

**Mutation of the Greek archetypal myth in P.B. Shelley's 'Prometheus Unbound' as opposed to Aeschylus' 'Prometheia'.**

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**Abstract**

On part of the literati, reshuffling established mythical moulds for facilitating adaptation to the need of the hour and give vent to idiosyncratic perspectives on variegated discourses has been quite in vogue. If one does not come out of the shackles of antiquity and respond to the demands of time, every old-school telling turns *passé*. From time to time, authors have therefore redone classical archetypes sticking to some of its relevant nuances while doing away with the obsolete. This research subscribing to a similar line of thought intends to showcase how P.B. Shelley builds upon the institutionalised myth but drifts away from Aeschylus' deployment of the Greek Promethean legend to centripetally offer a non-violent moral policing of one's psychological make-up and customise it in accordance with his ideological take on revolution. Shelley's *modus operandi* is discussed at length and a tabular structured detailing distinctions between the two depictions put forth by Aeschylus and Shelley is laid out for precision.

**Keywords:** literati, discourses, antiquity, *passé*, archetypes, ideological, *modus operandi*.

**Introduction**

Informed by their canonical stature that confers upon them the currency of 'truth', myths and their derivatives serve as a litmus test to the existential 'problematic' confronted by authors across the annals of history. Akin to this, the Greek archetypal legend of stealing away fire records Prometheus' double-edged act of philanthropy and defiance in disobeying Zeus, the most powerful Greek God consequently bringing upon him

tormentuous punishment. This narrative has sought attention in multiple discursive fields ranging from the torch relay at the opening ceremony of Olympic Games to literary renditions by classicists like Aeschylus and P.B. Shelley. Aeschylus' 'Prometheia' is assumed to be systematised in the form of a trilogy comprising 'Prometheus Bound', 'Prometheus Unbound' and 'Prometheus the Fire bringer' where reconciliation between the antagonists: Zeus and Prometheus happens to dim the fervour of rebellion. Imbued with a "passion for reforming the world" (Preface) P.B. Shelley's 'Prometheus Unbound' (1820) is a lyrical drama in Four Acts that concerns more with establishment of alternate revolutionary stances than character portrayals and offers no reconciliation between the binaries.

### **Method and Methodology**

Textual method and content analysis are the qualitative research methods operational in this study. As secondary sources multiple other journals on Aeschylus and Shelley are referred to and studied. Archetypal criticism and Harold Bloom's 'anxiety of influence' are the research methodologies functional for data analysis.

### **Discussion**

Dissecting and mutating a myth is itself a mammoth task because myths have become a part of the establishment and it's sacrilegious to take liberty with these canonised records. While Aeschylus was a conformist of traditions, Shelley's fetish for mythic reconstruction intensified by his revolutionary zeal was not simply accidental. The notion of rebellion organically oozes out of his biographical sketches. In 1811, while a first-year undergraduate at Oxford, Shelley published an inflammatory pamphlet 'The Necessity of Atheism' together with his friend Thomas Jefferson Hogg and consequently he was rusticated. Later on Shelley was offered readmission to Oxford, only if he recanted his views, but he refused. This instance suggests he did not prefer to be a part of the bystander effect and adhere to the conventions of his time. In 'Prometheus Unbound' he reshaped and reworked the received classical myth to aid a self-serving purpose adapting it to a new context specific to his culture. He created an alternate ethos that hypothesized the morality driven psychic equilibrium of Prometheus as being immune to physical hardships inflicted by Zeus turning his revolt into an internal system of retaliation through endurance of pain not just an impulsive external resistance to violence. Shelley departed from Aeschylus' Greek trilogy 'Prometheia' in the below-mentioned prospects:

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<b>Aeschylus' 'Prometheia'</b>	<b>P.B. Shelley's 'Prometheus Unbound'</b>
<p>Reconciliation between Jupiter (Zeus) and Prometheus. Oceanus' advice to Prometheus insinuates this culmination:                      "My poor friend, give up this angry mood of yours and look for means of getting yourself free of trouble"(Aeschylus).</p>	<p>No reconciliation between Zeus and Prometheus for Shelley presumed Prometheus "averse from a catastrophe so feeble as that of reconciling the Champion with the Oppressor"(Preface). Prometheus is freed by Hercules and the tyranny of Zeus is brought to an end by Demogorgon, son of Zeus.</p>
<p>The focus is actively on Prometheus.</p>	<p>The focus is on the liberation of Prometheus. In spite of being "the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature"(Preface) and beholding the stature of Satan and benevolence of Christ, Shelley's Prometheus is a passive hero.</p>
<p>No such experimentation.</p>	<p>Shelley topsy-turves the conception of Heaven and Hell by making Zeus, the symbol of corruption and tyranny reside in Heaven and in the Underworld (Tartarus) resides Demogorgon.</p>
<p>No such use of shadows and phantasms.</p>	<p>Shelley uses the realm of shadowy beings as a trope to bring up the phantasm of Jupiter. Resonating with the notion of 'doppelganger', Shelley figures the Underworld as a land of shadows where there exists a replica of each self:                      "Time fell, an envious shadow; such the state / Of the earth's primal spirits beneath his sway..."(Shelley 2.4).</p>
<p>In Aeschylus' version, father Oceanus and his daughters Oceanids empathised tormenting Prometheus but there are no specific names accorded to the individuals.</p>	<p>Shelley names the Oceanids or Sea-nymphs: Asia, Ione and Panthea.</p>
<p>There is no mention regarding the time span of Prometheus' sufferings.</p>	<p>Shelley limits the extent of Prometheus' sufferings to "three thousand years of sleep-unsheltered hours"(Act 1). Prometheus' capacity for tolerance and endurance of pain is highlighted.</p>
<p>Demogorgon does not exist in the dramatis personae.</p>	<p>Demogorgon is Shelley's conscious innovation. The darkness he symbolises is not just chaotic but represents a power that can revolt and overthrow: "I see a mighty darkness / Filling the seat of power, and rays of gloom / 'art round, as light from the meridian sun, / Ungazed upon and shapeless; neither limb, / Nor form, nor outline; yet we feel it is / A living Spirit." (Shelley 2.4).</p>

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Zeus, after a particular time span grants Prometheus a reprieve from his punishment allowing Hercules to free him in exchange for a foretelling. Prometheus foresees that Thetis, a sea-nymph whom Zeus desired would bear a son who would be the cause of his father's i.e. Zeus' death.	In Shelley's retelling although Prometheus' punishment remains the same, he does not tell Zeus about the fate awaiting Thetis' child. Zeus weds her. She bears him a son, Demogorgon, who ultimately overthrows his licentious and tyrannical father. It is still Hercules who liberates Prometheus but not under the compulsion of Zeus' instructions.
No such episode involving a curse.	Prometheus curses Zeus that he'll be unable to control his own self and that a day shall come when tyranny would be terminated: "I curse thee! let a sufferer's curse Clasp thee, his torturer, like remorse; Till thine Infinity shall be A robe of envenomed agony; And thine Omnipotence a crown of pain, To cling like burning gold round thy dissolving brain"(Act I).
Zeus never intended to marry Thetis in the Greek myth.	In Act III of 'Prometheus Unbound' Zeus is found asking Thetis to sit beside him granting her the position of a wife. This is entirely fictional. "And thou / Ascend beside me, veil'd in the light / Of the desire which makes thee one with me, / Thetis, bright image of eternity!"(Shelley 3.3).
Oceanus and Hephaestus are the sympathisers. Hermes is the torturer.	Mercury is the negotiator. The Furies are the torturer.
Presents the ancient Greek taxonomy of four worlds: Heaven- Earth-Underworld-Tartarus (deepest infernal region of the underworld).	States the modern notion of three worlds: Heaven- Earth-Underworld/ Hell.
The Caucasus mountains of Aeschylus' tragedy are located westwards in the Russian Georgia.	The Caucasian topography here, signifies the Hindu Kush range of the Indian Himalayas: "A Ravine of Icy Rocks in the Indian Caucasus"(Act 1) and "A lonely vale in The Indian Caucasus"(Act 2).
Passive representation of women.	Female characters are dominant and treated as equals. Prometheus exclaims with wonder: "How thou art changed! I dare not look on thee; I feel but see thee not"(Shelley 2.2).

### **Conclusion**

Mankind is quintessentially handcuffed to myths but grasping them in its entirety might not always serve one's purpose, hence Shelley's hermeneutic enterprise finds valuation in moments of departure from the original, transforming the narrative into a subjective experiment echoing possibilities of contemporary counteraction. Aeschylus' model has been alluded to by Shelley but only as a skeletal architecture to his reception of the Promethean archetype which he manipulates to suit the Romantic ethos of his times

coloured by watchwords of the French Revolution: liberty, equality and fraternity.

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite; To forgive wrongs darker than death or  
nights; 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 (Act 4).

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