Entering the Stream of Sound: The Reader and the Masque in Shelley's Prometheus Unbound

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All things are recreated, and the flame
Of consentaneous love inspires all life.
Queen Mab, VIII

IN HIS FRAGMENTARY essay "On Love," composed during the summer of 1818, Shelley writes, "[I]f we imagine, we would that the airy children of our brain were born anew within another's."[1] When he begins work on *Prometheus Unbound* the following September, Shelley will develop various strategies that urge the reader of his lyrical drama to become that sympathetic "co-author" he yearns for in the earlier piece. His essay "On Love" rather plaintively suggests the heightened level of engagement with his poetry that *Prometheus Unbound* in fact demands of those of us who enter his mental theater. And it is in the play's exuberant finale that Shelley most powerfully implicates his reader, a reader who must now replace the liberated Prometheus at center stage.

As Stephen C. Behrendt has recently demonstrated, Shelley's ardent desire for a responsive audience was matched by his genius for manipulating audience response. Genre, as well as style and rhetoric, provided the poet with powerful tools for attracting and then guiding particular audiences, from "a general, 'popular' audience" to the "SUNETOI, the 'ideal' readers for whom *Prometheus Unbound* and *Epipsychidion* were intended."[2] In one of the few detailed explications of the lyrical drama's fourth act, Joanna E. Rapf notes that "Usually

1. Unless otherwise indicated, my source for Shelley's poems and essays is the Norton Critical Edition of *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, selected and edited by Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (New York: Norton, 1977), quotation p. 473. All references to *Prometheus Unbound* will be cited parenthetically within the text.

2. See *Shelley and His Audiences* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press,1989), 2. Behrendt's valuable study emphasizes Shelley's acute awareness and skillful manipulation of his various (real or imagined) audiences. Without singling out Act IV for special attention, several recent commentators on *Prometheus Unbound* have focussed on the role of its reader. Tilottama Rajan's sophisticated and timely "Deconstruction or Reconstruction: Reading Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*," *Studies in Romanticism*, 23 (1984), 317–38, looks closely at certain textual "gaps" which we as readers are required to fill in as we help "produce" the meaning of the play. Alan Richardson's discussion of *Prometheus Unbound* in *A Mental Theater: Poetic Drama and Consciousness in the Romantic Age* (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1988), 124–53, illuminates the function of the sympathetic imagination—that of both the play's characters and readers—and emphasizes the play's enactment and encouragement of "the relaxation of psychic borders" (145). I am also indebted to Marlon B. Ross's insights into the play and its implied reader. See both "Shelley's Wayward Dream-Poem: The Apprehending Reader in *Prometheus Unbound*," *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 36 (1987), 110–33 and *The Contours of Masculine Desire: Romanticism and the Rise of Women's Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), especially chap. 4.

the Act as a whole is glossed over as a 'nuptial song' or 'wedding masque.'"[3] Her comment reminds us how prominent and yet how neglected the question of genre remains in discussions of this act. When we confront rather than simply invoke this question, it becomes clear that Shelley, in modeling Act IV of *Prometheus Unbound* on the Renaissance masque, exploits what is perhaps the most salient characteristic of this genre: its intermingling of spectators and performers. The masque that concludes the play prompts us not only to witness but also to participate in the joyous reunion of regenerated humanity and nature that comprises the drama's "involving and involved" finale (IV. 240).

In its most celebrated incarnation, the courtly masque of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this form of the drama emerged as a stylized, decorous social ritual in which play and audience interpenetrated, existed symbiotically, as it were. In the masques of Daniel, Jonson, and Campion, for example, the aristocratic audience not only joined the masquers in the final dance, the revels, but courtiers and even such royal personages as James's Queen Anne and their sons Henry and Charles played roles which the court poet wrote especially for them. While in the Jonsonian masque, created for the Jacobean court, the blurred boundary between audience—particularly the royal spectator(s)—and performers served to reinforce and idealize the aristocracy's authority,[4] Shelley employs the masque in order to involve his reader directly in a radically democratic vision of human unity and cosmic harmony.[5] Central to the play's fourth act are Panthea and Ione, upgraded from subordinate, sometimes confused observers to crucial narrators and participants. Within the elaborate masque that concludes the play, these sisters correspond not only to the chorus figures of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, but to graceful masquers who invite us to enter the dance and "weave the mystic measure" in a world where man has become "Equal, unclassed, tribeless and nationless" and where a cast of liberated spirits, heavenly bodies, and responsive readers supplant the opulent trappings and royal revellers of the Jonsonian masque (IV. 77; III. iv. 195).

Yet unlike the stark and "ghastly masquerade" of *The Mask of Anarchy*, completed shortly before Shelley composed the fourth act of *Prometheus*

3. See "A Spirit in Search of Itself: Non-Narrative Structure in Act IV of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*," *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin*, 30 (1979), 36–47. Rapf's superb essay focuses not on generic issues but on structural elements and image patterns in this act.

4. See Stephen Orgel's *The Jonsonian Masque* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1965) and *The Illusion of Power: Political Theater in the English Renaissance* (Univ. of California Press, 1975) for elucidations of the masque's complex function in the Stuart court. Stephen Kogan, *The Hieroglyphic King* (London: Associated University Press, 1986), David Lindley, ed., *The Court Masque* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1984), and David M. Bergeron, ed., *Pageantry in the Shakespearian Theater* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1985), examine not only Jonson's work but also the masques and pageants of his contemporaries and explore the masque as it functions within plays, especially those of Shakespeare. Enid Welsford's *The Court Masque* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962) provides a comprehensive history of the masque from its beginnings in medieval seasonal festivals.

5. Although performed before and by a "Noble Family" in an aristocratic setting, Milton's *Comus* provided Shelley with a precedent for transporting the masque out of the courtly realm, as did Leigh Hunt's somewhat ponderous *The Descent of Liberty. A Mask*, published in 1816. In *The Transcendental Masque: An Essay on Milton's* Comus (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1971), Angus Fletcher emphasizes Milton's "characteristic ambivalence toward the mystification of political authority," a mystification in which the Jonsonian masque specialized: "There is much less sense of regal or princely power in *Comus* than in any masque of comparable stature, and this is the result of a nascent Miltonic libertarianism, which will not permit the act, the process, the dramaturgy of masking to assimilate all individual differences into the oneness of the princely person" (18).

Unbound,[6] the masque in Act IV does not appropriate in order to invert a primarily aristocratic genre by casting it in "the low style" and thus—in the words of Stuart Curran—"accommodating [Shelley's] vision to the mass audience he wanted to reach."[7] As Shelley realized, *Prometheus Unbound* could never have the popular appeal of the propagandistic "Song to the Men of England" or *The Mask of Anarchy*;[8] and he wrote to Leigh Hunt not long after the drama's completion that it "will not sell—it is written only for the elect."[9] Although Shelley's "elect" is presumably superior in terms of intellect, aesthetics, and spiritual depth rather than economic and social privilege, his use of the masque parallels that of Jonson and other Renaissance court poets in that both Shelley and his precursors present "beautiful idealisms" to an elite audience, who in turn *become*, if only temporarily, the ideal beings they observe and intermingle with in the masque (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, p. 135).[10] However, neither Jonson nor Shelley simply caters to or flatters his readers / audience, but compels them to strive for the "moral excellence" which Shelley emphasizes in his Preface to the play and which Jonson's allegorical figures represent. Stuart Curran's remark that Shelley hoped to "reach" a wide audience with *The Mask of Anarchy* is suggestive, for in creating the cosmic masque of *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley instead forces his *reader* to reach upwards to discern its "awakening tones" (IV. 190). Unlike the closed circle for whom Jonson wrote his masques, Shelley's notion of an "elect" is a more fluid one. By empathically entering the "Chorus Hymeneal" in Act IV,[11] the responsive reader, having "lived into" the first three acts as well, can join a unique aristocracy—of the regenerated human consciousness and imagination—and thus half-create the

6. Shelley finished *The Mask of Anarchy* during September 1819 and wrote Act IV that same autumn.

7. The first phrase is Shelley's, from *The Mask of Anarchy* (line 27), and the latter two belong to Stuart Curran, *Shelley's Annus Mirabilis: The Maturing of an Epic Vision* (San Marino, Ca.: Huntington Library, 1975), 186. Curran discusses *The Mask* in relation to Shelley's knowledge of the masque tradition and to Hunt's *The Descent of Liberty. A Mask*, but his commentary does not shed much light on the masque elements in *Prometheus Unbound*. While he accurately points out that Shelley transformed rather than merely mimicked inherited ideas of the masque, Curran's labelling of Act IV's predecessors in this genre as "pompous" and "frivolous" ignores the serious didactic thrust and metaphysical implications of the Jonsonian courtly masque, which, like Shelley's cosmic masque, often takes place "on a sublimely ritualistic plane" (112). See Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne, and Their Contemporaries* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1983), especially 55–74, for a lucid account of the Jonsonian masque's mythmaking—and myth-preserving—role in the Stuart court, where poet and king, respectively, create and embody the "more removed mysteries" at the heart of the masque's spectacle (56). Earl R. Wasserman and Harold Bloom note without fully exploring Act IV's masque, though Wasserman does cite *The Masque of Beauty* by Jonson, "one of Shelley's favorite authors," in connection with the Renaissance notion of the cosmic dance (363). See Curran, 186–92; Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1969; rpt. from New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1959), 139; and Wasserman, *Shelley: A Critical Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1971), 363, 373.

8. Curran contends that Shelley "was quite incapable of deserting his twenty auditors, his 'fit audience, though few,' even where he attempted to enlarge his appeal," as in *The Mask of Anarchy*, never published in Shelley's lifetime (186).

9. This letter of May 1820 can be found in vol. 2, p. 200 of *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964). Marlon B. Ross's illuminating essay on "The Apprehending Reader in *Prometheus Unbound*" addresses the question of Shelley's elite audience and traces the way the play's dream elements and linguistic strategies help teach the reader how to "image the poem and envision the dream" (133).

10. See Orgel's Introduction to his edition of *Ben Jonson: The Complete Masques* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1969): "Every masque concluded by merging spectator with masquer, in effect transforming the courtly audience into the idealized world of the poet's vision" (2).

11. P.B. Shelley, "To a Sky-Lark," line 66.

ecstatic nuptial masque which celebrates the marriage of Prometheus and Asia, heaven and earth, man and nature, and, implicitly, reader and text. The interpenetrating form of the masque, with its explosive lyrics, whirling dances, and awesome spectacle, unites reader and text in order to allow them, in effect, to create each other. Shelley has not, in the final act of *Prometheus Unbound*, actually subverted or ironized an aristocratic genre, but has used it to help create ideal readers, ones who must themselves grapple with and "complete" a difficult visionary poem as they become those ideal readers, part of the aristocracy of the imagination.[12]

THROUGHOUT *PROMETHEUS UNBOUND* Shelley incorporates pageantry and masque-like episodes, though never so masterfully as in Act IV. In Act I, for example, the encounter between Prometheus and the Furies serves as the antimasque—what Jonson calls "a foil or false masque"[13]—to the true masque of the prophetic "gentle guides and guardians . . . / Of Heaven-oppressed mortality" which the Earth, acting as the "presenter" of the traditional masque, offers to the despairing Titan (I. 680-81). Both *The Mask of Anarchy* and the 1822 fragment *Charles the First* include Shelleyan versions of the antimasque; and, as Curran has ably demonstrated, the poet brilliantly and subversively manipulates this convention in the former poem.[14] Stephen Orgel's remarks on Jonson's development of the antimasque illuminate Shelley's understanding and unique harnessing of its dramatic power in *Prometheus Unbound*'s first act. Examining Jonson's *The Masque of Queens*,[15] a work which has much in common with Shelley's Act I antimasque and masque, Orgel writes:

12. The "quaint masque" of *Charles the First* (I. i. 2) receives much more ambivalent treatment from Shelley than does the pageantry which concludes *Prometheus Unbound;* in the later fragment, Shelley employs the device of audience participation (the masque is filtered through the perceptions of its spectators, some censorious and some enchanted) in order to question, if not completely undermine (as in *The Mask of Anarchy*) this traditionally royalist genre. See *Charles the First* in vol. 4, pp. 141–65 of *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck, 10 vols. (London: Ernest Benn, 1926–1930). The masques included in *Charles the First* and *The Mask of Anarchy* have much more in common with the inexorable march of *The Triumph of Life* than with the fluidly weaving, encircling dances and climactic vision of "Ten thousand orbs involving and involved" that distinguish the finale of *Prometheus Unbound* (IV. 241). For Shelley, it is the circle and not the line that is "magic," and when he wishes to problematize the genre that serves him so well as the finale of his lyrical drama, he links the masque with the relentlessly linear movements of the martial Triumph, which, in *The Mask of Anarchy* and *The Triumph of Life*, tramples those who fall in its path. See "To Jane. The Recollection," where Shelley enlarges on the notion of a "magic circle" (line 44) that expands and lovingly embraces rather than circumscribes and excludes in the way that class-bound social and political "circles" generally do.

13. *The Masque of Queens* in *Ben Jonson: The Complete Masques*, 122.

14. Curran tends to underestimate the function of the antimasque in Renaissance court drama, calling it "a parody of the sublime seriousness of the main masque" (190); while Shelley's Youth in *Charles the First* erroneously believes that it merely "serves as discords do / In sweetest music" (I. i. 175–76). Actually, the main masque overthrows and, in effect, parodies its "foil." When Curran, in his discussion of *The Mask of Anarchy*, cites with approval Schlegel's notion of the Jonsonian antimasque as an "antidote" to the cloying "ideal flatteries" of the main masque and asserts that "if a seventeenth-century antimasque can be seen as a temporary, limited violation of the decorum established by the masque, in the nineteenth century all is reversed" (190–91), he does not acknowledge that the Shelley who composed the Act I antimasque and masque and the Act IV pageantry in *Prometheus Unbound* preserved the Jonsonian conception of the antimasque as "only incidentally involved with the traditional grotesquerie of the 'antic masque.' . . . Its falseness explains the truth of the revels, for through the antimasque we comprehend in what way the masque's ideal world is real" (Orgel, Introduction to *Ben Jonson: The Complete Masques*, 13). See, for example, Jonson's *The Masque of Queens* and *The Golden Age Restored* in *The Complete Masques*.

15. The Romantic painter Henry Fuseli, whom Shelley greatly admired, made an etching based on this Jonsonian masque. We can only speculate as to whether Shelley ever saw this etching, entitled "The Witch and the Mandrake" (c. 1812–13).

[Jonson's] antimasque figures are "hags or witches, sustaining the persons of Ignorance, Suspicion, Credulity, etc., the opposites to good Fame"—they are devised, that is, as the abstract antitheses of the virtues represented by the queens of the main masque. So conceived, the worlds of antimasque and revels are mutually exclusive, and no confrontation between them is possible. The moral victory, the triumph of virtue, is therefore achieved not through drama, the ordinary means of the poet and playwright, but through Inigo Jones's machinery, which Jonson employs to make a symbolic statement about the world of his masque.

Orgel then cites Jonson's own description of how Jones's spectacular machinery instantly transformed "the whole face of the scene," replacing the hags' infernal abode with "a glorious and magnificent building figuring the House of Fame." Orgel continues:

In such a structure as this, the transition from antimasque to masque is a metamorphosis . . . . Symbolically the total disappearance of the hags and their hell demonstrates a basic assumption of the universe Jonson has created: the world of evil is not real. It exists at all only in relation to the world of ideals, which are the norms of the masque's universe.[16]

Although Shelley's "hags," the Furies who "present" to Prometheus a nightmare vision of evil's bloody triumph, represent Prometheus' own despair rather than Jonsonian abstract vices, the transition from antimasque to masque in Shelley's play is, as in Jonson's piece, a metamorphosis that exposes evil's essential unreality.[17] Neither poet treats the antimasque, with its "execrable shapes," demonic emblems, and tormenting words, as impotent illusion, but as a dynamic world of insidious suggestion that must be vigorously resisted, decisively destroyed (I. 449).[18] In Shelley's "mental theater," Prometheus' pity for those who remain ignorant of the final Fury's cruel but edifying portrait of the Heaven-enslaved replaces an ingenious stage machine to abolish the Fury herself. Though his mind remains "woe-illumed," Prometheus can now receive the comforting masque of prophetic spirits whose lessons correct, if not totally eradicate (as in Jonson), the grotesque pageantry of the antimasque (I. 637).

Besides exemplifying how Shelley revises without rejecting the Jonsonian antimasque / masque format, the antithetical pageants in Act I suggest by introducing what I will call "the internalized masque" the best way to approach the much more elaborate masque of Act IV. Moreover, this episode allows Panthea and Ione to resume and expand the roles of rather timid chorus figures which they had initiated at the appearance of the Phantasm of Jupiter. Lesser deities than Prometheus and their sister Asia, these two Oceanides correspond to the limited human perceptions and act as surrogate readers, allowing us to journey with them toward the "far goal of Time" in Act IV, where we, along with

16. See Orgel's Introduction to *Ben Jonson: The Complete Masques*, 8–9.

17. When the most terrible and tenacious Fury declares "Behold an emblem" after Panthea "reads" the prophecy of Christ's crucifixion and even more violent aftermath inscribed on the tortured Prometheus, she explicitly takes on the role of the pageant's "presenter" who explains pictorial images to the audience (I. 594). See Bruce R. Smith's "Pageants into Play" in *Pageantry in the Shakespearian Theater*, ed. David M. Bergeron, 225–45 for a discussion of the presenter's function in several of Shakespeare's plays.

18. As Orgel points out, "the nature of the antimasque and its relation to the main masque are continually changing throughout Jonson's career"; and in many masques written after the 1609 *Masque of Queens*, the antimasque became not "a simple antithesis to the world of the revels, but essentially . . . another aspect of it, a world that can therefore ultimately be accommodated to and even included in the ideals of the main masque" (Introduction, *Ben Jonson: The Complete Masques*, 29,13). However, except for what Francis Thompson calls the "Bacchic reel and rout and revelry of beauty," which corresponds to the (redeemed and redirected) boisterous

the nymphs, will play central roles (III. iii. 174).[19] Here in the first act, however, Ione and Panthea remain marginal figures, full of trepidation and somewhat unwilling to witness the drama unfolding before them. Panthea, the braver of the two, does play a crucial part in the Furies' antimasque when she "reads" Christianity's tragic history inscribed on the suffering Titan. Briefly but compassionately, she dares to "observe how the fiends torture" the Titan and thereby encourages the reader to behold and empathize with Prometheus as well (I. 582). For after the disappearance of all but one Fury, Prometheus has suddenly absorbed the pageant of pain into himself. In an astonishing passage, he becomes both the crucified Christ and the parade of human misery that, Shelley believed, was spawned by the doctrines of the Christian church. Without uniting with the oppressive powers that create "fierce confusion," Prometheus can internalize and gain new endurance from the "woeful sight[s]" which the Furies present to him (I. 652, 584).[20] In a much more radical way than the courtly audiences of the seventeenth century, Prometheus breaks into the world of the pageant and embodies the ideal reader / spectator who willingly becomes an author / actor when he encounters the dynamic, involving form of the masque.

Prometheus' assimilation of the antimasque not only reinforces his refusal to "disdain" his oppressor but also moves him, through his pity for Christ and His "suffering fellow men," closer to the ideal of sympathetic love which will allow the Titan to reunite with Asia and to spark the universal regeneration celebrated in Act IV (I. 630). As the first act closes, Prometheus interacts with and gains solace from the masque of "subtle and fair spirits" summoned by the Earth (I. 658). His seemingly dismissive comment, "How fair these air-born shapes! and yet I feel / Most vain all hope but love" suggests instead that he has directly experienced rather than passively observed their prophetic masque, with its message of Love's—and Prometheus'—ultimate triumph, and is now impatient to return to Asia's "transforming presence" (I. 806–07, 832).

Although the Act I pageantry, with Prometheus at center stage, exemplifies the crucial interplay between masque and audience, Prometheus' absence from the Act IV masque is an appropriate, even necessary feature of what Alan Richardson calls "the ultimate classless society of interrelated minds" inaugurated in the play's finale (*A Mental Theater*, 142). In part because of the masque's traditional associations with royalist mythmaking, Prometheus cannot participate in the final celebratory masque.[21] Shelley's retention of several key features

energy of, for example, the antimasque satyrs in *The Masque of Oberon*, Shelley's version of the antimasque / masque dynamic in *Prometheus Unbound* corresponds most closely to that of *The Masque of Queens*. Thompson's comment can be found in *Shelley's* Prometheus Unbound: *A Variorum Edition*, ed. Lawrence John Zillman (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1959), 568.

19. Since his boyhood at Field Place, where his four younger sisters listened raptly as Shelley recited poetry that he learned at day school or spun his own fantastic tales, the poet often envisioned his ideal audience as a feminine one.

20. Earlier in the "scene," Prometheus had sharply dissociated himself from the vicious Furies and, implicitly, from their malevolent master, Jupiter: "Pain is my element as hate is thine. . . . I weigh not what ye do, but what ye suffer / Being evil" (I. 477, 480–81).

21. As Frederick Burwick states in his discussion of Prometheus as language-giver and of the transformation of language in Act IV, "Prometheus *must* disappear. . . . The awful antagonist has been overthrown; the protagonist must exit as well, for every liberator threatens to succeed as dictator" (157). See "The Language of Causality in *Prometheus Unbound*," *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 31 (1982), 136–58.

of the Jonsonian courtly masque does not extend to including and exalting a vainglorious monarch. With its royal "centerpiece" missing, Shelley's pulsating, ecstatic pageant invites the reader to join in and imaginatively conduct the revelry, if not as an absolute monarch, then as a co-creator, who, paradoxically, enters a "great Republic" (IV. 533) when he or she becomes one of the "elect" whose cleansed consciousness, in the words of "Mont Blanc," holds "an unremitting interchange" (line 39) with the poet's vision of an absolutely unified cosmos. When we cease to behold "Reality's dark dream," as embodied by the tormented earth and her "pining sons" in Act I (152-86) and chronicled by the Spirit of the Earth in Act III (iv. 33-50), we in effect perform the divine fiat of Panthea's comet-enthroned God who abolishes the primordial "earth-convulsing behemoth" by simply crying "Be not!" (IV. 310, 318). The reader, after imaginatively conjuring and annihilating the "melancholy ruins / Of cancelled cycles" with their deadly "monarch beasts," emblematic of political oppression or any "mind-forg'd manacles," can, along with Panthea, usher in the whirling dance of the Moon and the Earth, whose "animation of delight" and antiphonal songs comprise the nuptial masque which follows and supersedes the gruesome antimasque, Panthea's dark vision of the earth's tragic history (IV. 288–89, 311, 322).

The "boundless, overflowing bursting gladness" that characterizes the epithalamion which the Earth and Moon sing to each other and to mankind prevails throughout most of Act IV, especially in the lyrical exchanges between the various liberated and commingling spirits (IV. 320). Within the overarching structure of the masque, some of Shelley's most exuberant lyrics explode in a "Storm of delight . . . [a] panic of glee" (IV. 44). While his friend Leigh Hunt once referred to the "lawless form" of the Renaissance masque,[22] Shelley saw in the masque a means of ruling "with Dædal harmony a throng / Of thoughts and forms," which, if not "senseless and shapeless," might have been merely "music wild" without the controlling and harmonizing forces of the traditional masque's ritual dances, rhythmic choruses, mediating presenters, and "final moral commentator," Demogorgon (IV. 416-17, 252).[23] The dialectical relationship between lyricism and the masque in Act IV roughly corresponds to that of Blake's Prolific and Devourer, with the masque's delimiting and shaping principles playing disciplined Devourer to the Prolific's lyrical energy. "The Prolific," as Blake writes, "would cease to be Prolific unless the Devourer as a sea received the excess of his delights."[24]

Moreover, the various lyrics in Act IV work in tandem with the masque form to implicate the reader in the "action." Anne Williams' brave and often convincing attempt to answer the question "What is the lyric?" illuminates the way lyricism in *Prometheus Unbound*, particularly in its finale, can compel the reader

22. See Hunt's prefatory essay, "Some Account of the Origin and Nature of Masks" in *The Descent of Liberty. A Mask* (London: Gale and Fenner, 1816), l.

23. The last phrase is Wasserman's, 373.

24. See Plate 16, p. 39 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* in *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David Erdman, with commentary by Harold Bloom (New York: Doubleday, 1970).

to commune with, or, as Keats would put it, to "greet" the text:[25]

> [I]f the drama is life observed, the lyric is life shared; that is, the lyric may be distinguished from other modes by the unique angle of vision it permits its audience—from the inside rather than the outside of its characters. The lyric perspective is akin to the one from which we all experience "reality"; the peculiarity of the lyric poem is that it allows us to assume the perspective of another individual consciousness. . . . Professor Hamburger is correct in associating the lyric's air of reality with its characteristic use of the first person. A reader does, arguably, identify more closely with such a speaker; it is as if the "I" were an empty space in the world of the text which the reader irresistibly enters. But when that empathy is established, the speaker's language temporarily becomes our language, his experience ours.[26]

Shelley's lyrical drama allows us both to "observe" and to "share" the life of its speakers and singers, as, for example, the dirge of the "past Hours weak and grey" demonstrates (IV. 31). The prevalence of the collective first person and the almost hypnotic marching rhythm in the first two tercets can "irresistibly" draw the reader into the "empty space" of the text, but only if he or she actively reaches out, strives to coalesce with the chanting Spectres:

> Here, oh, here!
> We bear the bier
> Of the Father of many a cancelled year!
> Spectres we
> Of the dead Hours be,
> We bear Time to his tomb in eternity.
> (IV. 9-14)

When the next three stanzas shift to the imperative mood, this reader suddenly feels as though the mourners, now distinct from her own being, are commanding her to strew "Hair, not yew!," to "Be the faded flowers / Of Death's bare bowers," and to "Haste, oh haste!" (IV. 16,18-19, 21). Finally, as the dirge softens into a lullaby and the Spectres resume the first person, we can again converge with the singers to fade from the masque and make room for "the children of a diviner day" (IV. 27). These include Panthea and Ione, whom we will, in turn, similarly unite with and receive commands from, this time of a more festive nature, if we faithfully exercise the sympathetic imagination. When we plunge into the act's most sublime "stream of sound," the exultant duet and dance of the Earth and the Moon, we experience the play's climactic fusion of the masque and the lyric as they work together—with our cooperation—to break down any residual barriers between ourselves and a text that imaginatively reunites a fragmented universe (IV. 505).

25. Keats's notion of "a greeting of the Spirit" beautifully conveys the way I believe Shelley hoped his readers would lovingly—and vigorously—meet his unique version of the masque: "Probably every mental pursuit takes its reality and worth from the ardour of the pursuer. . . . Things semireal such as Love, the Clouds &c . . . require a greeting of the Spirit to make them wholly exist ." See Keats's 13 March 1818 letter to Benjamin Bailey in vol. 1, pp. 242–43 of *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1958).

26. See Williams' excellent study, *The Prophetic Strain: The Greater Lyric in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984), 14–15. For a fruitful exploration of the interplay between dramatic and the lyrical elements in Romantic poetry, see Irene H. Chayes, "Rhetoric as Drama: An Approach to the Romantic Ode," *PMLA*, 79 (1964), 67–79.

Demogorgon's remain the only "strong words" we cannot "put on," as Yeats expresses it in "Leda and the Swan," but only obey; because of his essential impenetrability, we can never, despite his final generous and rousing declarations, affiliate ourselves with, or even discern, an "I" which may hover behind his powerful voice (IV. 553). While clothed in meter and rhyme, his impersonal edicts preclude the intimate relationship between speaker and reader which the lyric usually creates. Yet it is appropriate that the play conclude with what Jerrold E. Hogle calls Demogorgon's "coda of warning." [27] Acting as the masque's moral commentator and admonisher (analogous to, for example, Mercury in Jonson's *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*), Demogorgon implicitly reminds us that our participation in the celebratory masque comprises not an end in itself but rather an *initiation* into what I've termed an aristocracy of the imagination. As Marlon B. Ross emphasizes, "the mode of Shelley's reform . . . is preparatory": the play teaches us to inhabit a world of idealisms and then prepares us—by introducing such "realistic note[s]" as Demogorgon's final speech—to re-enter and perhaps, ultimately, to reform the actual ("Shelley's Wayward Dream-Poem," 130).[28]

As opposed to the unbridgeable gap that exists between ourselves and Demogorgon, our identification with and reliance on Panthea and, to a lesser extent, her sister Ione become crucial factors when we enter what Bloom calls the "uncovered universe" of Act IV. [29] With the retirement of Prometheus and Asia to their "destined Cave," the more "human" deities, the inquisitive and enthusiastic Oceanides, appropriately oversee how the human and natural realms joyously enact the immortal couple's reunion (III. iii. 175). As Bloom rightly points out, Panthea and Ione's "function is to be audience for a masque of interlocked song and rushing vision"; but his assertion that "they do not interpret, but they describe for us every vision that does not join in the song"[30] underestimates the Oceanides' varied and vital roles as "presenters"[31] of the masque which in turn immerses them in "Love's sweet rain" (IV. 179). When Panthea declares that the infant Spirit of the Earth's "tyrant-quelling myrtle . . . / Heaven and Earth

27. *Shelley's Process: Radical Transference and Development of His Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988), 198 .

28. Although she does not touch on Demogorgon's almost anti-lyrical final speech, Tilottama Rajan examines how in such Romantic texts as *Prometheus Unbound*, "the deconstruction of the lyric moment through its insertion into a narrative or dramatic context actualizes as well as dismantles it." See "Romanticism and the Death of Lyric Consciousness" in *Lyric Poetry: Beyond the New Criticism*, ed. Chaviva Hosek and Patricia Parker (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985), 194–207; quotation from p. 206. Rajan convincingly argues that Shelley's hybrid "lyrical drama" resists the "will to transcendental privacy" that the lyric consciousness may entail through "making the lyric interdiscursive, by intertextualizing it, narrating, or dramatizing it" (206). She points out that the sympathetic, imaginative reader of "the almost entirely lyrical" Act IV may be tempted to remain hermetically sealed within its world of song and celebration, within what I would call its involving and involved masque. "But," she continues, " if we wish to bring [Act IV's] propositional paeans to life by dramatizing them in the theatre of our own experience, we also make them problematical. That the play seeks this kind of animation, which requires it to pass through the external detour of an audience other than Shelley himself, is evident from the fact that it is subtitled a lyrical drama and not a dramatic lyric. Shelley saw its discourse as revolutionary, and therefore set it in the space of historical and personal difference" (206).

29. See Bloom's introduction to *The Selected Poetry and Prose of Shelley* (New York: Signet, 1966), xxi .

30. See *Shelley's Mythmaking*, 139.

31. The term "presenter" again refers to the intermediary between image and audience in the traditional masque (see note 17). The presenter was an integral part of the masque, as, I believe, are Shelley's Oceanides.

united now," she is not only presenting, or unveiling, the "vision . . . of strange radiance" but interpreting it as well, as her Renaissance counterpart would do (IV. 272–73, 202). Although they do not displace or dominate the reader, either in this act or earlier in the work, the Oceanides do constantly mediate between reader and text, often acting as our ears and eyes, and they thus facilitate our entry into the Act IV masque itself. Like Prometheus in Act I, Panthea and Ione now guide us toward an ideal response to the masque form. Panthea's wonderful receptivity to the first episode, the dance of the Spirits of the human mind and the regenerated Hours, allows her to experience a kind of baptism in the "ocean of splendour and harmony" which flows over her (IV. 134):

IONE
Yet feel you no delight
From the past sweetness?

PANTHEA
As the bare green hill
When some soft cloud vanishes into rain
Laughs with a thousand drops of sunny water
To the unpavilioned sky!
(IV. 180-85)

Panthea's remarkable response to the masque's final episode, the joyous epithalamion of the Earth and Moon, reveals her absolute immersion in the song and spectacle whose words and images she only intuitively understands: "I rise as from a bath of sparkling water, / A bath of azure light, among dark rocks, / Out of the stream of sound" (IV. 503–05). The somewhat skeptical Ione casts herself—and her sister—in a more passive role when she finds herself in the silent aftermath of the nuptial masque: "Ah me, sweet sister, / The stream of sound has ebbed away from us / And you pretend to rise out of its wave"; yet her gentle criticism of Panthea inadvertently identifies the most essential quality of the ideal masquer: the ability to "pretend," actively to take part in and to *realize* (in its most fundamental sense) the "beautiful idealisms" presented in the sublime pageantry (IV. 505-07).

Ione, too, opens herself to the masque when she encounters the "Æolian modulations" which accompany its most amazing spectacle, the paired visions of the infant-bearing Earth and Moon (IV. 188). Her description of the "clear, silver, icy, keen, awakening tones / Which pierce the sense, and live within the soul" recalls and recuperates the "moon-freezing chrystals" which "pierce" the bound Prometheus in Act I and anticipates the Moon's "chrystal accents" that lovingly "pierce / The caverns of [the Earth's] deep Universe" (IV. 190-91; I. 31; IV. 499-500). Demonstrating and echoing Ione's inspired account of "the deep music of the rolling world," the highly-charged duet of the Earth and Moon celebrates another interpenetrating and transforming power—that of love (IV. 186). According to Shelley's famous remarks on the connection between the imagination and morals in *A Defence of Poetry,* both poetry and love enable us

to transcend "the dull vapours of the little world of self" by effecting "a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own." "Poetry enlarges the circumference of the imagination," Shelley continues, "by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight, which have the power of attracting and assimilating to their own nature all other thoughts, and which form new intervals and interstices whose void forever craves fresh food" (pp. 497, 487, 488). Although Shelley emphatically asserts in his Preface to *Prometheus Unbound* that "didactic poetry is my abhorrence," his protagonists and his readers must learn to "enlarge" and "replenish" the sympathetic imagination in order to create, with the poet, a world in which men have become "Man, one harmonious Soul of many a soul" (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, p. 135; IV. 400). By actively "identifying ourselves with the beautiful which exists" in the play's rhapsodic finale, we not only co-create the fictional world of the text, but we also allow it, in Ione's words, to "live within the soul."

The masque which concludes Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* upholds an ideal of absolute equality rather than absolute monarchy, and it relies on a cosmic cast, the poet's extraordinary lyrical gift, and the reader's sympathetic imagination rather than on courtly revellers, Inigo Jones's sumptuous sets, and the stately decorum of Jonson's verse to achieve its effects. Yet it resembles its Jonsonian predecessors in the genre more closely than some of Shelley's most perceptive readers have acknowledged. The courtly masque as perfected by Jonson and recreated by Shelley presents instructive visions of social and spiritual harmony which it urges its elite audience to embody and disseminate by involving them directly in the "renovated world" that supplants the dissonant world of the antimasque.[32] Coupled with an array of lyrics which invite the reader to merge with various voices, various consciousnesses, the sublime pageantry of Shelley's fourth act enjoins us to co-create and communicate its "bright Visions" of human unity and cosmic harmony (IV. 514). As inspired masquers initiated into a uniquely egalitarian "elect," the aristocracy of the imagination, "we are blest, and bless," like the planetary gods invoked by Demogorgon, even when we exit the stage of Shelley's beatific lyrical drama (IV. 533).

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32. *A Defence of Poetry*, 497.

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