

## From Chronos to Kairos Time and Eternity in P. B. Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*

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**Abstract:** This study focuses an attention upon the issue of time and eternity in P. B. Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*. As many scholars have already pointed out, the main concern of *Prometheus Unbound* is the process of self-reform and self-awakening of Prometheus, Asia and mankind. That is to say, the stress of the play is less on dramatic action than on revelation. This means that the concept of time is one of the most important elements in this lyrical drama. The present writer hypothesizes that Shelley, who had a good command of classical Greek, wrote *Prometheus Unbound* in conscious of the Greek concept of chronos (Κρόνος) and kairos (Καῖρός). While chronos means usual or physical time, kairos is “a time when conditions are right for accomplishment of a crucial action” (*Definition.net*). In the reign of Jupiter, time was based on chronos. When Prometheus mentions “three thousand years of sleep-unsheltered hours and moments” in Act I, for example, he is speaking in the concept of chronos. On the other hand, when the “Spirit of the Hour” breathes into the “curved shell” and loosens its “mighty music” in Act III scene iii, it introduces the concept of kairos into the world of humanity.

The age of Prometheus (kairos) comes only after Prometheus's attitude towards Jupiter turned from “curse” to “pity” in Act I and Asia realized that only “eternal Love” could overcome “time” in Act II. In Act III, two kinds of “Spirit of the Hour” (kairos) appear, one is driven by a spirit “with dreadful countenance” and the other is driven by a young and beautiful spirit. Demogorgon (eternity and necessity) arrives on the “Car of the Hour”, whose task is to dispose of things in the past, identifies himself and dethrones Jupiter. Asia and Panthea, on the other hand, arrive on the “Car of the Hour”, which is future-oriented. The marital reunion of Prometheus and Asia coincides with the sounding of the “curved shell” by the “Spirit of the Hour”. In Act IV, “the dead Hours”, the time of which man was a victim, exit from the stage and are replaced by “Chorus of Hours” (kairos) who dance with the “Spirits” of human mind. But while Prometheus and Asia are immortal, “man” is not. “Time” still passes, but the awareness of duration is entirely subjective. Demogorgon reappears in the end, and announces that “Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance” are the key to maintain the ideal world, and warns that Despotism could come back anytime without “eternal Love”.

**Key Words:** P. B. Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, chronos, kairos, eternal Love

## 1. Introduction

*Prometheus Unbound: A Lyrical Drama in Four Acts* by Percy Bysshe Shelley(1792-1822) is inspired by a trilogy *Prometheia* by Aeschylus(525-456B.C.), of which only ‘Prometheus Bound’ and fragments of ‘Prometheus Unbound’ survive. It deals with the endless torments of the Greek mythological figure Prometheus, who defied the gods and gave fire to humanity, for which he was punished by Zeus(Jupiter). In the trilogy, Prometheus reconciles with Zeus. Prometheus discloses the danger threatened to his empire by his marriage with Thetis. Thetis was given in marriage to Peleus and Prometheus, by the permission of Zeus, was released from his captivity.

In Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound*, however, there is no reconciliation between Prometheus and Jupiter. Shelley writes in the Preface of *Prometheus Unbound* as follows:

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.<sup>1</sup>

Although Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound* derives from the trilogy of Aeschylus, practically only Act I is based upon it. Prometheus never discloses the secret to Jupiter. Jupiter marries Thetis, which immediately leads him to ruin. Thus, the main themes of Shelley’s drama are not reconciliation and compromise but perseverance, revelation and spiritual awakening of the protagonists Prometheus and Asia. In that sense, “Unbinding of Prometheus” rather than *Prometheus Unbound* is a more suitable title for the Shelley’s drama.

In his letter to Charles and James Ollier, Shelley himself wrote that *Prometheus Unbound* was the most perfect of his productions.<sup>2</sup> In this drama, Shelley successfully combined his two biggest themes, the necessity of social reform and the necessity of societal love, in such a way that they supplement and complement one another.

## 2. The Outline of *Prometheus Unbound*

### (1) Act I

Throughout Act I Prometheus is chained to a rock in the Indian Caucasus, and all events and characters centre on the single, static figure. Prometheus demands that the Earth recalls the curse he laid upon Jupiter. She responds by describing Zoroaster and that there are two realities; the current and the shadow reality, and then mentions the name Demogorgon, “the supreme Tyrant of the shadow realm”. She asks Prometheus to call upon his own ghost or the ghost of Jupiter. Prometheus calls upon the “Phantasm of Jupiter” and commands it to recall his own curse against him. After

hearing his own words, Prometheus repents and is freed from a negative emotion, hatred and scorn. The Earth laments that Prometheus is vanquished but Ione claims that he isn't. Then Mercury and Furies appear to torture Prometheus. Mercury asks Prometheus to reveal the secret of Jupiter's fate only Prometheus knows, but Prometheus refuses. Furies then mentally torture Prometheus by showing him two woes in human history, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ (ll.546-566) and the bloodshed of French Revolution(ll.567-577). To console Prometheus, the Earth calls Spirits who prophesy the ultimate triumph of good people over evil (ll.672-800). Prometheus, Ione and Panthea discuss the spirits' message after they depart. Prometheus says "all hope was vain but love", and Panthea tells him that Asia awaits him.

### **(2) Act II**

While Act I is a single scene, Act II is made up of five scenes. In scene i, Asia asks Panthea to lift her eyes so that she could read her two dreams. One is the figure of self-reformed Prometheus shadowed over by love. The other is the voice "Follow, follow!", which urges Asia and Panthea to the realm of Demogorgon(eternity and necessity). Scene ii takes place in the Forest Asia and Panthea pass into. Spirits sing about various living things in the Forest and two Fauns discuss what the spirits' life is like in the Forest. In scene iii, Asia and Panthea reach the Mountains, and a Song of Spirits begins, calling them "To the deep, to the deep,/ Down, down!" Scene iv takes place in the cave of Demogorgon. Asia asks Demogorgon some questions, but all it answers are what she already suspects; 1. All spirits are enslaved who serve things evil (l.110), 2. All things are subject to Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance and Change but eternal Love (ll. 119-120). When she asks him when Prometheus will be freed, Demogorgon cries out, "Behold!", and the mountain opens and Cars move out, which are driven by the "Spirit of Hours"(kairos). One of the Hours asks Asia and Panthea to ride with him, and scene v takes place upon a mountaintop as the Car stops. Panthea is surprised to see how Asia is changed, and how her sister radiates with beauty. Act II is closed by Asia's famous song "My soul is an enchanted Boat/ Which, like a sleeping swan, doth float/ Upon the silver waves of thy sweet singing", in which Asia and Prometheus make a voyage to the lost paradise(i.e.golden age) before the reign of Jupiter.

### **(3) Act III**

Act III consists of four scenes. Scene i takes place in heaven. Jupiter claims that he has conquered all but the soul of mankind and that when his child is born, he will be omnipotent. Then Demogorgon appears and proclaims himself to be Jupiter's child and mightier than Jupiter. Jupiter tries to attack Demogorgon, but the elements refuse to help Jupiter and he is dethroned. Scene ii takes place at a river on Atlantis. Ocean, the father of three Oceanides, Asia, Panthea and Ione, and Apollo rejoice over the fall of Jupiter. Apollo compares Jupiter to a storm-encompassed eagle sank down "to the abyss...to the dark void" (l.10). In scene iii, Hercules unbinds Prometheus and promises that he will minister Prometheus like a slave. Prometheus describes to Asia a cave in

which they could call home and be with each other forever. Prometheus requests the “Spirit of the Hour” (kairos) to take Ione, with the conch shell of Proteus, over the earth. Earth describes the nature of death to Asia, because she, as an immortal being, doesn’t understand what it is like. Earth then calls forth her torch bearer, a winged child, who would guide Prometheus, Asia and the others to a temple that was once dedicated to Prometheus and will become their cave to dwell in. In scene iv, Asia and the “Spirit of the Earth” talk to each other about nature and love. At the end of Act III, the “Spirit of the Hour” describes a revolution within mankind on behalf of Prometheus. Mankind no longer feared Jupiter the tyrant, no longer acted as tyrants themselves, and treated each other as equals and with love. “The painted veil” called “life” is now torn aside. The man is now “sceptreless”, “free”, “uncircumscribed”, and “the king over himself”.

#### (4) Act IV

Act IV concerns with the perception of the Universe in the Promethean age (kairos); the main actors are space, time and the spirits. None of the play’s major characters appears in this act except Panthea and Ione. Act IV is a single scene but consists of three parts. The first part represents the confused departure of the out-worn pre-reformational hours “to the dark, to the past, to the dead”, and the arrival of the bright nascent hours of the new order. The “dead Hours” (chronos) exit from the stage and are replaced by the “Chorus of Hours” (kairos) who dance with the “Spirits” of the human mind singing and rejoicing in love. The image “Lovers catch ye [Hours] by your tresses”(l.107), reminds us of the feature of Kairos. The second part is a fanciful love-dialogue between feminine Moon and the masculine Earth. The conceit is that the rebirth of love in the Earth has kindled a response in the cold bosom of the Moon. In the third part, Demogorgon announces that Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance are the key to maintain the ideal world, and also warns that Despotism could come back anytime without “eternal Love” (agape).

### 3. Chronos and Kairos

As you see from the outline of Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound*, the concept of time is one of the most important issues of the drama. The present writer interprets the drama on the hypothesis that Shelley, who had a good command of classical Greek, wrote *Prometheus Unbound* in conscious of the Greek concept of chronos (Χρόνος) and kairos (Καιρός).

There is a convincing evidence that Shelley was familiar with the ancient Greek literature. He read *The Banquet* (Συμπόσιον) in 1817, 1818 and 1820, *Phaedrus* (Φαῖδρος) in 1818 and 1820, and *Phaedo* (Φαίδων) in 1820.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, there is an incontestable proof that he translated some of Plato’s works. Among them, Shelley’s *The Banquet Translated from Plato* together with his introduction, ‘A Discourse on the Manners of the Ancient Greeks Relative to the Subject of Love’, are the two works which of his whole output show most clearly his qualities as a pure scholar.<sup>4</sup>

According to *Definitions.Net*, “Chronos is the personification of Time in pre-Socratic

philosophy and later literature. Chronos was imagined as a god, serpentine in form, with three heads – those of a man, a bull, and a lion. “Kairos is “A time when conditions are right for accomplishment of a crucial action; the opportune and decisive moment...While chronos is quantitative, kairos has a qualitative nature”.<sup>5</sup>

As for general usage, chronos is translated as usual time or physical time, and kairos is interpreted as occasion, opportunity, or right time. The former is objective and the latter is subjective. We can recognize the timing of kairos only by ourselves.

In Act I, when Prometheus mentions “Three thousand years of sleep-unsheltered hours /And moments” (ll.12-13), he is speaking in the concept of chronos. In Act II scene iv, when Asia says “Time fell” from Saturn’s throne (ll.33-34), it means the age of chronos started in the reign of Saturn. (“Saturn” is “Saturnus” in the Roman myths, and it is equivalent to “Chronos” in the Greek myths.) The age of chronos continued in the reign of Jupiter (Zeus), but when the “Spirit of Hour” describes the millennial change the “mighty music of the “curved shell” brought about in Act III scene iv, we know that the concept of time has changed from chronos to kairos. In Act IV, “Chorus of Spirits” sing “lovers catch ye[Hours] by your tresses” (l.107), and in this context, “your loose tresses” mean the forelock of Kairos.

Finally, the present writer refers to Shelley’s distinctive sense of time. He believed that it was possible to prolong sensuous time by concentration of mind. The quotation below is from his own footnotes to *Queen Mab* VIII. ll.203-207.

Time is our consciousness of the succession of ideas in our mind. Vivid sensation, of either pain or pleasure, makes the time seem long, as the common phrase is, because it renders us more acutely conscious of our ideas. If a mind be conscious of a hundred ideas during one minute by the clock, and two hundred during another, the latter of these spaces would actually occupy so much greater extent in the mind as two exceed one in quantity. If, therefore, the human mind, by any future improvement of its sensibility, should become conscious of an infinite number of ideas in a minute, that minute would be eternity.<sup>6</sup>

Shelley must have had thousands of ideas while he was composing *Prometheus Unbound*, and that’s why the role of the “Spirits of Hour” is so important especially in the second half of the drama. The present writer conjectures that one of the reasons why Shelley added Act IV was to let “Chorus of Hours” and “Chorus of Spirits” of mankind sing alternately or together.

#### **4. Previous Researches on the Theme of Time in Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound***

##### **(1) The Hour of the World’s Redemption through Man’s Act of Self-Reform**

In *Shelley’s Major Poetry*(1961), Baker suggests that “Shelley chose to show man at a single

symbolic hour — the hour of the world’s redemption through man’s act of self-reform.<sup>7</sup> He further points out that “the whole of the poem is the biography of an Hour (the “all-nameless hour,”...of man’s redemption through Prometheus’ act of self-reform) together with the events immediately preceding it, and those which directly ensue upon its arrival. At the proper time, emphasis is placed upon Hour itself;...The Hour is even said to be “of many, one” — which suggests that it is not a particular predestined time, but any hour at which Prometheus reaches the point of growth which he has now reached.”<sup>8</sup>

As far as I know, this is the first book which paid full attention to the importance of the role of “time” and “hour” in Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound*. Baker, however, uses the term “hour” literally without any distinction between chronos and kairos.

## (2) The Dynamic Capture of the Perfect Present

In *Shelley A Critical Reading* (1971), Wasserman devotes 119 pages on *Prometheus Unbound*.<sup>9</sup> In Chapter 12 “Prometheus Unbound: The Far Goal of Time”, he assumes that there are “two goals of time” and “two forms of eternity” for “the two different levels of Experience”, One Mind (i.e. Prometheus) and human mind. He argues that the “two goals of time” is represented symbolically by the Spirit of the Hour who introduces the new age...After bearing Asia to Prometheus so that they may withdraw into the immediate perfection of their timeless eternity, she [the Spirit of the Hour] is ordered then...to bring about...gradual perfection of man within time”. Wasserman also refers to the two kinds of snake emblem in *Prometheus Unbound*. One is “an amphisbaenic snake”. He says it serves elsewhere in the poem as emblem of modes of time because “Joining the two poles of diurnal movement and notable for its ability to move in either direction, an amphisbaenic snake...serves as a kind of Zodiacal sign of the dynamic capture of the perfect present”. The other is “circular serpent, tail in mouth”, which is the emblem of the totality of time”.

The first snake Wasserman referred to is an “amphisbaenic snake” (Act III. scene iv. l.119). It is a mythical snake with a head at each of its body, which can move either way. A genus of animals named “amphisbaena”, however, exists on the earth.<sup>10</sup> The second snake, “circular serpent, tail in mouth”, although he doesn’t mention the name, is ouroboros (ουρόμφορος μασ), an “emblematic serpent of ancient Egypt and Greece represented with its tail in its mouth, a well-known symbol for eternity”.<sup>11</sup> The present writer assumes that the image of ouroboros best fits the line “The snake-like Doom coiled underneath his [Demogorgon’s] throne” (Act II. scene iii. l.97).

## (3) Magnified and Spread Present or No Time in Time

In the last chapter of *Shelley and the Tradition of English Poetry The Revised Edition* (1975), Hiroshi Suzuki assumes that Jupiter is “the King of Hours” and Prometheus is “a man who devotes himself to self-assertion”.<sup>12</sup> The following is a summary of his interpretation of the drama: In Act I, all the deities and creatures on the earth must obey the king Jupiter as slaves, but Prometheus never surrenders and tries to bring the torch of hope to realize the Promethean day. In Act II, through the

Zen-like dialogue with Demogorgon, Asia learns how Time came into existence. Demogorgon, Eternity includes all the possibilities yet belongs to none of them and the essence of all things in the universe. Time in the Jupiter's age served "the King of Hours" as a slave, but there is no king in the Promethean age. The new Promethean hour is "magnified and spread present" ("kakudai-sare, hikinobasareru-genzai). "All the hours are awakened" means that the state in which the intrinsic function of time stopped, like time of pray, time experienced in ecstasy, etc. Hours are "children of a diviner day" and they coexist under the light of "hope" (Prometheus) and "love" (Asia) like citizens of a republic. People in the Promethean age are not subject to passing time but control time by their own mind and enjoy "no time in time" i.e. "eternity" ("jikan-no-naka-no-mujikan" dearu "eien". Prometheus and Asia attained the stage of eternity by devoting themselves to agape. The reason why they don't even appear in Act IV is that they brought themselves to naught and are living for others like Jesus Christ. As for the concept of agape and eros, Suzuki referred to Hatano's *Time and eternity*.<sup>13</sup> Lastly, Suzuki offers an interesting interpretation on "an amphisbaenic snake", which has two heads and can move in either direction: Since the amphisbaenic snake is the yoke of the "winged steeds", its symbolic role is to dynamically fix "the perfect present" to eternity.

The present writer summarized Suzuki's interpretation of *Prometheus Unbound*, because although the article is written in somehow old-style Japanese, it still contains some interesting interpretations and suggestions to the readers of Shelley today. By using such unique expressions as "magnified and spread present" or "no time in time", it seems to me that Suzuki is groping for something close to the idea of *kairos* in Greek.

### 5. Jupiter's Hour as Chronos

As Asia mentions in Act II scene iv, time fell from Saturn's (Chronos's) throne and Saturn is the father of Jupiter. The concept of time during the reign of Jupiter is basically *chronos*.

The duration of Prometheus's suffering is "Three thousand years" and no more or no less. It is very long but a limited time. Even though they seem "years" from "torture and solitude", Prometheus knows they will end.

*Three thousand years of sleep-unsheltered hours*

*And moments — aye divided by keen pangs*

*Till they seemed years, torture and solitude,*

*Scorn and despair, — these are mine empire: —*<sup>14</sup>

(Act I. 11.12-15 *Italics mine*)

The line "Their wingless, crawling Hours"(l.48), however, shows that time passes very slowly for Prometheus.

...they[day and night] lead  
*Their wingless, crawling Hours, one among whom*  
— As some dark Priest hailes the reluctant victim —  
Shall drag thee[Jupiter], cruel King, to kiss the blood  
From these pale feet,...<sup>15</sup>

(Act I. ll. 47-51 *Italics mine*)

After the Phantasm of Jupiter vanished, Mercury and Furies, messengers from Jupiter, appear to torture Prometheus. Mercury repeatedly asks Prometheus to reveal the secret of Jupiter's fate only Prometheus knows, but Prometheus refuses.

MERCURY

...Once more answer me.  
Thou knowest not the period of Jove's power?

PROMETHEUS

I know but this, that it must come.

MERCURY

Alas!  
*Thou canst not count thy years to come of pain?*

PROMETHEUS

They last while Jove must reign; nor more, nor less  
Do I desire or fear.

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, lot, shelterless;  
Perchance it[Eternity] has not numbered *the slow years*  
Which thou must spend in torture, unreprieved.



## PROMETHEUS

Perchance no thought can count them — yet they pass.<sup>16</sup>

(Act I. ll. 411-424 *Italics mine*)

Mercury uses the word “Eternity”(l.418) in the wrong context, or simply to deceive or tempt Prometheus. Especially his words, “Plunge /Into Eternity, where recorded time, /Even all that we imagine, age on age, /Seems but a point”(ll.416-419) is misleading, because in his rhetoric, it sounds as if “recorded time” and “Eternity” were inseparable with each other. Mercury’s “Eternity” is a pseudo-eternity, because it does have an end, as Prometheus knows. Or Mercury might only be seducing Prometheus by using pseudo-rhetoric.

Sperry makes a very interesting comment on Mercury’s words; “Mercury’s question pierces to the very heart of Promethean dilemma. His Argument adapts the design of the asymptote, or Zeno’s paradox, in which time and eternity, though theoretically distinct, appear inseparable. Of what use to Prometheus is the promise of an end if he has not the means of anticipating it, of actually visualizing it? Lacking such he must, surely, fall into despair, ...Mercury’s speech distills the abiding doubt and terror of mankind’s situation, a terror that accounts for compulsion Shelley felt to envision an end to the ordeal with the composition of his drama.”<sup>17</sup>

Jupiter uses the word “Eternity” based on the false recognition. In Act III scene i, Jupiter calls Thetis “bright image of Eternity”(l.36). For Jupiter, “Eternity” means his omnipotence. Jupiter assumes that all the deities and creatures obey him except Prometheus and mankind but when Thetis bears a mightier child, Demogorgon, he will be omnipotent. That is why he calls his spouse “bright image of Eternity”.

## JUPITER

Ye congregated Powers of Heaven, who share  
 The glory and the strength of him ye serve,  
 Rejoice! henceforth I am *omnipotent*.  
 All else had been subdued to me — alone  
 The soul of man, like unextinguished fire,  
 Yet burns towards Heaven with fierce reproach, and doubt  
 And lamentation and reluctant prayer,  
 Hurling up insurrection, which might make  
 Our antique empire insecure, though built  
 On eldest faith, and hell's coeval, fear.

.....

And thou[Thetis]

Ascend beside me, veil'd in the light  
 Of the desire which makes thee one with me,  
 Thetis, *bright image of Eternity!*  
 When thou didst cry, “Insufferable might!  
 God! spare me! I sustain not the quick flames,  
 The penetrating presence; all my being,  
 Like him whom the Numidian seps did thaw  
 Into a dew with poison, is dissolved,  
 Sinking through its foundations” — even then  
 Two mighty spirits, mingling, made a third  
 Mightier than either, which, unbodied now  
 Between us floats, felt, although unbeheld,  
 Waiting the incarnation, which ascends —  
 Hear ye the thunder of the fiery wheels  
 Griding the winds? — from Demogorgon's throne. —<sup>18</sup>

(Act III. scene I. 1-10, 33-48 *Italics mine*)

It turns out that Jupiter was entirely wrong. Immediately after this scene, Demogorgon, mightier than Jupiter and Thetis, dethrones him and takes him down to the abyss. Reiman points out that “Jupiter’s treatment of Thetis contrasts sharply with the mutuality of love relationship between Prometheus and Asia”.<sup>19</sup> Thetis’s words, “Insufferable might! God! spare me! I sustain not the quick flames, /The penetrating presence;...”(ll.36-38) suggests that Jupiter practically raped Thetis.

In Act IV, Jupiter’s hour is dead. His hour is replaced by Demogorgon’s hour and is brought to his tomb in eternity.

Here, oh, here!  
 We[Unseen Spirits] bear the bier  
 Of *the Father of many a cancelled year!*  
 Spectres we  
 Of *the dead Hours* be;  
 We bear *Time to his tomb in eternity.*<sup>20</sup>

(Act IV. ll. 9-14 *Italics mine*)

The concept of time in the age of Jupiter was *chronos*. Jupiter used the word “Eternity” based on the wrong recognition. His messenger Mercury used the word “Eternity” to deceive or tempt

Prometheus. And neither of them knew their own fate.

## 6. Going Back to the Past

The most important parts of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* are Act I and II. And it is interesting to see that the starting points of self-reform and self-awakening of the protagonists Prometheus and Asia are going back to the past in Act I and II, respectively.

### (1) Prometheus's Reflections on the Past

Act I is a place for Prometheus's conversion. Since it was Prometheus who gave Jupiter power and his will (ll.272-274), Jupiter reflects the evil aspect of Prometheus himself. So, Jupiter will perish when Prometheus completely overcomes a portion of Satanic aspect within him.

In this act, Prometheus requests the Earth to recall his curse on Jupiter, but she asks him to call upon his own ghost or the ghost of Jupiter instead. So he conjures up the phantasm of Jupiter and let it speak his own curse on him in the past.

#### PHANTASM

Fiend, I defy thee[Jupiter]! with a calm, fixed mind,

All that thou canst inflict I bid thee do;

Foul tyrant both of Gods and humankind,

One only being shalt thou not subdue.

Rain then thy plagues upon me here,

Ghastly disease and frenzying fear;

And let alternate frost and fire

Eat into me[Prometheus], and be thine ire

Lightning, and cutting hail, and legioned forms

Of furies, driving by upon the wounding storms.

.....

Heap on thy soul by virtue of this Curse

*Ill deeds*; then be thou damned, beholding *good*,

*Both* infinite as is the Universe,

And *thou*[Jupiter], and *thy self-torturing solitude*.

An awful Image of calm power

Though now thou sittest, let *the hour*

Come, when thou must appear to be

That which thou art internally.

And after many a false and fruitless crime

Scorn track *thy lagging fall through boundless space and time*.<sup>21</sup>

*(Prometheus Unbound Act I. ll.262-271, 292-301 Italics mine)*

This scene is very important because it is the starting point of Prometheus' conversion. Jupiter is a projection of Prometheus himself before his spiritual awakening.

According to Scrivener, there are three reasons for having the ghost of Jupiter speak the curse; 1. To prevent speaker from being punished, 2. To force Prometheus to recognize the "Jupiterian" aspects of the Promethean curse, which is dramatic irony, 3. To begin the process of uniting the two worlds of phenomenal and potential reality, because utopia is where two worlds exist indistinguishably.<sup>22</sup>

It is noteworthy that "the hour" (l.297) and "thy lagging fall through boundless space and time" (l.301) in the last stanza foretell the dethronement of Jupiter by Demogorgon in Act III scene i.

Lastly a brief comment on the grammatical trouble spot; ll. 293-295 in the last stanza could be interpreted in two ways, or even both:

- ① Both "thou(Jupiter)" and "thy(Jupiter's) self-torturing solitude" are infinite as is the Universe.
- ② Both "Ill deeds" and "good (deeds)"(l.293) are infinite as is the Universe.

① hypothesizes that these lines are Latinism, in which "et(and) A...et(and) B..." means "both A and B". And we know Shelley was an expert in Greek and Latin.

Prometheus's second reflection on the past is not voluntary. It is from his torture on the Precipice in the Indian Caucasus. Furies tear the veil of time to mentally torture Prometheus. They show him two visions; the crucifixion of Jesus Christ (ll.546-566) and the bloodshed of French Revolution (ll.567-577).

## CHORUS

The pale stars of the morn

Shine on a misery, dire to be borne.

Dost thou faint, mighty Titan[Prometheus]? We laugh thee to scorn.

Dost thou boast the clear knowledge thou waken'dst for man?

Then was kindled within him a thirst which outran

Those perishing waters; a thirst of fierce fever,

Hope, love, doubt, desire — which consume him forever.

One[Jesus Christ] came forth of gentle worth,

Smiling on the sanguine earth;

His words outlived him, like swift poison

Withering up truth, peace, and pity.

Look! where round the wide horizon

Many a million-peopled city

Vomits smoke in the bright air.  
Hark that outcry of despair!  
'Tis his mild and gentle ghost  
    Wailing for the faith he kindled.  
Look again, the flames almost  
    To a glow-worm's lamp have dwindled:  
The survivors round the embers  
    Gather in dread.  
    Joy, joy, joy!  
Past ages crowd on thee[Prometheus], but each one remembers,  
And the future is dark, and the present is spread  
Like a pillow of thorns for thy slumberless head.

SEMICHORUS I

Drops of bloody agony flow  
From his[Jesus Christ's] white and quivering brow.  
Grant a little respite now —  
See! a disenchanting nation[France]  
Spring like day from desolation;  
To Truth its state is dedicate,  
And Freedom leads it forth, her mate;  
A legioned band of link'd brothers  
Whom Love calls children —

SEMICHORUS II

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

[*All the FURIES vanish, except one.*]<sup>23</sup>

(Act I. ll. 539-577)

Unlike Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*, the imagined time in which Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* is set is some undetermined time in the future. The historical events Prometheus is shown

are in the past, but he experiences the crucifixion, the French Revolution and their consequences as equally present. The crucifixion is not only associated with Christ but also Prometheus himself bound to the Precipice. Prometheus's experience is equivalent to Christ's crucifixion in witnessing the unexpected ill-effects that have resulted from attempts to confer benefits on human beings.

Lastly, the present writer pays attention to the lines below. Although it is from the last Fury's statement, and its main purpose is of course to torture Prometheus, it is an accurate summarization of the state of humankind.

The good want power, but to weep barren tears.  
 The powerful goodness want: worse need for them.  
 The wise want love, and those who love want wisdom;  
 And all best things are thus confused to ill.  
 Many are strong and rich, and would be just, —  
 But live among their suffering fellow men  
 As if none felt: they know not what they do.<sup>24</sup>

(Act I. ll.625-631)

If Prometheus had not been chained to the Precipice and tortured, he might not have realized the sad reality of humankind so much. In that sense, Prometheus's fall is a "fortunate fall" (*felix culpa*). The phrases "The good want power" and "The powerful goodness want" remind us of the following lines from Shelley's last major poem, *The Triumph of Life*.

And much I grieved to think *how power and will*  
*In opposition rule our mortal day —*

And *why God made irreconcilable*  
*Good and the means of good;* and for despair  
 I half disdained mine eye's desire to fill

With the spent vision of the times that were  
 And scarce have ceased to be...<sup>25</sup>

(*The Triumph of Life* ll.228-234 *Italics mine*)

In this poem, the poet himself grieves on how "power" and "will" rule the human society in opposition and why God made "Good" and "the means of good" irreconcilable. The present writer assumes that this is Shelley's one of the most serious recognitions of human woes.

To the last Fury, Prometheus says “And yet, I pity those they torture not”(ll. 632-633). Lowe contends that “In this crucial shift within the poem, we find Prometheus, for the first time, thinking of others. His pity is no longer focused solely on himself, but projected into the world and onto humanity...He no longer opposes tyranny with defiance but with empathy and love.”<sup>26</sup>

## (2) Asia's Reflections on the Past

It is noteworthy that the climax of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* is Act II scene iv and v, in which reverse of time occurs respectively.

In Act II, Asia, the most active character in the drama, travels all the way from the Forest through Mountains to the Cave of Demogorgon. Asia's spiritual awakening is completed by her dialogue with Demogorgon. As Abrams describes, “Demogorgon...responds to her queries with riddling utterances that merely stimulates her to answer her own questions, by specifying as knowledge what she had already possessed as obscure presentiment.”<sup>27</sup> Also Demogorgon's reply is somehow enigmatic because he answers in absolute concept, not in relative concept. Asia asks Demogorgon “who made terror, madness, crime, remorse,...Abandoned hope, and love that turns to hate;...And Hell, or the sharp fear of Hell?”(scene iv. l. 19, 24, 28).<sup>28</sup> In response to this, Demogorgon only replies “He reigns.” three times. Lowe contends that Demogorgon thereby positions that “the same God who created the world out of benevolence also created Hell, whilst giving man the degree of free will that leaves him free to choose either option”.<sup>29</sup> In the next long monologue (scene iv. ll.32-109), Asia goes back to the past to reflect on the origin of evil.

Asia traces back to remote antiquity, before the birth of time. The readers learn what happened before Jupiter's reign and the manacling of Prometheus. Heaven, Earth, Light, and Love were all that existed in the epoch before the birth of time. Asia begins her monologue by questioning herself.

### ASIA

Who reigns? There was the Heaven and Earth at first  
And Light and Love;<sup>30</sup>

(Act II. scene iv. ll.32-33)

This age was succeeded by a primitivistic period, under Saturn(Saturnus), in which earth's “primal spirits” merely vegetated, having neither knowledge, power, thought, self-governance, nor love.

— then Saturn, from whose throne

*Time fell, an envious shadow; such the state*  
Of the earth's primal spirits beneath his sway

As the calm joy of flowers and living leaves  
 Before the wind or sun has withered them  
 And semivital worms; but he[Saturn] refused  
 The birthright of their being, knowledge, power,  
 The skill which wields the elements, the thought  
 Which pierces this dim universe like light,  
 Self-empire, and the majesty of love,  
 For thirst of which they fainted.<sup>31</sup>

(Act II. scene iv. ll. 34-43 *Italics mine*)

“Saturn” is Saturnus in the Roman myths, and generally thought of as the founder of agriculture and culture. In the Greek myths, Saturnus corresponds to Chronos. In Hēsiodos’s *Erga kai Hēmérai*, the age of Chronos or Saturnus is a golden age, but for Asia, it is not. Because the concept of “Time” started in the age of “Saturn”, the father of Jupiter. “Time” is “an envious shadow”(l.33), because knowledge, power, skill, thought, self-empire and love of “the earth’s primal spirits”(l.35) (human kind) were undermined in the age of Saturn (Chronos).

Then Prometheus

Gave wisdom, which is strength, to Jupiter  
 And with this law alone: “Let man be free,”  
 Clothed him with the dominion of wide Heaven.  
 To know nor faith nor love nor law, to be  
 Omnipotent but friendless, is to reign;<sup>32</sup>

(Act II. scene iv, ll. 43-48)

The Age of Saturn ended when Prometheus taught man science and art, medicine, astronomy, and navigation, but at the same time gave wisdom and power to Jupiter.”<sup>33</sup> Prometheus gave Jupiter power under the condition that Jupiter gives man freedom, but Jupiter betrayed Prometheus and became a tyrant. Thus, the reign of Jupiter rains down evils on the humankind.

And Jove[Jupiter] now reigned; for on the race of man  
 First famine, and then toil, and then disease,  
 Strife, wounds, and ghastly death unseen before,  
 Fell; and the unseasonable seasons drove,  
 With alternating shafts of frost and fire,



Their shelterless, pale tribes to mountain caves;  
 And in their desert hearts fierce wants he sent  
 And mad disquietudes, and shadows idle  
 Of unreal good, which levied mutual war,  
 So ruining the lair wherein they raged.<sup>34</sup>

(Act II. scene iv, ll. 49-58)

Then to save the humankind, Prometheus gave them hope, love, fire, speech, thought, science, music, etc., for all of which he was bound to the Precipice in the Indian Caucasus.

Prometheus saw, and waked *the legioned hopes*  
 Which sleep within folded Elysian flowers,  
 Nepenthe, Moly, Amaranth, fadeless blooms;  
 That they might hide with thin and rainbow wings  
 The shape of Death; and *Love* he sent to bind  
 The disunited tendrils of that vine  
 Which bears the wine of life, the human heart;  
 And he tamed *fire*, which like some beast of prey  
 Most terrible, but lovely, played beneath  
 The frown of man, and tortured to his will  
 Iron and gold, the slaves and signs of power,  
 And gems and poisons, and all subtlest forms  
 Hidden beneath the mountains and the waves.  
 He gave man *speech*, and speech created *thought*,  
 Which is the measure of the universe;  
 And *Science* struck the thrones of Earth and Heaven  
 Which shook, but fell not; and the harmonious mind  
 Poured itself forth in all-prophetic song,  
 And *music* lifted up the listening spirit  
 Until it walked, exempt from mortal care,  
 Godlike, o'er the clear billows of sweet sound;  
 .....

...for which he hangs

Withering in destined pain — but who rains down  
 Evil, the immedicable plague, which, while  
 Man looks on his creation like a God

And sees that it is glorious, drives him on,  
 The wreck of his own will, the scorn of Earth,  
 The outcast, the abandoned, the alone? —  
 Not Jove: while yet his frown shook heaven, aye when  
 His adversary from adamantine chains  
 Cursed him, he trembled like a slave. Declare  
 Who is his master? Is he too a slave?<sup>35</sup>

(Act II. scene iv. ll.59-79, 99-109 *Italics mine*)

At the end of the conversation with Demogorgon, Asia realizes that the world is not governed by a certain ruler, Jupiter, for example, but by impersonal principles and that “all spirits are enslaved who serve things evil” (l. 110). She also senses that each heart must be the oracle of such truths to itself i.e. no one can explain such truths to anybody.

In Act II scene v, the reverse of time occurs again in the last stanza of Asia’s song. It is the song of the voyage of her soul back through time to the fountainhead of being.<sup>36</sup>

#### ASIA

My soul is an enchanted Boat,  
 Which, like a sleeping swan, doth float  
 Upon the silver waves of thy sweet singing,  
 And thine doth like an angel sit  
 Beside a helm conducting it  
 Whilst all the winds with melody are ringing.  
 It seems to float ever — forever —  
 Upon that many-winding River  
 Between mountains, woods, abysses,  
 A paradise of wildernesses,  
 Till, like one in slumber bound  
 Borne to the Ocean, I float down, around,  
 Into a Sea profound, of ever-spreading sound.  
 .....  
 We have passed Age's icy caves,  
 And Manhood's dark and tossing waves  
 And Youth's smooth ocean, smiling to betray;  
*Beyond the glassy gulfs we flee*  
*Of shadow-peopled Infancy,*

*Through Death and Birth, to a diviner day,*  
 A Paradise of vaulted bowers  
 Lit by downward-gazing flowers  
 And watery paths that wind between  
 Wildernesses calm and green,  
 Peopled by shapes too bright to see,  
 And rest, having beheld — somewhat like thee,  
 Which walk upon the sea, and chant melodiously!<sup>37</sup>

(Act II. scene v. ll. 72-84, 98-110 *Italics Mine*)

Abrams states that Asia's soul, which is compared to "an enchanted boat", moves up and back through age, manhood, youth, infancy, and "Through Death and Birth, to a diviner day; /A paradise of vaulted bowers". This spiritual dying to be reborn is equated, on the mythical level, with her visible outer change back to the pristine form she had manifested when she had risen as Aphrodite from the sea...<sup>38</sup> For Asia, the reversal of time is a means of rebirth as the goddess of love in the Roman myths, Aphrodite (Venus in the Greek myths).

According to Reiman, the reversal of time and mortal aging described in ll. 101-103 parallels a myth in Plato's *Statesman*(*Πολιτικός*)270e and 271b.<sup>39</sup>

## 7. Eternity and Love

In *Prometheus Unbound*, Demogorgon is the embodiment of "Eternity" as it claims itself to be. When Demogorgon descended from the "Car of the Hour" in Act III scene i, Jupiter asked, "Awful Shape, what art thou?" and it answered, "Eternity — demand no direr name."

### DEMOGORGON

*Eternity* — Demand no direr name.  
 Descend, and follow me down the abyss;  
 I am thy child, as thou wert Saturn's child,  
 Mightier than thee; and we must dwell together  
 Henceforth in darkness. — Lift thy lightnings not.  
 The tyranny of Heaven none may retain,  
 Or reassume, or hold, succeeding thee...  
 Yet if thou wilt, as 't is the destiny  
 Of trodden worms to writhe till they are dead. —  
 Put forth thy might.<sup>40</sup>

(Act III. scene i. ll.51-61 *Italics mine*)

But Demogorgon has another quality besides eternity; necessity. As Reiman points out, Demogorgon is “operative as necessity, the principle of cause and effect”.<sup>41</sup>

In the last stanza of Act II scene iii, Demogorgon is referred to as “the Eternal, the Immortal” (1.45), who is ready to unloose the “snake-like Doom” anytime “through life’s portal”.

We have bound thee[Asia and Panthea], we guide thee  
 Down, down!  
 With the bright form beside thee  
 Resist not the weakness —  
 Such strength is in meekness —  
 That *the Eternal, the Immortal*,  
 Must unloose through life’s portal  
*The snake-like Doom coiled underneath his throne*  
 By that alone!

(Act II. scene iii. ll.90-98 *Italics mine*)

“The snake-like Doom” suggests two kinds of mythic snakes. One is ouroboros (ουρόμπορος μας), a well-known symbol of eternity. The other is an amphisbaena, a serpent with a head at each end of its body, which can move either way. The present writer assumes that Demogorgon is essentially like “an amphisbaenic snake” (Act III. scene iv. l.119) because he can move either way in accordance with necessity as he suggests in the didactic closing remark in Act IV. That is to say, ouroboros and amphisbaena symbolize the two aspects of Demogorgon.

There is no such deity as Demogorgon in the Greek or Roman myths. It entered English literature through Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Genealogia deorum gentilium (On the Genealogy of the Gods of the Gentiles)*.<sup>42</sup> According to Castelain, it is a scribe’s error for Plato’s Demiourgon, the Demiourgos of the *Timaeus (TIMAIOS)*<sup>43</sup>.

## DEMOGORGON

— If the Abyss

Could vomit forth its secrets; — but a voice  
 Is wanting, the deep truth is imageless;  
 For what would it avail to bid thee gaze  
 On the revolving world? What to bid speak  
*Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance and Change?* To these  
 All things are subject but *eternal Love*.<sup>44</sup>

(Act II. scene iv. ll. 114-120 *Italics mine*)

As for “eternal Love” (l.120) in the quotation above, according to Reiman’s footnote, “Demogorgon makes sense only if we read Shelley’s use of “Love” here as Eros or Desire; the *desire* for good eternally outlasts all the evils of mortality.”<sup>45</sup> When the present writer read Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound* in Graduate University some 35 years ago as a graduate student, Professor Akio Hachiya said that the Reiman’s footnote was not quite right. The present writer, however, now agrees with this footnote, because the main concern of Act II scene iv is exclusively the relationship between Prometheus and Asia.

Sperry’s insight into this Demogorgon’s statement is remarkable: “Two elements...give force to Demogorgon’s affirmation...The first is the idea of necessity implicit in “Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance and Change”...It is an idea that given the infinity of change within the physical universe together with the endlessness of time, the conditions favoring human renewal and fulfillment are bound ultimately to come about and, if wasted, to recur...The other element...is the eternity of love...The possibilities for human change that time and chance occasion can fulfill themselves only through the endurance of hope, through the fortitude of Prometheus and the longing and responsiveness of Asia”.<sup>46</sup> This explains the dual nature of Demogorgon; necessity and eternity.

Scrivener comments that Demogorgon’s statement, “the deep truth is imageless” refers not to epistemological skepticism, but to love; that is, the deep truth which can overcome the master-slave relationship is love, which has no prescriptive language, no images.<sup>47</sup>

In his essay ‘On Love’, Shelley states that “Love...is the bond and the sanction which connects not only man with man but with everything which exists”.<sup>48</sup> What Shelley refers to in this context is agape rather than eros. And as Suzuki (and Hatano) point out, agape is the only road to eternity.<sup>49</sup>

According to *Princeton WordNet*, the definition of Eros is “(Greek mythology) god of love; son of Aphrodite; identified with Roman Cupid, a desire for sexual intimacy” The definition of Agape, on the other hand, is “(Christian theology) the love of God or Christ for mankind, selfless love of one person for another without sexual implications (especially love that is spiritual in nature)”.<sup>50</sup>

The present writer asserts that in *Prometheus Unbound* eros is sublimated into agape only after the “Spirit of the Hour” blows from the curved mystic shell the music of millennial change in Act III scene iii.

To sum up, only Demogorgon (eternity) and reunited Prometheus and Asia(love) in Act III & IV are eternal beings in *Prometheus Unbound*. Demogorgon himself, however, is not love, though he helped Asia reborn as a love goddess Aphrodite. And “Prometheus is represented anthropomorphically, but Demogorgon is not”<sup>51</sup>.

Prometheus and Asia reach the stage of eternal Love (agape) in Act III, but man is still not free from chance, death and mutability (scene iv. l.201). That is why Prometheus tells Asia “...we will

sit and talk of time and change /As the world ebbs and flows, ourselves unchanged — /What can hide man from mutability?” (scene iii. ll.23-25) Although the Spirits of humankind are in good terms with the “Spirit of Hours” in Act IV, they are still mortal and mutable.

### 8. “Spirit of the Hour” as Kairos

Bloom said the “Spirit of the Hour” was “emblem of the *now*”.<sup>52</sup> The present writer doesn’t disagree with this, but the Spirit of the Hour is far more than that. It is a time when conditions are right, in this case, for the millennial change i.e. kairos.

In Act II scene iv, immediately after Demogorgon calls out, “Behold!”(l.128), Asia sees the multitude Cars (Chariots) of “the immortal Hours”(l. 140) through the cleft in the rocks before her. There are two kinds of “Spirit of the Hour”, one is the Spirit “with a dreadful countenance”(l.142), “the shadow of a destiny”(l.146), and the other is with “the young Spirit”, which has “the dovelike eyes of hope”(ll.159-160). According to Sperry, the former is “the dark hour of destruction” and the latter is “the bright hour of love”.<sup>53</sup> Asia and Panthea get on the latter, which bears them upward to reunion with Prometheus. Asia’s desire, however, cannot by itself hasten her reunion with Prometheus, because she must await the arrival of the destined hours.

In Act III scene iii, at the command of Prometheus, “the Spirit of Hour”, i.e. “the young Spirit” blows from the whorls of a curved mystic shell the music of millennial change. This is Shelley’s version of the last trump in the Book of Revelation. When she breathes into the shell and loosens its mighty music, it introduces kairos (Καῖρός), the time when conditions are right for accomplishment into the world of humankind. One of the missions of Prometheus is to bring the torch of hope to the “far goal of Time” (l.174). At the end of Act III, the spirit reappears to describe to Prometheus and Asia the effect of the music on the world of mankind. The inner changes of humankind in the earthly paradise are described in detail in the first half of her description (ll.98-163).

#### SPIRIT OF THE HOUR

Soon as the sound had ceased whose thunder filled  
 The abysses of the sky and the wide earth,  
 There was a change...the impalpable thin air  
 And the all-circling sunlight were transformed  
 As if the sense of love dissolved in them  
 Had folded itself round the sphered world.  
 My vision then grew clear, and I could see  
 Into the mysteries of the Universe,  
 Dizzy as with delight I floated down,  
 Wincing the lightsome air with languid plumes,

My coursers sought their birthplace in the sun  
 Where they henceforth will live exempt from toil,  
 Pasturing flowers of vegetable fire —  
 And where *my moonlike car* will stand within  
 A temple, gazed upon by Phidian forms,  
 Of thee, and Asia, and the Earth, and me  
 And you, fair nymphs, looking the love we feel,  
 In memory of the tidings it has borne,  
 Beneath a dome fretted with graven flowers,  
 Poised on twelve columns of resplendent stone  
 And open to the bright and liquid sky.  
 Yoked to it by *an amphisbaenic snake*  
 The likeness of those winged steeds will mock  
 The flight from which they find repose.<sup>54</sup>

(Act III. scene iv. ll.98-121 *Italics mine*)

The scene in the last eleven lines (ll.111-121) is from the *Sala della Biga* in the Vatican Museum Shelley visited. *Sala della Biga* (Two-Horse Chariot) is the model for the Spirit of the Hour's "moonlike car" (l.111). The likeness (statue) of "winged steeds" (l.120) are yoked to the "moonlike car" by "an amphisbaenic snake" (l.119). An "amphisbaenic snake" or an amphisbaena, is a mythic serpent with a head at each end of its body, which can move either way. Literally it is a kind of ornament attached to the "moonlike car" (l.111), but symbolically it has something to do with modes of time. The present writer contends that the "Spirit of the Hour" is kairos and "an amphisbaenic snake" is necessity. The snake is attached to the Car of the Hour because kairos and necessity are the two sides of the same coin.

...but soon I looked,  
 And behold! 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, as o'er the gate of hell,*  
 'All hope abandon, ye who enter here.'  
*None frowned, none trembled, none with eager fear*  
*Gazed on another's eye of cold command*  
 Until the subject of a tyrant's will

Became, worse fate, the abject of his own  
 Which spurred him, like an outspent horse, to death.  
*None wrought his lips in truth-entangling lines*  
*Which smiled the lie his tongue disdained to speak;*  
*None, with firm sneer trod out in his own heart*  
*The sparks of love and hope, till there remained*  
 Those bitter ashes, a soul self-consumed,  
 And the wretch crept a vampire among men,  
 Infecting all with his own hideous ill.  
*None talked that common, false, cold, hollow talk*  
*Which makes the heart deny the yes it breathes*  
 Yet question that unmeant hypocrisy  
 With such a self-mistrust as has no name.  
 And women too, frank, beautiful and kind  
 As the free Heaven which rains fresh light and dew  
 On the wide earth, passed: 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,  
 Yet being now, made Earth like Heaven— *nor pride*  
*Nor jealousy nor envy nor ill shame,*  
 The bitterest of those drops of treasured gall,  
 Spoilt the sweet taste of the nepenthe, love.<sup>55</sup>

(Act III. scene iv. ll. 130-163 *Italics mine*)

The quotation above is conspicuous for the rhetoric of negation, such as “None fawned”, “none trampled; hate, disdain or fear, /Self-love or self-contempt on human brows/ No more inscribed” (ll.133-135), etc. Even though the verbs are negated, they remind us of man’s behavior during the reign of Jupiter.

Shelley knew well enough that external authority could not be abolished until man became the “King over himself”. So he emphasizes the inner change within men and women in the first place, and only then he refers to the dismantling of institutions in the quotation below (ll. 164-196).

Thrones, altars, judgment-seats, and prisons; wherein  
 And beside which, by wretched men were borne



Sceptres, tiaras, swords, and chains, and tomes  
 Of reasoned wrong glozed on by ignorance,  
 Were like those monstrous and barbaric shapes,  
 The ghosts of a no more remembered fame,  
 Which from their unworn obelisks, look forth  
 In triumph o'er the palaces and tombs  
 Of those who were their conquerors, mouldering round.

.....  
 The loathsome mask has fallen, the man remains  
*Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed* — but man:  
 Equal, *unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,*  
*Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the King*  
 Over himself; just, gentle, wise; but man:  
 Passionless? no — yet free from guilt or pain  
 Which were, for his will made, or suffered them,  
 Nor yet exempt, though ruling them like slaves,  
 From *chance, and death, and mutability,*  
 The clogs of that which else might oversoar  
 The loftiest star of unascended Heaven,  
 Pinnacled dim in the intense inane.<sup>56</sup>

(Act III. scene iv. ll.164-172, 193-204 *Italics mine*)

The quotation above reveals the dual nature of the earthly paradise of Promethean age (kairos). The last word “inane” in the concluding line “Pinnacled dim in the intense inane”, for example, undoubtedly suggests eternity. It signifies “the formless void of infinite space — a vacancy full...of unlimited potentialty”.<sup>57</sup>

The rhetoric of negation again suggests limitation and mutability of “man”. The poetic images such as “Sceptreless”, “uncircumscribed”, “unclassed”, “tribeless”, “nationless”, “Exempt from awe, worship”, etc. even reminds us of despotism or tyranny in the age of Jupiter. This is partly because poetical images exist in full force even though they are rhetorically denied.

Butter makes an interesting comment on the quotation above: “If man is not exempt from chance and death and mutability, it is difficult to see that he rules them like slaves and is free from pain. If not passionless he would surely, for instance, feel pain over the death of a loved one. Shelley the visionary knew that even after man had freed himself from all the evils he could free himself from he would remain subject to irksome limitations, his highest aspirations unfulfilled; but Shelley the reformer, the main writer of this scene, was unwilling to acknowledge this”.<sup>58</sup>

Act IV is an immense epithalamion in which Spirits from the mind of human kind, Hours, the Earth, the Moon celebrate the triumph of love and participate in song, dance and ritual mimicry.

[A Train of dark Forms and Shadows passes by confusedly, singing.]

Here, oh here!  
We bear the bier  
Of *the Father of many a cancelled year!*  
Spectres we  
Of *the dead Hours* be,  
We bear *Time* to his tomb in *eternity*.

Strew, oh, strew  
Hair, not yew!  
Wet the dusty pall with tears, not dew!  
Be the faded flowers  
Of Death's bare bowers  
Spread on the corpse of *the King of Hours!*<sup>59</sup>

(Act IV. 11.9-20 *Italics mine*)

“A Train of dark Forms and Shadows” is the funeral procession that buries the past. “We bear Time to his tomb in eternity” means past hours are going to be buried forever. That is, the Jupiter’s hours are going to be replaced with the Promethean hours.

The Hours are now in harmony with the Spirits of humankind. In Act I, time was hostile to Prometheus, but now the Hours and the Spirits of human mind sing and dance together. The “hungry Hours” in the past are compared to “hounds” which chase the Day. The thematic word is “Unite!” which unites the Spirits of Hours and the Spirits of humankind like the clouds and sunbeams.

#### CHORUS

Weave the dance on the floor of the breeze,  
Pierce with song Heaven's silent light,  
Enchant the Day that too swiftly flees,  
To check its flight ere the cave of Night.

Once *the hungry Hours* were hounds  
Which chased the Day like a bleeding deer,

And it limped and stumbled with many wounds  
Through the nightly dells of the desert year.

But now — oh weave the mystic measure  
Of music and dance and shapes of light,  
*Let the Hours, and the Spirits of might and pleasure*  
*Like the clouds and sunbeam, unite.*

A VOICE

Unite!<sup>60</sup>

(Act IV. ll.69-80)

In the stanza below, the line “Where lovers catch ye [Hours] by your loose tresses —”(l.107) reminds us of the feature of Kairos and the English common phrases “to take (or seize) time by the forelock”, which means “to seize the chance”. It means that “lovers” can lengthen the apparent duration of their happy time in the manner of kairos. Butter comments that “The passage of the Hours is delayed by Love and by Wisdom. In moments of love and in contemplation of wisdom men are so absorbed as to be heedless of time.”<sup>61</sup>

From the dim recesses  
Of woven caresses,  
*Where lovers catch ye [Hours] by your loose tresses —*  
From the azure isles,  
Where sweet Wisdom smiles,  
Delaying your ships with her siren wiles.<sup>62</sup>

(Act IV. ll.105-110 *Italics mine*)

Chorus of Spirits announce that their “singing shall build” a new Promethean world and introduce new hours (kairos). Bloom comments that the stanza below is perhaps the worst Shelley ever produced.<sup>63</sup>

And our singing shall build  
In the void's loose field  
A world for the Spirit of Wisdom to wield;  
We will take our plan  
From the new world of man,

And our work shall be called the Promethean.<sup>64</sup>

(Act IV. ll. 153-157)

This act on the whole is a celebration of the millennium, the earthly paradise, but not the apocalypse. Demogorgon's closing message below suggests the possibility of the return of the evil, which means "time" still exists in the Promethean Age.

DEMOGORGON

This is the Day which down the void Abyss  
 At the Earth-born's spell yawns for Heaven's Despotism,  
 And Conquest is dragged captive through the Deep;  
 .....

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

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;  
 To forgive wrongs darker than Death or Night;  
 To defy Power which seems Omnipotent;  
 To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates  
 From its own wreck the thing it contemplates,  
 Neither to change nor falter nor repent:  
 This, like thy glory, Titan! is to be  
 Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;  
 This is alone Life; Joy, Empire, and Victory.<sup>65</sup>

(Act IV. ll.554-556, 562--578 *Italics mine*)

As Wasserman indicates, "Shelley never thought that earthly man, in contradistinction to Prometheus, could ever be released from the strenuous moral resoluteness made necessary by the continuous threat of resurrected evil. The scope of the Promethean action is cosmic, not human..."<sup>66</sup>

The earthly paradise perpetually contains the figures of amphisbaena and ouroboros within itself, which means that the dialectic of necessity could change any time. In that sense, Act IV of *Prometheus Unbound* as a whole falls under the category of kairos, not eternity.

## 9. Conclusion

*Prometheus Unbound* is a drama about modes of perception rather than dramatic action. Its main concern is the process of self-reform and self-awakening of Prometheus, Asia and mankind. This means the concept of time is one of the most important elements in this “Lyrical Drama”.

The present writer concludes that it is natural to assume that Shelley wrote his *Prometheus Unbound* in conscious of the concept of chronos and kairos from the five points below:

1. The “Spirits of Hours”, “Car of the Hour”, other kinds of hours, the “curved shell”, “Demogorgon” (eternity and necessity) play very important roles in *Prometheus Unbound*.
2. It is clear that Shelley had a distinctive sense of time from the footnotes to his *Queen Mab*, for example.
3. Shelley read a wide range of the ancient Greek and Latin literature and had a good command of Greek and Latin.
4. An “amphisbaenic snake”, emblem of necessity is connected to the “moon-like car” of the Spirit of the Hour (kairos) in Act III scene iv. ll.111-121.
5. There is a direct reference to the feature of Kairos, who is bald except his forelock, in Act IV. i. 107.

Before Saturn (Saturnus in the Roman myths and Chronos in the Greek myths), “there was the Heaven and Earth at first and Light and Love.” Jupiter was the son of Saturn, from whom “Time” (chronos) fell, an envious shadow.

As the first step to his self-reform, Prometheus looked back his curse toward Jupiter, became wiser by repenting his own words in the past. If he had not been chained to the Precipice and tortured, he might not have realized the sad reality of humankind. In that sense, Prometheus’s fall is a “fortunate fall” (felix culpa).

In Act II scene iv, Demogorgon (who has the qualities of both ouroboros and amphisbaena, eternity and necessity) helps Asia’s spiritual awakening. In the dialogue with Demogorgon, Asia learns that to Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance and Change, all things are subject but eternal Love (ll.119-120) and that only Love could overcome Time and is the road to Eternity.

Jupiter believed that he would be omnipotent by marrying Thesis and begetting a mighty child Demogorgon. He even called her “bright Image of Eternity” (Act III. i. 1.36), but he was wrong. Demogorgon, mightier than Jupiter arrived by the “Car of the Hour” (kairos), identified himself and

dethroned Jupiter. The new world was minutely described by the “Spirits of Hour” (kairos). Prometheus and Asia enter the stage of eternity by devoting themselves to agape, but man is still not free from chance, death and mutability.

At the beginning of Act IV, “the dead Hours” (chronos), the time of which man was a victim, make their exit from the stage and are replaced by “Chorus of Hours” (kairos) who dance with the “Spirits” of human mind. Time still passes, but the awareness of duration is now subjective. Lovers may catch the hours by their “loose tresses”, which is a symbol of Kairos, can lengthen the apparent duration of their happy hours in the manner of kairos.

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- <sup>7</sup> Carlos Baker, *Shelley's Major Poetry: The Fabric of a Vision*, New York; Russell & Russell, 1961, p.92.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.
- <sup>9</sup> Earl R. Wasserman, *Shelley A Critical Reading*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971, pp. 255-373.
- <sup>10</sup> The following is the description of AMPHISBAENA in *Encyclopaedia Britannica, Ninth Edition*: “a genus of animals, found only in South America and the West Indies, which, though they have the general appearance of snakes or worms, belong to the order *Lacertilia*, or Lizards...The body of the amphisbæna, from 18 to 24 inches long, is of nearly the same thickness throughout. The head is small, and there can scarcely be said to be a tail, the vent being close to the extremity of the body. The animal lives mostly underground, burrowing in soft earth, and feeds on ants and other small animals. From its appearance, and the ease with which it moves backwards, the popular belief in the countries where it prevails has been that the amphisbæna has two heads, and that when the body is cut in two the parts seek each other out and reunite. From this has arisen another popular error, which attributes extraordinary curative properties to its flesh when dried and pulverised.” ([https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Encyclop%C3%A6dia\\_Britannica,\\_Ninth\\_Edition/](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Encyclop%C3%A6dia_Britannica,_Ninth_Edition/))
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