

PROMETHEUS UNBOUND: REWRITING CLASSICAL MYTH

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Percy Bysshe Shelley is one of the lyricist of the Romantic Age. Revolutionary in his spirit and ideals he was a great lover of ancient Greek mythology. Some of them are *Adonais* in commemoration to John Keats, *Hellas* and *Prometheus Unbound* which was in reply to Aeschylus *Prometheus Bound*. Shelley's lyrical drama *Prometheus unbound* in four Acts is a remaking of *Prometheus bound*. The play written in 1820 reveals Shelley's artistic freedom in his adaptation of Aeschylus myth. This paper aims at probing into Shelley's merit in recreating the classical myth to suit his philosophical concept of rebellion against any form of tyrannical outlook.

The poetic play is considered Shelley's masterpiece where one of the Titans Prometheus stole fire from heaven and gave it to mankind. A myth is a traditional story concerning the early history of a people or explaining natural phenomena involving supernatural beings. According to the Greek Mythology Prometheus is one of the Titans, the banished Gods of old. Prometheus had fondness for mankind, being a beneficiary to mankind he was punished by Jove. Prometheus is bound to a rock surrounded by Oceanides, tortured and punished by making an eagle peck his liver where the organ grows the next day making the punishment eternal. The Prometheus myth appears prominently in Shelley's important works. Shelley has attempted to recreate a new myth of earth's redemption. Shelley's revolutionary spirit of getting rid of superstitions and old values is symbolically brought out in the play. Shelley compares Prometheus to Jesus Christ who was crucified to redeem mankind.

In Aeschylus *Prometheus Bound* Prometheus gets patched up with Jupiter but Shelley gives a different twist to the ancient myth by liberating the titan. Prometheus was bound to the Indian Caucasus. He is made to repeat the curse which he uttered to Jupiter once. Mercury and the Furies come and pester him to reveal the secret of his curse and surrender to Jupiter. Prometheus prefers to suffer rather than surrender to Jupiter.

Prometheus is represented as an embodiment of goodness while Jove as an evil by Shelley. Shelley's Revolutionary ideals are reflected in this poetic drama. The Furies torture him, Asia mourns for Prometheus in his exile. She is joined by Panthea and Oceanides. Panthea consoles Asia by narrating the dream which she saw where she heard Prometheus utter the name of Asia. The dream passes into Panthea and Asia where they hear an echo repeating follow! Follow!.

A wind arose among the pines; it shook
The clinging music from their boughs, and then
Low, sweet, faint sounds, like the farewell of ghosts,
Were heard: O, follow, follow, follow me! (Act II, Sc I, 156-160)

They move into the forest surrounded by caves and mountains and hear strange songs of the fauns and chorus. They meet Demogorgon there. Though Jove is the supreme of all gods by

the Greeks still he has punished Prometheus for his goodness. Asia in her anxiety begs Demogorgan about the duration of Prometheus, wild eyed charioteers who are rainbow winged steeds. Asia wonders what kind of forces they were and they reply:

I am the shadow of a destiny
More dread than is my aspect: ere yon planet
Has set, the darkness which ascends with me
Shall wrap in lasting night heaven's kingless throne (Act II, Sc.IV 146-150)

The spirit ascends his chariot and disappears into the sky in the darkening night. Another spirit appears with a dove like eyes and his chariot is laid with ivory shell and is crimsoned in colour. He takes Asia and Panthea into a snowy mountain. C.S. Lewis divides the suffering of Asia and Prometheus. Asia has a great role to perform in liberating her lover. Panthea could find that Asia was transformed into much radiance and beauty.

I scarce endure
The radiance of thy beauty. Some good change
Is working in the elements, which suffer
Thy presence thus unveiled. (Act II, Sc V, 17-20)

The third Act opens in heaven where Jupiter as the supreme omnipotent Demogorgan appears and combats Jupiter and says that he is his child just like Jupiter himself who is the child of Saturn. He pulls him down into the abyss and makes Jupiter asks for mercy but in vain and they both fall into ruin.

Sink on the wide waves of ruin,
Even as a vulture and a snake outspent
Drop, twisted in inextricable fight,
Into a shoreless sea. (Act III, Sc I, 71-74)

Apollo narrates the fall of Jupiter to Ocean who feels that the ocean will be freed from Tempests. Prometheus is unbound by Hercules in the presence of his beloved Asia, Panthea, Ion and the spirit of the earth. Prometheus wishes to celebrate this deliverance with Asia and other spirits of the hour. The earth rejoiced saying henceforth all the children of the earth will be happier. The earth felt some change with liberty of Prometheus.

The fourth act begins with the rapture of deliverance by the earth and contrasts the present good with that of evil. There is a long veneration by both the moon and the earth expressing delight of each other for liberation. They address all the elements of the earth and the beasts and birds. Finally they address Prometheus as :

Man who wert once a despot and a slave;
A dupe and a deceiver; a decay;
A traveller from the cradle to the grave
Through the dim night of this immortal day. (Act IV, ln549-552)

Shelley was a visionary who had his own ideals. Rene Welleck is of the opinion that Shelley is both a lyricist and symbolist whose aim is to recreate a new myth to liberate the nineteenth century. He contrasts real with his ideals and becomes emotional in expressing his ideals. His spirit of liberty, lyrical quality and emotional fervour is expressed through his lyrical drama Prometheus Unbound and has actually rewritten Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*. He is an ineffectual angel beating his wings in the void. His love for Greek classical learning and the myths is expressed through this poetic drama. Shelley has created a new myth and has rewritten the original myth to suit his revolutionary ideals.

Works Cited

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