

PASSING ON THE PROMETHEUS MYTH: SHELLEY'S MISREADING OF THE SETTING OF *PROMETHEUS BOUND*

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Introduction: Necessary Misreading vs Literary Opportunism

1. Harold Bloom¹ describes Shelley's "misreading" of his predecessors as an Œdipus complex, which consists in killing the poetic father in order to secure a seat in the already crowded literary pantheon. To write something original and new, Shelley has to deviate from Aeschylus, Milton or Wordsworth, even to correct them, as in "Prometheus Unbound" (1818-1820), where the Titan no longer "unsay[s] his high language" or "quail[s] before his successful and perfidious adversary"², although he does "recall" his curse and reject the scorn, hatred and violence which he voiced in *Prometheus Bound* (Vth century B.C.).
2. To reduce that revision to literary opportunism and anxiety or a rejection of tradition and continuity is to overlook, first, the Romantic's ideals, especially non-violence, Platonic Beauty and Love, the antitheses of hatred and oppression; it also means missing the many other transformations of *Prometheus Bound* which contribute to the unity of Shelley's "lyrical drama". As the poet himself explains in the preface, imitation and transformation are inevitable: on the one hand, the poet imitates his predecessors and contemporaries, both unconsciously and consciously, like the "chameleon" which instinctively mirrors the leaves above it and like the poet who "must study" literature and the arts; on the other hand, there are at once a principle within him and forces without, since he is at once "a creator and a creation of his age", which necessarily inspire him to pass on a myth or poetic vision in a new form. Far from denying his imitation and necessary correction of his famous predecessor, Shelley at once pays homage to the latter and adapts the Aeschylean myth of Prometheus to his own age and sensibilities. The process is both deliberate and involuntary.
3. Among the transformed motifs of Aeschylus's (literary) myth³ is its setting. This article will

1 H. Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, 104, 151.

2 P.B. Shelley, "Prometheus Unbound" (1820), "Preface", *The Poems of Shelley*, 2:472. [*The Poems*]

3 By myth, I mean what D. Bush defines as "[...] myth in the stricter sense of the body of Greek and Roman myths which have been an immemorial part of the Western cultural tradition and have been used with infinite diversity in

show how Shelley's transformation of the Titan's Caucasus, even before the writing of "Prometheus Unbound", leads the poet in two opposite directions, westwards and eastwards, as his poem contrasts corrupt everyday reality with the Ideal. To do so, he draws on his knowledge of the Swiss Alps and of a fantasised Greece and India ironically glimpsed through modern Italy – another misreading. The transmission of the myth thus partly depends on personal experiences.

4. Since most of Shelley's descriptions of the Swiss and Italian landscapes are transmitted through his letters, the foretexts or "hypotexts" (sources) to his poem, this study will resort to Gérard Genette's transtextuality⁴ and terminology to analyse the transformation of Aeschylus's setting in the first two acts.

Updating the Myth: Continuation and Diegetic Transposition

5. "Prometheus Unbound" can be considered as a proleptic continuation⁵ of *Prometheus Bound*: the scene takes place after the Titan's curse at the end of the first episode and after the appearance of Zeus's eagle ("Heaven's wingèd hound", I. 34, *The Poems* 2:479) in its sequel *Prometheus Unbound*, which is barely extant. However, only "three thousand years" (I. 12, 2:478) have elapsed since Hephaestus chained him. While D.H. Reiman⁶ notes that the binding of the Titan thus dates back to the first great civilisations, as scientists of the 19th century believed and since it is the Titan who civilised mankind, Shelley's possible shortening of the torture⁷ also sets the scene in contemporary times⁸, as the allusions to Christ and the Terror (I. 546-577) suggest; or rather, it will take place in the near future⁹, when Man, which Prometheus represents, has rejected violence and hatred. In taking the political and cultural context into account, Shelley thus updates the myth, and this updating betrays his optimism as to the improvement of mankind. This chronological transposition is the first stage in the diegetic transposition¹⁰ that affects all that constitutes the

literature, painting, sculpture, and music" (*Pagan Myth*, 1). Besides, myths should include Norse and Egyptian myths, as well as folklore legends like those of Faust or The Wandering Jew, which are also literary myths.

4 "Transtextuality" consists in the relationship between texts (*Palimpsests*, 1982, trans. 1997). Since Genette's "intertextuality" only refers to the obvious presence of one text in another, as in quotations, and "hypertextuality" to less obvious borrowings, like allusions, the former can be seen as an obvious mode of the latter. "Transtextuality" also includes the relations between one text and its genre ("architextuality"), its paratext ("paratextuality") or the texts written on it ("metatextuality"). The present study is thus more particularly hypertextual and paratextual.

5 F. Desset, "Hypertextual Transpositions of *Prometheus Bound*", 102-07.

6 P.B. Shelley, *Poetry and Prose*, 136, n. 4. [*Poetry & Prose*]

7 Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, 94 (*μυρίετη χρόνον*), is translated "countless years" in *Aeschylus* 1:225.

8 L. Zillman, *Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound"*, 343-44, K. Everest, *The Poems* 2:478, n.

9 E.B. Hungerford, *Shores of Darkness*, 76.

10 G. Genette uses the term "transposition" as a synonym of "transformation", perhaps influenced by J. Kristeva who, in *La Révolution du langage poétique* (1974) prefers that term to "intertextuality".

diegesis or world of fiction, time, setting and the participants.

6. There is indeed a geographical transposition too, since Prometheus is no longer bound to the European Caucasus but to the “Indian Caucasus” (I, S.D., *The Poems* 2:477), the Hindu Kush. Aeschylus actually refers to Scythia to emphasise the remoteness and inhospitable nature of the Titan’s prison, and a scholastic note¹¹ indicates that the scene is in fact set on the North West confines of the Black Sea (see below). Thus, Shelley’s orientalisation first compensates for the fact that the region between the Danube and what is Georgia today was perhaps no longer as exotic and remote in the 19th century as it had been in Aeschylus’s time. It was still hostile, though, as it had been occupied since 1801 by Russia, which Shelley was to describe as an opportunistic “eagle” – the bird of Jupiter / Zeus? – in *Hellas* (307-08, *Poetry & Prose* 419). As Stuart Curran¹² suggests, relocating the setting thus removes it away from political oppression, although Caucasus still represents it through most of act I. Nevertheless, it is a first step towards the idealisation of the diegesis. That relocation also universalises the myth (*Poetry & Prose* 137, n. 2), since this region was then considered as the cradle of mankind¹³, a return, then, to nature and innocence. The transposition indeed echoes the eastbound travels in “Alastor” (1815) and *Epipsychidion* (1821), where the Poet finds an Ideal in the Vale of Kashmir or the Ionian isles contrasting with the cold and corrupt West. Consequently, it is not surprising, in the stage direction of Act II, to find Asia, Prometheus’s ideal love and double, in “a beautiful vale in the Indian Caucasus” (*The Poems* 2:527). This geographical relocation announces the Titan’s healing as well as the redemption of mankind, whom he represents.

7. In Act I, however, the Titan still has to “recall” (59, 2:481) and reject the hatred and scorn with which he cursed Jupiter at the end of the hypotext. So, the Aeschylean setting also retains western elements, although this is less deliberate; Shelley does not so much seek to repress the voice of the Greek or oriental other¹⁴ as to use what little means he has in store to give shape to the Promethean setting, which Aeschylus barely describes.

Aeschylean or “Alastorian” Mountainscape

8. As a matter of fact, Shelley had already expanded Aeschylus’s setting in “Alastor” (1815) and

11 L. Zillman, *Shelley’s “Prometheus Unbound”*, 339.

12 S. Curran, *Shelley’s Annus Mirabilis*, 61.

13 L. Zillman, *Shelley’s “Prometheus Unbound”*, 339.

14 J. Wallace, in *Shelley and Greece*, 6, for instance, draws on E. Said, *Orientalism* (1978), in her study of Shelley’s Hellenism.

“Mont Blanc” (1816), composed after his first two excursions (1814, 1816) on the Continent. The poet, who had also quoted from *The Eumenides* in *The Wandering Jew* (1809-10) and ordered an *Aeschylus* in 1812, had re-read or remembered *Prometheus Bound* in 1814, as a Greek quotation referring to Typhon shows in a letter to Mary¹⁵. Indeed, the letters written in Savoy and Switzerland or the notes later drafted in Mary Shelley’s *Journal* during their final trip to Italy in 1818 clearly identify the Swiss Alps with Aeschylus’s Caucasus:

The rocks which cannot be less than 1000 feet in perpendicular height, sometimes overhang the road on each side, and almost shut out the sky. The scene is like that described in the “Prometheus” of Aeschylus; vast rifts and caverns in granite precipices; wintry mountains, with ice and snow above; the loud sounds of unseen waters within the caverns; and walls of toppling rocks, only to be scaled, as he describes, by the winged chariot of the Ocean Nymphs.¹⁶

The plight of the Savoyards in the same note, “bounded by these mountains” and “tyranny” and thus *bound to* them, might have played a part in the recollection of the tragedy, but the scene is not so much like that in *Prometheus Bound*, as like the landscape Shelley imagined while reading the Greek tragedy.

9. The motifs which, according to the poet, make the scenery “Promethean” are the “bound[ing]” and inaccessible “wintry mountain(s)”, the “perpendicular”, “overhanging” and “toppling rocks”, the sky which is “almost shut out”, the “vast rifts”, “precipices”, ravines or chasms, the “caverns” with their “loud sounds of unseen waters”, and the glacier-like “ice and snow”. The “Prometheus” of Aeschylus is clearly contaminated by the Swiss landscape, but also, by the hypotexts that Shelley used to write about scenery, particularly John C. Eustace’s *A Tour through Italy* (1813), in which the hyperbolic adjective “perpendicular” is repeated:

[...] the river [...] assumes the roughness of a torrent; [...] the mountains break into rocks and precipices, which occasionally approach the road, sometimes rise perpendicular from it, and now and then hang over it in terrible majesty. [...] and the river on the right, between two vast perpendicular walls of solid rock, that tower to a prodigious height, and cast a most terrific gloom over the narrow strait that divides them. As the road leads along a precipice, hanging over the river [...].¹⁷

The influence will be analysed in detail in another paper, but it can already be noted that Shelley borrows some motifs from Eustace to write in the style of modern travel narratives, perhaps with a view to publishing some of his letters, as he had just done in *A History of a Six Weeks’ Tour* (1817).

15 P.B. Shelley, *Letters* 1:344, 411, n°218, 24 December 1812, to T. Rickman, and n°271, 25 October 1814. [*Letters*]

16 M. Shelley, *Journal*, 94-5, entry of 26 March 1818.

17 J.C. Eustace, *A Tour through Italy*, 1:28. See also 1:9-10, 21.

10. Writing about “Caucasus” in “Alastor” (352-601), even the Indian Caucasus (142), Shelley could not but conjure up these motifs:

[...] and lo! the ethereal cliffs

Of Caucasus, whose icy summits shone

Among the stars like sunlight, [...] (352-54, *The Poems* 1:476-77)

[...] There, huge caves,

Scooped in the dark base of their aëry rocks

Mocking its moans, respond and roar for ever. (423-25, 1:479)

[...] On every side now rose

Rocks, which, in unimaginable forms,

Lifted their black and barren pinnacles

In the light of evening, and its precipice

Obscuring the ravine, disclosed above,

Mid toppling stones, black gulfs and yawning caves,

Whose windings gave ten thousand various tongues

To the loud stream. [...] (543-50, 1:483-84)

Aeschylus is content to suggest the height of the mountain, its barrenness, solitude and harsh climate through a couple of phrases, “high-beetling crags” (4-5) and rocks or “cliffs in mid-air” (269: *πέτραις πεδαρσίοις*), “desolate and drear crag” or “desolate peak without neighbours” (270) and “rugged ground” or “earth” (283-84), and “rocky cleft assailed by cruel winter” or, more literally¹⁸, “with a rigorous climate” (15, *Aeschylus* 1:214-41). In “Alastor”, Shelley translates the first motif into “ethereal cliffs”, “aëry rocks” and, for the Hindu Kush, “aërial mountains” (142, *The Poems* 1:469), and the second into “black and barren pinnacles” and “accumulated crags” (52), which incidentally emulate Aeschylus’s taste for alliterations. Shelley “revalues” (greater importance) the “harsh climate”, both in the poem (“icy summit”, “wintry river”, “wintry speed” 346, 543, 539) and in the note (“with ice and snow above”, “wintry mountain”), so that he seems to associate the adjectives “icy” and “wintry” with Aeschylus. However, this winter and the barren

18 I am indebted to Professor J.-P. Levet, for helping me with the original Greek.

mountains are softened in “Alastor” by the lush forest below and the Poet’s “green recess” (625), which displays “ivy” (578), “berries” (581), “knotty roots” (574), decayed “leaves” (584) and an “old pine” (634). This mitigation or contrast is echoed by the Poet’s approaching death, symbolised by the autumnal setting (527-39), which lulls his torturers, the Fury-like “Hope and despair” (639-40), to sleep.

11. The “crag clos[ing] round” (359) and “ample chasm” (379) at the “caverned base” (355) of Caucasus are replaced in the third extract of “Alastor” by the “precipice” that hides the sky, by the “ravine”, “toppling stones”, “black gulfs”, “yawning caves” and “overhang[ing]” peak, that is to say, by the future Aeschylean mountainscape in Mary’s *Journal*. The note’s “low sound of unseen waters within the caverns” is indeed announced in the poem by the “waves” that “Rage and Resound forever” (355-56), then by the river “with sound / That shook the everlasting rocks” (377-78), by the whirlpool and finally the “loud stream” heard in the caves. The violence is reminiscent of the Hybristes in *Prometheus Bound*, although Aeschylus’s description is once again limited. What the poet thus passes on is the spirit of the ancient setting in a new, more contemporary form. At the same time, his emphasis on eternity (“for ever”, “everlasting”) makes the setting of his yet modern diegesis as mythical and sublime as Aeschylus’s. The words “shook” and “toppling” might in fact be a reminiscence of the final episode of *Prometheus Bound*, in which the Titan is thrust into the earth: “[...] the earth rocks, the echoing thunder-peal from the depths rolls roaring past me [...]” (1081-83, *Aeschylus* 1:312-13). Shelley had already found the idea of subterranean thunder in *Thalaba* (1801)¹⁹, but what this rewriting shows is that the Caucasus that Shelley passes on is remade out of Aeschylus’s suggestions and out of his experience of Swiss nature, which he also describes through words borrowed from his various readings, like Wordsworth’s nature poems, Southey’s *Thalaba*, Radcliffe’s *Italian* and, at least for the note, Eustace’s *Tour through Italy*²⁰. These three different sorts of sources, the inspirational hypotext, the direct experience of scenery,

19 “There adown / The perforated rock / Plunge the whole waters; so precipitous, / So fathomless a fall, / That their earth-shaking roar came deaden’d up / Like subterranean thunders”, R. Southey, *Thalaba*, VII. vi. 12-17, as quoted in *The Poems* 1:477, n. for lines 376-79.

20 I have already quoted Eustace and Southey. Ann Radcliffe’s fancied Italian mountainscapes have obviously inspired Shelley with some motifs: “Along this deep and shadowy perspective a river, which was seen descending among the cliffs of a mountain, rolled with impetuous force, fretting and foaming amidst the dark rocks in its descent, and then flowing in a limpid lapse to the brink of other precipices, whence again it fell with thundering strength to the abyss, throwing its misty clouds of spray high in the air, and seeming to claim the sole empire of this solitary wild. Its bed took up the whole breadth of the chasm, which some strong convulsion of the earth seemed to have formed, not leaving space even for a road along its margin. The road, therefore, was carried high among the cliffs, that impended over the river, and seemed as if suspended in air; while the gloom and vastness of the precipices, which towered above and sunk below it, together with the amazing force and uproar of the falling waters, combined to render the pass more terrific than the pencil could describe, or language can express” (*The Italian*, 63). Besides the vocabulary and motifs (“precipice”, “abyss”, “chasm”, “impetuous” – like the Hybristes – “convulsion of the earth”, “towered above”, “uproar”, “dark rocks”), what these texts have in common is a will to make these more or less exotic mountains sublime and picturesque.

and other readings, contaminate each other and merge into an intermediary text that, from then on, will be considered Aeschylean, although it is actually “Alastorian”.

12. “Mont Blanc” (1816) was even more directly inspired by Shelley’s experience of the mountain and its glacier, which he first described in his letters:

The river rolls impetuously [...]. The glacier [...] overhangs this cavern & the plain, & the forests of pines which surround it, with terrible precipices of solid ice. On the other side rises the immense glacier of Montanvert, 50 miles in extent occupying a chasm among mountains of inconceivable height & of forms so pointed & abrupt that they seem to pierce the sky. [...] These glaciers flow perpetually into the valley ravaging in their slow but irresistible progress the pastures & forests which surround them, & performing a work of desolation in ages which a river of lava might accomplish in an hour, but far more irretrievably [...]. The verge of a glacier, like that of Boisson, presents the most vivid image of desolation that it is possible to conceive. (*Letters* 1:498-99, n°358, 23 July 1816)

13. Again, he could not fail to see Aeschylus’s “wintry mountain” in Mont Blanc, although he only implicitly refers to the volcanic Typhon devouring the fields, here as in the poem (“the old Earthquake demon”, “the sea / Of fire”, text A, 73-75, *The Poems* 1:539). Besides Typhon and the Hybristes, which survives in the Arve and the symbolic “vast river / [which] Over its rocks ceaselessly bursts and raves” (10-11), and in addition to the other motifs taken from his letters, like the “unsculptured image” behind the “aërial waterfall” (26-7) or the snowy “dome, pyramid and pinnacle” (104), the Aeschylean-Alastorian landscape can be recognised in the adjectives “rude, bare, and high, / Ghastly, and scarred, and riven” (71-2) and “inaccessible” (98), the first line being a translation of *Prometheus Bound*. Other familiar motifs include “ice and rock” (64), “dark deep ravine” (12), “dark mountains” (18), “rocks and pines and caverns” (14), “Thy caverns echoing to the Arve’s commotion” (32), “vast caves / Shine in the gushing torrent’s restless gleam” (121-22) and “loud waters” (124, 538-41). Admittedly, the words “wintry”, “perpendicular”, “toppling” and, although it is used for the sky, “overhanging” are absent, but most of them are present in the letters (“perpendicular mountains”, “the untameable Arve”, “the overhanging brow of a black precipice”). The second voyage has enriched the Promethean landscape, and “Mont Blanc” is now to be found behind the Caucasus of “Prometheus Unbound”, for, as Shelley says in these letters: “I never imagined what mountains were before” (*Letters* 1:496-97).

Expansion of the Setting: Concretisation and Polarisation

14. In “Prometheus Unbound”, Shelley first condenses those Promethean motifs in the stage

direction of Act I, “a ravine of icy rocks in the Indian Caucasus [...] the precipice” (*The Poems* 2:477). He relocates them to India and again revalues the ice, by annexing the snake-like glaciers and pyramid-like stalactites from “Mont Blanc” and the Swiss letters: “The crawling glaciers pierce me with the spears / Of their moon-freezing crystals” (31-32, 2:479) clearly recasts “[...] The Glaciers creep / Like snakes that watch their prey [...]”²¹. Aeschylus only mentioned a “rough climate”, “the rime of morn” (26) and, more virtually, in Prometheus’s final challenge, the “white wings of snow” (993, *Aeschylus* 1:216-17, 306-07)²². This time, however, the revaluation of cold is not softened by vegetation, sleep or death, as Prometheus is immortal.

15. This “concretisation”²³ of setting, thanks to the annexation (isolated borrowing) of the glaciers and the revaluation of cold (the adjective “wintry” is again used l. 21), transforms the torture and the Titan himself. Firstly, the glaciers and stalactites are substituted for the more subtle “rime of morn” and more metallic “adamantine wedge” or rivet (64, *Aeschylus* 1:220-21) thrust into Prometheus’s chest. The word “spear[s]”, in alluding to the crucifixion (*John* xix.34), also likens Prometheus to Christ, as allusions to Italian paintings will in Act II. It announces the Titan’s rejection of hatred and devotion to love, since Christ is no longer the “demagogue” of *Queen Mab* (1813, VII. 8), but the non-violent idealist of “On Christianity” (1817). In spite of the metaphor of the spear, which refers to the same paradigm as the Man-made metallic wedge, it is nature who tortures Prometheus, but “Alastor” has shown that nature could be symbolic of the Poet’s choices and mental state. Here, the frozen glaciers contrast with the warm flowing vale and transforming presence of Asia (see below); the former symbolise experience shackling ideal aspirations, be it love, as in “Alastor”, or the welfare of mankind, as in *Prometheus Bound*. The ice also symbolises the potentialities of humankind frozen by their own, corrupt choices, the evil they do, and evokes the ambivalence of “Mont Blanc”, in which the devastating glaciers eventually turn into nourishing rivers, an image of impartial Necessity. Aeschylus himself says that Zeus is subjected to it (515-518), and Shelley that it is bound to lead mankind to freedom and a new Golden Age of love (II. iv. 126-27). Finally, the substitution of glaciers and nature to metal rivets or spears makes the torture and tortured even more titanic, while the Titan’s brotherhood assume the form of “Mountains”, “Springs”, “Air” and “Whirlwinds” (I. 59-131, *The Poems* 2: 481-83), just like the “[...] giant brood of pines around thee clinging / Children of elder time [...]” in “Mont Blanc” (20-22, 1:538). On the other hand, if the snake-like glaciers liken Prometheus to Apollo wrestling with Python, Shelley more likely had in mind *the Laocoön*, which he had not yet seen in Florence, but which he

21 Zillman, *Shelley’s “Prometheus Unbound”*, 336, 346-47, for the critics who first noted the influence.

22 *Ibid.*, 336-37.

23 T. Webb, *The Violet and the Crucible*, 103-04, meaning more concrete details.

had probably seen in an engraving. Prometheus is therefore also a man.

16. The poet also “aggravates” (makes worse) the desolation and solitude of Caucasus: “desolate and crags without neighbours”, “remotest confines”, “untrodden solitude” and, perhaps too, “the mother of iron” (σιδηρομήτορα, 1-2, 303, *Aeschylus* 1:214-15, 242-243) turn into “[...] eagle-baffling mountain, / Black, wintry, dead, unmeasured; without herb, / Insect, or beast, or shape or sound of life” (I. 20-22, *The Poems* 2:478), with the paratactic “Black, wintry, dead, unmeasured” echoing “rude, bare and high / Ghastly and scarred and riven” in “Mont Blanc”. This aggravation is due to contaminations by Byron’s *Manfred* (1817), “Where the birds dare not build, nor insect wing / Flit o’er the herbless granite”²⁴ – Shelley uses “granite” in Mary’s *Journal* –, and by a common influence, Southey’s *Thalaba*:

High mountains clos’d the vale,
 Bare rocky mountains, to all living things
 Inhospitable; on whose sides no herb
 Rooted, no insect fed, no bird awake
 Their echoes, save the Eagle, strong of wing [...].²⁵

Shelley aggravates the lifelessness of the place in both hypotexts by suppressing the action verbs and, like Byron, by excluding Southey’s eagle from the picture, even if Jupiter’s bird *is* there, although barely visible, on lines 34-36 of Act I. From his letters, he borrows the idea that the solitude of Mont Blanc, “peopled by the storms alone” (67, 1:539, “whirlwind-peopled mountain” in the first draft of “Prometheus Unbound”, 204, 2:489 and n.), is caused by the ice and snow covering it: “[...] the most vivid image of desolation [...]. No one dares to approach it” (see above). Yet, the Titan turns out to be less isolated than expected, since not only the Oceanids but also the Earth and the titanic elements forming an audience on stage stand by him. This contrast between the aggravated desolation and presence of a few characters is typical of the small commune of Shelleyan rebels, usually a man and his female double, isolated in a cold, insensitive and corrupt world.

17. The allusions to the Swiss Alps thus not only concretise the Aeschylean setting: the glaciers also convey an autobiographical (the visit of the Alps), cultural (Christian crucifixion), symbolic (vexed ideals, seclusion), sublime (titanic nature) and even aesthetic (picturesque, sculptural)

24 G.G. Byron, *Manfred* I. ii. 64-65, *Poetical Works*, 391.

25 R. Southey, *Thalaba*, VI. 140-46, 2:11, quoted in L. Zillman, *Shelley’s “Prometheus Unbound”*, 345.

dimension to the Promethean setting. Shelley has regenerated the dead metaphor. This recreation is a good example of the intercontamination process of autobiographical, cultural, literary and aesthetic influences at once invoked by the poet to give shape to an idea and influencing this idea: the influences which give shape to the myth are not all strictly formal but also ideological; their variety also conjures up a variety of connotations which in turn suggest new ideas and several levels of reading. They even affect the poet's perception of the "spirit" of the myth to which he wishes to give a new "form", to use the distinction in the preface.

18. Only in the last episode, in which Spirits come to cheer up the Titan, and Panthea describes Asia's ideal vale, do the Italian "spring" and the "bright blue sky" of Rome ("Preface", *The Poems* 2:473) seem to enter the stage:

Panthea

Look, Sister, where a troop of spirits gather,
 Like flocks of clouds in spring's delightful weather,
 Thronging in the blue air!

Ione

And see! more come,
 Like fountain-vapours when the winds are dumb,
 That climb up the ravine in scattered lines.
 And hark! is it the music of the pines?
 Is it the lake? is it the waterfall? (l. 664-70, *The Poems* 2:517)

Vida Scudder²⁶ suggests that Shelley might take a hint from Aeschylus, when the Oceanids "quit [their] swift-speeding seat and the pure air, pathway of birds" for "this rugged ground" (281-84, *Aeschylus*, 1:240-41). In that case, the poet expands this more ideal element of setting.

19. In fact, the "blue air" of "spring's delightful weather" cannot be Roman, since Shelley first went to this city in November 1818, two months or so after the completion of Act I. Of course, it was to be revised and corrected in the next few months, but this passage is not an addition. The preface, which yet remained to be written (*The Poems* 2:472), is therefore a rewriting of this

26 L. Zillman, *Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound"*, 403.

passage, hence the echo “blue air” in the first draft of this preface then changed to “blue sky”²⁷. The “vigorous awakening of spring [...] drenches the spirits even to intoxication” in the published preface (473) also expands the adjective “delightful” of the poem, by likening spring to wine or the other meaning of the word “spirits”. Still, the spring of Act I can be Italian, since Shelley had already reached Milan in April 1818 and seen the “lake” and “waterfall[s]” of the Como region. Indeed, Ione and Panthea’s descriptions draw on Shelley’s descriptions of the sky over Bagni di Lucca and its wooded mountains:

I take great delight in watching the changes of the atmosphere here, & the growth of the thunder showers with which the noon is often overshadowed, & which break & fade away towards evening into flocks of delicate clouds. [...] over the rift in the forest-covered mountains [...]. (*Letters* 2:20, n°470 to John and Maria Gisborne, 10 July 1818)

The atmosphere here [...] is diversified with clouds, which grow in the middle of the day, and sometimes bring thunder and lightning, and hail about the size of a pigeon’s egg, and decrease towards the evening, leaving only those finely woven webs of vapour which we see in English skies, and flocks of fleecy and slowly moving clouds, which all vanish before sunset; and the nights are for ever serene, and we see a star in the east at sunset. (2:25, n°472 to T.L. Peacock, 25 July)

We see Shelley at work here: similar letters sent to different people enable him to perfect his ekphrasis or images, and memorise them for his poems. The clouds are first animated into “flocks of delicate clouds” and “flocks of fleecy and slowly moving clouds”, which suggest either birds vanishing in the sky or peaceful “fleecy” sheep evoking some “serene” Arcadian or at least “ancient” scenery (*ibid.*, n°471 to W. Godwin). The metaphor then becomes a simile in the poem to give shape to the flock-like Spirits.

20. This concretisation of the Spirits, however intangible clouds and vapours may be, is yet – but typically – accompanied by a spiritualisation of the Italian sky, since its clouds and vapours are transformed into Spirits in the poem and since it now represents the either agitated or appeased human mind. The Spirits themselves use another image inspired by these letters, “storm-extinguished day”, in a passage referring to the “atmosphere” of Bagni di Lucca, in order to describe “the atmosphere of human thought”:

Be it dim and dank and grey

Like a storm-extinguished day

Travelled o’er by dying gleams;

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 121.

Be it bright as all between

Cloudless skies and windless streams,

Silent, liquid, and serene –

As the birds within the wind,

As the fish within the wave, [...]

Voyaging cloudlike and unrepent [...] (I. 676-88, *The Poems* 2:518)

The Spirits are again “cloudlike” and like “birds within the wind”, but the “fleecy” sheep are replaced by the equally peaceful “fish within the wave”, since the “extinguished” sky is literally “liquid”. The contrast between stormy and serene skies is symbolic at this point, since Prometheus has just rejected his thunder-like anger, scorn and violence, corrupt thoughts and emotions embodied by the Furies who tortured him. Shelley already insisted in his letters on his delight resulting from the change to “serene[r]” skies. Here, he transforms the summer sunsets of Bagni de Lucca into the more symbolic spring dawn announcing the Titan’s regeneration: “During the scene, morning slowly breaks” (S.D. *The Poems* 2:477). That the second metaphor in the letter, “the finely woven webs of vapour”, which Ione borrows (“fountain vapours”), be also reminiscent of England, does not really jeopardise the polarisation of the setting between the icy Alpine Caucasus symbolising the corrupt West, although it is already in the process of redemption, and Asia’s Indian vale symbolising the ideal East, yet concretised, like the Spirits, by Italy. The polarisation is not perfect in this passage, because this is a transitory one: the star-like (I. 693), flock-like Spirits, Prometheus’s purer thoughts, can be seen in the distance, but the veil of clouds has first to be removed in order to unveil the Ideal. Indeed, they have not yet dissolved in Act II (I. 16-27, 143-44, see below). In Act I, the Italian landscape is still virtual and only appears in images and symbols.

21. Panthea’s short description of Asia’s “far Indian vale” highlights the polarisation of the setting. Whereas it is again too early to evoke the “flowery glades, and thickets of odoriferous blossoming trees” of Rome (*The Poems* 2:473), the extra line in the first draft, “fruits & flowers & sunwarm winds, & sounds smooth”²⁸, and the published text announce it:

[...] rugged once

And desolate and frozen like this ravine;

But now invested with fair flowers and herbs,

28 *Ibid.*, 180.

And haunted by sweet airs and sounds, which flow

Among the woods and waters, [...] (l. 827-831, *The Poems* 2:525-26)

The polarisation of the setting is highlighted by the obvious contrast between the old Promethean motifs (“rugged”, “desolate”, “frozen”) and the new Asian ones (“flower and herbs”, “sweet airs and sounds”), which actually reverse Southey’s or Byron’s “herbless” and “soundless” mountain used earlier for Caucasus. The deleted line is less similar in style but closer to the Italian letters which flesh out this literary influence with memories from the spring and summer 1818, like the arch of Augustus at Susa or Lake Como:

A ruined arch of magnificent proportions in the Greek taste standing in a kind of road of green lawn overgrown with violets & primroses & in the midst of stupendous mountains, & a blonde woman of light & graceful manners, something in the style of Fuseli’s Eve. (*Letters* 2:4, n°460 to T.L. Peacock, 06 April 1818)

The lake [...] is long and narrow, & has the appearance of a mighty river winding among the mountains & [...]. But usually the immediate border of this shore is composed of laurel trees & bay & myrtle & wild fig trees & olives which grow in the crevices of the rocks & overhang the caverns & shadow the deep glens which are filled with the flashing light of the waterfalls. [...] there intervenes between them [mountains... covered with perpetual snow] & the lake a range of lower hills, which have glens & rifts opening to the other such as I should fancy the *abysses* of Ida or Parnassus. Here are plantations of olives & orange & lemon trees which are now so loaded with fruit that there is more fruit than leaves, & vineyards. (2:6-7, n°462 to T.L. Peacock, 20 April)

That blond woman and Fuseli’s Eve (*The Creation of Eve*, 1791) may even lend their white marble-like skins and sensuousness to Asia, later described as a Venus Anadyomene, and the “fair flowers” that are paratactically (“&”, “and”) mixed with “herbs” may be identified as “violets”, also found in Rome, and “primroses”, which are the first to flourish in spring. The fruits of the draft may be myrtles, figs, olives, oranges and lemons.

22. Beyond these more immediate and symbolical elements, Shelley may also have in mind the eastern Eden which Southey, in the VIth book of *Thalaba*, contrasts with the herbless and soundless mountains, and where other flowers can be found, like the “tulip”, “lily”, “red eye-spot” and the “rose”, but the same “orange[s]”, other odours from the “jasmine”, “rose” and “henna” (there are already “odorous plants” in the vale of Kashmir in “Alastor”, 146), as well as sweet sounds from the “waterfall”, “leafy groves” and the “nightingale”²⁹. If we except Asia, Shelley only omits human presence. *Thalaba* and the diffuse hypotext constituted by the many literary descriptions of gardens

²⁹ R. Southey, *Thalaba*, vi, 2:16-17.

of Eden³⁰, especially oriental ones, passes a structure on to him, an idea which he fleshes out with this real, experienced Italian landscape, although the concretisation remains virtual, since Panthea does not actually name those flowers and fruit. By offering an alternative to the cold yet sublime Alps, Italy starts regenerating the Promethean setting as early as Act I, but it is in Act II and III that the metamorphosis is to be completed.

Transposition of the Setting in Act II, scene i

23. The stage direction of the first scene, “Morning. A lovely vale in the Indian Caucasus” (*The Poems* 2:527), links this Act with the previous one. Shelley continues the diegetic transposition of *Prometheus Bound* (“Indian Caucasus”, “Too long desired, too long delaying,” II.i.15, 528). The distance between the “far Indian vale” and the Hindu Kush is all the more symbolic, since the former is clearly located “in” the latter, and since the veil that separated Asia from Prometheus is now being lifted:

O rock-embosomed lawns, and snow-fed streams,

Now seen athwart frore vapours, deep below,

Through whose o’ershadowing woods I wandered once (I. 120-22, 484)

The point of one white star is quivering still

Deep in the orange light of widening morn

Beyond the purple mountains; through a chasm

Of wind-divided mist the darker lake

Reflects it – now it wanes – it gleams again

As the waves fade, and as the burning threads

Of woven cloud unravel in pale air...

’Tis lost! and through yon peaks of cloud-like snow

30 Other sources have been suggested, like Spenser (L. Zillman, *Shelley’s “Prometheus Unbound”*, 416) or Homer’s *Iliad*, xiv. 347-9 (*The Poems* 2:526, n.).

The roseate sunlight quivers [...] (II. i. 18-25, 528)

By referring to the “wind-divided mist” or unravelling “woven cloud” of Bagni de Lucca (“woven webs of vapour [...] which all vanish”), Shelley at once concretises Plato’s revelation of the Ideal in *The Republic* (the Good) and *The Symposium* (Beauty), which he translated in the summer, and transposes this Ideal and its “reflect[ions]” into the world of nature. Similarly, Lake Como, which, like the “dark lake”, is also “shadow[ed]” by “the deep glens” and “*abysses*” in the letter, makes the ideal star more earthly by reflecting it. This may also concretise the Cimmerian “mere” or “lake” of the hypotext (729, *Aeschylus* 1:278-79). The Titan is about to be freed, as announced by the snow and even peaks dissolving into the “sunrise” (14), by “Spring” (6) and Venus, the morning star replacing the Hesperus-like Jupiter of the letter. Its light, however, is still uncertain (“now it wanes”), just like the Homeric “roseate sunlight”, which “quivers”. Indeed, the lake is not calm yet and the planet vanishes (“’Tis lost!”), before Panthea, whose eyes are “Like stars” (29) and who is likened to “Spring”, eventually enters the stage. Far from considering those Platonic “shadow[s]” (31, 528) and reflections as misleading, Shelley revalues them as traces of the Ideal on Earth. This is the main difference with Plato: the Ideal is not only transcendent but immanent; it can be found in nature and Man if mankind, like Prometheus, rejects hatred, selfishness and violence. However, Asia has not yet embarked on the final quest and Prometheus is still bound to Caucasus. Therefore, Shelley transfers the old “Alastorian” motifs to the “Parnassian” scenery of Como and, more particularly, to the Apennines, which eventually replace the Alps:

About 4 miles from Fossombrone, the river forces for itself a passage between the walls & toppling precipices of the loftiest Apennines which are here rifted to their base and undermined by the narrow & tumultuous torrent. It was a cloudy morning & we had no conception of the scene that awaited us. Suddenly the low clouds were struck by the clear north wind, & like curtains of the finest gauze removed one by one, were drawn from before the mountains whose heaven cleaving pinnacles & black crags overhanging one another stood at length defined in the light of day. (*Letters* 2: 55, n°487 to T.L. Peacock, 20 November 1818)

The Hybristes-like “tumultuous torrent”, the “overhanging”, “abrupt / toppling precipices”, partly borrowed from Eustace’s peregrinic discourse, and their base “rifted” by chasms and caves now apply to the Italian Apennines, which, therefore, look as sublime and dangerous as the Promethean Alps (“black crags”, “heaven cleaving”), and, in the poem’s symbolism, potentially corrupted. In the first scene of Act II, Italy is indeed contaminated by France and Switzerland: the “peaks of cloudlike snow” in the poem actually condenses the simile of “[the snowy Alps...] look like those accumulated clouds of dazzling white that arrange themselves on the horizon in summer” in Mary’s

*Journal*³¹. Actually, the “accumulated crags” in “Alastor” (552) or “steeps” in “Mont Blanc” (67, *The Poems* 1: 483, 539) already transformed the “accumulated cloud” simile into a metaphor. Similarly, the “curtains of the finest gauze” in Fossombrone, which may account for the adjective “wind-divided” in Act II, and “the woven webs of vapour” in Bagni de Lucca are reminiscent of another early description in Mary’s *Journal*:

From the summit of one of the hills we see the whole expanse of the valley filled with a white undulating mist, over which the piny hills pierced like islands. The sun had just risen, and a ray of the red light lay on the waves of this fluctuating vapour. To the west, opposite the sun, it seemed driven by the light against the rock in immense masses of foaming cloud until it becomes lost in the distance, mixing with the fleecy sky.³²

It is curious in the letter written in Bagni de Lucca that Shelley should compare the “woven webs of vapour” to what he saw in England and not to what he saw in the Alps, “a white undulating mist” and “fluctuating vapour”, just as the “flocks of fleecy and slowly moving clouds” recall the “masses of foaming cloud” and “fleecy sky”. It is not clear, however, whether the thicker clouds in the *Journal* are dispersed by the “light”, as they are by the wind in the Italian letters and the poem. Besides, although the sunrise casting a red-light may make its way into the Promethean diegesis (“burning threads / Of woven cloud”, “roseate sunlight”, but also “golden clouds”, 11, and “crimson dawn”, 27), it is a common image in Shelley’s poetry. The letters of Bagni de Lucca, in which a star is revealed by the dispersed cloud, and of Como, whose shadowed lake can reflect it, still constitute the main hypotext, through which older reminiscences are transmitted.

24. The “purple” colour of the mountains either refers to the “crimson” glow of sunrise or to the bluish appearance of the Apennines seen in the distance. Other descriptions of the mountains clearly suggest the latter:

[...] the blue sea [was seen] reflecting the purple heaven of noon above it, & supporting as it were on its line the dark lofty mountains of Sorrento, of a blue inexpressibly deep, & tinged towards their summits with streaks of new-fallen snow. (*Letters* 2:73, n°491 to T.L. Peacock, 23-24 January 1819)

On one side [...] every ravine & glen whose precipitous sides admitted of other vegetation but that of the rock rooted ilex; on the other the aetherial snowy crags of an immense mountain whose terrible lineaments were at intervals concealed or disclosed by volumes of dense clouds rolling under the tempest. [...] The immense mountains covered with the rare & divine vegetation of this climate with many-folding vales, & deep dark recesses which the fancy scarcely could penetrate, descended from their snowy summits precipitously to the sea [bay of Naples]. Beyond, the other shore of sky-cleaving

31 L. Zillman, *Shelley’s “Prometheus Unbound”*, 421; M. Shelley, *Journal*, 10, entry of 19 August 1814.

32 *Ibid.*, 9, entry of 18 August 1814.

mountain, then dim with the mist of tempest. [...] the grand amphitheatre of the loftiest Apennines, dark purple mountains crowned with snow & intersected then by long bars of hard & leaden coloured cloud. (*Letters* 2:78-79, n°492 to T.L. Peacock, 25 February 1819)

While “concealed [...] by volumes of dense clouds rolling under the tempest” once more echoes the Alpine “masses of foaming cloud”, the “immense”, “loftiest” and “aetherial snowy crags” recast the “etherial cliffs” and “aëry rocks” of “Alastor” and, therefore, Aeschylus’s “high-beetling crags” and “crags in mid-air”. Yet, in spite of their “terrible” and “precipitous” appearance, the “bars of hard & leaden coloured cloud” and the snow, which, in Act II, is warmed up by the red sunlight shining through the very peaks, the “purple” colour, the “sea” and the “divine vegetation of this climate” make the Apennines less “wintry” and desolate than the Promethean Alps, and the Italian range an apt symbol for the regenerating diegesis.

25. The “many-folded mountains” of this first scene (201, *The Poems* 2:539) also refer to “the many folded Apennines” seen in Bologna beyond the “fertile fields” (*Letters* 2:53, n°486, 09 November 1818, to T.L. Peacock), and to his translation of the Homeric “Hymn to Venus” (63, *The Poems* 2:347) in January, in which he had momentarily added this feature to the “acropolis” (*ακροπολις*) of Ida, one of the two mountains to which he compares the Italian Alps in the Como region. It will be used again to describe the Euganean hills in *Julian and Maddalo* (“many-folded hills”, 76, *The Poems* 2:668). In the poem, though, Shelley suppresses the direct reference to Italy in order to suggest eastern mountains, be they “Parnassian”, “Idaeon” or “Indian”.

26. The adjective “many-folded” is also echoed by the adjective “many-folding” in the February letter to depict the vales in the Apennines, and, with the other adjective “lovely”, in his “View from the Pitti [Boboli] Gardens”, written later, between September and December 1819 in Florence³³. As in the Titan’s description in Act I, the Alastorian peaks and green valleys form a “picture” and the contrast is also a “gentle” blending of picturesque elements. The picturesque, like the sublime, always challenges a clear-cut polarisation in Shelley’s symbolism.

27. Asia describes her vale in a dream, which turns out to be prophetic, as she then hears the words “follow, follow” (159) that she first read in her sleep:

[...] methought among these lawns together

We wandered, underneath the young grey dawn,

And multitudes of dense white fleecy clouds

33 P.B. Shelley, “View from the Pitti [Boboli] Gardens”, “Notes on Sculptures” (1819-1820), *Shelley’s Prose*, 345-46.

Were wandering in thick flocks along the mountains,

Shepherded by the slow, unwilling wind;

And the white dew on the new-bladed grass,

Just piercing the dark earth, hung silently [...]

Athwart the purple mountain slope [...] (II.i. 143-52, *The Poems* 2:536)

The “lawns” and “clouds” echo Prometheus’s description in Act I, as a symmetrical view, from below, is given here. The slow Lucchese shepherd-like “wind” and sheep-like “flocks of cloud” of Act I are further personified but have also become as thick as the Alpine vapours of 1814. Yet, the “purple” Apennines, the “rock-embosomed lawns” of Prometheus’s picture, the “herb” (154) and “sweet... sounds” (158) have replaced the herbless, soundless Alps and their white glaciers. The Italian “clear spring” (163) is at hand, as suggested by the “new-bladed grass” and, in Panthea’s second dream, by the “almond-tree” (135), the first to bloom in January and bear fruit in March according to Pliny³⁴, and as Shelley might have seen in Italy while completing this second Act. Even though the “Scythian” north wind blasts its flowers (136), the written petals urge the Oceanids to embark on their mystic journey, the complement to Prometheus’s moral transfiguration, so that the tree symbolises rebirth, hope and, through a Hebraic pun, the idea of “hastening” (*Jeremiah* I. 11-12)³⁵. They have to “wander” away just as the clouds and “ghosts” (158) do, so as to lift the thick veil once and for all.

28. The presence of “the white Scythian wilderness” in Panthea’s second dream, which Asia’s then replaces by a warmer one, is not, therefore, a literal regression to Prometheus’s wintry “untrodden solitude” and the “Scythian nomads” that Io has to go past in the hypotext (1-2, 708-10, *Aeschylus* 1:214-15, 278-79). It is a symbol of resilience and Necessity, as destruction can lead to hope and action (“follow! follow!”), like the thawing glaciers, and all the more so since the Scythian wind echoes the “north wind” that divides the veil of clouds. Still, from a transtextual point of view, Shelley again aggravates the Scythian desolation, firstly, by removing the Scythian nomads themselves, and secondly, by adding the “white” colour referring to the snowy “wilderness” of “Mont Blanc” (76, *The Poems* 1:539-40). The contrast between the two dreams also reinforces the polarisation of the setting between the flowery vale and icy Caucasus, on which Panthea first had that dream (58-61, 2:530). It shows that the scene, the entire Act even, is still

34 Pliny, *Natural History*, XIV. li. 103, 454-55. The almond-tree here replaces the blasted oak or pine of Shelley’s earlier poetry.

35 E.R. Wasserman, *Shelley’s Prometheus Unbound*, 116-17.

transitional.

29. The last elements of setting concretising the first scene are the “fountain-lighted caves” and “rents, and gulfs, and chasms” (II. I. 184, 202, 2:539), which announce Demogorgon’s cave in scene iv and Prometheus’s in Act III. They recall the darker Promethean caves of “Alastor” filled with subterranean waters (here, “waves”, 183), first unseen and then leading up to Caucasus, like the Hybristes. Shelley also combines the cave of the *Republic* (VII, 514a-517c)³⁶ with others found in his poetry, like the Gothic witch’s cave leading to Hell in *The Wandering Jew* (1810), and his letters, especially the caves of the Villa Pliniana, with “its fountain which ebbs & flows” on the bank of Lake Como, and “of the Sybil”, “which pierces one of the hills” and leads to Lake Avernus “surrounded by dark woody hills, & profoundly solitary” (*Letters* 2:7 and 61, n°462 and 488, 20 April and 17 or 18 December 1818, to T.L. Peacock). Thus, the Echoes leads the Oceanids “Through the caverns hollow, / Where the forest spreadeth” and “By forests, lakes and fountains” (175-76, 200, *The Poems* 2:538-39) to Demogorgon, who replaces the Sybil. Indeed, as K. Everest notes (2:535, n.), the fallen blossoms of the almond-tree on which “follow! follow!” is written are “Sibylline leaves”. Not only does the visit concretise the setting and passage through the cavern; it also prompts the image. These caves, as in Act I, represent Asia’s mind, as she tries to see through the shadows cast on the walls, Demogorgon himself in scene iv; they are also Orphic, as they lead to Hell or Hades, and like the shades of the dead in Homer, Virgil and Dante, the oracle is to disclose “the deep truth [which] is imageless” (II.iv. 116, 564). Although “imageless” suggests Shelley’s scepticism, the luminous reflections of the fountains again revalue the shadows of Plato’s fire.
30. Besides the caves of Tartarus through which the “thunder-peal from the depths” echoes at the end of *Prometheus Bound* (1051, 1082-83, *Aeschylus* 1:310-13), Aeschylus also mentions caves in relation to the Oceanids and Ocean: “[...] our inmost cave’s recess [...]”; “the rock-roofed caves thou thyself has made [...]” (131-33, 302-03, 1:228-29, 242-43). Yet, as he barely describes them, Panthea’s first recollection augments those descriptions: “Under the glaucous caverns of old Ocean / Within dim bowers of green and purple moss” (II. i. 44-45, *The Poems* 2:529). The “green and purple moss” again comes from the bay of Baiae:

[...] there was not a cloud in the sky nor a wave upon the sea which was so translucent that you could see the hollow caverns clothed with the glaucous sea-moss, & the leaves & branches of those delicate weeds that pave the unequal bottom of the water. [...] After passing the Bay of Baiae & observing the

36 J. A. Notopoulos (*Platonism of Shelley*, 244) only mentions Plato’s cave for I. 655, II. iv. 56-57 and v. 16-37. See also *Thalaba*, VI, 153-57, which follows the passage quoted above.

ruins of its antique grandeur standing like rocks in the transparent sea under our boat [...]. Some vast ruins of the temple of Pluto stand on a lawny hill on one side of it [Avernus] and are reflected in its windless mirror. (*Letters* 2:61, n°488, 17 or 18 December 1818, to T.L. Peacock)³⁷

In substituting the adjective “glaucous”, either green, bluish purple, like the moss, or grey³⁸, for “rock-roofed”, Shelley revalues the maritime and Italian aspect of Ocean’s caves and removes them even farther away from Caucasus. The “mouth of a great river in the Island Atlantis”, “the fields of Heaven-reflecting sea”, “their glassy thrones” and “Behold the Nereids under the green sea, / Their wavering limbs borne on the wind-like streams” of Act III (ii, SD, 18, 23, 44-45, *The Poems* 2:532-84) still draw on the bay of Baiae, whose waters are at once “transparent” and like a “mirror”. While Panthea refers to the ancient age of gold in Act II, Ocean envisages a new golden one in Act III, the see-through, reflecting water symbolising peace and serenity. The terms “bower” and “moss” also suggest a place that is ancient, natural, moist, soft and safe, like Tethys’s wombs (see “The Cloud”, 83), hence the almost foetal position of the Oceanids “Before the sacred Titan’s fall” (II.i.40-49, 2:529). Similarly, “the pale faint water-flowers that pave / The oozy bottom of clear lake and pools” in scene ii (72-73, 546) echoes “those delicate weeds that pave the unequal bottom of the water”. This also enables Shelley to again experience the “divine vegetation” of Italy. Indeed, there are several advantages in concretisation: by rooting the mythical diegesis in reality, the poet makes it more realistic and believable, while he gives shape to his ideas and creates new metaphors; above all, concretisation enables him to recollect beautiful and breathtaking places and experiences in tranquillity.

31. There is no room here to further explore the setting of “Prometheus Unbound”, but the analysis of Act I and the first scene of Act II already shows a polarisation of the setting and the use of the Alps and Italy. Although Shelley again alludes to the French Alps in scene iii (19-30), the Italian landscape, mainly “the countryside around Naples”³⁹, predominates in the rest of the act. In Act III, in which Prometheus descends from Caucasus into a cave partly inspired by the ruins of Caracalla and the Coliseum in Rome, the polarisation is no longer an issue, since the veil has been lifted and humankind redeemed. It only survives when this act is compared with the first, the second being transitional. The setting of Act IV is more cosmic and symbolic, although some of its symbols derive from Shelley’s descriptions of Italy.

37 L. Zillman, *Shelley’s “Prometheus Unbound”*, 423.

38 L. Zillman (*ibid.*) paraphrases “bluish green”. In the Homeric hymn “To Minerva” (1818, *The Poems*, 2:344), Shelley translates the Greek “γλαυκώιδος” into “azure” (1) and “Cerulean” (11), thus meaning blue. Other translators translate it into “grey” or “bright”.

39 K. Everest, *The Poems* 2:540, n., quoting *Letters* 2:77, n°492, 25 February 1819, to T.L. Peacock.

Conclusion

32. The orientalisation of the setting paradoxically requires its westernisation, since Shelley has never been to Greece, not to mention India. He could as well quote from orientalist's works, which he sometimes does, but he cannot resist the powerful inspiration of nature to flesh out his Promethean diegesis. His excision of western toponyms, architecture and men in his descriptions of landscape in the first two acts, while it universalises the setting, that is to say, makes it valid for all of mankind, at once makes Prometheus's prison more desolate and Asia's vale more pristine. There is indeed a polarisation of the setting, but Shelley's love, on the one hand, of the picturesque, which emphasises relief, depth, contrast and unity, as in landscape paintings, and, on the other hand, of the sublime, which is described by E. Burke as danger experienced from a safe distance, sometimes jeopardises this opposition, especially when it is considered as temporary.
33. The concretisation of the Aeschylean setting, which consists in making it more detailed by referring to real, extratextual scenery, also shows the existence of an intermediary text between *Prometheus Bound* and "Prometheus Unbound" made up of three main sorts of sources, the inspirational hypotext, literary sources and direct experience. This intermediary text is also an imaginary one: the "Promethean" landscape that Shelley passes on to his readers is not only, nor necessarily Aeschylean, as he projects his own experience of nature and nature literature onto a hypotext which, in fact, barely describes the setting and characters. As Jennifer Wallace remarks⁴⁰, the myth becomes as much Hesiod's or Aeschylus's as Shelley's creature for succeeding generations who may "see" the Shelleyan landscapes when reading *Prometheus Bound*. Shelley's text may then be seen as the origin of the tradition, the original source of the transmission.

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⁴⁰ J. Wallace, *Shelley and Greece*, 176.

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