead another world in which its most unbearable features are eliminated and replaced by others that are in conformity with one's own wishes. (*Civilization and its Discontents* 31)

That the figure Prometheus is in possession of a great power at the poem's beginning is without question. The story tells us that Jupiter's sphere of influence ends where Prometheus's psychological constitution begins; Prometheus has given Jupiter control of the Earth and cosmos, but not of himself. He is barred, through the exercise of his great will, from satisfying vital physical needs. In his great contempt for Jupiter, the Father and Patriarch of this poem, he sacrifices to a single reproach in the form of a curse the physical liberty of not only himself but

⁶ Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, eds. *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, 202.

also the human race; Prometheus re-creates the world by repudiating it. This repudiation, a denial of the Father, is the first stage, a necessary one, in the evolution of unbinding *Prometheus*, and also the primitive and infantile in human thought. One senses a stubborn child reproaching the unreasonable demands of an overbearing Father in the opening speech of the drama. And, like a stubborn and frustrated child, Prometheus sees his present condition as a permanent one: “Ah me, alas, pain, pain ever, forever!” (I.22). Of course, Shelley did not share this bleak view of things, who maintained all creative gestures of mankind, aesthetic, political or scientific or otherwise, constitute and reflect the eternal poem from which all such gestures derive.⁷ One could even speculate the poem itself is the attempted suicide of this “pain ever, forever.”

Prometheus Unbound begins by trying to seize hold of a great loss. Prometheus tries to remember what he said before the poem, the words that now bind him. The goal of this recollection is to depose Jupiter, and the physical force that legitimizes his rule. As the action of the poem demonstrates, this authority and the fear that attaches to it resist all external threats. In order to remove Jupiter’s supremacy over the phenomenal world, which constitutes both the source from which authority claims power and the fear of punishment that authority incorporates into individuals, Prometheus turns away from physical defenses toward mental ones. At play is an interrogation into the origin of the mental slavery in which we first see Prometheus. Reading the conflict between Prometheus and Jupiter at the beginning of the play as an expression and occasion for the recreation of a world undisturbed by history and the implacability of custom is just one model of interpretation, and a very literal one. The infantile need for a father’s protection is a manifestation of a much deeper feeling pursued by the ego. The

⁷ *Defense of Poetry*. 1821.

poem moves toward this deeper feeling, and tries repeatedly to articulate it. The fourth act is largely devoted to exalting this sense and feeling into a historical ideal driven by a political program of love. The first act, in sharp contrast, works as both a lament to this singular and unitary state of consciousness and, at the same time, a sanguinary plea for a future where the inner and outer life of mankind is not itself already divided into separate aims. “[O]riginally the ego includes everything,” Freud tells us, “later it separates off an external world from itself” (Civilization and its Discontents 15).

If a mind hopes to successfully negotiate both the demands and advances of culture, there must be a clear and stable delineation between experience and its interpretation, individual and society. Inevitably, however, the contest of Markers who dispute the authenticity and legitimacy of governing powers always threatens the rational of the mark; it therefore fails to remove the original, but always present, longing for the union of experience and its interpretation, individual and society. If individuals will achieve happiness in society, they must both submit to its laws and participate in the customs and values that sustain its history. The appointment that Shelley makes with culture in *Prometheus Unbound* rests on the assumption that ego interests can be satisfied outside of the ego, but Shelley’s poem keeps telling us this is not the case. If it were, then Prometheus need not pay attention to Jupiter’s tyranny, his forgotten curse that sustains it, the new world visible beyond the horizon of Demogorgon’s deed. Prometheus, after all, tells Jupiter’s phantasm that “Thou art Omnipotent. / O’er all things but thyself I gave thee power, / And my own will” (l.272-3). Subject to horrific physical punishment, Prometheus nevertheless claims a liberty inaccessible to Jupiter.

If Love is nearer the province of will than force, then why does Shelley take the poem

beyond the first act?; why the political revolution?; why the combat with history, custom, everything social? Because Shelley writes in the preface, we are all “in one sense the creators and in another the creations of [our] age”; because of conscience, quite simply, that element within mental life which most resembles the extraneous world without (208). Maybe it is not what *Prometheus Unbound* keeps telling us but what we, as critical readers, keep telling it that fails to arrive at its destination and renders the reading experience unreadable.

The competing interests of human desire and the process of human development as a mass that seeks to check that desire, produces a discord against which ego interests retreat as civilization presses them further inward, a civilization that at the very same time promises to harmonize this discord. Civilization plays off the originary and absolute harmony experienced by the ego when it included everything. Because the memory of this perfect pleasure, as Freud notes, does not altogether vanish from the mind as the reality principle presses upon it, but both anticipates its recovery and fixates on its absence, therefore ruining the quality that governs its perfection, its memory operates like history. History is the name we give to perpetual discord, and Culture, our need to harmonize it. The ruins of memory, of which history comprises, Shelley anticipates and wishes to bring into the present fury of pure being, eliminate, through the execution of *Prometheus Unbound*. It comprehends the preface’s declaration of men as creators and creations, expressing itself as a need to escape this “lofty subjection,” history, which, in the poem, is itself already historical (208). Shelley does not disguise or complicate his reasons for desiring unhistory, but clearly sets them forth in three prose pieces, “On Love,” “On Life,” and *Defense of Poetry*.

A lot is said and implied in the opening sentence of “On Love”: “What is Love?—Ask

him who lives what is life; ask him who adores what is God” (503). Shelley chooses to understand Love, an idea we attach to a very powerful emotion, as signifying a much more profound and procreant feeling, which brings with it the possibility of emotional experience. He also suggests that Love is somehow different from life and God. Shelley does not ask someone who lives, as “him who lives,” or adores, as “him who adores,” love to define it because Love, according to Shelley, provides the possibility of answering all questions if Love can conform to the pragmatic applications of society, or if such applications are willing to conform to Love’s ideals. Not only does *Prometheus Unbound* resist this possibility up until its last word, “Victory,”⁸ but also Shelley’s prose language inadvertently precludes it. Shelley endeavors to settle the debt he owes to Love for its gift; in exchange for which Shelley gives up, quits his claim to desire, ego-interests. But what provides the rationale for such loss? For Shelley, Love construes itself as “discovery of [an] antitype” (504). In “On Love,” Shelley calls this antitype “a miniature as it were of our entire self [...] the ideal prototype of every thing excellent or lovely that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man” (504). From this definition of antitype we can begin to talk about Otherness in *Prometheus Unbound*, alterity, what Freud calls the “uncanny,” an encounter with something or someone who, unfamiliar to the ego, surprises and provokes within it a powerful sense of estrangement. However, the sense of estrangement is

⁸ The poem concludes with this passage, delivered by Demogorgon: “Neither to change nor falter nor repent: / This, like thy glory, Titan! Is to be / Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free; / This is alone Life, Joy, Empire and Victory.” One wonders what Shelley was about giving Chaos the final words. Whether a careless concluding utterance, or the decision of a poet who stands in awe of what he has composed, and realizing the debt he owes to *Thanatos*, the Freudian Death drive, which is itself a slave to *Ananke*, Necessity, or, more appropriately, I think, Chaos, Shelley concedes defeat and redeems us by betraying us to “eternity,” the mental concept Demogorgon offers as his name.

not so much genuine and literal as latent, since the uncanny experience situates itself in familiars, in things that we understand as the same to ourselves. The someone or something else of the uncanny is almost always another way of looking at ourselves, our things.

Derrida suggests that what we mean by Other is another way of looking at Self. And his comments originate in Freud:

[...] just as psychoanalysis aims to teach us that, beside the *Id* and the *Superego*, there is an *Ego* or a *Me*, in the same way psychoanalysis as the psychic structure of a collective identity is composed of instances that can be called *Id*, *Superego*, and *Ego*. Far from setting us adrift in a vague analogism, the figure of this relation will tell us more about the terms of their analogical relation than any simple internal inspection of their content.⁹ (136)

If the ideas and terms we use to understand the psyche lead us to a “collective identity” of the Unconscious, and also to “instances” of it, then it seems to suggest that history is always an uncanny structure insofar as it is always heterogeneous and collective. In this view, there is never a We of history, only a Me, and if the randomness of chance dictates that “I” did not get to experience this or that instance of it firsthand, then the Me of the psyche has no other choice but to textualize and internalize it into the psyche, reading it into a real experience, so to speak. Everything we never experience but know about becomes historicized in this way; it becomes uncanny because of its familiarity, but it is familiar to us not because we experienced it in its present moment, or instance, but because we forget to historicize it as a familiar process of the psyche. Making of *Prometheus Unbound* an analogy between a psyche that forgets what was

⁹ Derrida, Jacques. *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume I*.

once known to an instance once experienced explains the complicated structure of the poem. Shelley recalls more than Prometheus's curse to liberate him, but also his Id and Superego, his history.

However, before I closely read passages in the poem that stage this encounter with the uncanny, showing how Freud's 1919 eponymous essay on the subject carries the poem's discourse into futurity, I must make mention of Freud's superego, which Shelley's "antitype" anticipates. Thomas Weiskel, in *The Romantic Sublime*, draws the analogy from what he identifies Shelley's "fear of identity" with Freud's superego (148). He says, "[i]dentity is an inverse function of desire, a secondary precipitate which coalesces as narcissistic desire fails or is betrayed"¹⁰ (148). Because Love implicates identity in its failure to discover its own perfected version of itself, Love duplicates Law—at this moment, and during its iterations, Shelley's rhetoric extinguishes the meaning it repeatedly gestures toward. The process reproduces itself in *Prometheus Unbound* when, in act three, Demogorgon descends to his cave with Jupiter his prisoner, as Prometheus is physically Jupiter's in act one. Weiskel mentions that Shelley's poetry "move[s] into dialogue with [...] a nonerotic ideal, a kind of superego," a description that ornaments Shelley's "ideal prototype" with political impact and historical significance, since the superego emerges in response to civilization's effort to control individual aggression. Freud compares the superego to conscience, a mental category that, like authority, always works to subdue; in fact, I read the superego as external Law's proxy in Law's aspiration to become a fixed premise of human action, subject to the needs of the public sphere. Weiskel's "nonerotic ideal" means one realized in death, working against Eros, and for which civilization well prepares

¹⁰ Weiskel, Thomas. *The Romantic Sublime*.

individuals because, unlike the ego, as Freud notes, civilization can evolve and progress without paying attention to happiness.

Whether Shelley makes the case for his antitype originating inside or outside the self is unclear. If Love is “discovery of antitype,” then which discovery we call our own ever occurs outside of the mind’s interpretive reach? Shelley’s antitype, it seems, because the discovery reveals and names what was already always there, the “ideal prototype.” But the introduction of another, whose mental life we can never really be sure of but whose existence we nonetheless require to satisfy the social demands of human life, outside a Shellyean discourse on Love, deteriorates into a reminder that everything “belonging to the nature of man” is not owned by man. Simple knowledge of the discrepancy, conversing with others about the mysteries of philosophy and science, Society, generally, brings Shelley no closer to the fulfillment of his wish; instead, the opposite occurs, and when he tries to unburden his soul to another, he finds his “language misunderstood like one in a distant and savage land” (503). We find a correlative with the geographic and psychological compositions of *Prometheus Unbound* in the use of “distant” and “savage.” The economics of exile dictates a simultaneous turning away from one culture and turning toward another, which calls for a reshaping of it by the ego in satisfying the demands made in the name of culture. Shelley’s poem is an expression of this need to create an autonomous standard of measurement for what he calls in the preface “beautiful idealisms of moral excellence” (209). The misunderstood language to which he refers in “On Love” is the enigmatic form and composition, the wrought theatrical aestheticism of the lyrical drama, *Prometheus Unbound*. If the poem arrives at the destination to which its preface aims, then the invocation of a “beautiful idealism of moral excellence” becomes an elite icon of worship for its

aspirants, yet for the majority of mankind whose vision the poem seeks to expand, a misunderstood language, distant and uncontrollable.

I argue for Shelley's ingenuousness in the preface, but hope to explain one of its principle inconsistencies. I mean that Shelley, regardless the degree of self-consciousness, also and at the same time he exalts "beautiful idealisms of moral excellence" in the poem's preface, directly threatens both their potency and potentialization. Something remains in excess at the end of the poem, inerasable. This overflow and undesired extraneous part of the poem is history, the past, which presses on the presence of the autonomous poem and the poet's unconscious impressions, both internal and external, which produced it. The fourth act of the poem can be read as attempt to escape the dialectic of history and events. Shelley reaches beyond the triad of thesis, antithesis and synthesis in search of excess, and the result is at times unreadable. But though the fourth act might be unreadable in terms of the three acts that precede it, this is precisely the point. Excess has no claim to precedence or eventual realization to future. The emotion that attaches itself to the demands of excess is terror. The poem's failure to mimetically represent in both form and strength the mind's first vision of it creates this terror and is the expression of it. This terror carries forward the memory of the original vision of the poem into the present; without it, the creative source of the poet dies, and so we can say that terror divides one half of Shelley's procreant urge; the other half is Love. Both coexist alongside each other in the mind, legitimized in the difference between *Prometheus Unbound* and Shelley's original vision of it. Excess of love, like the excess we name "history," unburdens itself in the aesthetic object, but it must battle against being historicized, literally ruined by its contrary. In the *Defense of Poetry*, Shelley universalizes this potential for love, which, as we shall see in *Prometheus Unbound*, becomes the

excess that marks its origin:

Every man, in the infancy of art, observes an order which approximates more or less closely to that from which this highest delight results: but the diversity is not sufficiently marked, as that its gradations should be sensible, except in those instances where the predominance of this faculty of approximation to the beautiful (for so we may be permitted to name the relation between this highest pleasure and its cause) is very great. Those in whom it exists in excess are poets, in the most universal sense of the word [.] (512)

This passage demands close attention because its meaning hinges, like *Prometheus Unbound*, on Love's transformation into a mental faculty while orbiting a remote enough distance from the ego, as superego, to satisfy the powerful need for a singular ideal. Love for both Shelley and Freud plays a god-like role in this process. Love, as they understand it, is anterior to all good action, inhibited or uninhibited, and to all bad action gradations of its absence. In each writer, the idea of love offers a compelling choice for how to account for the persistence of a lost condition of wholeness. Memory carries the remains of private experience, that which we call past, and writing public experience, what we call history. Love in *Prometheus Unbound* is the reason this memory of perfect sense and feeling remains, and determines the natural and civic qualities of these remains. But in acts three and four, particularly, as Prometheus "unbinds," so to speak, Love takes on an entirely different quality than in act one and two. The poem helps show us the cost of Love. Beauty is now the object and subject of approximation, since he who loves is necessarily beautiful. The poet purchases "this highest pleasure"—approximation to the

beautiful—from literally loving beauty in exchange for bearing it “in excess.” Distributed across the best minds of a generation, like a powerful sensory organ present in “poets,” according to Shelley, and no one else, this excess drives cultural change because it departs from culture.

This departure threatens the logic of the established order in three ways. First, instead of trying to destroy customs, and the values and events on which they rest, the excess seeks to reinterpret them according to an “approximation to the beautiful.” So this first method of attack is both historical, in that it “legislates” another event, and ahistorical, in that it seeks to escape its own ruin as a legislated product bound to political history. Secondly, because Shelley’s use of excess universalizes the “poet” in whom it exists, who can then “legislate” the world, it complicates the boundary line between individual ego interests and those of society, and therefore deligitimizes both extraneous authority and the signature “poet.” And finally, Love bridges this excess to imagination and brings it forth into the social community (535).

The influence of Shelleyan excess in moving culture forward into futurity and arriving at its meeting with history ready to repudiate and therefore historicize it, determines the action of *Prometheus Unbound* and accounts for the inadequate distribution of its impact across literary history. One could understand the direction of this departure as always turning in relation to reason and imagination, and what these ideas gain for Shelley’s poetic discourse. Again, this contest stages itself in a confrontation between Demogorgon and Jupiter, but to first identify the process of its development in the *Defense* extends the reach of Shelley’s thoughts on poetry and culture.¹¹ In the first act, a fury says, “In each human heart, terror survives / The ravin it has

¹¹ Shelley puts into play three different concepts in the *Defense* that name, but do not necessarily determine the reality of Prometheus, Jupiter and Demogorgon: imagination,

gorged,” two lines that demand rigorous and sensitive reading (618-20). The pun on “ravin” is more important than it at first appears. One way to read ravin is “plunder, booty, spoils; that which is taken or seized.”¹² Here terror becomes a product of ravin, the psychological remnants of a thing expressed in an emotion. If we read ravin as an act of “rapine or robbery; a plundering, a pillaging,” then ravin becomes an event, and terror its interpretation.¹³ This would suggest that terror is a motivating force in the carrying out of ravin, even always anterior to it. The paranoia and morbidity that clouds Jupiter’s reign in the poem converges to a point of terror, and force always follows; in fact, force impregnates the “terrorist” with a built-in warrant for its application because physical force will always only terrorize those who wield it, or at least *Prometheus Unbound* suggests. There is only one physical act of terror in the whole poem: Demogorgon’s carefully structured and measured ascent to Jupiter, Jupiter’s evacuation of power, symbol and control, and Demogorgon’s equally structured and measured descent back to his throne in the deep. Prometheus, though the subject of physical torture for three thousand years, avoids the mental disturbance of Jupiter. Prometheus comes close to despair, but never terror.

Reading ravin as an event, and terror as the interpretation of it, the knowledge left over from the event’s happening, suggests Shelley understands that the price of history is terror, since

reason, utility. By studying the interplay between reason, imagination and utility, one maps out the psychological structure of *Prometheus Unbound* and the language that charts its limits. Shelleyan Love names Asia, but operates throughout the whole poem, its presence or absence consistently identified.

Poets, then, in Shelley’s view, cannot choose to vacate the public sphere, since their existence legitimizes it.

¹² OED, 2nd ed. 1989.

¹³ Ibid.

history seeks to record the discord and conflict between political subject and State (the ego and everything extraneous to it). This marks a critical distinction between history and poetry. For Shelley, poetry is the “record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds” (532). This definition clearly anticipates the aim of the pleasure principle’s program, happiness, and would seem to oppose the ruin that historicity consolidates.

Shelley’s 1816 lyric, *Mont Blanc*, offers another reading of the lines, “In each human heart, terror survives / The ravin it has gorged.” In this poem, one begins to see how the pattern of Shelley’s thought pulls external reality downward toward the region that Demogorgon will inhabit in *Prometheus*. The *Thou* of *Mont Blanc*, also the mountain Mont Blanc is not Europe’s highest peak but “ravine”: “Thus Thou, Ravine of Arve—dark, deep Ravine” (12).¹⁴ Fifteen lines below in the second of five stanzaic breaks, the speaker says:

the strange sleep

Which when the voices of the desert fail

Wraps all in its own deep eternity.¹⁵ (27-9)

The “strange sleep” is not death, but something like a living death, a vampyric veil that so subtly insulates a feeling of meaning from the “swaddling clothes” of Luke and reorders it into a “deep eternity.” If we read ravin as a “deep narrow gorge or cleft,” then we meet Freud at the place where he metaphorizes depth as conscience, the vast interiority to which the ego descends

¹⁴ No doubt the debt this poem owes to Coleridge’s *Kubla Khan* has been exhausted, but whereas Coleridge builds from his imagination a pleasure dome, the developmental process utilized in *Mont Blanc* proceeds from its ruins, a mental conceit that seems to attribute imagination, perhaps ironically, to Natural entities outside its compass.

¹⁵ Read Yeats “The Second Coming.” *Yeats’s Poetry, Drama, and Prose*, 76.

when pressed by society.¹⁶ Although reading the superego into ravin might seem arbitrary, I think it is an accurate vocabulary in which to begin, since I will show how ravin essentially consumes itself. This reading legitimizes many of the psychological assumptions of this thesis, and makes full use of a brief passage from the *Defense* in which Shelley reveals in basic terms the nature of his thought and poetry: “Poetry, and the principle of Self, of which money is the visible incarnation, are the God and the Mammon of the world” (531).

Shelley’s placement of caesura, which leaves hanging for the reader “terror survives,” and his use of enjambment, which drives the sentence toward “gorged,” reflects the rhetorical and thematic impact of both lines and, in at least one respect, *Prometheus Unbound*: in Jupiter’s world, Mammon’s, individuals cannibalize themselves in pursuit of “the principle of Self.” The ravin, or ravine, exists to be sated, “gorged.” Love for Shelley lays claim to a certain individual limitlessness, which poetry always seeks to outline, trace and define in order to match it, equal its source. In a similar way, the principle of Self lays claim to an analogous limitlessness, a depth whose operations mirror Freud’s id and whose appearance terrorizes both the individual in whom it exists and the society at which it directs contempt. Shelley calls its visible incarnation in the world “money,” from which we conclude the principle of Self is economic materialism, and the relationship between Materialism and Individual is ownership. Jupiter owns one face of human existence, things. The apparatus of this ownership is Law, and its force comes in the service of things; Jupiter’s Law protects property. Because Jupiter understands Prometheus as a piece of property only, a slave, he cannot access the other face of existence, Poetry, as Shelley calls it in the *Defense*, but when Shelley mentions Prometheus’s tremendous will in the poem, he is talking

¹⁶ OED, 2nd ed., 1989.

about the same idea of liberty.

The distinction between Jupiter as master and Prometheus as slave complicates itself in what can be construed as Jupiter's sincere concern for Prometheus as property, albeit property too expensive to own. This is to say that in one respect Jupiter's interest, like Prometheus's, best serve them by canceling terror's appointment with ravin: quite simply, terror must not gorge ravin. If the insatiate desires that comprise Shelley's "principle of Self" terrorize the human heart with hate, avarice and violence, then what vanishes is hope. What rouses Prometheus from inaction, and occasions the repudiation of his curse is exactly this: civilization, as Shelley knows it during the composition of *Prometheus*, distributes its institutions and controls individuals according to the "principle of Self." A titan in the poem, Prometheus is a poetic representative of the best and worst in human potential; an image of human perfection Prometheus is not, nor did Shelley intend him. Narcissism, like the raven, feeds off what is already dead. We see a defeated figure in the opening speech of the poem not because Jupiter is too strong but Prometheus too weak; "[b]lack, wintry, dead, unmeasured," as Prometheus names the terms of the contract to which hate binds him (I.21). The eagle that gnaws and disgraces him in the first scene is a reminder of the ravin in his heart.

In which ways does Shelley's "principle of Self" threaten Jupiter, however?

I mentioned above three concepts at work in *Defense of Poetry*: reason, imagination and utility, and how we might read them as abstract models for Jupiter, Prometheus and Demogorgon. Shelley's mythopoeia borrows from diverse use of classical mythology, offering ready-made plots that he adapts to his purposes, the most important of which prophesizes the outcome of Jupiter's union with Thetis. Mercury informs Prometheus of this knowledge in act

one: “There is a secret known / To thee and to none else of living things / Which may transfer the scepter of wide Heaven” (371-3). Mercury tells Prometheus that knowledge of this prophecy “perplexes the Supreme,” who will do anything to avoid it; Jupiter, in fact, marries Thetis to Peleus, a mortal, to ensure their offspring poses no threat to his authority. Not Achilles, however (son of Thetis and Peleus), but Demogorgon regulates Jupiter’s fate, gorged into existence following the rape of his mother. In *Prometheus Unbound* Civilization is broken beyond man’s capacity to repair it (hence humanity’s surface removal from the poem’s action, replaced by a greater agent of change, a Titan, Prometheus); indeed, broken perhaps beyond even divine restoration and redemption, and only terror survives each human heart, history’s ruin. Demogorgon is Shelley’s response to the fall of man.

To say that Jupiter’s force gorges Demogorgon into the poem’s realm, or sphere, would do more than point to a homophonous relationship of words; it, in a like manner, forces us to proceed from a new reading, one that suggests not only Demogorgon’s birth but also the birth of a new realm, or sphere which names itself “Eternity” (III.ii.52). Demogorgon would seem to represent Utility, or necessity, in *Prometheus Unbound*; and unsurprisingly so, for he names himself “eternity,” and is not subject to any index of mutability. The whole structure of *Prometheus Unbound* erects itself in him and from him, this “One” whom Shelley introduces and sets above all others in the second line of the poem: “Monarch of Gods and Daemons, and all Spirits / *But One*, who throng those bright and rolling Worlds” (emphasis mine). It was, I think, Shelley’s understanding of historical development, in which what we create as “cause” signifies nothing but a “word expressing a certain state of the human mind with regard to the manner in which two thoughts [[things]] are apprehended to be related to each other,” which led to his

decision to invent Demogorgon (“On Life,” 508). In addition, Shelley’s conception of history largely has to do with “Mutability,” to which he addressed and entitled a short poem published in 1816. The poem leaves the reader with “Nought may endure but Mutability,” except for the strange “may” to which rises the first iamb (16). What this suggests is that for Shelley, at least, and in *Prometheus Unbound*, particularly, Love and Necessity, individual and society; or, echoed in *Civilization and its Discontents*, Eros and Ananke, do not exist in a causal or sequential relationship but coexist with each other as radials issuing from an unknown center -- unknown always. Love and Necessity are always being birthed, and always simultaneously. Jupiter’s prophesized fate is certain, whether he could have escaped it, irrelevant; that he chooses to rape Thetis and set in motion the prophecy is at once a procreative (Demogorgon’s birth) and destructive (the decision is suicide) act—“Nought may endure but Mutability” (emphasis mine). My reasoning here echoes Freud’s toward the end of *Civilization and its Discontents*:

The two processes of individual and cultural development must stand in hostile opposition to each other and mutually dispute the ground. But this struggle between the individual and society is not a derivative of the contradiction—probably an irreconcilable one—between the primal instincts of Eros and death. (106)

Freud asserts that the struggle derives from “within the economics of the libido,” and represents a dispute that “does admit of eventual accommodation in the individual,” and he then expresses the same wish for civilization (106).

I mention this to suggest that the symptoms and conflicts of culture and the public sphere are, at bottom, symptoms and conflicts of the psyche, the individual mind. The social customs

for which Shelley professed so much contempt (Religion, Monarchy and Nationalism) inscribe themselves in the ego as obstructions to individual happiness. This is because they arise in the ego. Although the professional reader may, and should, make explicit the possible metaphorizations within reach of Prometheus in the poem, ranging from a representative of ideal man to ideal culture, Shelley still invests the dream of universal love of mankind in a single figure. Nor do I take this small point to be an outcome of the textual genesis of the title, in adherence to Aeschylus's classical Promethean trilogy, but an illustration of the poem's intended design. In showing his audience a titan, Shelley tries to show them their intellectual "miniature," their "ideal prototype." Nevertheless, this "ideal" psyche in whom Shelley places the redeemer's burden comes to resemble the much more common and conflicted one: the psyche who is already and always in one sense a "creator" and in another a "creation" of his age.

I want to iterate the centrality of that omnipotent feeling of wholeness at which the ego aims in its search for pleasure, happiness and perfection. The psychological imagery of the poem works in concert with this aim, as Shelley tells us in the preface, emphasizing the human mind as the scene of the drama: "The imagery I have employed will be found in many instances to have been drawn from the human mind, or from those external actions by which they are expressed" (207). in the poem Shelley demystifies the terror of the unfamiliar. Engaging psychological discourses will not foster a reconciliation of Shelley's relationship to literary history; such critical treatments stand alongside traditional Shelleyan oppositions (as one critic puts it, "an other-worldly naïf versus an Anarco-activist")¹⁷ and the theories to which readers attach them. I offer an analogy of the psychological struggle Shelley stages in *Prometheus Unbound* to Freud's

¹⁷ Duffy, Cian. *Shelley and the Revolutionary Sublime*.

theory of the relationship of individuals to society, not to show that Shelley is more politically determined as a poet-“legislator” than aesthetically so, as aspirant of Adonais, or vice versa. One does not require Freud to say that both politics and aesthetics run parallel in Shelley’s apprehension of things, or that Shelley is more politically determined as a poet-“legislator” than aesthetically so, as aspirant of Adonais. Nor does one require Freudian theory to make the case that psychology performs an important role in Shelley’s poetry and prose; nor to argue Romantic poetry’s obsession with the imagination resembles Modernity’s relationship to the unconscious.

I want to impress upon the reader and remind the reader of what Shelley says in the preface of *Prometheus Unbound*: “The imagery I have employed will be found in many instances to have been drawn from the human mind, or from those external actions by which they are expressed” (207). The province of poetry belongs to Psyche, and psyche to Other, so poetry is fundamentally a pathological disturbance of the limits between ego and object, self and other, event and history; there is one exception, however, which I’ve already cited—Love. According to Freud and Shelley, poetry without Love is always already the taking of curses rather than the giving of blessings; but of course it is both already always. The psychological operations from which we apprehend our perceptions and perceive our apprehensions, ideas of history, modernity, futurity begin and end in the mental sphere; their coherence and transmission comes later in grammatical edifices and figures of speech, which are precisely what Prometheus, Jupiter and Demogorgon are *figures* of speech, Shelley’s, Freud’s and our own.

Defining the exchange that *Prometheus Unbound* dramatizes, and that Freud exposes, shows the mind in conflict with itself. Our defenses against a reality indifferent to our perpetual

demise are limited, but our uncertainties which are boundless and exert upon us their strength in this material unborn existence of reality. In the next chapter I explain the terror of becoming just another thing in the world, just a momentary event, an object of historical ruin. Shelley answers the absurdity of this fear in *Prometheus Unbound*, a vision born from chaos. Freud passes it along to our contemporaneity and we foolishly call him a psychologist when he is, quite the contrary, one of the great poets of the twentieth century. The poem *Prometheus* and Freud's exiled annihilation from nativity abides the pieces of its ruin in order to admit and then dismiss the procreant wish for wholeness; poetry must historicize its love, love its history.

Chapter Two

Perchance no thought can count them—yet they pass.

—Prometheus (*PU I.424*)

The poem *Prometheus Unbound* is uncanny from its first words: *Prometheus Unbound, A Lyrical Drama in Four Acts*. Freud defines this term in the eponymous essay, *The Uncanny*, ascribing it special status as an obscure species of Aesthetics. He writes:

If psychoanalytic theory is right in asserting that every affect arising from an emotional impulse—whatever—is converted into fear by being repressed, it follows that among those things that are felt to be frightening there must be one group in which it can be shown that the frightening element is something that has been repressed and now returns. This species of the frightening would then constitute the uncanny, and it would be immaterial whether it was itself originally frightening or arose from another affect. In the second place, if this really is the secret nature of the uncanny, we can understand why German usage allows the familiar (*das Heimliche*, the ‘homely’) to switch to its opposite, the uncanny” (147).

Freud the modern Philosopher is to my understanding the best way to read him, the way which best delivers his theoretical project, and does not solicit the double bind of proceeding from the proposition that Freud is the “Father of Psycho-analytic interpretation,” wherein we as readers become another iteration of infantile helplessness, and our turn back to Freud, a substitutive satisfaction of paternal protection. The phrase comes from the first page of Freud’s *The Uncanny*: “Yet one may presume that there exists a specific affective nucleus, which justifies the

use of a special conceptual term.” The idea of an *Affective nucleus* exercises the Platonic, Lucretian and Goethean influence in Freud. One also finds an atomic motif in Shelley, and though the process by which Shelley’s amateurish scientific intent often extends its compass is thoroughly and lightly documented by Richard Holmes in the seminal 1976 literary biography, *Shelley: The Pursuit*, the occasional atomic phraseology Shelley turns in his poetry to stress parallel, though imaginative, processes in the poet’s mind is *not* produced by similarly intense Philosopher-Poet influences. Even so, Shelley draws from Plato, Lucretius and Goethe more explicitly than Freud does. One concern of aesthetics is, as Freud notes, everything “beautiful, attractive and sublime”; more profoundly, and negatively, however, is the “dread and horror,” the psyche’s “core” fear to which aesthetics seeks access. But the “uncanny” is familiar; it is home to us, so how is it possible for a mind to alienate itself from the very place to which it unintentionally is always returning? As I will show, Freud and Shelley arrive at the same problem and solution.

For a moment, I return to Shelley’s epigraph situated after the title and before the preface. Shelley carries himself, culture and us across the great design initiated by the Greek Tragedians, Aeschylus, particularly. Shelley’s audience for this play is, bluntly and aptly, a ghost, one with many selves and masques, some material, others only imaginary. The epigraph, “[d]o you *hear* me, Amphiaraus, hidden away under the earth,” is not only a rhetorical question but also a literal one (emphasis mine). A footnote to Norton’s second edition of *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose* explains that the origin of this question lies in Cicero’s translation of a lost play by Aeschylus, *Epigoni*, who voiced it through Cleanthes’s address to Zeno as a bitter interrogative of the pleasure-seeking Dionysian lifestyle (206). So already this epigraph bears witness—*hears*—an

anticipation of Freud's "Eternal City," one that is both inside and out of language, which maintains the impossibility of matching historical sequence in mental images; the idea is self-evident, yes, but worth mention because Shelley will never be Aeschylus, nor *Prometheus Unbound* an Attic drama. Yet also worth mentioning is that Shelley revives Aeschylus and Greek tragedy, so the case must *also* be made that what is so disturbing and perverse about this *Prometheus* is that we hear ourselves calling to Shelley buried beneath and hidden in the earth (the ocean, literally), as Prometheus does Demogorgon in the poem.

Yet if we read Freud sedulously, then we see he has already built into his assumptions and premises of memory, and what always *was*, an access and exit to the problem he posits in understanding how the primitive occupies the modern simultaneously in the preservation of the mental life of mankind: Imagination. I mentioned above Freud's comparison of ancient to Modern Rome, but before the reader grants Freud permission to follow this line of reasoning, which reveals the entanglements and anxieties of the mind's psychological preservation of memories, and the uncanny impressions and experiences this preservation excites, he first gains access to a key component, the only one, in my estimation, in order to demonstrate what repeatedly defeats such entanglements and anxieties—Imagination.¹⁸

Freud prefaces, like Shelley does in *Prometheus Unbound*, his fundamental point with an elitist and rarified documentation of what the "best" history is, and this complex interstice of

¹⁸ Freud says in the long essay, *The Uncanny*, that its effects are produced by an encounter with our "double," and that at first this other self was a defense against the annihilation of the body once its vital needs could no longer be met or satisfied. He explains: "having once been an assurance of immortality, it [Doppelgänger] becomes the uncanny harbinger of death (142).

events, experiences and interpretations depend on the imaginative, though not pathological, celerity of the individual. The scaffolding and flying buttresses of Freud's thought are levied on a contradiction of stained glass, literally and rhetorically. He comes close to saying outright that his major assumption put forth in *Civilization and its Discontents* falls apart like the ruins figuratively construing it. Freud contends:

Since we overcame the error of supposing that the forgetting we are familiar with signified a destruction of the memory-trace—that is, its annihilation—we have been inclined to take the opposite view, that in mental life nothing which has once been formed can perish—that everything is somehow preserved and that in suitable circumstances (when, for instance, regression goes back far enough [say three thousand years, for instance]) it can once more be brought to light. (16-7)

Supposing an inherent truth to this claim, we need only switch scientific principles with psychological ones, since what Freud does in the abovementioned passage is to define a natural law of physics. It is understood by science that the 1st Law of Thermodynamics states that matter, the *thingness* of ourselves Freud defends against annihilation, can be neither created nor destroyed but only transisted and transformed. One sees this displayed in Freud's view of Religious doctrines and beliefs, an absurd infantilization that assures perpetual infancy by admitting a superior patriarchal figure, Aton, Moses, Christ, Jahve, Allah, Demogorgon, etc. Shelley shares Freud's assessment of religion but cannot seem to discard the notion of a Universal Oneness; but really it is us as poor readers of Shelley who do not listen when he tells us in the *Defense* that Oneness is simply the condition of battle and mark of faith of an

enlightened individual who exalts the many over the one.

A similar instance of the inanity that blooms from each generation of critics to the next is present in the opening sentence of *Civilization and its Discontents*, in which Freud tells us, “It is impossible to escape the impression that people commonly use false standards of measurement [...]” (10). This is an ironic claim for several reasons, least of which is the fact that Freud’s measurements are anything but common; 2) escaping the “impossible” is what Religion, and Freud (though he uses “error” instead of sin, tells us is possible; 3) the term “common” is so relative that after reading Freud’s tome, one begins to believe that there exists only the common alongside the singularity of Freud. Shelley of course employs a similar rhetorical trick when he writes in the preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, “[d]idactic poetry is my abhorrence,” his stated purpose is to “familiarize the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical readers with beautiful idealisms of moral excellence” (209). I want to iterate the intangible quality of “highly refined imagination” and the physical notion of what is to us “familiar,” not because Shelley and Freud’s thoughts are identical, but they are distributed across their texts similarly.

That Shelley wishes to “familiarize” a select audience would seem counterintuitive alongside Wordsworth’s ardent request to bring poetry from the ethereal sphere, to the common tongue of common man and common speech, back to iambic pentameter. But even Wordsworth is not literally pleading for this; like Wordsworth, and Freud after him, who seek in a “common” tongue a *natural* man, one uninhibited by the demands of culture and punishment of Law, Shelley makes of his poem a document that shows us what we are *not*, so that his s/elect readers are addressed not as possessors of intellectual and spiritual acumen; but its opposite, an ordinary, terrified and therefore blood-bespangled by the ideas which have carried them to this point in

history. The most carefully crafted bitterent Freud offers the common man indicated also a craftsman-like exaltation of him: “Let us return to the common man and to his religion—the only religion that ought to bear that name” (23). The “common” man, superannuated and primitive, perhaps simply ungoverned by Law and conscience is common because of his religion and also in spite of it. Freud says in this passage that there exists a relational dependency between the common and religious because we at first draw out from the statement that religion is an attribute of natural rather than civil man, but Freud criticizes both.

As Freud reiterates, there exists an inverse relationship with the Promethean tools of scientific progress and the gradation of agitation and violence such tools bring forth into a civilized culture. Shelley, scientific dilettante¹⁹ he was, recognized this happening in his own country from Italy in 1820, and suggests through *Prometheus Unbound* a possibility of balancing this scale, if not wholly counteracting it—Imagination.

And here we turn back again to how Freud sets up the Eternal City metaphor. He says:

Now let us, by a flight of *imagination*, suppose Rome is not a human habitation but a psychical entity with similarly long and copious past—an entity, that is to say, in which nothing that has once come into existence will pass away and all the earlier stages of development continue to exist alongside the latest one.

(18; emphasis mine)

Again, the burden falls on the imagination to complete seemingly impossible tasks, to render pictorially, and, according to Shelley’s definition of poet, grammatically in language or image the

¹⁹ Read Richard Holmes Literary biography, *Shelley: The Pursuit*.

mental life of our minds. Still more mark how Freud suggests the “flight” of imagination, which posits an undecidable distinction between soaring like a bird or escaping like a coward. Such a distinction calls attention to the fight/flight mechanism of language in general, but that we see Prometheus bound to an “eagle-baffling” mountain in the first scene, since he is literally disemboweled repeatedly by birds, suggests something more sinister at work. Prometheus is a carcass for all physical purposes, food for ravens and other scavengers,²⁰ a psychically raped cannibal indebted to his own curse on Jupiter.

This brings my essay toward an understanding of this supposed embodied idea of moral excellence, Prometheus, against and for which he struggles, succeeds and fails. I find that Prometheus casts an implicit shadow on the rest of Shelley’s poem, *Prometheus*, and poetry, meriting an accurate and exact reflection of Shelley’s philosophic and poetic ideals. This would be one way to read the poem *Prometheus Unbound*, yet there is another far more tempting and interesting. From this line of reasoning I proceed. First, *Prometheus Unbound* is high tragedy. In addition, its tragic hero is Demogorgon. In sum, because the history the poem is always trying to iterate through moments of psychological distress, the reader of it can only conjure events, single occurrences, rather than singular knowledge of truth. The psychical pressure that these fractures bring about in both reader and Prometheus, alongside interpretive efforts driving toward understanding the poem as a coherent whole, fractures critical attempts to individuate them spatially or temporally. This is to say, there is no reality in *Prometheus Unbound*, nor any literal signpost or rhetorical theory we can point to in order to measure its moments and match our

²⁰ Scavengers, which include literary critics and unkind readers also, as Shelley’s initial understanding of Keats’s death suggests.

expectations. Shelley writes a purely imaginative document, unfiltered, employing primal impulses alone, ones that would actually, along this line of reasoning, deteriorate when published. That we do not hear Shelley today, *Prometheus Unbound* is not regularly read in English departments demonstrates its truly uncanny nature because the author we thought we knew, knows us so much better.

I said earlier I would look closer at Mercury's speech addressed to Prometheus in act I.²¹ I also said that when we add the six lines which follow Mercury's speech, we begin to isolate out of the poem an inimitable sonnet, which operates in terms of an intentional deceit? by Shelley regarding action and thought of the principle players also. For convenience and clarity, I quote the passage a second time, this time all fourteen lines:

MERCURY. Yet pause, and plunge
Into Eternity, where recorded time,
Even all that we imagine, age on age,
Seems but a point, and the reluctant mind
Flags wearily in its unending flight
Till it sink, dizzy, blind, lost, shelterless;
Perchance it has not numbered the slow years
Which thou [Prometheus] must spend in torture, unreprieved.

PROMETHEUS. Perchance no thought can count them—yet they pass.

MERCURY. If thou might'st dwell among the Gods the while

²¹ See page 5 of my thesis.

Lapped in voluptuous joy?—

PROMETHEUS. I would not quit

This bleak ravine, these unrepentant pains.

MERCURY. Alas! I wonder at, yet pity thee. (I.17-29)

I take this passage as dramatic irony on a macrocosmic level; macrocosmic because the Eternal and Infinite are reduced to a “point.” But to fully comprehend the sardonic sphere which Shelley adopts in this exchange, one must turn again back to the epigraph to the preface of *Prometheus*, one must hear it howling beneath the text, “[d]o you hear this, Amphiarus, hidden away under the earth?” Remember the footnote to this epigraph that the editors of the Norton provide is that Shelley is doing what Aeschylus does: he is parodying the Dionysus lifestyle, the inability of a culture to not only see but prepare for the future, a culture that will not abide its own ruins, will not stoically submit to suffering.

What else is Mercury’s question, “If thou might’st dwell among the Gods the while / Lapped in voluptuous joy,” but another way of asking, will you live, Prometheus, as do Gods, all pleasure, whimsy, indifferent, self-cannibalized by hate and rancor? So now we can read the epigraph not only as an ego-maniacal (and manacled) announcement of genius, one that transcends the Greek tragedians’s accomplishments even, but also a haunting taunt of what the Greek’s valued above all else: balance, equipoise, stoicism, Apollonian ethics, basically. Shelley is calling this way of merging with the cosmos utterly foolish and impossible, in such a way that the epigraph actually overhears itself burying Aeschylus while also sending him soaring into snow burning peaks of the Indian Caucasus, all resolve endlessly torn and flayed by winged-

carrions.

Of course, Shelley is doing something else echoing the epigraph in Prometheus's exchange with Mercury. He calls his "hero," Prometheus, an impossible fool for stoically suffering three-thousand years of physical torture at the decree of an infantile, though patriarchal Monarch, Jupiter; yet Prometheus is just as childish and irrational in his unwillingness to recall his curse and be the savior of mankind, but if this is so, then why?

I think Shelley is pointing out to us that Prometheus in his conception is *not* a "beautiful idealism of moral excellence," but quite the contrary. The uncanny effect this difference of the idea of Prometheus produces relies on the difficulty of naming literal from rhetorical. Paul de Man tells us that for Shelley's last poem, *The Triumph of Life*, this difficulty creates for readers certain deafness, but de Man's admonition applies equally to *Prometheus Unbound*:

The Triumph of Life warns that nothing, whether deed, word, thought, or text, ever happens in relation, positive or negative, to anything that precedes, follows, or exists elsewhere, but only as a random event, whose power, like the power of death, is due to the randomness of its occurrence.²² (122)

So the power of chance, which for Freud is the superior power of fate, drives all relational connections we make, whether in the name of psyche, history or the aesthetic. Poetry then, Shelley's Prometheus and *Prometheus* certainly, is an impotent figure, and our expectations for the Titan and author always unmatched because an expectation is another name for the eventual realization of relational connections.

Intentionality also becomes a relational illusion in de Man's understanding of Shelley and

²² de Man, Paul. *Blindness and Insight*.

Romanticism. One proposition of this thesis is the question of intentionally, the apparent disjunction between what is heard and read, said and meant, irony and reference. “I would feign be / What it is my destiny to be” is the line that carries the whole first act, and Prometheus as a model/anti-model and idea. Absolutely irrelevant what Prometheus’s destiny literally is, he ends up with Asia, which some characterize as pure Love, but which I contend is simply an extension of Prometheus, his anima other. Confined to a cave-like dwelling fit for aesthetes only, taking upon himself the mystery not of things but their transformation into beautiful things, independent of the subject of his liberation, mankind. The transformation Shelley acquires throughout the poem for Prometheus is astonishing. Consider that at its opening Prometheus is bounded to the E/earth and ends up descending its remotest depths with Asia in order to enact Demogorgon. While this conclusion shows Prometheus absolutely free, each air-born thought a blessing rather than curse conceived by the mind to spark the Promethean fire into the very remotest depths of humanity’s intellect, to satisfy every flash of his and our minds, yet reluctant to engage the revolution he apparently undergoes on humanity’s behalf.

However, though the literal fate of Prometheus might be out of his hands, that Shelley chooses “feign” to try and put it there for his and the sake of his readers, encompasses what Freud says is beyond (yet) the grasp of “modern” science and philosophy. That is, holding *during* the same temporal event two contrary ideas, historical polarities and the bi-polarity of mental life, in general. The homophonous correlation, and therefore annihilation of reading “fain,” which denotes will and intentionality, as “feign,” which denotes deception and pretence, pulls from Prometheus’s hands control of the poem. Shelley realizes this and so invents Demogorgon, *who* and *what* is no invention at all, but the very source of the fractal nature of will and intention.

For Shelley, Prometheus's intention at times evidences a misguided model of action and thought, stemming from his own psychical history between himself and father; for reader, a model of human progress and culture, and therefore not very interesting, like any model of perfection always is. Mercury tells us in his speech that only with great "reluctance" does the mind "pause, and plunge / Into Eternity," as if in assurance against history and psyche's birth of it. "Reluctance" implies doubt, uncertainty and fear at bottom, but Prometheus does know that this is the natural way of things, that men and the ideas men produce are always passing by whether men understand only the literal, rhetorical or both; Prometheus is untraumatized because his reluctant mind is "unrepentant," living in an always already to be uncertain future.

This dissociation between the literal and rhetorical is captured toward the end of the first act. Having passed through his dark night of the soul, Prometheus delivers an agitated but impassioned speech, one that thematically unites the next three acts. He despairs indifferently and yet intellectually at his position, one occupied some two hundred years earlier by Shakespeare's hero, Posthumous, of the late romance, *Cymbeline*. I quote this passage from *Prometheus Unbound* in its entirety because I judge, to a large degree, the thematic coherence and incoherence of the poem's last three acts upon the foundation this monologue lays:

How fair these air-born shapes! and yet I feel
Most vain all hope but love, and thou art far,
Asia! Who when my being overflowed
Wert like a golden chalice to bright wine
Which else had sunk into the thirsty dust.
All things are still—alas! how heavily

This quiet morning weighs upon my heart;
Though I should dream, I could even sleep with grief
If slumber were denied not...I would fain
Be what it is my destiny to be,
The saviour and the strength of mankind
Or sink into the original gulph of things...
There is no agony and no solace left;
Earth can console, Heaven can torment no more. (l.807-20)

The first line, “[h]ow fair these air-born shapes,” is in response to Panthea’s observation that “[o]nly a sense / Remains of them [...],” but the two puns are clear: one hears air-born and *heir-born*, sense and *sins* simultaneously, whether we choose to attribute meaning to one or the other is irrelevant; that Shelley’s language is elastic, fluid and dynamic is key. The moderation of these two, there are dozens, calls attention to the violent and hostile transculturation happening at this time in England (Shelley, again, composed *Prometheus Unbound* in Italy) and the continent. Because Shelley viewed the French Revolution as a clash between the superannuated aristocracy and progressive bourgeois, one understands why heir and sins correlate. The French and English nobles, while “civil,” were too natural and vulgar in their ethical judgments on religious affairs. While the merchant-class bourgeois maintained a deep fidelity to the Church, their civility and scientific sophistication questionable (note that Percy Shelley was once and already, and probably always, in many ways Lord Percy Bysshe Shelley, and his life became a renunciation of the indefinite article each title of nobility signifies).

It should be noted that Demogorgon is a polemical idea and figure in Shelleyan

scholarship. Fate, Destiny, Law, Necessity, even the Dialectic itself is attributed to him. Called many names, I prefer the one he gives himself, Eternity. And rather than iconoclastically trying to subvert all previous critical attempts to define this indefinite article, Demogorgon, I demonstrate how all are correct and in some way betray our desire for a Father's protection. From not only external threats but what Freud calls "universal love of mankind," an "oceanic" and sublime glimpse of something lost, denied and rebuked, but also from the agitation and intense anxiety stemming from will transcending reason, intent compass, are we safe in Demogoron's sphere. Demogorgon is History, *history* and Psyche, or chaos, for short. I conclude this thesis with a discussion of Demogorgon and Freud's discussion of Moses and monotheism, so for now, I need only make the claim that Demogorgon is the *heard* hero of the poem. The point which we return to now because of its uncanny effect, owns something terrifying in its target. An agent of order materializing from chaos riding an Ezekial chariot, Demogorgon cycles the psychical history of Shelley's mind in *Prometheus's* composition and all of Shelley's compositions. That *Prometheus* and Prometheus is both semantic and semiotic, poem, Titan and fable of Titan, grammatically renders him untenable (in 1820 and 2009) as an object of aesthetic appreciation, of what a perfect man might be, do, say and think. I would think this man more "gorgon" than "demos," perhaps a monster *for* the people instead *of* and *by* them.

Yet still this is not the full story of Prometheus in his eponomial unbinding, still less of the complex interregnum of literal and rhetorical one finds in the above-quoted speech, which again construes itself as sonnet at fourteen lines, that aporia of hope and despair in which Prometheus, and Shelley, no doubt, finds himself limited and micro-scoped—Love. "Most vain all hope but love, and thou art far [...]," Prometheus says, assigning love, or so it seems, a

tributary position to hope, but love is “thou,” and “art” distant; in other words, Prometheus quietly submits to fate and becomes a tertiary presence behind Demogorgon and Shelley.

Prometheus, that is, equates the subject of Art, reified in Thou to the eternal other, the non-self or Freudian double. Love is not the anima Asia in this poem, but Art, which is culture, which is tradition, civilization, which, as Freud convincingly argues, is our modern anxiety and discontent. As long as History parades itself as sequential narrative in space, as a literal parade, a triumph rather than infinite singularities which are never rendered whole, but which seekers, *in-questers*, maybe, then art will possess not even the merciful of all destinies, a quiet and quick death, but gets filtered through the psyches of those who wield it for individual *history*; Jupiter is a prime example of this, a law-giver who is bound by Law, attached to a physical as Prometheus is mental rock. Freud says something in *The Uncanny* that sheds light on this linguistic paradox, that Northrop Frye termed “overhearing,” the highest possible eventuality of self-criticism:

Yet it is not only this content—[superannuated primordial narcissism of which Prometheus owns a great deal]—which is objectionable to self-criticism that can be embodied in the figure of the double: in addition there are all the possibilities which had they been realized, might have shaped our destiny, and to which our imagination still clings, all the strivings of the ego that were frustrated by adverse circumstances, all the suppressed acts of volition that fostered the *illusion of free will*. (143)

This passage is heard often but not read, simply because it brings about in our psyches a disturbing trinity of “learnt repose,” which we do not learn but guess at and pretend to own: self-criticism, imagination and free will (*II.5*). I do not believe that Freud privileges as “truth”

necessity or determinism over free will and liberty, but how I do not believe this is simple: the first line of *Civilization and its Discontents*, once again, is “It is impossible to escape the impression that people commonly use false standards of measurement.” We read this, but what *does not* follow is this: there is a correct standard of measurement and you, reader, are about to see me explain and demonstrate it. Of course I don’t attribute any special truth to Freud, no more so than I would any other seminal author of modernism, or romanticism, for that matter. But what is true is that Freud always employs his imagination to choose to believe the fictional world from which his visions of the psyche prophesize themselves in reality, and, greater still, such a vision claims as its driving force Eros, the life-drive, which for Freud was truth driven inward toward the depth of psyche. This raises the questions whether it is necessary for psychological health to believe in fictitious things, whether things that do not exist in our reality, like the events, figures and speeches of Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound*, or an omniscient and retributive father figure called God, are essential ingredients in understanding and measuring the things that do impact us. Perhaps, however, this is more a question of linguistics, definition, grammar: realities and fictions are thus and so because we define them thus and so with so many or few words.

Conclusions

I have no qualms in saying that men have always known [...] that once upon a time they had a primeval father and killed him.

—Freud (*Moses and Monotheism*. 1939)

I began this thesis talking about hearing and reading, rebellion and imagination, ruin and preservation; now I will talk about murder, and demonstrate through Freud and Shelley how original sin is nothing but psychological and grammatical murder. In 1939, Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* was published and other tremendous, though not cataclysmic transpired. The date may seem uncanny, but it's only familiar; if people read it or heard it otherwise, then maybe I would not be discussing it now. Freud's thesis in this book is that Moses, the Law-giver of Judaism, was, in fact, not Jewish but a noble Egyptian of the Pharaoh's court around 1350bc. Centuries later, when the Jewish people were prepared to remember and be influenced by Moses as a great individual, who delivered and sustained through memory the "One God Only" religious system, primeval Father of the Jewish people, several events, according to Freud, transpired at the same time:

The [Jews] people met with hard times; the hopes based on the favour of God were slow in being fulfilled; it became not easy to adhere to the illusion, cherished above all else, that they were God's chosen people. If they wished to keep happiness, then the consciousness of guilt [that they killed God, and were now acknowledging it through the return of the repressed cultural memories] that they themselves were such sinners offered a welcome excuse for God's severity. (173)

Such is Freud's proposition, but how does one get to Shelley's poem through Freud? I think the answer is that I do not. A chiasmic dependence on reading Freud through Shelley's Prometheus

Unbound and hearing *Prometheus Unbound* through Freud accomplishes two aims of literary history: first, the text is always task; second, forget the text because once you read it, it is no longer a text, it is history.

Literary history is all text, and of course much more than text. Before history becomes the material happening of text, it is psychic, immaterial, yet as soon as deeds becomes words, which are then internalized back into the psyche through reading, something is lost. This something is characterized by its presence, immediacy, homology and synchronicity. It could be called chance, but it could also be called allegory. The relationship between words and deeds is allegorized in the relationship between self and civilization, and vice versa. Another way of saying this is the relationship between Psyche and History is allegorized in the relationship between Shelley and Freud, and vice versa. The main point of these relationships and oppositions is the question of relation. What allegories do is impose relations by seeming to discover them. This is why Shelley introduces Demogorgon into *Prometheus Unbound*. To recall Paul de Man, Demogorgon is the trope of the name zero:

It is as sign that language is capable of engendering the principles of infinity, of genus, species, and homogeneity, which allow for synecdochal totalizations, but none of these tropes could come about without the systemic effacement of the zero and its reconversion into a name. There can be no *one* without zero, but the zero always appears in the guise of a *one*, of a (some)thing. The name is the trope of the zero. The zero is always called a one, when zero is actually nameless,

“innommable.”²³ (59)

Demogorgon is something of a logarithm, a word and number. Shelley tells us in the preface to *Prometheus* that his goal is greater than to merely reconcile the oppressor with the oppressed of humankind. Demogorgon makes possible in the poem this transcendence of language in the guise of its absence. Remember, Demogorgon tells us to demand no dire name.

It is often noted that Prometheus never meets Demogorgon or addresses him. Asia alone divines his council. Because Asia is understood to be pure Love, it makes sense, critics believe, to match this Love with Necessity. But I posit a different interpretation. Prometheus’s guilt spikes to such a level in the first act that he traumatizes himself out of his author’s drama. When one reads the first few speeches of Prometheus’s, intersticed with Greek-like choruses and spirits, one gathers that Prometheus, whose will is infinite and unconquerable, nevertheless cannot remember what he said to Jupiter. It would be extraordinarily naïve to assume that Prometheus’s despair is caused by a memory dosed with three thousand years of torture, for if this is the case, then others in the play would suffer the same amnesia. Yet there is something special about how and what Prometheus remembers, that makes a great impression on the reader and affects an uncanny sense: the *Phantasm of Jupiter*. Prometheus remembers his curse/course because Shelley has the Phantasm of Jupiter repeat it to him. The curse reads like a homily or prayer, and it should because Prometheus is listening to the words in obeisance:

O’er all things but thyself I gave thee power,

And my own Will.

I curse thee! Let a sufferer’s curse

²³ de Man, Paul. *Aesthetic Ideology*.

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

Both infinite as is the Universe,
And thou, and thy self-torturing solitude.
An awful image of calm power
Though now thou sittest, let the hour
Come, when thou must appear to be
That which thou art internally. (*I.273-99*)

Through this curse, the poem undergoes many changes, textual and thematic. On the surface, we see Prometheus developing cognitively and emotionally, but his brain is “dissolving,” and to explain this attribute of the poetic mind, one must turn again to levels and ways of reading the word “dissolving.” Jupiter later dissolves when Demogorgon ascends to his ethereal throne, destroys his power over Earth, Prometheus and humanity, and so too Demogorgon, when he descends back to the depths. Moses, we can say, according to Freud’s argument, dissolves also, until that time when the vital needs of the Jewish people are not being met, and his dissolution is based on mass guilt based on the severity of God’s judgments; then he reappears as a forgotten memory and is caged once more, like Demogorgon, until the One God Only need be resurrected again.

If we focus on the word “dissolve,” we begin to see inside of it “solve,” “soul,” “sole,” “dis,” “evolve,” even “love,” etc. Again, this is an exemplary instance of the literal trapped in the rhetorical, or visa versa. What we read is the pejorative dissolve; we do not hear its contrary, coalesce, because this is the word Shelley knows we desire, but for a poet such as Shelley, it is a far greater intellectual accomplishment for the brain to dissolve like sand, to (as its etymology suggests, come apart toward pluralism) than incorporate into the bondage of One. But there is another, more focused and intentional ambivalency in the Phantasm’s speech, far beyond the sphere of even the question of the indefinite article “phantasm,” and which leads me into the discussion of Moses and Demogorgon, or at the macrocosmic level, Freud and Shelley, Psyche and History:

[L]et the hour

Come, when thou must appear to be

That which thou art internally.

These three lines merit close attention if only because they propose that appearance and the interpretation of appearance are linked by this word “art.” The binary carries further appearance and reality to external and internal, and only one figure in *Prometheus Unbound* owns completely the internal, depths, gulph of things, Demogorgon.

One gets the sense that there is something always moiling and seething, like a volcano, to be sure, but unlike a mountain peak, unlike Prometheus. The volcanization of Demogorgon is forecasted in the second line of the poem, “[a]ll spirits but One [Demogorgon],” and his home more potent than the mountain because of its destructive, terrifying and chaotic nature. If a mountain were to symbolize our unconscious minds, then a volcano would symbolize both our

unconscious and conscious minds. Demogorgon is the monotheistic access to *Prometheus Unbound*, like Moses is the pure monotheistic force, as a great man, to *Moses and Monotheism*.

Shelley's monism, I propose, masques as Manichaeism in a similar correlative of Judaism's pure monotheism to Christianity's Trinitarian doctrine, which by definition alone can never be monotheistic. Shelley makes this point setting up his own fictive players, Demogorgon, Jupiter and Prometheus; Asia, conceivably, could be substituted for anyone of these since her power is Love, an attribute or absence in all three. This relationship lets me say that Demogorgon is the literally and rhetorical hero of *Prometheus Unbound*, and Asia's descent to Demogorgon's cave is a descent into the remote corner of what Freud calls the super-ego, conscience, internal Law. But I think it goes still further than Freud's terminology, or is a more accurate wording of it, at least, because in Demogorgon's case there is not submission whatsoever to external law or reality—Demogorgon reigns supreme in this imaginary world while at once stimulating its transculturalization. Each evocation of Demogorgon in order to reinscribe psychical/cyclical history is an announcement of the failure of society to meet the needs of individuals; each centrality, announces the end of an event and its beginning.

The echoes presage exactly this chiasmic relationship, which Demogorgon embodies:

In the world unknown

Sleeps a voice unspoken;

By thy step alone

Can its rest be broken,

Child of Ocean! (*II*.189-94)

The chorus is well aware of what Demogorgon is and even alludes to the first literal murder of

genesis, in which “Cain,” or “Can” kills Abel. True poets, Shelley suggests speak an unspoken language, and literary critics, historians, scientists and philosophers must overhear it in order to move beyond logo and ego centrism; yet the central point of this passage tells us that “step” is key. I read the line, “By thy step alone,” as something like we must be near in proximity to poets, great men, even such as contrary thinkers Shelley and Moses, that by this “step” we raise ourselves, and raze simultaneously to rest, death. A step is only an action, a movement toward a value of greater resolve, peace and rest; it is abrupt and cyclical, so perhaps we are not ready to read Shelley’s step yet, perhaps this is why we do not *hear* him.

To return to Asia’s interrogation of Demogorgon, which begins by Demogorgon’s interrogation of her when he asks of her, “Ask what thou wouldst know” (*II.iii.7*), I quote only Demogorgon’s words, not Asia’s, knowing full well their meanings interrelate and hinge on being read together, but for Freud’s sake, and Moses’s, I choose to hear only Demogorgon’s:

DEMOGORGON. Ask what thou would’st know.

DEMOGORGON. All things thou dar’st demand

DEMOGORGON. God.

DEMOGORGON. God, Almighty God.

DEMOGORGON. Merciful God.

DEMOGORGON. He reigns.

DEMOGORGON. He reigns.

This is the sum of all Demogorgon says until in act three Jupiter, sitting on his throne, asks, “Awful Shape, what art thou? Speak!” and Demogorgon replies, “Eternity—demand no direr name [...],” (50-1) but the sum of his words places on scholarship an unbearable onus,” because we can only understand these characters, these alphabetic symbols even, as literal parts of a rhetorical whole; so that what we see when we quote only what we *choose* to quote is aporias and lacunae, the “[s]corn[ed] track thy lagging fall through boundless space and time” (l.301). Reading between the lines in *Prometheus Unbound* is a challenge, to be sure; numerous aporetic objections exist in both poem and scholarship it solicits. Calling attention again to the “-----,” or the lacunae that I construct, I see how perhaps reading is vision, giving a pulse to the blank flatline inscription of a writer’s death and monument, his poetry. When we do this, fill in the blanks, so to speak, we measure aesthetically, and therefore also politically, what Shelley calls the track of “thy lagging fall,” which is really just a step on another tower, further in distance from the Earth, but still bounded to it by language. This language can be merciful, as in New Testament or almighty, as in Old. But it is imperative to read and hear the language, above all, to see its inscription between the aporetic lacuna, the literal and rhetorical.

Of course Freud has something to say about all this in *Moses and Monotheism*, but he does not use the terminology adopted by several generations of literary critics. He actually begins *Moses and Monotheism* with one such, the most important one, ambivalency mentioned in the previous paragraph: “To deny a people the man whom it praises as the greatest of its sons is not

a deed to be taken lightheartedly.” This is exactly what he does and he knows it; this is exactly what the Jews do to Moses and they probably know it; finally, this is exactly what we do to Freud and the psychologists are beginning to understand it. Freud’s opening line is further complicated by the word “sun,” since Freud could be talking about Egyptian Sun Gods, Old Testament prophets, the father-son dynamic in family romances, or Christ. I contend Freud does and intends all four, but this is not important at this point in my thesis. Freud begins with a denial and ends with this:

If we are quite clear in our minds that procedure like the present one—to take from the traditional material what seems useful and to reject what is unsuitable, and then to put the individual pieces together according to their psychological probability—does not afford any security for finding the truth, then one is quite right to ask why such an attempt was undertaken. In answer to this I must cite the result. *If we substantially reduce the sever demands usually made on a historical and psychological investigation, then it might be possible to clear up problems that have always seemed worthy of attention and that, in consequence of recent events, force themselves again on our observation.* (133; emphasis mine)

The “recent events” to which Freud refers is the beginning of WWII and the systematic, mechanized, “civilized,” one abhors to say, elimination of Jews. Substitute 9/11, and the permanent state of war it enacts between East and West, and more prophetic words exist nowhere else in twentieth century thought. Freud is also demonstrating, by producing an uncanny effect, the conclusion to his book which opens new possibilities of thinking about civilization.

I want to end with Shelley, since *Prometheus Unbound* got me to Freud in the first place.

The explication of “ravin” I delivered in chapter one still resonates. The OED defines an obsolete, perhaps uncanny definition of the word: “The sound of the cry of a raven.” Along which course will we feed in the twenty-first century: literal, rhetorical, both? Or will we try to annihilate and dissolve the ravin in ourselves, cannibalize all that it worthy of the idea, Love, the event History, make from it a Psychic corpse?

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