

The Limits of Super-Rationality: A New Look at the Conception of Jupiter in *Prometheus Unbound*

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ABSTRACT *In Prometheus Unbound, the empire of Jupiter is a mythic figuration of monotheism and its corresponding hegemonies, broadly conceived in both instances as the domain of supreme oppressive governance. The ties of governance are reified by paternalism—hence the use of Jupiter (Gk. Zeu + pater) as the master embodiment of the Father, combining the role of God-the-Father in Judeo-Christianity, of the Trinity, of pope or monarch, and that of paterfamilias, such that, in Shelley’s unifying vision, one becomes indistinguishable from the other: all emanations of the Law of the Father, the symbolic order of “rationality” which represses primordial desire, associated with Prometheus and Asia. The overthrow of Jupiter in Prometheus Unbound is an implicit rejection of European rationalist hegemony, embodied in the conception of a manic, autocratic sky God, uniting sacred and secular aspects, and a reinstatement of an extra, or at least more profound and enduring identity that is consistent with re-ascendant primeval forces, paradoxically embodied in the shadowy figure of Demogorgon, but repressed as long as Jupiter reigns.*

Shelley’s Jupiter is a complex mythical divinity, but he is generally, and not incorrectly, characterized as the archetypal tyrant, reigning supreme over the archetypal victim, rebel, and saviour, Prometheus.¹ In its simplest form, the conflict is said to be the standard one of oppressor-oppressed, on a universal scale, and a manifestation of the endless cycle of revenge and resistance from which society seems unable to break free. A cosmic impasse constitutes, as it were, the bedrock of the drama and motive spring for all that ensues. In its broad symbolic sweep, this polar opposition subsumes state and religious domination of the earth and its inhabitants.² These implicit power structures are givens of the drama, played out figuratively in a revisionary retelling of the classical Greek myth,

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and are correlatives of Shelley's unceasing hostility to inflexible rule, of whatever kind. Beyond such recognition of primary elements, the nature of this domination is not often, in itself, the subject of exploration. It is accepted that despotism, be it in a political, social, or personal sphere, is untenable and harmful: but—as represented in the play—its subtle psychological hold over humanity,³ underpinned by religion, is glossed over or perhaps, simply taken for granted. The fact that religion is immersed in, and vitiated by, authoritarian conceptions is a central concern for Shelley in many of his works;⁴ yet in the discussion of *Prometheus Unbound* the religious dimension is all too frequently played down or universalized out of existence. Attention is focused on unresolved conflict between antagonists, on their mirroring of each other, and on the tortuous but ultimately successful path to Promethean liberation—the resolving of persistent conflict through the hero's wise renunciation of blind resistance, of hatred and revenges—rather than on the nature or dynamics of suppression itself, instituted and given sanction by the highest conceivable authority. In other words, while the trajectory of the play is followed in depth—as indeed one would expect it to be—the full character of the god, Jupiter, who he is, what he stands for, and how he is represented, is at best explored in a scattered and fragmentary manner, mainly in so far as it explains the hero's motives and actions.⁶

Because he is an emblematic representation of divine authority, Jupiter's dramatic personage does, as it were, overflow the boundaries of classical myth, making his interconnectedness with the broader face of religion only too apparent. As universal tyrant and supreme deity, the figure of Jupiter in *Prometheus Unbound* may be considered, mythically, to implicate the God of Judeo-Christianity and, further, all other representations which posit a principle of being that has full and ultimate governance over the earth and indeed the entire Universe. While monotheism would normally exclude pagan concepts, which tend to be polytheistic, the name Jupiter obviously refigures the ancient Roman God of the Sky, and Father/King of the Gods, and, at a slight remove, Zeus, from whom the name Jupiter (Zeu + pater = Zeus father) derives, and who is the invincible antagonist in the original play by Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, upon which Shelley's rival version is based. Operating then within the context of Graeco-Roman mythology, and identified with Rome as the home of both classical and Christian traditions, Jupiter in *Prometheus Unbound* is the name of an all-presiding composite patriarchal divinity who draws into pagan diversity the grand monocentrism of Western/European religion.⁷

Itself fashioned out of pagan elements, monotheism is, scripturally and historically, considered in the West (in Europe, America and in the Middle East) to be an advanced form of religious worship. Its special character is the unitary nature of the Godhead (even if it be in the form of the Trinity, uniting father, son and holy spirit), allowing for no other divine beings or gods of equal stature or worth.⁸ Moreover, no living being, divine or human, can reasonably contest a god who is said to be the originator of creation, embodies ideal perfection, and is omniscient and omnipotent.⁹ In Act 1, the depiction of Jupiter as "Monarch of Gods and Daemons, and all Spirits" (1,1)¹⁰ inscribes into a polytheistic base along the lines of Roman-Greek mythology, the impression of divine authority so superior, that, in effect, Jupiter can at the same time symbolize the assumption of monotheism (the scriptural "King" and "Lord"), eclipsing all other gods and men. Yet from the very first lines of the play, this unitary conception is relativized: there is (according to Prometheus) "One" exception to Jupiter's overall

mastery (2). That exception may be Prometheus, who sees himself, and is frequently seen, in heroic terms as Jupiter's only antagonist, foreknowing that Jupiter's reign cannot last—that it is eventually fated to end (as did the reigns of Uranus and Saturn, his predecessors). As Prometheus puts it, in defiance: slowly (“wingless” and “crawling”) an Hour will arrive which “Shall drag thee, cruel King, to kiss the blood/From these pale feet” (50–51). We observe the disparity between “cruel King” (which the play confirms) and the perfection which supreme authority assumes. All the same, in the opening scene of the play, Jupiter is quite clearly in command over his antagonist, as the Titan—himself a mighty god—is

Nailed to this wall of eagle-baffling mountain,
Black, wintry, dead, unmeasured; without herb,
Insect, or beast, or shape or sound of life. (20–22)

Moreover, as Prometheus tells us, he has been in this state for “Three thousand years of sleep-unsheltered hours” (12). He is not “unbound,” released from this imprisonment, until Act 3 Scene 3, which can be posited to take place at some future noon.¹¹ Thus, if applied to the Titan himself, the identity of the “One” would appear to be rhetorical and ambivalent at this point of introduction. But whatever Prometheus's conception of his own role or frame of reference (he clearly knows the prevailing cosmic system), the One turns out later in the play to be readily identifiable with Demogorgon,¹² whose shadowy realm of potentiality, to which Asia is drawn in Act 2, not only permits Jupiter's ascendancy but also determines his eventual and necessary fall. Demogorgon clearly “exists” outside the system: his law operates outside the framework of motivated action and conflict, and is thus exempt from Jupiter's rule. As the excluded “One,” the shapeless, impersonal, Demogorgon—whom Jupiter mistakenly believes is his son¹³—parodies the monotheistic principle, ritually encoded (“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord,” Deuteronomy 6.4 (KJ)).¹⁴ He establishes the limits of Jupiter's reign within the broader compass of the drama. In consequence, Demogorgon redefines the Aeschylean system which, in *Prometheus Bound*, identifies Zeus (Jupiter) as supreme authority, and with the law of ostensibly cruel, but unalterable, necessity.¹⁵

A critical instability effectively redimensions Jupiter's rule from above. Notwithstanding the actually circumscribed character of his dominion, so swiftly intimated, the figure of all-presiding Jupiter fuses the concepts of monotheism and monarchy, in order to imply the complicity of religion and state in the order of things, and their tendency to be founded on the elevation of one sole authority over everything else. The term “Monarch” (literally ‘one ruler’) and its correlatives “King” and “Lord,” often recurring in the course of Act 1, play on the scriptural elevation of God via categories of political authority once thought a mark of the highest conceivable earthly status. In doing so, they reinforce the sense of a collusion of earthly and heavenly powers in history, laying bare the ill-concealed despotism which religion exalts. It would appear, therefore, that Jupiter is both a sacred and secular power at one and the same time. He is sacred in that he represents “Mighty God” as Prometheus is wont to address him (and “Almighty” if united with the Titan) (I, 17–18); he is secular in that Prometheus regards him with the rebellious disdain of a Republican opposing Monarchy or Empire—forms of governance which arrogate to themselves unlimited powers. The nation state repeats the hierarchical design of heaven, even to the point of attributing divinity to the

king, emperor, or pope. All those who serve these exclusive and reified dignitaries are likewise complicit in the despotism that filters through into every aspect of society, creating a network of allegiances that are all bound to the monocentric design. This intricate correspondence between lord and servant is strikingly underlined by the composite word, “knee-worship” (I, 6), which registers both Jupiter’s regal insistence on adoration, and the willing subordination of the subject in acts both of veneration and fealty.¹⁶ Finding himself tortured for refusing this oppressive mutual compact (or, in Freudian terms, “cathexis”¹⁷), Prometheus elicits a note of anguish echoed later in the Act by his mother, the Earth, whose empathy for the Titan’s “double-bind” results in her misery (“for my wan breast was dry/With grief” (I, 176–77). She preserves his curse of Jupiter, “a treasured spell,” (184) in keeping with her hatred for “her child’s destroyer” (who, unlike the Titan, appears not to be born of the Earth),¹⁸ and, one infers, in the hope that the curse’s prophecy of everlasting torment for the oppressor might come to fruition.¹⁹

While it thrives on submission, and finds its security therein, Jupiter’s great empire is not really threatened by resistance when that takes the form of revulsion or defiance. Stalemate has resulted from Prometheus’s terrible curse. Neither the Titan’s suffering nor that of earth and humanity has been alleviated. On the contrary, it would seem in both instances to have been exacerbated. The motive of revenge has only intensified the conflict between the Olympian god and the Titan. Moreover, in enunciating the curse, Prometheus has blurred the distinction between himself and Jupiter, thus to a very considerable extent reducing the power of opposition, and diminishing his idea of exclusion. In a certain sense (as many have pointed out) he *becomes* Jupiter, filled with a destructive impulse that, if carried out, would ruin earth’s future hope of “rebirth.” Thus his claim, repeated in the curse, “One only being shall thou not subdue,” has become, in effect, a mere taunt, defeated by the fact that, as long as the curse remains in effect, Jupiter has no creative antagonist and his programme for destruction is enhanced. This convergence of the rival gods is dramatized in the appearance of the Phantasm of Jupiter, who repeats the curse as if it had been uttered by a typically enraged and heartless Jupiter:

Be thy swift mischiefs sent
To blast mankind, from yon ethereal tower.
Let thy malignant spirit move
In darkness over those I love:
On me and mine I imprecate
The utmost torture of thy hate
And thus devote to sleepless agony
This undecending head while thou must reign on high. (274–81)

In this instance, enmity (which might be characterized as a struggle for power) supercedes all other considerations, and is an ironic acknowledgement of Jupiter’s great ascendancy “on high,” towering over the Titan’s “undecending head.” Revisiting the curse, as Prometheus does here—deliberately calling on the Phantasm to repeat it—is sufficient motive for revoking it (the alternate meaning of “recall”²⁰), thus recovering his separate nature which will ultimately displace Jupiter in a cosmic rebirth—though not, of course, *replace* him.

2

Since Jupiter is a composite deity, combining divergent—and conventionally opposed—traditions, “sacred” and “secular,” there are several underlying aspects to his oppressive rule. One of them concerns the rational principle, which is mentioned in critical discussion especially in relation to Blake’s Urizen, a comparative figure of religious despotism. But few studies explore this element in a significant way. Like Urizen (who is said to symbolize “Reason” and “Nobodaddy”),²¹ Jupiter brings together (as if to a single point of focus) monotheism and rationality, unquestioning faith *and* reason. The fusing of these seemingly discordant elements gives rise (in Shelley’s case) to an implied critique of the persistent hegemony of rationality—of an abstract, bureaucratic consciousness—in Western culture. In *Prometheus Unbound*, Jupiter’s insistence on his own Law—quite apart from whether it has any intrinsic relation to nature or necessity—dramatizes the stranglehold of an overdetermined or “super-” rationality in Western thought, originating in the ancient world. The idea of an abstract Law, demanding unwavering observance for its own sake—simply because Jupiter proclaims it—is immediately captured in “kneeworship,” and is further reflected in the subjection of the Earth in Act 1, weighed down by the constraint of Jupiter’s fixed authority and by Prometheus’s unsuccessful resistance to it. Earth’s reference to Jupiter as the “almighty Tyrant” (I, 161) underlines the imposition of inflexible totalitarian law, carved in stone, and demanding obeisance; she also alludes to the stirring of release from “knee-worship” when at the moment of Prometheus’s ascendancy as benefactor of mankind, “her pining sons lifted/Their prostrate brows from the polluting dust” (159–60). Displacing “knee” as the figure of submission, the “brow” registers an awakening from supine abjection and defeat. By virtue of the Titan’s resistance and the earth’s alliance with him, the life spark remains, and it is what continues to give humanity hope. Jupiter declares that “All else has been subdued to me” (III, i, 4), the exception being the soul of man (symbolized by the Promethean gift), which alone resists this draining out of energy (vital spirits) by external control.

It is evident, then, that rationality, as it is manifested in the play, is in opposition to life forces, and is not in any sense their “handmaiden” in the service of “progress.” It underpins Jupiter’s absolute command through law and is identified with him. An idea further suggested by the drama, and which finds support in Max Weber’s sociology of religion, is that monotheism or, more broadly, a supremacist religious authority as can be found also in polytheism, accompanies and gives effect to the ascendancy of rationality in the ancient world—a design for reducing the multifarious and multidimensional universe into an easy formula of oneness, of homogeneity: one overriding authority, and all the rest forcibly aligned and submitted to it.²² This combination of disparate elements, of chaos into systems of order or orderliness comes to govern us, even if the theistic element falls away. The point is that the system remains monocentric, governed by Reason (or what portrays itself as Reason), the controlling thought, at the expense of all other functions of the mind or body. Spontaneous play of mind yields to mental abstraction, perhaps the foundation of “evil” in the play. This regulated, monolithic universe is Jupiter’s colourless and self-defeating realm, contrasting at every turn with the dynamic possibilities of liberation—of humanity and of the earth itself. In Act IV, in celebration of the defeat of Jupiter, a universe of infinite potential and multifarious complexity is released from subjugation, so that the earth appears as

“Sphere within sphere, and every space between/Peopled with unimaginable shapes” (IV, 243–44). The inexplicable is not argued away or reduced to a single identity. Rather, it is left to itself to proliferate, being ungraspable and irreducible, out of reach even of the imagination.

Although inevitably linked with the Christian God the Father (as I will later indicate), Shelley’s Jupiter is strongly redolent of that deity’s earlier formulation as the Hebrew God, the great codifier of commandments, notably magisterial, unrelenting, and inscrutably self-absorbed. Jupiter takes after the chief architect of history in biblical narrative, having reigned supreme over humanity for three thousand years. In Jupiter, we see registered—without any softening influence—the absolute demand for obedience, the dismay at humanity’s recalcitrance and rebelliousness (in the Bible first inscribed in the fatal lapse of Eve and later in the abandonment of the Israelites to the Golden Calf, in defiance of the lawgiver), and the vindictive punishment that so characterizes the Almighty: in the case of Adam and Eve, the heartless though self-justified eviction from Paradise. If Jupiter’s hysterical self-pleadings cannot match his biblical prototype’s awesome self-assurance and self-certainty, if indeed he seems in some way to parody his model, then it is probably because he simulates, but does not actually enjoy, full-blown sovereignty (as is accorded to God), and so, in effect, draws the monolithic Hebraic model back into the pagan plurality and impermanence from which it is almost certainly derived. As a caricature of that model, Jupiter reduces the scriptural deity’s fullness of being and presence to a hostility towards his own creation, as if caring for the earth and its inhabitants would be a threat to his own existence.²³ This diminution of scale results, finally, in bluster when, after insisting on his anticipated omnipotence,²⁴ Jupiter faces the knowledge of his own impending downfall. At this point he is unrecognizable from the egotistical pose of certainty he earlier assumes in Act 3 Scene 1, showing how empty are all his earlier protestations. The picture of the first of gods stripped of his power casts a huge shadow over religions which seek to absolutize the divine presence and yet disguise the tyranny that is thereby implied.

In many ways the God of the Old Testament provides a blueprint for the inextricable bond between dogmatic law and monotheism as depicted in Jupiter.²⁵ To set his Law in place, the Creator begins the Decalogue with a declaration that he is the exclusive God of Israel, and then adds an injunction forbidding worship of all other gods but himself (“Thou shall have no other gods before me” [Exod. 20.3(K)]). There is to be no rival to his supremacy. As Hagith Sivan points out, “there is no instinctive monotheism. Monotheism is a virtue that must be instilled through legal strictures and learnt by negative examples.”²⁶ It has to be promulgated. Ironically, it is effectively unstable (as Shelley seems to suggest), always capable of being resisted or undermined. If it were instituted in the world by divine fiat there would be nothing left to do but relent.²⁷ Consequently, opposition to, or neglect of, God’s commands is not left to chance. A myriad of statutory binding regulations (recorded mostly in Leviticus, Deuteronomy and Numbers) encompasses every detail of a person’s life that, if followed in obedience to the divine will, would purportedly bring prosperity, and if not, misery.²⁸ This is an expedient bargain that is overturned by Shelley, since in *Prometheus Unbound*, he intimates that unilateral rule—rule that cannot be contested—satisfies only the ruling party (and in the end, not even that), and is, itself, the cause of universal misery and suffering, by reducing all mankind to slavery.

This potential consequence is dramatized in Jupiter's sole appearance in Act 3 Scene 1, this being also his last. Corresponding to his manic assertion, "Henceforth I am omnipotent" (just referred to above), is the anticipation that his fatal child will "trample out the spark" that ignites the rebellious human soul, which "like unextinguished fire/Yet burns towards Heaven" (ll. 24, 5–6). The fire image is Jupiter's own acknowledgment of Promethean mediation, and his admission that the potential for resistance embedded in the human soul remains the one stumbling block to his vainglorious quest for supremacy. That such exaggerated authority is, in fact, circumscribed by the temporal limits of his realm, about to be realized in the same scene by his overthrow, is beyond Jupiter's own comprehension, illustrating the folly with which he asserts his empire over all things. While Jupiter emerges finally as a preposterous, self-deluded poseur (as might all tyrants), there can be no underestimation of his ruinous command or of the consequence of conceding unlimited power to one divinity. The spark to which Jupiter refers broadly establishes a death-life antinomy. Ostensibly caretaker of the universe, Jupiter is, nevertheless, the reified principle that represses life in all its forms: once released from that stranglehold, the spark no longer threatens conflagration; rather, it is freed to ignite the earth's infinite creativity, as revealed in the scenes following Jupiter's demise (especially Act III Scene 4 and Act IV).

It can be inferred that, in Shelley's play, monolatry leads invariably to formulaic reductionism of life's complexity, its abundance and diversity, with a heavy emphasis on observance, as reflected in Jupiter's monolithic discourse. Such a design Prometheus learns to undo, essentially because one model, one ruling power, cannot take charge of and encompass the whole of life, every accidental or chance event in nature, the energies that are commensurate with existence, the potential that exists for change, without repressing the very impulse to live, to create and to find happiness. Nor can Prometheus be held to ransom to satisfy the god's thirst for power (absolute control). Knowledge that Jupiter's reign is temporary strengthens the Titan's resolve not to sell out to the despot for a privileged place in heaven, so betraying humankind. The Furies, who in the words of Prometheus are "thought-executing ministers" (like the secret police, carrying out the tyrant's thought and passing a death sentence on free speech) are essentially his first line of attack: hence their appearance in Act 1. Their torture is psychological, aimed both at ridiculing the Titan's self-reform and self-recovery—his withdrawal of the curse, and with it any motive for revenge—and at undermining the Promethean conviction that a Jupiter-less existence is worth attempting and worth suffering for. It is curious that Mercury and the Furies are sent primarily to extort information from Prometheus concerning his knowledge of a secret—

Which may transfer the sceptre of wide Heaven,
The fear of which perplexes the Supreme. (I, 373–74)

Notwithstanding the degree of intimidation, the Furies betray their own dependence upon the larger scheme of things, and, even more dramatically, the precarious nature of Jupiter's ascendancy. Whilst inspiring fear in himself, Jupiter is in no sense immune to the dreaded apprehension of an even greater force which clearly exists, but which he would seek somehow to control or manipulate. Perhaps it is that dread that motivates his oppression. Jupiter is compromised by his own methods, suffering just

the fear and perplexity he would wish to arouse in his arch enemy. That Prometheus should have the greater knowledge ironically signals the deeper source of power upon which he can draw, provided he can find the endurance to resist any loss of faith in the cause of humanity. The seeming futility of resistance in history (as evidenced in the play by the failure of the French Revolution and Christianity to break the cycle of violence) threatens Prometheus with despair. Again intimidation does not work because a cynical view of human capacity would just be playing Jupiter's game of threat and calculation, and reflects the poverty of the god's univocal system, dependent as it is on enfeebling dissent.

Party to the process of rationalization, patriarchy is underwritten in scripture in the orderly conception of an all-presiding male ruler from above (heavens), in the addressing of the laws to males, priests and the general community (and not females) as conduits and practitioners of the divine will, and in the deliberate placement of women as the obedient servants of men, as men are of God.²⁹ Repeatedly in the biblical narratives, it is women who are seen as disruptive forces, their earthly primordial desires running counter to the legally ordained, super-rational hegemony of a universe inscribed "in the name of the father," echoing the Lacanian "symbolic order." Not surprisingly Asia, Prometheus's erstwhile consort, is absent from Act 1 of *Prometheus Unbound*, as there is no place for the feminine principle in a world so dominated by an encompassing logocentricity. However the Oceanides, Panthea and Ione, sisters of Asia as much in "spirit" as in "fact," are present in Act 1 as supportive agents of Asia's gentle and fluid realm, one which in Act 2 is constituted by a negation of measurable, ratiocinative thought, in favour of imagination, dream, and intuition.

3

Though less obviously present than its Judaic predecessor, a corresponding Christian hegemony (one that will also reshape Europe) is likewise embedded in Jupiter's empire. As supreme patriarchal authority, Jupiter refigures God the Father (as he has come to be called), an evolution of that divinity's earlier, more dramatic, covenant-centred manifestation in Judaic lore—one whose male authority is typically recessive and ancestral, flowing back, as it were, to the great origin of things. The father-son-holy spirit nexus that constitutes the Trinity in the formulation of the Church at Rome³⁰ is a uniquely layered monotheism, a rationalization of Judaic and Christian theistic concepts with an admixture of paganism in the assumption of a god (Christ [Messiah], the Son) whose sacrifice redeems the world. Moreover, the concept of the Trinity itself is said to follow several pagan examples.³¹

The inoperancy of the Christian Trinity resides, for Shelley, in its contradictory nature, in the fact that the strict letter (sin/punishment/damnation) and spirit of the letter (forgiveness/redemption/salvation) cannot be reconciled.³² The retention of divine punishment in Christian theology (with its implied condemnation of dissidence expressed as disbelief in Christ as Saviour) was made worse by the overdetermined and thus heavily rationalized doctrine of heaven and hell, deeply entrenched by the Church in Medieval Europe, which made suffering cosmic and eternal rather than earthly and transient, and the notion of a truly humane, redemptive god, who loves all his creatures, anomalous.³³

A New Look at the Conception of Jupiter in Prometheus Unbound

This disjunction between letter and spirit is borne out in *Prometheus Unbound* by the solipsism which severs Jupiter from Prometheus, the God of judgment from the God of compassion, resulting in ceaseless woe for the Titan, and consequently the subjection of the earth/humanity (the hero's punishment is comparable to Satan's in Hell). Since in Shelley's version of the myth, as reported by Asia in Act 2 Scene 4, 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 (44–46)

it is evident that the bartering of dominion for freedom is a fatal error since no reconciliation is possible when free will is circumscribed or even predestined by "dominion."³⁴ Prometheus is therefore complicit in the divide that results between him and Jupiter, and that divide must under those conditions be considered inevitable. But his unswerving dedication to humanity—his alleviation of the human condition with every creative insight and technical skill in his armoury—offsets his error of judgment. It upholds his side of the bargain, as stated in the injunction: "Let man be free," echoing but also redefining the all-encompassing will of God in the myth of Creation (Genesis 1) by transferring that "will" to mankind, as Prometheus has done. While Jupiter is in a sense the Titan's own creation (as the monster is Frankenstein's in Mary Shelley's novel), he is cut off from his "benefactor" the way a ruler loses touch with his realm, "strength" is severed from "wisdom," or an idea from the integral thought which gave rise to it. When Asia says "this Law alone," she points to the free spirit inherent in necessity (the nature of things) by contrast with the restraining letter of the law superimposed by verbal inscription from "above" ("wide heaven").

Shelley therefore parts company with the Christian version in his visionary re-alignment of Prometheus with Christ in key instances of Act 1.³⁵ Both are rebels against the Iron Law that gives precedence to ritual observance ("knee-worship, prayer and praise," I, 6) and sectarian affiliation, to what is exclusive rather than inclusive (the inequalities of "class," "tribe," and "nation," reversed when Jupiter falls, III, iv, 195), and that insists on judgment/conformity rather than universal compassion. Acting as the surrogate for a truer, and ideally Christ-like, conception of divinity, Prometheus exclaims to Jupiter: "I wish no living thing to suffer pain" (I, 305). This dissolution of the notion of punishment—a refusal to yield to its coercions or to endorse its bloodthirsty satisfactions—is, arguably, what negates Jupiter's authority and liberates Prometheus by setting Asia free.³⁶ It effectively turns the Son against the Father. Momentarily in Act 1 this identification of Prometheus with Christ suggests shared failed martyrdom: addressing a vision of the Crucifixion—a youth with pale lips nailed to a crucifix—a Fury declaims:

those who do endure
Deep wrongs for man, and scorn and chains, but heap
Thousand-fold torment on themselves and him. (I, 594–96)

The Fury's logic is Jupiter's, designed to break the Titan's rebel spirit at the prospect of despair (the twin of frustrated hope), and to buy him over to the reigning powers. But since Prometheus refuses to yield to this intimidation, the Fury's mockery of martyrdom in the cause of humanity is cancelled, thus restoring a positive identification

of Christ and Prometheus. Martyrdom is creative when it disdains “knee-worship, prayer and praise,” that is, the reification of the martyr.³⁷

While Shelley seems to split apart the Trinity, the version of Christ he rejects remains the official one; and in a sense, Christ (as Promethean revolutionary) is pitted against himself (as first of deities). In Shelley’s composite and comprehensive image of Jupiter’s reign, the deified son implicitly merges with the father, the holy spirit and all the saints of the Church, to constitute a centralized patristic empire (“a dark yet mighty faith”) that resonates throughout society, from Pope as father of the Church (as founded by the Apostle Peter), to every form of patronage that devolves from him, to the paterfamilias who, by social consent, spiritually heads each household, all paying tribute to male ascendancy.³⁸ This “faith” is “a power as wide/As is the world it wasted” (III, iv, 174–75), an allusion no doubt to the far-reaching devastation that has been carried out with entrenched religious sanction, in modern and ancient times. The imperial network is not simply what Jupiter symbolizes, but rather, in a sense, what Jupiter is.

While this developed religio-political hierarchy clearly has its primary source in Ancient Judaism (as we have seen), it remains in its advanced form a European conception, a classic example of the “super-rationalism” that established itself in Rome, when the as yet inchoate Christian doctrine, immersed in a sea of rival heresies, was grafted onto the already heavily regulated pagan culture. This fusion was institutionalized following the virtual adoption of Christianity by the pagan Roman Emperor, Constantine in A.D. 312, at the Battle of Milvian Bridge. The grand master plan which would eventually, by means of conquest and proselytism, embrace nearly the whole of Europe (and Latin America) involved the assimilation of Christianity into the Roman Empire, and establishing the Roman Church as avowedly “catholic” (Gk. *Katholikos* = ‘universal’) in the Nicene Creed. The settling of the issue of the Trinity was the cornerstone of the new dispensation, placating supportive Bishops, proscribing dissident ones (who simply advanced rival theories), and giving the emperor secular and spiritual command in a grand holy alliance of Church and State.³⁹

Given this compromised alliance—betrayed linguistically in the lyrical drama by the naming of the all-powerful Roman god Jupiter as both “Monarch” (I, 1) and “Great Father” (I, 354)—the ethical content of religion, even of the most rarefied kind, is sacrificed to advance the interest of those in authority, or to authority itself. This is the point at issue when, in an early passage in “A Philosophical View of Reform” (written contemporaneously with the near completion of *Prometheus Unbound*, in Florence, 1819), Shelley explains that the Catholic Church was founded not on the actual doctrines of Jesus but on a perversion of his system of reform in order “to support oppression.” The perversion entails the recasting of the man Jesus—“that great Reformer”—into a symbol which, in name only, has dominion over all. Once “dominion” enters the formulation, ethics departs: such the fate of the institutionalization of Christianity, and its later aggressive attempts at conquest of the pagan world “in the name of Christ.”⁴⁰ These consequences are embedded in Act 1 in the ambivalent projected image of the crucifixion, reflecting the Christ-rebel—he who suffers on behalf of humanity—compromised by the Christ-oppressor he has become in history. As Prometheus himself observes, his name is “a curse” and his followers “slaves,” whose militant cross became

a signal for persecution, directed at those noble rebels ironically despised for embodying Christ's true personality: "The wise, the mild, the lofty and the just" (603–5).

This recasting is an act of "imposture," disguising the man by presenting him in the glow of full divine authority and therefore making his ideas unimpeachable Law—at one with the Father. In this sense, as I have been arguing, the immortalized Christ is Jupiter. By means of this intimidation, "the cunning and selfish few" exploit "the fears and hopes of the ignorant many" in order to tighten their hold on power.⁴¹ The displacement of the person by the name (or icon, as object of worship rather than simple admiration) suggests that oppression is nominal or factitious, a matter always of indoctrination and censorship, of the imposition of false or arbitrary or untested claims to the truth (codes), but given as absolute. In Act III, as the spirit of the Hour observes the extraordinary change that has overcome humanity following the overthrow of Jupiter—a change that clearly takes place in some imaginary future time, beyond the immediate present—she notes the absence of "tomes/Of reasoned wrong glozed on by ignorance" (III, iv, 166–67), which, under Jupiter's reign, had entrenched the power given to "Thrones, altars, judgmentseats and prisons" (164). The especially significant term is "reasoned," placed in juxtaposition to "wrong" to point up the paradox that an extensively rationalized system of knowledge and argument serves, in fine detail, to justify an oppressive system ("wrong") and can never be any guarantee of "right" (justice). Jupiter's empire is "reasoned" but ignorant, and that point underlines the arbitrariness, vacuity, and duplicity of rationalization, and its self-serving nature. It is in the light of this specious vacuity that the heavy marks of punitive rule—the thrones etcetera that are the visible, tangible expression of Jupiterian logic and the subjection it entails—are compared to "monstrous and barbaric shapes" (168), redolent of the gruesome mindset of marauding times. The "shapes" characterize a ghostly charade of repressive authority that, in the last passages of the Act, comes to be defined as Jupiter himself, transformed into the medium of his unreal existence:

And those foul shapes—abhorred by God and man—
Which under many a name and many a form
Strange, savage, ghastly, dark and execrable
Were Jupiter, the tyrant of the world. (180–83)

The different names, designating the plethora of "foul shapes," are really one name and person, and that person is the unequivocal conflation of God and the world that serves him—a supreme deity who is nothing more nor less than the projected earthly overlord.

In view of this broader implication, Jupiter may be seen, by extension, as the symbol of super-rationality, of systematic knowledge and calculation having become the "god" of Europe (the new "faith"). Gradually in the West, as an outcome of the drive towards unitary systems of thought and governance,⁴² reason has assumed ever-increasing importance and at the time Shelley was writing *Prometheus Unbound*, had, in Europe at least, provided an intelligible foundation for religion, or even superseded it as the highest authority, as occurred in Revolutionary France. Ironically, the long-standing dispute between reason and faith in Europe proves to be misleading, since monocentric systems of faith have given impetus to rationality, to the extent that rationality is now a law unto

itself, unconstrained by religious sanctions. Inevitably it dissociates itself from figurative modes of apprehension which do not rely on explication and are not dependent on linear thought and the rule book. It is this severance of reason from imagination (the faculty that embraces every new possibility without forcing ideas into conformity) which Shelley warns against in his *Defence of Poetry*. The highly regulated bureaucratic society (considered by Max Weber to be a pervasive modern instance of rationality),⁴³ with its emphasis on efficiency, order, predictability and utility, at the expense of personal relationship and inspiration, has become an all-embracing rationale for living (and even dying). Weber's gloomy characterization of the bureaucracy as an "iron cage" exactly registers the cold and inflexible dominion of Jupiter, against which the tortured Prometheus is pitted.⁴⁴

The policing of Prometheus by Jupiter's legionaries (Mercury and the Furies) in Act I is characteristic of the endless surveillance of individuals lest they step out of line and do the unpredictable thing. The attempt to stifle the creative, effectively the rebellious, impulse in Prometheus does not succeed (as the rest of the play shows), but it is clear from Asia's absence in Act I that the realm beyond reason which she represents—the expansive realm of primordial nature and the imagination, of desire,⁴⁵ operating according to Necessity rather than a fabricated system—is in abeyance, and therefore always in danger of becoming inert (in Weber's terms "demystified") unless freed from Jupiter's iron grasp. The African playwright, Wole Soyinka, recognizes the threat of an overrationalized western culture when he remarks, much in keeping with the spirit of Shelley's vision:

In Asian and European antiquity . . . man did, like the African, exist within a cosmic totality, did possess a consciousness in which his own earth being, his gravity-bound apprehension of self, was inseparable from the entire cosmic phenomenon . . . The seed of anti-terrestrialism sowed by Buddhism and Judeo-Christianity had to end with such excesses as the transference of the underworld to a new locale up in the sky, a purgatorial suburb under the direct supervision of the sky deities . . . The ultimate consequence of this—in terms of man's cosmic condition—is that the cosmos recedes further and further until, while retaining something of the grandeur of the infinite, it loses the essence of the tangible, the immediate, the appeasable.⁴⁶

Paradoxically, the monocentric God, intended to encompass all of reality, has but a vacuous portion of it, in the sky (or heavens), seemingly detached from the earth and the surrounding constellated universe, as we understand it today. There is, in this conception, an unbreachable divide between human and divine, rather than their interfusion. The God rules from above, as the mind rules over the body, emptying out the energies that are bound up with nature. In consequence, the cosmic consciousness of humanity is drastically diminished. It is, finally, this attenuation that is portrayed by Jupiter as sky god, while Prometheus is bound to the earth and its misery, but also its inviolate potential. He and his consort Asia, in restoring their love with the downfall of the sky god, dramatize the recovery of that consciousness of the union of earth-being and the cosmos to which it belongs, a union which signifies love. In so far as Africa still retains an immediate and integrated awareness of all of creation—which is a truly sacred awareness—it holds out to Europe a way of restoring the "cosmic totality," which, over the centuries, super-rationality has displaced.

Notes

1. In his pioneering study, Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, Earl Wasserman identifies the archetypal nature of Shelley's mythopoetics (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965); see esp. ch. 2.
2. The human drama of *The Cenci*, written contemporaneously with *Prometheus Unbound* in the spring and summer of 1819, presents a localized, historically-based exemplum in Italian society of this all-pervasive oppression.
3. Whether in overt or even hidden forms, as happens within democratic systems.
4. See, for example, "The Wandering Jew," *Queen Mab, Laon and Cythna, The Cenci, A Refutation of Deism, "On Christianity," "On the Devil, and Devils."*
5. In this formulation, renunciation is a prerequisite for change but not necessarily the determining agent for change. Much debate centres on whether the liberating factor is 'will' (associated with Prometheus) or 'necessity' (associated with Demogorgon), or 'love' (associated with Asia). For a thoughtful discussion of this issue, see John Rieder, "The 'One' in *Prometheus Unbound*," *Studies in English Literature* 25.4 (Autumn 1985): 775–800.
6. There are surprisingly few commentaries focusing specifically on the character of Jupiter. A major exception is Earl Wasserman's classic study (note n. 1). His understanding of the character of Jupiter remains distinctive and influential (see esp. 31–110). Shelley's strong antipathy towards religion underpins his drama and is suitably embedded in his treatment of the Greek myth. It is perhaps Shelley's avowed atheism that remains a stumbling block for many readers otherwise sympathetic to his broad opposition to tyranny: hence the underplaying of this theme.
7. The mixing of deities from Roman, Greek and Pseudo-classical mythology (e.g. Jupiter, Prometheus and Demogorgon) indicates that Jupiter is a liberal adaptation and reconstitution of his Roman namesake, and not identical with him. Shelley uses the Greek story as a mythic prototype that, through revision, becomes inclusive of pagan and non-pagan religions.
8. The Decalogue and narratives such as "Elijah" prohibit the worship of other gods but, in doing so, imply their existence. If other gods are said to exist (and are not just empty idols), the precedence given to one god over the others is called "monolatry." Later traditions tend to universalize this unitary Hebraic god-figure without excluding angels, saints and other intermediaries constituting the divine pantheon.
9. Ironically, in *Paradise Lost* (as in Christian tradition), Satan is just such a figure, heroically contesting God's power, being the embodiment of evil, tempting mankind to sin, but effectively and inevitably powerless (in the grander scheme of things). In his Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley suggests that Prometheus is a regenerate Satan (see note n. 10). For a satirical commentary on the way Satan serves God's interests, see Shelley's "On the Devil, and Devils" (composed 1819–20).
10. References to the play are cited from *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002).
11. Intimated in Act 2 Scene 4 by the Spirit who, as Asia ascends his car (one of the immortal hours) announces, "We shall rest from long labours at noon" (173); and then, in Scene 5, as the car pauses just before dawn, explains that, on the momentous day ahead (of liberation) "The sun will rise not until noon" (10). Jupiter is overthrown at the setting of the morning star (Venus), likewise before dawn on the same "day."
12. In his reading of the "One," Wasserman regards the Titan as the "One Mind." However, unlike Demogorgon, Prometheus is clearly subject to Jupiter's rule, despite his total resistance to it. Indeed Jupiter rules by grace of Prometheus himself.
13. See Wasserman, who explains that Demogorgon is Jupiter's child only in a figurative sense, and is (as Shelley quite clearly intimates), "eternal" (89–90).
14. Also translated as "The Lord is our God, the Lord alone": see, for example, the *New American Bible*. There are at least ten further references in the gospel to the "Oneness" of God.

15. Nevertheless, even in *Prometheus Bound*, Jupiter would appear to be the servant or executor of Necessity and not in command of it, at least in the opinion of Prometheus (“He cannot fly from Fate”). See Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound and Other Plays*, trans. Philip Vellacott (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981), 35.
16. “To whom all things of Earth and Heaven do bow/In fear and worship” (I, 284–85).
17. *Cathexis* meaning “investment of mental or emotional energy in a person, object, or idea” (Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary), in this case “knee-worship.”
18. The implication is that Jupiter, the sky god, is a creation of the mind.
19. As the embodiment of motivation and desire, the earth is clearly distinct from the law of Nature (Necessity) to which it is genuinely subject.
20. “The Curse/Once breathed on thee I would recall” (I, 58–59).
21. Reason as a form of divinely ordained mind-control. See *The Book of Urizen*. “As the creator of the fallen world, Urizen takes on the role of the monotheistic deity and lawgiver, Jehovah, or the Nobodaddy of ‘To Nobodaddy’. In his role of founder of this religion, the creator of the net of religion, he is the Primeval Priest. In his pursuit of single rule, he is also the archetypal King, the political oppressor” (Glossary in *The Urizen Books of William Blake*, Website by Joseph Hogan, available at <http://facstaff.uww.edu/hoganj/contents.htm>).
22. See Stephen Kalberg, “Max Weber’s Analysis of the Rise of Monotheism: A Reconstruction,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 45.4 (December 1994): 563–83. Citing Weber’s *Economy and Society*, Kalberg records: “. . . the personal, transcendental and ethical god . . . corresponds so closely to that of an all-powerful mundane king with his rational bureaucratic regime that a causal connection can scarcely be denied.” “Weber held that the radical monotheism of the Bible, with its tendency to desacralize the natural order . . . is one of the earliest and most influential expressions of the rationalization motif” (Richard L. Rubenstein, *The Age of Triage: Fear and Hope in an Overcrowded World* [Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1983, 2]). Monotheism was briefly anticipated under Akhenaten in Ancient Egypt, prior to the promulgation of Mosaic law.
23. That Jupiter is, like his ancient Roman-Greek model, not a creator God—neither of the universe nor of mankind—suggests dissimulation in the Hebraic mode: in other words, a genuine creator would invariably be more loving of all his creatures. A creative function is given instead to Prometheus, whose love for mankind results naturally in beneficence; and to Demogorgon, who liberates Prometheus and all mankind, and—in response to Asia’s dialectical questioning—seems identical with “God” who, he claims, “made the living world.” (In Boccaccio’s *Genealogia Deorum Gentilium*, Demogorgon is considered the ancestor creator God. See Albert J. Kuhn, “Shelley’s Demogorgon and Eternal Necessity,” *MLN* 74 [1959]: 597).
24. Ironically, the omnipotence attributed to Jupiter earlier in the play (by Earth and not Prometheus) now seems unfounded or delusional.
25. If, as Asia says, Jupiter has no respect for law (II.iv), she evidently refers to the independent operations of nature that advance human aspirations.
26. Hagith Sivan, *Between Woman, Man and God: A New Interpretation of the Ten Commandments* (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 28.
27. In this context, free will is freedom to obey what is right, or disobey, at one’s peril: a tortured conception that finds fresh impetus in Calvinism.
28. Prosperity also includes victory in battle.
29. See Sivan, *Between Woman, Man and God*, esp. 6–11.
30. This doctrine reached its current form by the end of the fourth century, that is, after the First Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325).
31. Egyptian, Hindu, Babylonian, Celtic, Chinese, Etruscan, Greek, Roman mythologies, for example, all had triune deities. In Weber’s view, Christianity is not strictly monotheistic, unlike Judaism and Islam.
32. A point that consistently underlies Shelley’s dispute with Christianity. See, for example, *A Refutation of Deism*, or in letters to his friends, Thomas Jefferson Hogg and Elizabeth Hitchener.

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33. See Merle Williams, "Contemplating Facts, Studying Ourselves: Aspects of Shelley's Philosophical and Religious Prose," in *The Unfamiliar Shelley*, ed. Alan M. Weinberg and Timothy Webb (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009, 215–17).
34. As explained in his Preface, Shelley's dispute with Aeschylus is based on the impossibility of a genuine reconciliation between Prometheus and Jupiter. Moreover, Shelley alludes to the central debate of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which calls on the reader to accept that free will allows man the choice to be saved or damned, thus immunizing divine authority.
35. Several critics have noted the parallel between Christ and Prometheus: among the more notable, Wasserman (96–110), and (more recently) Samuel Lyndon Gladden, *Shelley's Textual Seductions: Plotting Utopia in the Erotic and Political Works* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 253–56. Not surprisingly Jesus Christ (as Shelley insistently calls him) appears as a great benefactor of human kind (rather than as divine saviour) in the poet's fragmentary essay "On Christianity" as well as in other essays.
36. In line with this argument, compassion (as represented by Asia) and retribution are irreconcilable.
37. This is one way of interpreting the threatened absorption of Prometheus into Jupiter's realm: specifically, in the case of Christianity, the deification of Christ and the establishment of the Trinity.
38. This "patristic empire" is given local dramatized expression in *The Cenci* (1819).
39. Gibbon's masterly account of the Early Church in chs 15 and 16 of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is likely to have markedly influenced Shelley's understanding of the period.
40. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 637.
41. Leader and O'Neill, *Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 637.
42. Already in evidence in Hebraic scripture and Classical Greek drama (see e.g. the Oresteia).
43. Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), vol. 2, 973–75.
44. For his use of "iron cage," see the final paragraphs of Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (ch. 5).
45. The encompassing term might be "love," though it tends to collapse aspects of imaginative being into a loose or vague configuration.
46. Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 3–4.