

A RE-VISION OF WOMEN: APPROACHING GENDER EQUALITY  
IN *PROMETHEUS UNBOUND* AND *PROSERPINE*

by

NATALIE NICOLE HOPPER

A THESIS

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## ABSTRACT

Whereas ancient accounts of the Prometheus story cast the Titan's wife in a secondary and easily overlooked role, Percy Shelley portrays Prometheus and Asia as mutually dependent partners, establishing the couple as equals who represent what Percy sees as the two gendered aspects of the revolution that takes place in *Prometheus Unbound*: intellect and intuition. In contrast to Percy, Mary Shelley revises women in *Proserpine* by eliminating the male characters and creating females who possess both intuition *and* the intellect that Percy sees as an inherently masculine trait.

Both approaches improve women's status from their roles in the ancient texts but in drastically different ways. Percy views the distance between the genders not as something to be overcome but as something to be undone. Equality, as he sees it, is a natural state to be regained, and Prometheus and Asia, as mutually dependent partners, are free of the gender inequality that they eventually eliminate among humankind. Mary calls not for an undoing but a reaction by focusing on women's bond with one another and their independence from men instead of men and women's dependence upon one another.

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## INTRODUCTION

The tradition of revisionism—specifically, mythic revisionism—began as soon as the myths themselves were conceived. Inherent in the oral tradition of ancient Greece is the ever-changing, multi-versioned nature of myth. What began as a straightforward creation or alienation myth soon expanded into a variety of accounts—all similar in some respects but all different in others. These differences inevitably arise from the telling and retelling of the myths over a long period of time by numerous storytellers, and the extent of the changes depends upon the memory and intention of each individual storyteller. Discrepancies between accounts of the same story are likely the result of a storyteller confusing events or characters with those of other myths or forgetting parts of the stories altogether and extemporaneously filling the gaps with new material. Other more drastic changes, however, such as Aeschylus' revisions to the Prometheus myth in his *Prometheia* trilogy, were purposeful revisions on the part of storytellers to promote a particular social, political, or moralistic message.

Both Percy and Mary Shelley revise mythological texts, and improving women's roles within those texts is a priority for both authors. But whereas Percy creates equality between the genders in *Prometheus Unbound* by portraying Prometheus and Asia as equals, Mary creates an all-female society in which women thrive in the company of one another and in

the absence of men. By creating a female utopia that prospers without men—and is devastated by men’s intrusion upon it—Mary Shelley responds to the tendency of patriarchal cultures to subordinate women by reversing the typical gender roles and granting women independence and power in *Proserpine*.

In his preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, Percy Shelley explains the ancients’ tendency to stray from the popular or accepted accounts and “employ[s] a similar licence” in his mythological drama (981). The Greek tragedians, according to Shelley, “by no means conceived themselves bound to adhere to the common interpretation or to imitate in story as in title their rivals and predecessors” (981). Had the Greeks felt compelled to adhere precisely to earlier accounts of the same story, the desire to retell the myths would no longer exist. Revisions were inspired by a writer’s desire to demonstrate the supremacy of his account over his competitor’s, and he is no exception to this tradition.

Shelley, who saw Prometheus as both the Champion of mankind and a symbol of moral and intellectual perfection, could not abide Aeschylus’ decision to resolve the conflict of the drama by having Prometheus submit to Zeus:

I was averse from a catastrophe so feeble as that of reconciling the Champion with the Oppressor of mankind. The moral interest of the fable, which is so powerfully sustained by the sufferings and endurance of Prometheus, would be annihilated if we could conceive of him as unsaying his high language and quailing before his successful and perfidious adversary. (*PU*981)

Shelley’s retelling remedies what he sees as a problematic portrayal of Prometheus: Instead of gaining freedom by eventually giving into Zeus as Aeschylus’ hero does, Shelley’s

Prometheus achieves mental and physical freedom—for himself and for humankind—by continuing to resist Jupiter despite the suffering the Titan endures. Prometheus' rebellion against Jupiter allows for a number of changes to take place at the end of the drama, one of which is another primary focus of Shelley's revisionist efforts: the artificial inequality between men and women created and sustained by the intrusion of (patriarchal) social systems, whose rigidity and hierarchy take the place of humans' natural freedom.

Shelley reveals in his "Discourse on the Manners of the Ancient Greeks Relative to the Subject of Love" that, despite his fascination with Greek art and literature and Athens' progressive approach to democracy, he is troubled by women's lack of education and their subsequent second-rate status in Greek society. Realizing that the gender inequality of his own time was still present, though "incomparably less pernicious" than Greece's, Shelley's expansion of Asia's role revises both ancient and contemporary gender relations.

Prometheus' wife is briefly mentioned in ancient accounts of Prometheus' story, but Shelley is the first to make her a contributing character. By creating a mutual dependence between her and Prometheus and mirroring the Titan's own actions with those of Asia, Shelley represents the gender equality that will take place at the human level at the end of the third act.

Percy Shelley emphasizes Asia and Prometheus' dependence upon one another and portrays their relationship as one that is unaffected by the discrimination women have faced throughout history. Their status as equal partners represents an undoing of the problematic social structure, so Prometheus and Asia's relationship is a return to the natural order, as



Shelley imagined it—a clean slate. Mary Shelley, on the other hand, rather than creating a mutual dependence between men and women, asserts women's independence by eliminating the male characters from her drama *Proserpine*. Mary does not ignore or undo the historic inequality between the genders in her portrayal of women as Percy does; she responds to it by granting women the same autonomy and authority than men in those patriarchal cultures exercise.

PROMETHEUS AND ASIA:  
EQUALITY THROUGH DEPENDENCE

The writers of the Romantic period immersed themselves in classical languages and literature, and as a result, the characters and themes of the ancients appear—more subtly at times than others—in an overwhelming number of Romantic texts. Percy Shelley’s fascination with Greek culture and literature was especially pronounced in the years leading up to his composition of *Prometheus Unbound* in which he translated Plato’s *Symposium* and composed “A Discourse on the Manners of the Ancient Greeks Relative to the Subject of Love.” He began translating Plato between projects, “only as an exercise or perhaps to give Mary some idea of the manners & feelings of the Athenians” and intended his “Discourse” to serve as a companion essay to the translation (P. Shelley, “To Gisborne”). Especially interested in what made ancient Greece “different on many subjects from that of any other community that ever existed,” the focus of Shelley’s essay shifts from Greek manners in general to the role of women and sentimental love in Greek culture (P. Shelley, “To Gisborne”). He concludes that both the ancient Greeks and modern Europeans “arrived at that epoch of refinement, when sentimental love becomes an imperious want of the heart and of the mind,” but the education of the civilizations’ women affects how that love manifests itself (P. Shelley, “Discourse” 221). The “equal cultivation” of the sexes in modern

Europe, for example, results in the heterosexual union that Shelley celebrates as natural and sublime. In contrast, the gender inequality in ancient Greece denied women the “intellectual loveliness” men found attractive and led, as Shelley sees it, either to pederasty or to an imperfect heterosexual union that undermines the sublimity he finds in the union of men and women who are equal partners (P. Shelley, “Discourse” 221).

With Shelley’s rejection of the ancients’ treatment and portrayal of women coming in the years leading up to his composition of *Prometheus Unbound*, Prometheus’ wife, Asia, marks the poet’s first opportunity to revise the injustices he has reacted against. Victorian critics such as George Henry Lewes, Mathilde Blind, Charles Sotheran, and John Todhunter celebrate Percy Shelley for his early contribution to the feminist movement through works such as *Prometheus Unbound*, and Nathaniel Brown, in *Sexuality and Feminism in Shelley*, attempts to revive the feminist element of Shelley’s poetry that the Victorians found so progressive. Realizing that Shelley’s feminism has been overshadowed by more recent and radical feminist efforts and that Shelley was limited by the prejudices of his own period, Brown admits that “not all of his thinking would pass inspection by the standards of the current woman’s movement” but finds Shelley’s defense of women valuable in that it anticipates many modern feminist principles, namely, gender equality (165).

Within the ancient accounts of the story, Prometheus’ wife—called Pronoea, Hesione, or Asia, depending on the classical author—is given so little attention that the inconsistency of her name from one source to the next, if she’s mentioned at all, has no effect on the respective stories. Hesiod, in his “Catalogue of Women,” refers to Pronoea as the

mother of Deucalion by Prometheus (155), while Aeschylus in *Prometheus Bound*, Percy's Shelley's primary source text for his own mythological drama, mentions Hesione only once, in reference to her marriage to Prometheus: "I raised to grace thy marriage, / what time thou didst woo with gifts and win my sister Hesione / to be thy wedded wife" (lines 558-560). Herodotus calls her Asia, while Apollodorus and Lycophron fail to mention the Titan's wife. Shelley suspected that Greek women were, in fact, morally and intellectually inferior to men but only because men's views of women limited them as such: "The women, thus degraded, became such as it was expected they would become...devoid of that moral and intellectual loveliness with which the acquisition of knowledge and the cultivation of sentiment animates" (P. Shelley, "Discourse" 219). Shelley believed Greek women had the potential to be as morally and intellectually developed as men, but recognized that their potential went unrecognized because they were treated and educated as though they were slaves.

The classical accounts of Prometheus' story reflect the problems Shelley saw with women's role in Greek society. Realizing that Prometheus' wife was only briefly mentioned by most ancient historians and storytellers while others failed to mention her at all, Shelley improved upon these representations of Prometheus' wife by adding depth to her characterization, increasing her lines and agency in the drama, and making Prometheus depend upon Asia as much as she depends upon him. Prometheus tells the Spirit of the Earth in Act One that prior to being enchained, he used to wander through the woods and valleys with Asia, "drinking life from her loved eyes" (1.123). This line alone grants Shelley's character more prominence within the drama than any of his predecessor's portrayals of the

Titan's wife. It not only introduces Asia early in the drama but also demonstrates Prometheus' attachment to her. As E. Douka Kabitoglou suggests in *Plato and the English Romantics*, the image of Prometheus drinking life from Asia's eyes is "a recollection of what seems to be the 'original fall' in its pre-Christian, Platonic version—the splitting of the 'one' hermaphrodite being into 'two'" (420). Neither Prometheus nor Asia is complete without the other, and this portrayal of them as two gendered halves of a single whole continues throughout Shelley's drama. Neither can succeed in delivering humankind, but together, masculine Prometheus' intellect and feminine Asia's intuition create a complete whole, reuniting the "one' hermaphrodite being."

The earliest references to Prometheus, such as in Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days*, describe the Titan as crafty (*Works* 5), cunning, and wily (*Theogony* 119), all markers of intelligence, but the Titan's strongest association with intellect is the reason for his bondage. In both the ancient and Romantic accounts of the story, Jupiter punishes Prometheus for defying him—by giving humankind the gift of fire—which inspired such developments as medicine, astronomy, mathematics, and writing. As the bearer of such gifts and the Champion of the race who is now defined by them, Prometheus is as much a symbol of intelligence as is the fire or spark that inspired such progress.

Despite the numerous revisions of the Prometheus story from Hesiod through Aeschylus to Shelley, one aspect all the accounts share is Prometheus' theft of fire on behalf of humankind. Asia, while questioning Demogorgon in Act Two of *Prometheus Unbound*, explains the suffering that Jupiter's tyranny has caused humans, suffering that Prometheus'

gift relieves: “And Jove now reigned; for on the race of man / First famine, and then toil, and then disease, / Strife, wounds, and ghastly death unseen before” (*PU*2.4.49-51). The fire Prometheus gives humans is not only a physical flame, but also represents knowledge and innovation. In detailing the extent of Prometheus’ generosity, Asia tells Demogorgon that humans’ ability to speak and think as well as their understanding of music, art, medicine, and astronomy all trace back to the fire Prometheus stole from Jupiter:

He gave man speech, and speech created thought,  
Which is the measure of the universe...  
He told the hidden power of herbs and springs,  
And Disease drank and slept. Death grew like sleep.  
He taught the implicated orbits woven  
Of the wide-wandering stars; and how the sun  
Changes his lair, and by what secret spell  
The pale moon is transformed. (*PU*2.4.72-90)

The fire symbolizes human development, and as the party responsible for giving fire to humankind, Prometheus also embodies that physical and mental progress. The Titan’s association with intellect, however, is demonstrated not only by his gift but also by Prometheus’ awareness of himself and of his relationship to his surroundings, Prometheus’ suffering at the hand of Jupiter mirrors humanity’s, and only in a moment of self-discovery and enlightenment—realizing that his hatred gives Jupiter power over him—is Prometheus released from Jupiter’s (mental) control.

As the personification of nature, imagination, and intuition, Asia functions as scientifically-minded Prometheus’ complement within the drama. Asia and her sisters, Ione and Panthea, are physical personifications of nature whose interaction with humans,

according to mythology, is limited to lone travelers who stumble across them outside the walls of the city. Oceanids are unfamiliar with the logic and rationality of human society—with the technology and intelligence that Prometheus has given humankind—and behave according to their senses instead. Asia and her sisters think, move, and communicate via an intuitive perception of nature. Act Two of *Prometheus Unbound* begins with Panthea approaching Asia in a vale of the mountains where Prometheus is enchained. Even before seeing Panthea, Asia feels her presence:

I feel, I see  
Those eyes which burn through smiles that fade in tears  
Like stars half quenched in mists of silver dew...  
My heart was sick with hope, before  
The printless air felt thy beated plumes. (*PU*2.27-34)

Asia does not need to see or hear her sister to know she is nearby. She “sees” Panthea’s eyes by feeling their presence, and it is the sensation of Panthea’s wings disturbing the air, not the sight of her, that alerts Asia to her sister’s approach. She senses not only Panthea’s arrival but also knows that her sister’s thoughts are with Prometheus as she approaches. Panthea reveals that she has recalled a dream she had about the Titan, a dream Asia wishes to experience. By gazing into her sister’s eyes, Asia is able to relive Panthea’s dream as if it were her own:

Thine eyes are like the deep, blue, boundless heaven...  
There is a change: beyond their inmost depth  
I see a shade, a shape: ‘tis He, arrayed  
In the soft light of his own smiles, which spread  
Like radiance from the cloud-surrounded moon.  
Prometheus, it is thine! (*PU*2.1.114-123)

Asia's relationship with Panthea allows the sisters to share something as intimate as a dream as if it belonged to both of them. The Oceanids of Shelley's drama exist independently of and in contrast to the scientific and rational human world, which has no means of processing their modes of perception and expression.

Thus, in many ways Asia is rational Prometheus' imaginative and emotional counterpart. In the same way that Prometheus brings intellect to humankind and represents the power of mind, Asia both brings and represents love. At one point, Asia's sister, Panthea, draws a direct correlation between Asia and Venus, the goddess who personifies love:

On the day when the clear hyaline  
Was cloven at thine uprise, and thou didst stand  
Within a veined shell, which floated on  
Over the calm floor of the crystal sea,  
Among the Ægean isles, and by the shores  
Which bear thy name; love, like the atmosphere  
Burst from thee, and illumined earth and heaven  
And the deep ocean and the sunless caves  
And all that dwells within them. (*PU*2.5.21-29)

Shelley's image of a maiden arising from the sea and floating upon a shell alludes to descriptions of Aphrodite's birth in classical literature and subsequent artistic renderings. In Hesiod's *Theogony*, Aphrodite was born of the sea after Cronus castrated his father, Ouranos:

And so soon as he had cut off the members with flint and cast them from the land into the surging sea, they were swept away over the main a long time: and a white foam spread around them from the immortal flesh, and in it there grew a maiden...Her gods and men call Aphrodite. (93)

Separately, Prometheus and Asia stand as personifications of intellect and love, but together they become two halves of a more complete whole.



Shelley's association of Asia with Aphrodite suggests that Asia is, in fact, meant to function as Venus, or Love, in *Prometheus Unbound*. This suggestion is confirmed by Shelley's image of love bursting forth from Asia as she glides across the sea. Later in Act One, after Prometheus has reminisced about the time he was once able to spend with Asia, he makes his dependence upon her even more explicit: "Asia! who, when my being overflowed, / Wert like a golden chalice to bright wine / Which else had sunk into the thirsty dust" (*PU* 1.809-811). Prometheus sees Asia as a complementary aspect of his own existence, as the container that rescues him from oblivion. Without Asia, Prometheus' efforts are ineffectual and the Titan himself is lost and incomplete, but Asia is equally dependent upon Prometheus. Asia performs most of the action and commands a significant portion of the dialogue in Act Two, but even before her first scene, we have an understanding of her relationship with Prometheus and her emotional state from her sisters' and Prometheus' mention of her prior to her entrance. Panthea concludes the first act by telling Prometheus of the loneliness Asia experiences as a result of his captivity:

Asia waits in that far Indian vale  
The scene of her sad exile; rugged once...  
And haunted by sweet airs and sounds, which flow  
Among the woods and waters, from the ether  
Of her transforming presence, which would fade  
If it were mingled not with thine. (*PU* 1.826-833)

Asia experiences her own exile while Prometheus is enchained, emphasizing her emotional bond with the Titan. Similar to the image of Asia catching and therefore sustaining Prometheus' being when it overflows, Panthea notes that Asia herself would fade without

the company of Prometheus. James Cousins, in *The Work Promethean*, describes the couple's relationship as one of mutual dependence:

The whole vast poem...is built on the basic conception of Prometheus as the executive aspect of the Soul of Humanity operating in the external world, and of Asia as the shaping, nourishing, conserving aspect. Asia recognises, however, that while life could not express itself without form, neither could form maintain itself without life. (118)

The rugged vale is haunted by the "sweet airs and sounds" that once filled it, mimicking Asia's sorrow and sense of loss upon being separated from Prometheus. Asia has already begun to fade in his absence, but is sustained several lines later by reliving Panthea's dream about Prometheus.

Prometheus and Asia also rely upon one another in their quest to rid themselves of Jupiter's tyranny. Unable to act on his own behalf, Prometheus relies upon Asia to do what he cannot: to transform Demogorgon's potential energy into an active rebellion that will remove Jupiter from power and allow for Prometheus' release. At the same time, Asia counts on Prometheus to continue withholding his secret, for disclosing the means or timing of Jupiter's downfall would destroy the couple's chance to rid themselves—and humanity—of Jupiter's oppression. Kei Nijibayashi articulates this dependence in *Poetic Development and the Romantic Self in Exile in Byron and Shelley*: "Asia depends on Prometheus' ability to release love from its bondage; Prometheus, in turn, is dependent upon Asia's journey of self-discovery and self-renewal" (149). Prometheus must continue to resist Jupiter in order to make a place for the love Asia represents because Asia, as a result of Jupiter's cruelty, suffers almost as much as Prometheus does. Similarly, only by approaching Demogorgon and

subsequently realizing her own strength and knowledge does Asia inspire him to finally depose Jupiter—thereby freeing Prometheus.

Asia's early introduction in Act One and the emphasis on her mutually dependent bond with Prometheus both support the idea of gender equality in *Prometheus Unbound*, but the drama's discussion of gender continues throughout the remaining acts as well.

In a sense, the first act is Prometheus' moment to shine, while Act Two belongs to Asia.

Despite being enchained, Prometheus' part in the drama is nearly complete by the time Act Two begins: Having relived and rescinded his curse, explained Jupiter's betrayal, resisted Mercury's offer of freedom, and endured the torment of the Furies, Prometheus has demonstrated his role in the revolutionary process, leaving Asia's transformation the focus of the second act.

Prometheus and Asia not only represent the knowledge and intuition associated with masculinity and femininity but also blur the line that divides the once separate genders.

Alone in the Indian Vale and visited by Panthea, Asia's exile mirrors Prometheus'. Like the Titan, Asia opens her act with a monologue and commands a significant number of lines throughout the following scenes. Throughout Act Two, Asia physically mimics the internal transformation Prometheus undergoes in the previous act. Prior to the drama's onset, Prometheus curses Jupiter for betraying his friendship and abusing the power that the Titan helped him attain, but by the time the drama starts, Prometheus wants to hear the curse repeated so that he can rescind it. He has come to a deeper understanding of his relationship with Jupiter, one that is not limited to the physical world. Prometheus realizes that hating

Jupiter grants the god power over him, and upon releasing that hatred, the Titan finds strength and serenity: “Pity the self-despising slaves of Heaven,” he tells Jupiter’s messenger, Mercury, “not me, within whose mind sits peace serene” (*PU* 1. 429-430). Just as Prometheus’ retraction of his curse and his newfound pity mark a shift toward the boundless love Asia represents, Asia’s pursuit of the truth in Demogorgon’s cave indicates a transformation on her part similar to Prometheus’.

Asia probes Demogorgon for the answers to her biggest questions (the creation of the universe, the possibility of an authority higher than Jupiter, the day of Prometheus’ deliverance, etc.) and, after astutely weighing Demogorgon’s cryptic replies, realizes that he is merely confirming what she has always known: “So much I asked before, and my heart gave / The response thou hast given; and of such truths / Each to itself must be the oracle” (*PU* 2.4.121-123). Prometheus’ pity for Jupiter and Asia’s insightfulness, as demonstrated by her conversation with Demogorgon, mirror one another, strengthening the idea of gender equality in *Prometheus Unbound*. The lovers not only depend upon one another for their own survival and happiness, but whatever happens to one, happens to the other.

Although Prometheus is typically remembered as the hero whose resistance and suffering allows for Jupiter’s deposition, Asia’s role in the rebellion is as important as Prometheus’. Prometheus refuses to reveal how or when Jupiter will be removed from power and, by doing so allows Thetis’ son, who is destined to be stronger than his father, to be born of Jupiter. Prometheus’ silence allows for Demogorgon’s birth, but Demogorgon does not challenge Jupiter until Asia’s visit incites him to action. Panthea associates the realm of

Demogorgon with a volcano, an apt image for the dark and shapeless mass of powerful potential: “the action by which he [Demogorgon] brings about the downfall of Jupiter can be equated with a volcanic eruption which has been energised by Asia and Prometheus” (Kabitoglou 423). Without Prometheus, a power strong enough to defeat Jupiter would not exist, but without Asia, it is unclear whether Demogorgon would eventually act or continue to lie in wait as he had for some time.

Prometheus and Asia’s dependence upon one another and their respective transformations toward love and intellect blur the line between the once separate characters. By the end of Act Three, the lovers have become so close that their once distinct halves are no longer discernible. Asia and Prometheus have reached the ultimate equality by becoming a new whole that is both and yet neither of them: Prometheus *is* Asia, and Asia *is* Prometheus. By expanding Asia’s role to match Prometheus’ and emphasizing their dependence upon one another, Percy Shelley succeeds in transforming a hierarchical representation of gender in ancient accounts of the Prometheus myth into male and female characters who are equal because they exist outside of—or in rebellion against—the patriarchal and oppressive social system represented by Jupiter. Prometheus gains his freedom as a result of his and Asia’s united resistance against the god. When Demogorgon confronts and dismisses Jupiter, both Prometheus and humankind are freed from the tyrant’s physical and mental oppression. Jupiter has used his authority to enslave others just as Shelley saw the men of patriarchal cultures subordinating women, educating them to possess the “qualities and habits of slaves” (“Discourse” 219). As a result of Prometheus’ resistance

and suffering, humans—specifically, women—enjoy freedoms that were denied them by oppressive Jupiter, who represents many artificial constructs including patriarchal social systems.

Upon Jupiter's dismissal and Prometheus' deliverance, the Spirits of the Earth and Hour visit the Earth and report to Prometheus and Asia the changes that have taken place among humans. The Spirit of the Hour tells of the peace and freedom Jupiter's absence has inspired in men:

Thrones were kingless, and men walked  
One with the other even as spirits do,  
None fawned, none trampled; hate disdain, or fear,  
Self-love or self-contempt, on human brows  
No more inscribed. (*PU*3.4.131-135)

Humans enjoy this happiness because Demogorgon broke the cycle of tyranny by choosing not to replace Jupiter after removing him from power. Demogorgon told of a power that was older and mightier than Jupiter, a natural power that has always existed without interfering with humans or the other immortals, but the artificial authority perpetuated by the cycle of sons usurping their fathers (Saturn and Uranus, Jupiter and Saturn) ends with Jupiter. Removing this artificial authority allows humans to revert to their natural, peaceful, uninhibited selves.

A separate account of human women—in contrast to Spirit of the Hour's previous description of men—reveals what Shelley hoped to accomplish through his revolutionary act of writing *Prometheus Unbound*. The Spirit of the Hour reports:

And women, too, frank, beautiful, and kind

As the free heaven which rains fresh light and dew  
On the wide earth, past; gentle radiant forms,  
From custom's evil taint exempt and pure;  
Speaking the wisdom once they could not think,  
Looking emotions once they feared to feel,  
And changed to all which once they dared not be. (*PU*3.4.153-159)

Shelley sees these wise, beautiful, sincere women not a standard to strive toward but as a natural state to which women might one day return. The potential for the wisdom the Spirit speaks of was always there, but patriarchal societies rendered women incapable of harnessing it: "Shelley views the freedom conferred upon society not as something done, but as something 'undone': the lifting or 'en-lightening' of a burden, the oppression of the (female) population" (Kabitolou 426). Women's newfound freedom has not transformed them into something new; it has merely allowed them to change into what they had the potential to become but "dared not be."

Once this transformation in human thought takes effect, Prometheus and Asia retire to the cave of immutability for the fourth and final act of *Prometheus Unbound*. In Act Two, Demogorgon told Asia that everything save eternal love was subject to "Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance and Change" (*PU*2.121), and upon being released from bondage by Hercules, Prometheus tells Asia of a cave of immutability, "a simple dwelling, which shall be our own; / Where we will sit and talk of time and change, / As the world ebbs and flows, ourselves unchanged" (*PU*3.3.22-24). Asia has embodied love, which is able to resist change, throughout the drama, but for the couple to remain unaffected while the rest of the world changes suggest that Prometheus' transformation that began with the unsaying of his curse is

now complete. Prometheus is now as much a figure of love as Asia is, and the couple—along with Asia’s sisters—having saved themselves and humankind, retreats to the cave to enjoy the fruits of their labor. The drama concludes with Demogorgon reflecting upon the revolution that has taken place:

Love, from its awful throne of patient power  
In the wise heart, from the last giddy hour  
Of dread endurance, from the slippery, steep,  
And narrow verge of crag-like agony, springs  
And folds over the world its healing wings. (*PU*4.567-561)

Love within a wise heart, according to Demogorgon, has overcome what seemed impossible. Loving Asia and wise Prometheus, once distinct, have become one being, both loving and wise, and as such, have suffered, forgiven, defied, loved, and hoped “till Hope creates / From its own wreck the thing it contemplates:” physical and mental freedom (*PU*4.573-574).

Shelley uses Asia, who, in her rebellion, exists outside Jupiter’s patriarchal social system (at least to an extent), to represent his ideal view of women—as men’s intellectual and moral equals. The achievement of this relationship brings the same equality to the humans of *Prometheus Unbound*. Because he is focused on undoing the artificial constructs that disrupt natural order, Percy Shelley addresses the history of gender inequality by eliminating it altogether. Mary Shelley, as the following chapter on *Proserpine* will articulate, also seeks to revise the relationship between genders but does so by privileging the role of women and the bonds between them. Thus, Mary Shelley responds to both ancient and contemporary discrimination against women with a revision that subordinates men.



PROSERPINE AND CERES:  
EQUALITY THROUGH AUTONOMY

Mary Shelley's *Proserpine*, though long dismissed by critics, is noteworthy as a woman writer's revision of not only classical female figures, but also of her male contemporaries' portrayals of women as well. Mary Shelley, like Percy, who composed *Prometheus Unbound* around the same time she wrote *Proserpine*, sought to elevate the role of women in her revision from their secondary status in her classical source text, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; however, instead of emphasizing equality and dependence between the genders, she privileges the female characters of her story and casts the men—even Jove, king of the gods—as secondary and malicious characters who invade the peace and happiness of the female society. Whereas Percy brings together masculine Prometheus' intellect and feminine Asia's emotion in a sublime union, Mary's characters are both intuitive and intellectual women who depend upon one another instead of men.

In 1814, Percy Shelley wrote a letter to fellow author James Hogg in which he comments on Mary's moral and intellectual perfection:

I do not think that there is an excellence at which human nature can arrive, that she does not indisputably possess, or of which her character does not afford manifest imitations. I speak thus of Mary—& so intimately are our natures now united, that I feel whilst I describe her excellencies as if I were an egoist expatiating upon his own perfections. (*Letters* 265)

Percy makes no distinction between the excellence of men and women, only that of “human nature,” and ignores the issue of gender altogether when addressing the oneness of their being. Elise Michie notes Percy’s disregard of gender in her *Outside the Pale*, claiming “from his position as the male Romantic poet, her [Mary’s] gender difference does not make a difference. From hers, it is crucial” (23). Michie’s assessment also applies to the couple’s different goals in representing the revolutionary process. Whereas Percy Shelley seeks to undo centuries of gender inequality by uniting men and women as equals, Mary reacts to the tradition of subordinating women by subordinating men instead.

Completed in 1820, Mary Shelley’s mythological drama *Proserpine* was published in *The Winter’s Wreath* in 1832 but had to be shortened substantially in order to fit the journal’s specifications. The complete drama remained unpublished until 1922 when A.H. Koszul released *Proserpine*—along with its companion drama, *Midas*—to the public in honor of Percy Shelley in the centennial year of his death. Koszul, who finds little value in the two works, save the lyrics Percy Shelley contributed to them, serves as a fair representative of the critical reception of the dramas for the next fifty years:

Perhaps this little monument of his [Percy’s] wife’s collaboration may take its modest place among the tributes which will be paid to his memory. For Mary Shelley’s mythological dramas can at least claim to be the proper setting for some of the most beautiful lyrics of the poet, which so far have been read in undue isolation. (Koszul v)

As Alan Richardson notes, however, in “*Proserpine* and *Midas*,” the dramas are worth studying, if for no other reason, than “as a woman writer’s innovative assault on classical mythology...and as unusual collaborative ventures which raise questions regarding the

differences between female and male approaches to poetic invention in the early nineteenth century” (124). Although Koszul published them for the benefit of Percy Shelley studies in that they provide context for the lyrics “Arethusa” and “Song of Proserpine,” *Proserpine* and *Midas* never gained popularity within Percy Shelley studies. The critical reception of *Proserpine* and *Midas* within Mary Shelley scholarship continued to grow through the end of the twentieth century, but the mythological drams remain two of Mary Shelley’s least-known compositions.

Whereas imagination and raw intelligence are gendered traits in *Prometheus Unbound* that eventually merge into the genderless union Prometheus and Asia comprise, the women of *Proserpine* are rational and emotional, intellectual and imaginative without the contribution of men. Storytelling, for which Ceres and her attendant nymphs have an aptitude, is a skill indicative of intellectuals, and in general, among Shelley’s contemporaries, is limited to male characters. Proserpine, in the opening lines of her drama, begs Ceres to tell her a story: “Dear Mother, leave me not! / I love to rest / Under the shadow of that hanging cave / And listen to your tales” (*P*1). Mary Shelley reveals early in the drama that Ceres is a strong, intelligent, and creative woman, and as the story unfolds, Proserpine and the nymphs prove to be as well.

In contrast to Percy’s portrayal of the genders in *Prometheus Unbound*, Mary is interested in displaying women’s capability and completeness and does so by privileging them over men. Although neither appear as a character in the drama, both Alpheus and

Pluto succeed in destroying the female community that the women have worked to establish. In “Mother, Maiden and the Marriage of Death,” Susan Gubar shrewdly notes,

For Shelley, the myth of Ceres and Proserpine is a female version of *Paradise Lost* in which the original gold-ripe garden is lost not through any female sin, but because of the interference of a man...The power of the masculine God is directly antithetical to the energy of the feminine Goddess—his is an aggressive power to destroy, not a nurturing ability to create. (303-304)

Alpheus is mentioned as a character in Ino’s tale of Arethusa, and Pluto’s rape of Proserpine occurs between scenes and is related by Arethusa herself. The only male to actually appear in the drama is Ascalaphus, a shade of Hell, who, by pointing out Proserpine’s consumption of the pomegranate, causes the young goddess and her mother to be separated. Distancing the male characters from the reader emphasizes the role of the feminine, but as Gubar notes, Mary Shelley may have elected to omit the rape scene because “the iron-hoofed steeds, the black car and the spear of Hades [are] too terrible and fearful to represent” (304). No description, even from a woman’s perspective, of the abduction and rape could accurately convey Proserpine’s terror and despair, so the events of the scene are left to the reader’s imagination. The absence of men allows Mary Shelley to situate women as undeniable sources of both physical and mental power.

As is often the case with Jove, his presence is felt in *Proserpine* via his messenger. Whereas Mercury serves as Jupiter’s/Jove’s messenger in Percy’s *Prometheus Unbound* and Ovid’s version of the Proserpine myth, Mary Shelley replaces him with his female counterpart, Iris. As Jove’s messenger, Iris is the physical representation of the god’s voice,

and although she is bound to relay his commands, she does so with the freedom to speak and respond with her own voice and emotions. By using Iris to speak for Jove, Mary Shelley not only removes Jupiter physically from the drama but replaces his masculine voice with a feminine one. Iris, who is sympathetic to Ceres' suffering, regretfully relays Jupiter's commands, causing his calculated decrees to seem unnecessarily callous and the god himself to appear as another masculine obstacle standing between the women of the story and the bliss they once shared.

By establishing women as storytellers early in the drama, relegating the story's male characters to offstage positions, and replacing Mercury with Iris as Jove's messenger, Mary Shelley transfers the voice and agency of the myth from men to women. The most telling difference between the Shelley's approaches to gender is Percy's account of Arethusa's rape contrasted against Mary's sympathetic description of Proserpine's. In Ovid's account of Proserpine, the sea nymph, Arethusa, was seen, pursued, and raped by the river god Alpheus. Ovid's Arethusa fails to comment on the aftermath of the rape, noting only that she loves Sicily in memory of the goddess Diana, who led her there as a means of escaping Alpheus (*M* 5. 643). Percy's account of Arethusa's rape comes at the beginning of the drama, just after Ceres' departure, and is related by Ino. Percy's Arethusa cries for help throughout Alpheus' pursuit, "Oh, save me! Oh, guide me! / And bid the deep hide me, / For he grasps me now by the hair!" and Ino describes the chase/rape as "as an eagle pursueing [sic] / A dove to its ruin" (*P*5), yet by the end of Ino's story, Arethusa and Alpheus have "like friends once parted / Grown single hearted" (*P*6). Percy transforms what was a devastating violation for Arethusa

into a happy union between predator and prey. In contrast to Percy's romanticized portrayal of Arethusa's rape, Mary Shelley portrays Proserpine's as devastating for not only the goddess but for her mother and friends as well.

*Proserpine's* collaborative authorship and the disparity between the two accounts of rape reveal Percy and Mary Shelley's very different interpretations of women's relationship to men. Arethusa's rape, on the one hand, results in mutual love between the nymph and her pursuer, Alpheus. Percy depicts the rape as a simple matter of misdirected love and admiration—on the part of the woman, not the man—by effortlessly redirecting Arethusa's love for her motherland, whom she initially called upon to hide her—to Alpheus, who uses Sicily's land and waters to find and violate her. Mary, on the other hand, allows Proserpine no such resolution. By having Arethusa report Proserpine's abduction to Ceres, she forces both the reader and Arethusa to draw connections between the two rapes. As Ceres and the nymphs search desperately for the young goddess, Proserpine herself longs to escape Pluto's clutches. Proserpine cries out to her mother and to Arethusa, much as Arethusa herself called upon Sicily for aid. When relating the events of the abduction to Ceres, Arethusa says:

But that she strove, and cast her arms aloft  
And cried, "My Mother!"—When she saw me near  
She would have sprung from his detested arms,  
And with a tone of deepest grief, she cried,  
"Oh, Arethuse!" I hastened at her call. (17)

Unlike Arethusa, Proserpine does not warm to the god's embrace, and the only happy resolution is one that returns her to her mother and alleviates the rift between them caused by her absence. Percy's lyric idealizes Alpheus's violation of Arethusa "as amorous pursuit

resolved in erotic union” (Richardson 126), but Mary Shelley cannot reconcile love and happiness with a violent stripping of a woman’s power—particularly over her own body—and she calls Arethusa’s happy ending into question by revealing the nymph’s eagerness to save Proserpine from Pluto’s clutches.

In emphasizing the devastating effects of Proserpine’s rape, Mary Shelley omits one of Ovid’s own revisions to the even older myth. According to Homer and other Greek poets (Pamphos, Pausanias, and Pindar), Hades acts of his own volition when he seizes Proserpine. Ovid, who weaves the theme of transformations, or metamorphoses, throughout his text, chooses to have Pluto take Proserpine due to an overwhelming sense of love, having been struck by Cupid’s arrow just prior to his encounter with the young goddess. The removal of Pluto’s free will from the abduction scene in Ovid alters the implications of Proserpine’s story: As Ceres begs for his help in *The Metamorphoses*, Jove reminds the goddess, “this was not done / Through wickedness, but love” (M5.511-512). Unwilling to perpetuate Ovid’s association between love and rape, Mary Shelley ignores Cupid’s role and reestablishes Pluto’s actions as both deliberate and malicious. Shelley’s Proserpine is abducted while gathering flowers to “twine a blooming wreath” for her mother’s hair (P6). Her selfless motivation establishes her as a more thoughtful and loving character than Ovid’s goddess and changes the nature of her abduction. Whereas Pluto’s violation of Ovid’s Proserpine is sexual, emphasized by the image of falling flowers, Shelley’s decision to have Pluto seize the goddess while she seeks to make her mother a gift implies an added level of violation. Shelley’s Proserpine, instead of becoming separated from the nymphs due to self-interested

motives (trying to gather more flowers than the nymphs), is snatched while thoughtfully collecting flowers for her mother, suggesting that the physical and emotional distance Pluto's abduction places between Ceres and her daughter is as devastating to the goddesses as the actual rape.

For Mary Shelley, the relationship among Ceres, Proserpine, and the nymphs stands in lieu of the romantic bond between Prometheus and Asia. In this community of female poets, sublimity or bliss is created by the bond between Ceres and Proserpine—by the interaction between women instead of between a woman and man—and no relationship is more important than that of mother and child. Richardson states that Shelley's goddess is “more aggressive [than Ovid's] in her response to her daughter's abduction” because the desolation of the land “arises not from Ceres' despondency but from her ‘rage’” (129). Richardson's tidy classification of Ovid's Ceres as despondent and Shelley's goddess as angry, however, is misleading. Richardson cites the opening lines to Act Two of *Proserpine* as evidence of Ceres' rage:

How all is changed since that *unhappy* eve  
Ceres *forever weeps*, seeking her child  
And in her rage has struck the land with blight  
Trinacria *mourns* with her;—its fertile field  
Are dry and barren...  
And yet their hue but mocks the *deeper grief*  
Which is the fountain of these *bitter tears*. (*P* 14, emphasis mine)

In addition to the characters listed on the *dramatis personae*, Mother Nature herself acts as a character in *Proserpine*, hearing and abetting Arethusa in her attempts to escape from Alpheus and mourning Proserpine's disappearance. Shelley's lines suggest that the



devastation is the result of the land's own self-destruction. Sicily mourns, causing her foliage and waters to become desiccated, but more importantly, she *mourns with Ceres*. The dearth results as much from Ceres' grief as it does her ire. If anything, Ovid's Ceres is more violent than Shelley's:

[She] calls the lands ungrateful,  
Unworthy of her gifts; and above all others  
Sicily is to blame, for there she found  
The evidence of her loss. She cursed the land,  
Breaking the ploughs that turned the earth, and killing  
Cattle and men in anger, making fields  
Lie sterile, blighting seed and crop. (*M*5.472-478)

Shelley makes no mention of Ceres directly killing animals, only fields and flowers, but Ovid's goddess kills both "cattle and men in anger." Although Ceres' response, in both accounts, to Proserpine's abduction is severe, Shelley's tearful goddess appears to lose part of herself upon losing her daughter, emphasizing the importance of female unity and the bond between mother and child. Whereas Ovid's goddess deduces—however rashly—that Sicily is to blame for what happened and punishes the land accordingly, Shelley's goddess, without Proserpine, is a more vulnerable and incomplete version of her previous self.

Also emphasizing the intense bond between Proserpine and her mother is Ceres' response to finding out that Pluto has abducted her child. Shelley's goddess does not "simply wait upon and then accept Jove's absolute decree" upon learning of her daughter's fate (Richardson 39). Ovid's Ceres immediately goes to Jove upon discovering where and by whom Proserpine has been taken and begs him, as king of the gods and Proserpine's father, to demand her return. Ceres spends as much time devaluing herself as she does asking for

help: “Her mother holds no favor / It may be, in your sight; even so, a father / Should find the daughter dear, however worthless the mother may be” (*M5.517-520*). Ceres, who has throughout the tale appeared both confident and strong, cowers at the feet of Jove and falls into self-loathing language. Whether Ceres is blaming herself for Proserpine’s abduction or for some other unmentioned offense is unclear, but in either case, she demonstrates a feeling of inadequacy in the presence of her fellow Olympian. Ceres’ emphasis on the father/daughter relationship, in tandem with her assault upon herself, reinforces the idea of men having power over women and devalues the mother/daughter dynamic that is so important to Mary Shelley. Jove tells Ceres that Proserpine cannot return to the upper world because she has eaten of the food of Tartarus. Though his motives are unclear, Jupiter “divides the year in half so that the goddess [Proserpine] / May be with both and neither [Pluto and Ceres]” (*M5.565-567*).

Ovid’s Jove, consistent with older accounts of the myth, is both Ceres’ sister and Proserpine’s father, but Shelley makes no mention of the latter relation. By leaving Proserpine without a father, Shelley makes the goddess’ bond with her mother even stronger and gives the illusion that Proserpine is fatherless. Shelley’s Ceres calls to her brother upon finding out that Pluto has taken her child: “As you are God I do demand your help!— / Restore my child, or let all heaven sink, / And the fair world be chaos once again!” (*P17*). Proserpine’s separation from Ceres is as much about the physical and emotional rift it causes between mother and daughter as it is about physical violation. Richardson notes that Mary Shelley demonstrates the ill effects of Pluto’s lust by focusing on Ceres’ bereavement, which

stresses the effects of the separation of Proserpine from her mother even more than the physical rape (129). The Ceres of *Proserpine* stands up to Jove, despite his authority as king of the gods, because she recognizes her own power as an earth goddess. She uses her power over the earth as leverage, and upon discovering that Proserpine is doomed to remain in Tartarus, Ceres again threatens Olympus:

If she depart  
I will ascend with her—the Earth shall lose  
Its proud fertility...  
My harvests ripening by Tartarian fires  
Shall feed the dead with Heaven's ambrosial food.  
Wilt thou not then repent, brother unkind,  
Viewing the barren earth with vain regret,  
Thou didst not shew more mercy to my child? (*P*21)

Realizing the severity of Ceres' threat, Jove strikes a compromise between Proserpine's mother and new husband. No such ultimatum occurs in *The Metamorphoses*.

The Ceres of *Proserpine*, in contrast to that of Ovid, challenges the masculine authority represented by Jove. That Shelley does not simply situate females as the utmost power in her myth is worth considering. Ceres is not suddenly or arbitrarily given more power than Jupiter; she overpowers his will by recognizing her own strength and realizing the advantage it gives her. Shelley's Ceres, throughout the drama, reveals herself to be a strong, emotional, and intelligent woman, and while she does not rely upon men, her bond with Proserpine is as strong as Asia's with Prometheus. Whereas *Prometheus Unbound's* happy resolution comes as the result of Prometheus and Asia's cooperation, Ceres' reunion with Proserpine is made possible by Ceres' love for her daughter and her willingness to stand

in opposition to the men who seek to separate them.

Mary Shelley's decision to revise the story of Proserpine in 1820 was undoubtedly influenced by the deaths of three of her children. The myth of Proserpine is as much a story of Ceres' loss as it is Proserpine's, and Shelley, understanding the pain of a grieving mother better than anyone, shifts the subjectivity of her story even more toward Proserpine's mother by placing the rape "in the silence between the acts" and emphasizing the despair and rage of Ceres in the second half of the drama. In an 1819 letter to her friend Leigh Hunt, Mary Shelley reveals the depth of her loss:

The world will never be to me again as it was; there was a life and freshness in it that is lost to me. On my last birthday when I was twenty-one I repined that time should fly so quickly and that I should grow older so quickly. This birthday...the time since the last seems to have flown with speed of lightning, yet I rejoiced at that and only repined that I was not older; in fact I ought to have died on the 7th of June last. (M. Shelley, *Letters* 76).

June 7, 1819 was, not surprisingly, the day her son William died. Although William marked Mary's third loss, she would lose another child to a miscarriage in 1822. Shelley no doubt saw much of herself in grieving Ceres, who is sad, angry, and incomplete after losing Proserpine. Upon hearing that the goddess will divide her time between Pluto and Ceres, mother and daughter celebrate the decision as "a slight change / From our late happy lot" and a triumph over the doom Jove threatens; Proserpine assures her mother that even in their six months of physical separation, they will be joined in their dreams (*P*23-24). Although their joyous reaction is far from the tempered relief one might expect, Shelley's decision to portray the six-month sentence as a victory is understandable in light of the author's own situation:

Half a lifetime with her children is more than Mary Shelley received and more than she could hope for.

Mary expands the power of the female voice in *Proserpine* by making her goddesses and nymphs gifted storytellers, but Proserpine's voice in particular comes across as much stronger in Shelley than in Ovid due not only to her newfound narrative authority but her larger speaking role in general. Ovid's Proserpine is silent, and though she cries out when Pluto seizes her, Ovid relates her cries indirectly, stating only "She calls her mother, / Her comrades, but more often for her mother" (*M*5.395-396). Although Jove, Ceres, and Arethusa speak directly within Ovid's lines, Proserpine's voice is never heard. Even upon her return to the upper world, the young goddess remains a passive figure, her fate decided upon by Jove and recounted by the detached narrator. Shelley's *Proserpine*—constructed as a drama, which gives all six women active roles and distinct voices within the story—begins in Proserpine's own voice. Throughout the drama this new Proserpine, in contrast to Ovid's, explains her motives for gathering flowers, cries out *directly* for her mother and Arethusa, narrates her experience to her mother upon returning to the upper world, and evaluates her own fate once Jove's decision is handed down. Mary Shelley emphasizes Proserpine's intelligence and her bond with other women, namely her mother, both of which distinguish her and the drama's other women as dramatic revisions of Ovid's classical account of myth and of Percy Shelley's portrayal of women as exemplified by Asia in *Prometheus Unbound*.

*Proserpine's* women are storytellers, capable of uniting emotion and intelligence among themselves instead of in conjunction with men, whose absence allows Mary Shelley

to explore and draw attention to the powerful bond between mother and child. Though overlooked by critics for over one hundred years, *Proserpine* stands as an invaluable contribution to literary scholarship for the very reason it was initially dismissed: its unconventional presentation of women. That is not to say that the drama is Mary Shelley's best work or that it rivals the poetic genius of Keats' *Hyperion* or Percy Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, but as Richardson explains, "to acknowledge that *Proserpine* and *Midas* are not of the same caliber as *Frankenstein* or *Hyperion* is quite different from dismissing them as 'little classical fancies'" (136). Even after *Proserpine*'s delayed publication in 1922, women's writing was not considered a valuable addition to the literary tradition. One hundred fifty years after its composition, *Proserpine* eventually began to gain recognition for its revision of both classical and Romantic portrayals of women by presenting intellect and intuition as distinctly feminine traits brought about by unity among women.

## CONCLUSION

Both Percy and Mary Shelley substantially revise the classical accounts of Prometheus and Proserpine, increasing the voice, agency, and overall impact of women throughout their respective dramas. Intellectual Prometheus and intuitive Asia, as equals, create a sublime union that returns the world to a state free of the physical and mental bondage from which humans—specifically, women—previously suffered. The women of *Proserpine* are also free of bondage, but they are free of their reliance upon men as well. Unlike Prometheus and Asia, whose efforts result in a clean slate and an opportunity for true gender equality, Proserpine and Ceres represent an equality based on reaction to previous injustices: Instead of wiping clean the slate, Mary Shelley subordinates and vilifies the men of her drama, tipping in the other direction the scales that long favored men.

Although both authors perform double revisions—revising classical *and* contemporary views of women—they do so in conflicting ways. Percy, who saw Mary as his equal and longed for a society with no distinction between the genders, elevates women's role in the Prometheus myth by uniting Prometheus and Asia and blurring the line that once divided them. Mary, on the other hand, sees men and women as very different creatures with very different experiences, which prevent them from being united, as Prometheus and Asia, are as a single being. Mary Shelley presents a female union in *Proserpine* between

mother and daughter that is not only neglected in Percy's sexual union in *Prometheus Unbound* but is actually destroyed by sexual desire in *Proserpine*.

In isolation, neither Percy's romantic nor Mary's maternal love are complete unions. Although Prometheus and Asia's rebellion against Jupiter allows men and men to unite as equal partners, Percy Shelley realizes that such a resolution is impossible in the real world. As revolutionaries, Asia and Prometheus perform the role of poets as defined by Shelley. In his "Defense of Poetry," composed around the same time as *Prometheus Unbound* and "Discourse," Percy Shelley argues that Poetry is not the compilation of great verse produced over a matter of centuries or millennia, but an ever-changing entity that must be revolutionized in order to persist. Paul Cantor, in *Creature and Creator* explains, "the great danger Shelley sees throughout the history of poetry is the tendency of visionary poetry, such as Dante's or Milton's, to harden into a new orthodoxy, and become the very opposite of the liberating force it was originally meant to be" (93). Poets who began as revolutionaries inevitably become icons, and when this occurs, new iconoclastic poets must step in and renew the poetic cycle along with the spirit of poetry itself. The cycle of tyranny in *Prometheus Unbound* ends when Demogorgon decides not to take Jupiter's place, but there is no Demogorgon outside the lines of the drama—only another Jupiter, another artifice.

While Mary Shelley's presentation of women exists in response to—rather than outside of—real-world gender relations, her exclusion of men is as unrealistic as Percy's proposed equality. Mary privileges the relationship between mother and daughter above all else and casts men aside as intruders who seek to undermine that bond, but men must and do



intervene. Despite Mary Shelley's attempts to avoid the issue, the mother-daughter relationship is, after all, impossible without a prior romantic union between man and woman. As husband and wife—and two of the most prominent figures of the Romantic movement—Percy and Mary Shelley have different views of the relationship between men and women and of what constitutes completeness. In response to Percy's letter to James Hogg, Elsie Michie notes that Percy either fails to recognize the difference between men and women or chooses to ignore it (23), but the couple's own gendered views of women and their relationship with men confirm the difference that Percy overlooks in *Prometheus Unbound* but Mary emphasizes in *Proserpine*.

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