DANTE'S INFLUENCE ON SHELLEY'S *PROMETHEUS UNBOUND*

by

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This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Mary Faraci, Department of English, and has been approved by the members of her supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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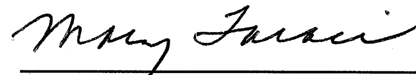

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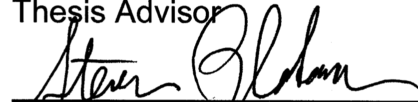

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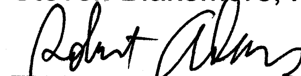

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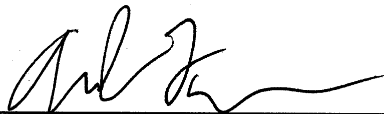

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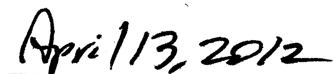

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ABSTRACT

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Although the critic C. S. Lewis observes there is an allusive relationship between the final cantos of Dante's *Purgatory* and the third act of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound,* no detailed analysis of Dante's language in *Purgatory* XXX and XXXI as a specific influence on Shelley's construction of imaginary realms in Acts II and III of the lyrical drama *Prometheus Unbound* exists. In this study, I will show how Shelley borrows from Dante's language in *Purgatory* XXX and XXXI, especially Dante's preoccupation with the cold as a form of punishment, to create the feeling of oppression and then liberation, in Acts II and III, respectively, of *Prometheus Unbound* to aid Shelley in his construction of imaginary realms. Shelley also uses Dantean allusions from *Paradise*, specifically Dante's descriptions of light and music, to help him create a feeling of joy and liberation as he creates a paradise on earth in Act IV of *Prometheus Unbound.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* was an important influence on Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound.* The influence is vouched for in Shelley's letters. On 7 December 1817, Shelley wrote to his London publisher and bookseller, Charles Ollier, "Pray be so good as to send me if possible by return Coach *The Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* of Dante in English and Italian by Carey and what other books may be ready" (Shelley, "Letters," 585). Unable to acquire the volumes, Shelley wrote again on 23 December to another bookseller, Lackington, to send "Carey's[1] Dante, the *Paradiso* and *Purgatorio*. I have the *Inferno*" (Shelley, "Letters," 586). A letter dated 2 January 1818 regarding his debts to Lackington confirms that Shelley received the volumes (Reiman 5:397). When he read *The Divine Comedy*, Shelley came to regard *Purgatory* as a superior poem to the *Inferno*, and he lauded *Paradise* as Dante's greatest achievement (Ellis 4). *Purgatory* and *Paradise* influenced Shelley's lyrical drama *Prometheus Unbound*, for his letters show that during the period of its composition, March 1818-December 1819, he simultaneously read the volumes (Ellis 3).

What Shelley most admired about Dante's *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* was Dante's use of language. In his treatise, "A Defense of Poetry," Shelley instinct

[1] Henry Francis Cary. Cary translated Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the *Inferno* in 1805, and *Purgatory* and *Paradise* in 1815. In this study, I will draw from both Carey's translation, which Shelley used, as well as Marc Musa's contemporary translation, which I prefer for its clarity.

with spirit; each is as a spark, a burning atom of inextinguishable thought; and many yet lie covered in the ashes of their birth, and pregnant with the lightning which has yet found no conductor" (Shelley, "A Defense," 528). Shelley found in Dante a precursor of extraordinary vividness. This study of Dantean allusion in *Prometheus Unbound* will consider the similarities between the language of *Purgatory* and *Paradise* and Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* in their construction of imaginary realms.

Heretofore, criticism of Dante Alighieri and Percy Bysshe Shelley has largely ignored the way Shelley draws from Dante's language. Only C. S. Lewis, in the first major study of the influence of Dante's *Purgatory* and *Paradise* on Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* in his 1939 essay "Shelley, Dryden, and Mr. Eliot," argues the structure of Dante's *Purgatory* influenced the third act of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*: "The third act is the least successful…It would be ridiculous at this point in achievement, to compare this weak act in Shelley's play with the triumphant conclusion of the *Purgatorio;* but structurally it corresponds to the position of the earthly paradise between purgatory and heaven" (Lewis 265-266). The "earthly paradise between purgatory and heaven" to which Lewis refers in his essay is set at the top of Mount Purgatory, and is found in the last six cantos of *Purgatory*, XXVIII through XXXIII. This study will take up C. S. Lewis's claim, which he does not explain or support further, that there is a correspondence between the final cantos of *Purgatory* and Act III of *Prometheus Unbound.* Additionally, C. S. Lewis famously calls Act IV of *Prometheus Unbound* "an intoxication, a riot…sustained on the note of ecstasy

such as no other English poet, perhaps no other poet has given us" (Lewis 266). If Shelley's paradise achieves *ekstasis*, that is if it achieves sublimity, Lewis for the same reason deems it inferior to Dante's because "it has not and cannot have the solemnity and overwhelming realism of *Paradiso*" (Lewis 266). Contrary to Lewis's observation, which I will later return to, Shelley understood well the "realism" of *Paradise* and borrows from its language to achieve a paradise, much like Dante's, that lies somewhere between the ineffable and the effable.

After C. S. Lewis's essay, studies of Dante's influence on Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* turned their attention from language and narrative to how Shelley's political and religious perspective differs from Dante's. In his 1983 book length study, *Dante and English Poetry: Shelley to T.S. Eliot,* Steve Ellis devotes a chapter on the influence of Dante's *Paradise* on Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*. Ellis insists "the 'important debt' [Shelley] owes to Dante will often involve us in discussion of his political, religious and ethical thought" (Ellis 1), instead of language, or "the production of poetry similar to Dante's own, or the imitation of specific turns of phrase or expressions" (Ellis 1). Ellis argues that Shelley reads the *Divine Comedy* in a way that was not consistent with Dante's religious intentions. Ellis states, "Rather than presenting Dante's belief, Shelley endows him with his own; and the powerful influence the *Commedia* has on him manifests itself in a poetry whose intention and philosophy is markedly different" (Ellis 3). Shelley's manner of reading Dante, Ellis further argues, would later provide a model for modernist writers: "[Shelley's] ability to negotiate [Dante's intention] is typical of several modern writers ignoring of Dante's philosophy,

religion, and poetic style in the interest of their own…interpretations of him" (Ellis 3).

In 1991, Alan Weinberg's full-length study, *Shelley's Italian Experience,* reassesses Ellis's source study. Weinberg argues that Ellis was wrong to suggest that Shelley "misread" Dante: "[Shelley] is reconstructing Dante's myth, not misreading it" (Weinberg 131). Weinberg analyzes carefully all four Acts of *Prometheus Unbound* and emphasizes the differences between the two works in order to show that Shelley appropriates Dante's Christian narrative of redemption for secular purposes. Weinberg also emphasizes the differences between the two texts to suggest that travel, not just reading Dante, influenced *Prometheus Unbound.* Weinberg searches for the "Italian origins, sources and precedents" (Weinberg 101) that give rise to the lyrical drama during the first two years of Shelley's four-year stay in Italy, from 1818 until his death there in 1822 (Weinberg 102).

Critical attention to Dante's influence on *Prometheus Unbound in* the 1990's and 2000's reassessed the criticism that focused on differences between Shelley and Dante as being underpinned by authorial anxiety. In 1994, in *The Circle of Our Vision: Dante's Presence in English Romantic Poetry,* Ralph Pite reassesses existing studies of Shelley's *Triumph of Life*, but his comments are equally applicable to Ellis's and Weinberg's studies of *Prometheus Unbound* surveyed above. Pite states, "These readings are facilitated by the assumption that the *Commedia* is a distinctively authoritative text which Shelley feels able (and/or compelled) to displace" (Pite 165). Ellis's and Weinberg's studies

arguments about Shelley's appropriation of Dante's salvation narrative for secular purposes are underpinned by the idea of a writer working out his place in the tradition and displacing his predecessor. Pite argues that "Shelley… does not try to…displace one writer with another; he uses eclecticism as a means of placing himself within a tradition of writers" (Pite 165). Pite also refutes such readings by pointing out that Dante's status as a canonical writer was not assured in Shelley's day: "[An authoritative] status for Dante's work is neither unequivocally present in the Romantic period nor the focus of Shelley's work" (Pite 165).

In *Dante and the Romantics,* the most recent study of Dante's influence on Shelley published in 2004, Antonella Braida does not examine *Prometheus Unbound*, but, as in Pite's study, Braida argues that previous studies of "Shelley's use of the *Divine Comedy* have emphasized his divergence from Dante's theology of salvation" (Braida 125) because "behind these attitudes perhaps lie attributions of influential anxiety" (Braida 126). Braida argues her study shows that "Shelley felt he was treading new ground with his use of Dante, and he was certainly free from the anxiety of influence" (Braida 126).

A part from C. S. Lewis, criticism of Dante's influence on Shelley has ignored the way Shelley uses Dantean allusion to construct imaginary realms in *Prometheus Unbound*. Although C. S. Lewis observes that there is an allusive relationship between the final cantos of Dante's *Purgatory* and the third act of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound,* no detailed analysis of Dante's language in *Purgatory* Cantos XXX and XXXI as a specific influence on Acts II and III of

Shelley's lyrical drama *Prometheus Unbound* exists. This study of Dantean allusion in *Prometheus Unbound* will consider the similarities between the language of *Purgatory* and *Paradise* and Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* in their construction of imaginary realms. For chapter one, I show through close readings of Dante's *Purgatory* XXX and XXXI that Shelley borrows Dante's language, especially Dante's preoccupation with the cold as a form of punishment, to aid Shelley in his construction of worlds as he attempts to create an atmosphere of oppression and then liberation, in Acts II and III, respectively, of *Prometheus Unbound.* I first explicate *Purgatory* cantos XXX and XXXI to demonstrate how Dante evokes an intense feeling of oppression through his vivid use of language. I show that the narrative is the process by which Dante, the courtly lover, must make a painful confession to Beatrice, the injured lady of courtly love, and admit his guilt. First, Beatrice withholds her love from Dante until he admits his guilt, and she is perceived as cold and oppressive by Dante, seen in the epic simile. Dante as poet sustains the feeling of oppression until Beatrice melts and grants Dante her pity, but only after a condition is met, namely, that Dante match his guilt with his grief. A feeling of liberation is then created by the change that comes over both Beatrice and Dante when he is redeemed through the regenerative power of Love. I then turn to *Prometheus Unbound* to show how Shelley borrows from the language and narrative of *Purgatory* XXX and XXXI for Acts II and III. Asia, Shelley's Aphrodite, like Beatrice, is first described in the sad exile of her frozen vale. However, once Prometheus stops hating, Asia is described as coming out of her frozen exile to offer her "transformative presence"

to the suffering Prometheus and to end oppression in the world. Once love comes out of her frozen exile, Asia is described as changing in appearance, and this also bears a striking similarity to Beatrice's physical transformation in *Purgatory* XXXI.

Shelley also borrowed from the entire canticle of *Paradise* as he composed Act IV of *Prometheus Unbound* (Ellis 3) to aid him in his world-building, so I have chosen it as the subject of chapter two. While I will show that all throughout *Paradise* Dante was self-consciousness over how to describe his ineffable vision of *Paradise,* Dante is never entirely reduced to silence, and Shelley finds in Dante's ineffable vision *Paradise* the language to aid him in conveying a feeling of joy, exuberance, and liberation as he creates a paradise on earth in Act IV of *Prometheus Unbound.* Dante was self-conscious about his use of the sun, moon and other "stars," as well as that most human way of conveying light, the smile, because he fails to *transhumanar,* or "go beyond human," and relies instead on descriptions from the natural world to convey a celestial one, his concrete words, phrases, and images paradoxically ground us as readers in his vision. C. S. Lewis, after all, speaks of the "overwhelming realism of the *Paradiso*" (Lewis 266). Contrary to Lewis who argues Shelley achieves sublimity but not realism in his paradise, Shelley grasps that Dante's descriptions of light create the feeling of light, warmth, happiness, and joy that readers would understand as what it would feel like to be in *Paradise.* Shelley thus finds in Dante's *Paradise* the language to help Shelley in the construction of an imaginary realm of a paradise on earth in Act IV of *Prometheus Unbound.*

My methodology in this study of Dante's influence on Shelley will draw from Christopher Ricks' recovery of the literary tradition of allusion as cooperative rather than competitive by considering the influence that Dante's language in *Purgatory* and *Paradise* had on Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound.* Previous critical attention to Dante's influence on *Prometheus Unbound* has focused on differences between Shelley and Dante, and thus is underpinned by theories of influence that argue that a writer must displace his predecessor (Braida 126; Pite 165). In the early twentieth-century theories of influence began to emerge that viewed the writer's relationship to his predecessors as fraught with anxiety. In T. S. Eliot's essay "Tradition and The Individual Talent" in his 1921 treatise on poetry, *The Sacred Wood*, Eliot writes that "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation, is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets…You cannot value him alone" (Eliot 49). Indeed, Eliot understands his own position as a poet in relation to a canon in which he configures Dante as the central poet of European literature. In 1970, Walter Jackson Bate argued in *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* that beginning in the seventeenth-century and continuing in the twentieth-century, "the burden of the past" created self-consciousness in writers about their achievements: an artist "may have his own anxieties and competitions in the face of previous achievement, and these may certainly cripple rather than inspire him in his own range and magnanimity as an artist" (Bate 7). Drawing from Bate, as well as Freud's essay "Family Romances" in which Freud argues that children secretly feel dissatisfaction with their parents and fantasize about replacing them

(Bloom 8), Harold Bloom puts forward a psychoanalytic theory of *The Anxiety of Influence* in his 1973 eponymous text. In Bloom's theory, a literary predecessor is configured as the Father, and a writer wishing to enter the tradition, as the son. Bloom argues a writer attempts to forge an identity in relation to Fathers of literature; however, in order for the writer to forge his own identity, he must kill the Father the prose.

In his 2002 book *Allusion to The Poet,* Christopher Ricks breaks sharply from previous theories of influence. Ricks argues that Jackson "inaugurated a critical tradition" that at the same time marginalized "a poetic one" (Ricks 5). Ricks further argues of Jackson's successor, Bloom, we have all been made "victims" of Bloom's "sub-Freudian patricidal scenario" (Ricks 6). Ricks restores precisely what Bloom discredited about influence: the emulation, cooperation, and pure "gratitude" of one writer for another in the act of borrowing and the interest in "allusion as a matter of the very words" themselves (Ricks 6). My methodology will be to use as a frame Ricks' turn towards allusion as a matter of cooperation, not competition, and allusion as a matter of an interest in *language* as I examine the similarities in Dante and Shelley's language that they use to construct imaginary realms.

At the close of this study, I return to the idea that language, rather than political and religious thought, is the basis of Shelley's interest in Dante. If existing studies have neglected the influence of Dante's language on Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, then we need only return to "The Defense of Poetry" to be reminded that Dante's "very words" which were to Shelley "as a spark" and

“pregnant with the lightning,” which, after being buried for an English audience for more than a century, finally found a “conductor” in Shelley.

II. CREATING OPPRESSIVE REALMS THROUGH LANGUAGE IN DANTE'S *PURGATORY* XXX-XXXI AND ACTS II AND III OF SHELLEY'S *PROMETHEUS UNBOUND*

In C. S. Lewis's 1939 essay "Shelley, Dryden, and Mr. Eliot," he argues the structure of Dante's *Purgatory* influenced the third act of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (Lewis 265-266). Taking up C. S. Lewis's claim that he does not further develop, I will establish that there is, indeed, a correspondence between the final cantos of *Purgatory* and Act III of *Prometheus Unbound.* In this chapter, I will first show how in *Purgatory* XXX and XXXI Dante creates an oppressive atmosphere through descriptions of Pilgrim, who is enslaved by lust and violates courtly love, and also through the Lady Beatrice, who treats Dante with coldness by upbraiding him, judging his conduct harshly, and withholding her pity from him. When Dante comes to acknowledge his sin of unfaithfulness to his Lady, a feeling of liberation is created. I then turn to Acts II and III of *Prometheus Unbound* to how Shelley alludes to Dante's language, especially Dante's preoccupation with the cold as a form of punishment, to help Shelley in his world-building as he attempts to create the feeling of oppression and then the promise of liberation, in Acts II and III, respectively, of *Prometheus Unbound.*

At the beginning of Canto XXX, the Pilgrim is still enslaved by lust. The

Canto begins with an angel singing, "*Veni, sponsa, de Libano"* (*Purgatory*; Canto XXX; line 10), a line from the Song of Songs. While the Song represents the sacred relationship between Christ and his bridegroom, the Church, it is also among the most sensual love poetry in the Bible. Dante perhaps hears only the eroticism implicit, for when Beatrice first appears, Dante's behaves not yet like the lover of the spiritualized courtly love of *dolce stil nuova*,[2] or the "sweet new style" of poetry, which he invokes earlier in *Purgatory*, but like a lover enthralled. Despite having invoked the "sweet new style" earlier (*Purgatory;* Canto 24; line 57), Dante is still in purgatory and has not yet been purged of his lust. When Dante compares Beatrice's face appears in the sky through the angel's flowers that form a veil around her face to the way the sun rises at dawn through a mist, he reveals his confusion between love and lust:

e la faccia del sol nascere ombrata,

sì che per temperanza di vapori

l'occhio la sostenea lunga fïata:

così dentro una nuvola di fiori

che da le mani angeliche saliva

e ricadeva in giù dentro e di fori,

---

[2] In his *An Essay on The Vita Nuova,* pre-eminent Dante scholar, Charles Singleton, explains that *la dolce stil nuova,* or "the sweet new style" arose out of the conflict between romantic love and Christian love, or *Caritas* (74). From its inception, the courtly love tradition of the troubadours was at odds with Christianity (Singleton 63), which holds that there is "no object of love higher than God" (63), and thus the love of woman had to be recanted and replaced with love for God (74). Instead of recanting the love of woman entirely, the Tuscan poets idealized and spiritualized courtly love in *la dolce stil nuova,* or the "sweet new style" (69) of poetry. The style, though not a "school," flourished in Tuscany.

[…] donna m'apparve. (*Purgatorio;* Canto XXX; lines 25-32)

The Sun's face rising in a misty veil

Of tempering vapors that allow the eye

To look straight at it for a longer time

Even so, within a nebula of flowers,

that flowed upward from the angel's hands and then

poured down, covering all the chariot,

Appeared a lady […] (*Purgatory;* Canto XXX; lines 25-31)

The epic simile foreshadows Dante's confusion about Beatrice's nature: If her face is pure light, which symbolizes truth, then this sun is obscured by a mist, which suggests a half light, or incomplete or partial knowledge. Further, Dante admits he "could not see her perfectly" (*Purgatory;* Canto XXX; line 37). That the flowers form a kind of veil around Beatrice's face connotes the idea of Beatrice as bride. Dante configures her as a bride because Dante still desires Beatrice the courtly lover that he once knew, and with whom he never had the opportunity to consummate his desire: "*anza de li occhi aver più conoscenza,/per occulta virtù che da lei mosse,/ d'antico amor sentì la gran Potenza";* "My soul […]/ still felt […] her mystery/ and power, the strength of its enduring love" (*Purgatory;* Canto XXX; lines 37-39). When Dante turns to Virgil and says, "*per dicere a Virgilio: 'Men che drama/di sangue m'è rimaso che non tremi:conosco i segni de l'antica fiamma,'*" "'Not one drop of blood/is left inside my veins that does not throb: I recognize signs of the Ancient flame" (*Purgatory;* Canto XXX; lines 46-48), the

line is a reference to Dido and Aeneas in the *Aeneid*, and whenever Dido is invoked, the context, unambiguously, is lust. Earlier in *Purgatory*, in Canto VI, Dante only understands Beatrice in the context of earthly love. He conveys his lust for Beatrice when Virgil tells Dante that "*Non so se 'ntendi: io dico di Beatrice;/ tu la vedrai di sopra, in su la vetta/ di questo monte, ridere e felice";* "'Beatrice will appear upon this mountain top;/ you will behold her smiling in her bliss'" (Canto VI; *Purgatory*; lines 46-48). In this comedic moment, Dante had been lagging on the journey, but when Virgil mentions Beatrice to Dante, Dante is so inspired by lust that he suddenly wants to continue the journey so that he can reach Beatrice presently: "*E io: 'Segnore, andiamo a maggior fretta,/ ché già non m'affatico come dianzi,/ e vedi omai che 'l poggio l'ombra getta'";* "I said: 'My lord, let us make haste: I'm not as tired as I was before'" (*Purgatory*; Canto VI; lines 49-51). Later Canto XV, Virgil again configures Beatrice in the language of desire, "*E se la mia ragion non ti disfama,/ vedrai Beatrice, ed ella pienamente/ ti torrà questa e ciascun' altra brama*"; "And if my words have not appeased your thirst,/ when you see Beatrice you will see/ all of your longings satisfied" (*Purgatory*; Canto XV; lines 76-78) because all Dante understands of love is earthly desire.

When Dante turns to speak to Virgil to convey his desire for Beatrice in Canto XXX, he finds that Virgil is not there; Virgil, his guide throughout the *Inferno* and *Purgatory,* disappears. Dante's desire is replaced by terror and tears. Beatrice speaks to him directly: "'*Dante, perché Virgilio se ne vada,/ non pianger anco, non piangere ancora;/ ché pianger ti conven per altra spada*'"; "'Dante,

though Virgil leaves you, do not weep,/ not yet, that is, for you shall have to weep/ from yet another wound. Do not weep yet'" (*Purgatory;* Canto XXX; lines 55-57). The love wound of Dido will soon be replaced by a new wound: the wound inflicted by Beatrice's harsh words, upbraiding Dante for his unfaithfulness to her. Dante quickly realizes this is not Beatrice, the bride, nor Beatrice, the lover; here, Dante soon realizes he has encountered Beatrice, the Lady.

Dante uses the Lady's role in courtly love to establish a feeling of oppression in the next tercet, in which Beatrice is figured as "admiral":

> *Quasi ammiraglio che in poppa e in prora*
> *viene a veder la gente che ministra*
> *per li altri legni, e a ben far l'incora*
> *in su la sponda del carro sinistra,*
> *quando mi volsi al suon del nome mio,*
> *che di necessità quisi registra*
> *vidi la donna […]* (*Purgatorio;* Canto XXX; lines 58-64)

> Just as an admiral, from bow or stern,
> Watches his men at work on other ships,
> encouraging their earnest labors—so rising above the chariot's left rail
> when I turned around, hearing my name called out,
> […]/ I saw the lady […]. (Musa; *Purgatory;* Canto XXX; lines 58-64)

Scholars have tended to emphasize the alleged "masculinity" of the image of Beatrice as admiral (Scott 40). What Dante scholars have missed is that the central action of the tercet is that Beatrice is oppressive because an admiral *watches*. Further, an admiral watches over not only a single ship, but an entire fleet of ships. Here, then, in the image of the admiral, what Dante imagines is Beatrice as all-seeing, as all knowing, as omniscient. Surely in Dante's imagining, Beatrice's watching includes the times that Dante fell into sin. As Musa notes, "Dante the Pilgrim, until now Everyman, must here be seen as the individual who represents only himself at this point, as he is about to answer to a number of very personal charges and make a very personal and painful confession to his lover" (327). That Beatrice is able to see all—including inside Dante's mind—is linked to the Lady's role, for it is the Lady who speaks to a man's conscience.

Her look generates its intended oppressive effect: Beatrice's continuous stare at Dante weighs upon his conscience and begins to evoke the requisite feelings of guilt. Although Beatrice's cloudlike veil of flowers obscures her face, and she is not fully visible, Dante nonetheless "senses the regal sternness of her face" (*Purgatory;* Canto XXX; lines 58-64) and she speaks in the imperative mood, "*Guardaci ben! Ben son, ben son Beatrice";* "Yes, look at me! Yes, I am Beatrice!" (*Purgatory;* Canto XXX; line 73). Dante is ashamed; he lowers his head and cannot look her in the eyes; he is so full of shame that when he sees his reflection in the water, he averts his eyes to the grass: "*Li occhi mi cadder giù nel chiaro fonte;/ma veggendomi in esso, i trassi a l'erba,/ tanta vergogna mi*

gravò la fronte"; "I lowered my head and looked down at the stream, but with shame at my reflection there, I quickly fixed my eyes upon the grass" (*Purgatory;* Canto XXX; line 76-78).

Dante, however, is not quite ready to confess his guilt to Beatrice; on the contrary, he reveals his resentment over the way Lady Beatrice attempts to oppress him by speaking to his conscience. His resentment over Beatrice's influence upon his conscience is closely related to the archetype of the Mother.[3] Dante desire a Mother who will provide him with affection as seen when he turns to speak to Virgil for support, *"volsimi a la sinistra col respitto/ col quale il fantolin corre a la mamma/ quando ha paura o quando elli è afflitto"* ; "with all the confidence/ that makes a child run to its mother arms,/ when he is frightened or needs comforting" (*Purgatory;* Canto XXX; line 43-45). Beatrice forewarns Dante that he will receive a symbolic "wound" from her words: *"Dante, perché Virgilio se ne vada,/non pianger anco, non piangere ancora;/ché pianger ti conven per altra spada,*" "Do not weep,/ not yet, that is, for you shall have to weep,/ from yet another wound. Do not weep yet" (*Purgatory;* Canto XXX; lines 55-57). Here, Dante finds not the nurturing mother, but Beatrice the corrective mother, who shames him over his misconduct: "*Così la madre al figlio par superba,/com' ella parve a me; perché d'amaro/ sente il sapor de la pietade acerba";* "I was the guilty child facing his mother,/ abject before her harshness: harsh indeed,/ is unripe pity not yet merciful" (*Purgatory;* Canto XXX; line 79-81). This wound that

[3] Dorothy Sayers' respected view is that Beatrice represents the Mother archetype to Dante.

Beatrice inflicts is a castration. Dante the courtly lover feels oppressed because he feels emasculated and therefore reduced to a little boy.

Dante is incredulous to find his once tender, loving Lady become the reproachful, Lady of *Purgatory,* and as the Canto unfolds, Dante persists in rejecting her coldness, and even tries to supplant her in his imagination with the warmth of the good Mother, a preference that he conveys in the next tercet through his use of thermal imagery:

Sì come neve tra le vive travi
per lo dosso d'Italia si congela,
soffiata e stretta da li venti schiavi
poi, liquefatta, in sé stessa trapela,
pur che la terra che perde ombra spiri,
sì che par foco fonder la candela. (*Purgatorio*; Canto XXX; lines 85-90)

As snow upon the spine of Italy,
frozen among the living rafters there,
blown and packed hard by wintry northeast winds,
will then dissolve, dripping into itself,
when from the land that knows no noonday shade,
there comes a wind like flame melting down wax. (Musa; *Purgatory;* Canto XXX; lines 85-90)

Given that Canto XXX takes place at the top of Mount Purgatory and Dante is the only living man there, in the simile le "*vive travi*" or the "living rafter" at the top of the mountain is Dante, and Lady Beatrice, the snow. In this epic simile, Lady Beatrice's coldness is compared to the way the snow falls upon the Apennine mountain range, or "*lo dosso d'Italia*" freezes over the timbers on the mountains, and becomes packed hard by the wind. The Lady's hardness and coldness, in turn, provokes a similar response in her lover, Dante: "*così fui sanza lagrime e sospiri"* ; "So tears and sighs were frozen hard in me" (*Purgatory*, Canto XXX; line 91). Conversely, the way the snow high in the mountains melts and becomes the source of rivers is compared to an outpouring of pent up emotion. Dante envisions Beatrice's pity for him, and it "melts like wax" (90) his frozen emotions and releases a torrent of grief in him for her:

> *ma poi che 'ntesi ne le dolci tempre*
> *lor compatire a me, par che se detto*
> *avesser:"Donna, perché sì lo stempre?"*
> *lo gel che m'era intorno al cor ristretto,*
> *spirito e acqua fessi, e con angoscia*
> *de la bocca e de li occhi uscì del petto.* (*Purgatorio*; Canto XXX; lines 94-99)

> When I sensed in their sweet notes the pity
> they felt for me (it was as if they said:
> "Lady, why do you shame him so?"), the bonds

of ice packed tight around my heart dissolved,

Becoming breath and water: from my breast,

Through mouth and eyes, anguish came pouring forth.

(Musa; *Purgatory*; Canto XXX; lines 94-99)

While Dante may have poured out his grief, he has not expressed his guilt. Instead, what Dante actually imagines here is Beatrice feeling guilt and regret over her coldness towards *him*, instead of Dante feeling guilty about his conduct towards *her*. In short, Dante desires to obtain the Lady Beatrice's pity before he has made the requisite acknowledgement of guilt.

The feeling of coldness is sustained in the next tercet when Beatrice refuses to speak to Dante directly in the next tercet. I disagree with Musa that Beatrice turns to address to the angels instead of Dante himself because it checks Beatrice's "overripe pity" (Musa 328). Dante fully imagines Beatrice's pity. Proof enough is found in the next tercet when he admits she is not full of pity, but that she remains fixed and frozen: "*Ella, pur ferma in su la detta coscia/ del carro stando,* […]," "Still on the same side of the chariot/ she stood immobile […]" (*Purgatory*, Canto XXX; lines 100-101). Beatrice cannot speak to Dante and grant Dante pity until he is fully repentant, and Beatrice will continue to upbraid Dante until an acknowledgment of guilt is made.

To induce an acknowledgment of guilt, Beatrice reminds him of his unfaithfulness after her death. She identifies her purpose as "*che m'intenda colui che di là piagne/,perché sia colpa e duol d'una misura,"* "to make the one who weeps [...]/ Perceive the truth and match his guilt with his grief" (*Purgatory*; Canto

XXX; lines 107-108). In her address to the angels at the end of Canto XXX, Beatrice accuses Dante of attempting to hide his sin against her, further evidence still that he has not acknowledged his guilt: "*Voi vigilate ne l'etterno die,/sì che notte né sonno a voi non fura/ passo che faccia il secol per sue vie,*" "With your eyes fixed on the eternal day,/ darkness of night or sleep cannot conceal/ from you a single act performed on earth" (*Purgatory*, Canto XXX; lines 103-105). To induce him to confess, Beatrice then names the act that he has attempted to conceal all along:

> *Alcun tempo il sostenni col mio volto:*
>
> *mostrando li occhi giovanetti a lui,*
>
> *meco il menava in dritta parte vòlto.*
>
> *Sì tosto come in su la soglia fui*
>
> *di mia seconda etade e mutai vita,*
>
> *questi si tolse a me, e diessi altrui.* (*Purgatorio;* Canto XXX; lines 121-126)

> There was a time that my countenance sufficed,
>
> as I let him look into my young eyes
>
> for guidance on the straight path to his goal;
>
> but when I passed into my second age
>
> and change my life for Life, that man you see
>
> strayed after others and abandoned me; (Musa; *Purgatory;* Canto XXX; lines 121-126)

The sin that Dante commits is unfaithfulness to Beatrice after her death, a violation of the rules of courtly love. Beatrice argues that since the eyes are the window to the soul, the metaphor is that when Beatrice was alive, it was sufficient for young Dante to look into her eyes in order to receive the spiritual direction that he needed. After her death, however, Dante loses the guardian of his soul, and Beatrice makes it clear that without his Lady, Dante falls into a state of degeneration: "*Tanto giù cadde,*" "To such depths he did sink" (*Purgatory;* Canto XXX; line 136).

Beatrice further oppresses Dante by shaming him for the loss of his gifts after her death. Beatrice views his fall into degeneration as all the more disappointing because it led him to abandon his goals: "*questi fu tal ne la sua vita nova/ virtüalmente, ch'ogne abito destro/fatto averebbe in lui mirabil prova,*" "this man was so endowed, potentially,/ in early youth—had he allowed his gifts/ To bloom, he would have reaped abundantly" (*Purgatory;* Canto XXX; lines 115-117). The young man had been blessed with considerable gifts as a poet. With the loss of his teacher and guide, he lost the one person on earth who would have truly loved him and helped him to channel his gifts and who would have spurred him on to greatness.

When Beatrice turns to address Dante, she finally shames him into an admission of guilt. "*'Dì, dì se questo è vero: a tanta accusa/ tua confession conviene esser congiunta*,'" "Speak now, is that not true? Speak! You must seal/ your confession this grave charge I make!" (*Purgatory;* XXXI; lines 5-6). Again, Beatrice asks Dante how he could forgot a sacred vow: "*E quali agevolezze o*

quali avanzi/ ne la fronte de li altri si mostraro,, per che dovessi lor passeggiare anzi?"; "And what appealed to you, what did you find/ so promising in all those other things/ that made you feel obliged to spend your time/ in courting them?" (*Purgatory;* Canto XXXI; lines 28-30). Beatrice again charges Dante with unfaithfulness when she says, "*Non ti dovea gravar le penne in giuso,/ ad aspettar più colpo, o pargoletta/ o altra novità con sì breve uso,*" "no pretty girl or any other brief/ attraction should have weighed down your wings,/ and left you waiting for another blow" (*Purgatory;* XXXI; lines 58-60). By repeatedly taunting him for having strayed from courtly love, Beatrice shames Dante into an admission of guilt.

Dante is overcome with emotion, sheds tears of anguish, and sighs, a sign perhaps of his regret over the past. Through his tears, he can "*a pena ebbi la voce che rispuose,*" that is he can "barely find the voice to answer," (*Purgatory;* XXXI; line 32), but he finally confesses in a barely audible voice that after Beatrice's death, the sin that brought him to the dark wood was lust: "[…] '*Le presenti cose col falso lor piacer volser miei passi,/ tosto che 'l vostro viso si nascose,*'" "Those things and their false joys,/ Offered me by the world, led me astray/ When I no longer saw your countenance" (*Purgatory*; Canto XXXI; lines 34-36). Since Dante discloses that it was after Beatrice's death that he fell into sin, Dante's confession underscores that it is the Lady's role in the courtly love of *dolce stil nuova* who provides man with spiritual guidance. Dante also states, "*Di penter sì mi punse ivi l'ortica/* […] *Tanta riconoscenza il cor mi morse,/ ch'io caddi vinto,*" "I felt the stabbing pain of my remorse/ […] The recognition of my

guilt so stunned my heart, I fainted […] (*Purgatory;* Canto XXXI; lines 85-89). Here, Dante acknowledges not only his culpability, but more importantly, he expresses deep contrition for having abandoned Beatrice.

Once Dante repents, faints, and regains consciousness from fainting, he finds that Beatrice undergoes a transformation. Beatrice's coldness has melted away, and she can at last grant him her pity. She leads him through her nymphs to look deep into her green eyes for spiritual direction, as he had before when she was alive: "'*Fa che le viste non risparmi; posto t'avem dinanzi a li smeraldi ond' Amor già ti trasse le sue armi,*'" "'Look deeply, look with all your sight" [...]/ For now you stand before those emeralds from which Love once shot loving darts at you" (*Purgatory;* Canto XXXI; lines 115-117). By looking deep in her eyes, in which God's love is reflected (*Purgatory;* Canto XXXI; line 121), the Lady Beatrice leads Dante to the Divine Love of Christ. Once Dante is spiritually transformed, Beatrice is transformed as well. In the last Cantos, once Dante has repented, Beatrice progressively becomes warmer and maternal towards Dante. She takes Dante "by the hand" (*Purgatory*; Canto XXXIII; lines 133), and "smiles" at him (*Purgatory*; Canto XXXIII; line 95). Having appeared veiled at the beginning of Canto XXX, Beatrice can at last unveil herself to Dante because he has finally made his confession, he is purified, and therefore is finally worthy of her love (Canto XXXI; lines 126-144).

I now turn to *Prometheus Unbound* in the second part this chapter to show how Shelley borrows from Dante's language to evoke an entire atmosphere of oppression and then the promise of liberation in his own construction of worlds in

Acts II and III of *Prometheus Unbound.* As in Dante's worlds of *Inferno* and *Purgatory*, in the beginning of the lyrical drama *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley creates a world in which everything is enslaved, this time not by a sin, but by a curse. The Titan Prometheus, who gave gifts to the world (in the original myth, fire and poetry), is punished by Jupiter for his deed by being held hanging in chains in 3000 years and having his liver attacked by birds: "Prometheus gave to man—for which he hangs/withering in destined pain" (*Prometheus Unbound;* Act II; lines 99-100). He, in turn, curses Jupiter, the head of the gods, for torturing him: "I curse thee! Let a sufferer's curse/ Clasp thee, his torturer,/ like remorse" (*Prometheus Unbound;* Act I; lines 286-289). Like the circularity of the imagery in *Inferno* and *Purgatory*, Shelley creates the feeling of oppression in this "imagining of an imagining" (Ricks 164) through the image projected from Prometheus's mind of his torturer Jupiter "clasped" (*Prometheus Unbound;* Act I; line 287) and encircled by a "robe" of "agony" (*Prometheus Unbound;* Act I; line 289). In this circular imagery, oppression begets oppression: By hating his tormentor, Prometheus keeps the world in tyranny.

Not far into the drama, Prometheus decides to disregard his own curse and to repent what he once uttered on his torturer, Jupiter: "It doth repent me: words are quick and vain;/ Grief for a while is blind, and so was mine/ I wish no living thing to suffer" (*Prometheus Unbound;* Act I; lines 303-305). Here, Prometheus stops thinking about what he hates, his oppressor, Jupiter, and he begins to think instead of his solemn wish, that no human being should ever suffer pain. In so doing, he transcends his oppressor.

Prometheus is then reminded by Panthea that while he was held in chains, Asia, Shelley's Aphrodite, has been waiting for him. As in Dante's *Purgatory* XXX, Shelley aids the feeling of oppression by depicting Asia as veiled in Act II because the veil represents love as exiled:

> And Asia waits in that far Indian vale
>
> The scene of her sad exile—rugged once
>
> And desolate and frozen like this ravine;
>
> But now invested with fair flowers […]
>
> Of her transforming presence—which would fade
>
> If it were mingled not with thine […] (*Prometheus Unbound;* Act II; lines 826-834)

Alan Weinberg suggests that Shelley specifically alludes to Beatrice in *Purgatory* XXX here, for Asia's veiled appearance has a strong textual link to Beatrice's at the beginning of the Canto (Weinberg 128). Recalling the scene in *Purgatory XXX*, Beatrice's face is described as appearing through a shower of flowers that form a kind of shroud around her face:

> *così dentro una nuvola di fiori*
>
> *che da le mani angeliche saliva*
>
> *e ricadeva in giù dentro e di fori,*
>
> *sovra candido vel cinta d'uliva*
>
> *donna m'apparve sotto verde manto*
>
> (*Purgatorio;* Canto XXX; lines 28-32)

[…] Thus, in a cloud

Of flowers, that from those hands angelic rose,

And down within and outside of the car

Fell showering, in a white veil with olive wreathed,

A virgin in my view appear'd beneath

Green mantle […] (Cary; *Purgatory*; Canto XXX; lines 28-33)

The veil, too, in *Purgatory* XXX is a repressive image, since the Pilgrim longs to see his lover, Beatrice, but cannot until he has made his confession and is worthy of her. As long as Beatrice withholds her love, she remains veiled. While Beatrice will unveil a love that is spiritual rather than physical, Asia in *Prometheus Unbound* is clearly described as Aphrodite. While Aphrodite is usually solely connected in classical myth with physical love, in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound,* bodily love connects with love that is disinterested as well as concupiscent. Asia represents concupiscent love because she is described as the lover of Prometheus who "mingle[s]" (*Prometheus Unbound;* Act II; line 834) her presence with his. She also represents disinterested love because she is described as a "transformative presence" (*Prometheus Unbound;* Act II; line 833) for humanity who will unselfishly conspire with suffering to end oppression.

As long as Prometheus hated Jupiter, his hatred kept Asia-love in exile. Shelley borrows from Dante to achieve a powerful effect of oppression in his world-building by describing Asia as exiled in a "desolate and frozen" vale (*Prometheus Unbound;* Act II; line 829). While critics have linked the depths of her frozen vale to the icy imagery of *Inferno*, this frozen image, along with the

veil, I believe alludes to *Purgatory* XXX. Just as Shelley envisions Asia-love as frozen, Lady Beatrice's coldness towards Dante at the top of Mount Purgatory is imagined as the snow that falls upon the Apennine mountain range:

> *Sì come neve tra le vive travi*
>
> *per lo dosso d'Italia si congela,*
>
> *soffiata e stretta da li venti schiavi*
>
> *poi, liquefatta, in sé stessa trapela,*
>
> *pur che la terra che perde ombra spiri,*
>
> *sì che par foco fonder la candela.*
>
> *così fui sanza lagrime e sospiri.* (*Purgatorio*; Canto XXX; lines 85-91)

> As snow, that lies,
>
> Amidst the living rafters on the back
>
> Of Italy, congeal'd, when drifted high
>
> And closely piled by rough Sclavonian blasts;
>
> Breathe but the land whereon no shadow falls.
>
> […] thus was I […] (Cary; *Purgatory;* Canto XXX; lines 85-91)

Cary softens Dante's response as stunned, emotionless, "thus was I, without a sigh or tear," while Musa translates Dante's response as more hardened by Beatrice's demeanor, "So tears and sighs were frozen hard in me" (*Purgatory*, Canto XXX; line 91).

Once Prometheus stops hating, Shelley creates a sense of liberation by imagining Asia as coming out of frozen exile to offer her “transformative presence” to the suffering Prometheus and the world. Here, Shelley also alludes to the epic simile of *Purgatory* XXX, in which Dante imagines Beatrice coming out of her frozen state and he imagines in his own frozen heart melting:

ma poi che ’ntesi ne le dolci tempre
lor compatire a me, par che se detto
avesser: “Donna, perché sì lo stempre?”
lo gel che m’era intorno al cor ristretto,
spirito e acqua fessi, e con angoscia
de la bocca e de li occhi uscì del petto. (*Purgatorio*; Canto XXX; lines 94-99)

But when the strain of Dulcet symphony express’d for me
Their soft compassion, more than could the words,
“Virgin!” why do consumest him?” Then the ice,
Congealed about my bosom, turned itself
To spirit and water; and with anguish forth
Gush’d through the lips and eyelids, from the heart. (Cary; *Purgatory*; Canto XXX; lines 94-99)

As stated earlier in my analysis of *Purgatory* XXX, the way the snow high in the mountains melts and becomes the source of rivers is compared to an outpouring of pent up emotion. Dante imagines Beatrice’s pity for him, and it melts his frozen

emotions into "spirit," or feeling. In Cary's translation, his frozen emotions are also described as melting into "water," releasing a torrent of grief in him for her. Here, however, Dante only *imagines* Beatrice's coming out of her frozen exile to grant him pity. Beatrice cannot offer Dante the transformative power of love—not yet. For love to be unveiled, the acknowledgement of guilt must first be made. Beatrice's intercession is dependent upon the Pilgrim's will; the pilgrim must choose to turn from the sin of lust. Conversely, in *Prometheus Unbound*, Asia's intervention is an unwilled process: When the time is right, Prometheus will stop hating, and Asia will come out of her frozen vale to unveil herself to him. When the time is right, love will conspire with suffering to end oppression, and then the Spirit of the Hour will becomes like a body (*Prometheus Unbound;* Act III; line 124) to descend upon the earth and oversee change. Yet the unveiling of love in both *Purgatory* and *Prometheus Unbound* share a commonality. Only when the requisite conditions have been met can love's redemptive power finally be released.

In *Prometheus Unbound,* once love comes out of her frozen exile, Shelley creates a feeling of liberation by envisioning Asia as changed in appearance; this image also bears a striking similarity to Beatrice's changed appearance in *Purgatory* XXXI. In *Prometheus Unbound,* Panthea describes the change that comes over Asia:

> How changed are thee! I dare not look at thee;
>
> I feel, but see thee not. I scarce endure
>
> The radiance of thy beauty. Some good change

Is working in the elements which suffer

Thy presence unveiled […] (*Prometheus Unbound*; Act II; lines 16-19)

Asia's transformation from her frozen vale is configured by Shelley as "radiance," light, and warmth. After Dante repents and Beatrice can at last grant him her pity, Beatrice, too, transforms in appearance. When Dante regains consciousness from fainting, he finds that Beatrice's coldness has melted away and Beatrice loses her "sternness" and becomes beautiful again in the eyes of the Pilgrim (*Purgatory*; Canto XXXI; lines 100-101). In the last Canto of *Purgatory*, XXXIII, Beatrice takes on an even warmer, more maternal quality: she takes Dante "by the hand" (*Purgatory*; Canto XXXIII; lines 133) and she "smiles" at Dante (*Purgatory*; Canto XXXIII; line 95), a human expression of light and warmth.

While in Dante's *Purgatory* only Beatrice and the Pilgrim are rejuvenated, Shelley extends the way Dante creates a feeling of liberation and exuberance by imagining a love that rejuvenates not only Prometheus and Asia, but a love that promises to rejuvenate the entire living world. After Asia-Love comes out of her frozen exile and changes in appearance, the appearance of the whole world is transformed. Panthea declares of Asia that love "Bursts from thee, and illuminates heaven and earth" (*Prometheus Unbound;* Act II; line 28). When the Spirit of the Hour descend upon the earth to see if the same transformation that has comes over Asia has, indeed, come over humanity, she observes the "mighty changes felt within/Expressed in outward things" (*Prometheus Unbound;* Act III; line 130). There are no kings; instead, men are equal. "None fawned,

none trampled; hate, disdain or fear […]/ None frowned, none trembled, none with eager fear/ Gazed on another eye of cold command (*Prometheus Unbound;* Act III; lines 129-139). Shelley imagines that in a state of oppression, men hate and flatter those in power. Because there is inequality under oppression, this, in turn, leads men to conceal their real thoughts and feelings under a mask. However, in a state of equality, Shelley imagines people may express themselves freely, without fear:

> None talked that common, false, cold, hollow talk
> Which makes the heart deny the yes it breathes
> Yet question that unmeant hypocrisy
> Which such a self-mistrust as has no name.
> And women too, frank, beautiful and kind […]
> Speaking the wisdom once they could not feel
> Looking emotions once they feared to feel (*Prometheus Unbound;* Act III; lines 151-158)

Donning the "loathsome mask" (*Prometheus Unbound;* Act III; line 193) is required by society, but Shelley imagines a glorious "unmasking" (Bromwich 252) of humanity that would extend even to women. In Shelley emancipation of women, they would no longer need to conceal their intelligence, "Speaking the wisdom once they could not feel" (*Prometheus Unbound;* Act III; line 157). Shelley further creates a sense of liberation by imagining a sexual revolution in which woman would be allowed to express pleasure from sex, "Looking emotions once they feared to feel" (*Prometheus Unbound;* Act III; line 158), although as a

result of Shelley's liberation of women, these new freedoms do not make woman sexually manipulative, but rather, "frank, beautiful and kind" (*Prometheus Unbound;* Act III; line 158). As Bromwich notes of *Prometheus Unbound,* "Humanity by the adaptive work of thoughts and feelings, will prove to have readied itself for any great mutation that occurs in society […] the violence of a revolution is likely to be extrinsic and unnecessary" (239). Shelley's deeply held conviction was that love rather than violence was the transformative force that would bring change to mankind. His concentrated vision of a world without suffering in *Prometheus Unbound* suggests a linear progression in which change is brought to humanity over time.

Shelley borrows from Dante's masterful use of language to aid the feeling of oppression by depicting love as veiled, exiled, and frozen. Dante imagines love's absence or the bereft lover as a solitary tree being blown by the freezing winds and snow that blow over the Apennine mountains in *Purgatory.* Yet Dante also imagines love as a transformative force. Dante imagines Eros as selfish and that the Pilgrim has to turn from Eros to learn to love unselfishly; Shelley through Asia, his Aphrodite, envisions the transformative power of concupiscent love when it is balanced with ideal love. However, in both Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* and Dante's *Purgatory*, when love unselfishly conspires with suffering, they end misery and oppression. If Dante creates a feeling of liberation and exuberance by imagining a transformation from love that comes over only Beatrice and Dante, then Shelley extends and renews Dante's *Purgatory* by

imagining a love in Act III that promises to rejuvenate not only Prometheus and Asia, but also the entire living world in Act IV.

III. CREATING INEFFABLE REALMS OF JOY THROUGH LANGUAGE IN DANTE'S *PARADISE* AND ACT IV OF SHELLEY'S *PROMETHEUS UNBOUND*

This chapter explores how Dante and Shelley sustain the change in atmosphere in their world-building from the gloom and misery at the top of Mount Purgatory and the depths of Asia's frozen vale, respectively, to the promise of transcendence and joy of paradise. C. S. Lewis famously calls Act IV of *Prometheus Unbound* "an intoxication, a riot, a complicated and uncontrollable splendor…sustained on the note of ecstasy such as no other English poet, perhaps no other poet has given us" (Lewis 266). If Shelley's paradise achieves sublimity, that is, if it achieves *ekstasis*,[4] Lewis for the same reason deems it inferior to Dante's because "it has not and cannot have the solemnity and overwhelming *realism* of *Paradiso*" (Lewis 266, emphasis mine). By "overwhelming realism," I take Lewis here to mean that Shelley does not anchor the reader, as Dante does in *Paradise* through his description from the natural world. Contrary to Lewis's observation, Shelley understood well the "realism" of *Paradise* and borrows from the language in Dante's *Paradise* to achieve a paradise, like Dante's, that lies somewhere between the ineffeable and the

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[4] David Richter explains that Longinus's notion of the sublime is defined as *ekstasis,* or transport. See Richter's introduction to Longinus' *On the Sublime,* in *The Critical Tradition: Classical Texts and ContemporaryTrends,* Ed. David H. Richter. New York: Bedford's St. Martin, 1989.

effable. Both Dante and Shelley create a sublime realm, while at the same time through their use of descriptive language of light and music, they locate precise words, phrases, and images that will anchor the reader in their vision of an imaginary realm.

Paradise immediately opens with an admission by Dante the poet that he has been to *Paradise* and seen things so extraordinary that he cannot hope to reproduce his vision: "*Nel ciel che più de la sua luce prende/ fu' io, e vidi cose che ridire/ né sa né può chi di là sù discende,"* "I have been in his brightest shining heaven/ and seen such things that no man, once returned/ from there, has wit or skill to tell about" (Musa; *Paradise*; Canto I; lines 4-6). The opening lines establish the "topos of inexpressibility,"[5] a discourse in medieval literature. Closely related is the topos of the sublime. Dante scholarship has perhaps been reluctant to apply the term "sublime" to the *Paradise* perhaps because Dante had no knowledge of the sublime, since Longinus's treatise, *Peri Hypsous,* would remain unknown until after the Middle Ages when was translated in 1554, and Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant would not re-inscribe Longinus's work until the late 18th centuries. Longinus' idea of the sublime was *ekstasis,* or transport of

[5] Several Dante scholars have written on the topos of inexpressibility. See the scholarship of Kenelm Foster, "Dante's Vision to God" *Italian Studies* 14 (1959): 21-39; Daniel Murtaugh's "*Figurando il Paradiso*: The Signs That Render Dante's Heaven," *PMLA*, 90:2 (1975): 277-284; and Peter Hawkins's "Dante and the Dialectic of Ineffability" in *Naming The Unnamable: from Dante to Beckett,* 1984. 51-21. My position is closest to Foster's medial position that "[Dante's] self-assumed task…was to make spiritual order imaginable. Images had to be Dante's starting point; a system of signs that both *hid and half-revealed* [Paradise]" (Foster 34, emphasis mine). As a linguist, Murtaugh takes the position that language does, indeed, bear the referential capacity to "render transparent" (Murtaugh 282) Dante's heaven to the modern reader. Hawkins conversely argues that everywhere Dante is reduced to silence: "the poem can be seen everywhere to silence itself" and Dante's vision "lies beyond the grasp of language" (Hawkins 14).

the audience by elevated language. Burke enlarges on Longinus notion of the sublime as an effect. In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of The Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), Burke's sublime is based upon a perceptive reading of the poet Homer, in which he observes that the beauty of Helen was beyond representation, and thus the Homer's only recourse is to describe the effect of her beauty upon the men of Troy. Dante's *Paradise,* however, exemplifies the Kantian sublime that is discussed in the *Critique of Judgment* and connotes a kind of failure. Dante had difficulty communicating his vision of *Paradise*, which is demonstrated in the way he repeatedly attempts to find physical equivalents to convey his vision of immense spiritual joy. At the same time, his recourse to the physical world is not entirely a failure because Dante paradoxically grounds the reader in his vision.

In Canto I, Dante falls back on human myth to express the mystery of the beginning of the Pilgrim's transformation. Dante begins with an invocation of the muses and Apollo (*Paradise*; Canto I; lines 13-15) who represents the Sun in the medieval mythic tradition. Dante extends Apollo's association with the Sun to represent the Christian God, which is established through his address of Apollo as "O, Divine Power" (*Paradise;* Canto I, line 22). As Beatrice stares at the brilliance of this Sun and has a beatific vision, the Pilgrim turns to look at her, and he feels the miraculous transformation of his soul begin:

Beatrice tutta ne l'etterne rote

fissa con li occhi stava; e io in lei

le luci fissi, di là sù rimote.

Nel suo aspetto tal dentro mi fei, qual si fé

Glauco nel gustar de l'erba

che 'l fé consorto in mar de li altri dèi. (*Paradiso;* Canto I; lines 64-69)

And Beatrice stood there, her eyes fixed

On the eternal spheres, entranced, and now

My eyes, withdrawn from high, were fixed on her.

Gazing at her, I felt myself becoming

What Glaucus had become tasting the herb

that made him like the other sea-gods there. (Musa; *Paradise;* Canto I; lines 64-69)

As the Pilgrim stares at Beatrice who stares at the Sun, which represents a direct vision of God, the Pilgrim begins an inner transformation that will prepare him to enter the Empyrean of *Paradise.* Dante attempts to explain the ineffable by comparing the Pilgrim's metamorphosis to that of Ovid's Glaucus, in which a fisherman tastes a miraculous herb and is transformed into a sea-god. Dante's recourse to myth is quickly followed by a qualification; the poet explains that he is struggling here to explain things that go "beyond human": "*Trasumanar significar per verba/ non si poria; però l'essemplo basti a cui/ esperïenza grazia serba*" (*Paradiso;* Canto I; lines 70-72); "'Transhumanize' —it cannot be explained/ *per verba*, so let this example serve/ until God's Grace grants the experience" (Musa; *Paradise;* Canto I; lines 70-72). Although the Pilgrim might transhumanize, or "go beyond human," through his transformation, Dante the poet fails at

transcendence. In inventing the verb "transhumanize," Dante feels a sense of failure to go beyond mere human myth to explain the onset of a transformation that has spiritual dimensions. At the same time, Dante's recourse to human myth anchors the reader in Dante's vision. The medieval reader would know the tradition of myth and would understand that Apollo is meant to represent God.

Just as Dante resorts to the light of the sun in Canto I, the poet continues to resort to the light of the planets or "stars" to express Divine power in Paradise. Having "transhumanized," the Pilgrim feels himself soaring towards *Paradise* (Musa; *Paradise;* Canto I; line 75). As he and Beatrice ascend, the first "star" they encounter is the moon. Also, having transhumanized, the Pilgrim is further drawn to the light and becomes curious for the first time about its origin, "*La novità del suono e 'l grande lume/ di lor cagion m'accesero un disio/ mai non sentito di cotanto acume"* (*Paradiso;* Canto I; 82-84), "The revelation of this light […]/ inflamed me with such eagerness to learn/ their cause, as I never felt before" (Musa; *Paradise;* Canto I; 82-84). He asks about the origins of the moon's appearance (Canto II; line 49), to which Beatrice replies,

> *Virtù diversa fa diversa lega*
> *col prezïoso corpo ch'ella avviva,*
> *nel qual, sì come vita in voi, si lega.*
> *Per la natura lieta onde deriva,*
> *la virtù mista per lo corpo luce*
> *come letizia per pupilla viva.*

Da essa vien ciò che da luce

a luce par differente, non da denso e raro;

essa è formal principio che produce,

conforme a sua bontà, lo turbo e 'l chiaro." (*Paradiso,* Canto II; lines 139-148)

Different virtues mingle differently

With each rich stellar body that they quicken,

Even as the soul within blends with you.

True to the glad nature from which it flows,

This blended virtue shines throughout that body,

As happiness shines through living eyes,

And from this virtue, not from dense and rare,

Derive those differences of light we see:

This is the formal principle that gives,

according to its virtue, dark and light." (Musa; *Paradise,* Canto II; lines 139-148)

Beatrice explains that as God's light filters down through the universe, it is differentiated; that is, as light combines with matter, it interacts with the unique properties of each body. Some bodies have the capacity to receive more light than others; each body receives the only the amount of light it is capable of receiving and reflecting back. Considering Beatrice's explanation to the passage in Canto I examined above, the Pilgrim cannot stare directly at the Sun because

he is not capable of receiving the same amount of light as Beatrice; instead the metaphor is he looks at Beatrice, who looks directly at God. Compared to the Sun, the moon seems an especially inadequate metaphor for expressing a Divine mystery. In the tradition, the moon is considered inferior to the sun, the moon is always with the feminine, and the moon is particularly associated with women who have broken their vows. The poet's recourse to the moon in order to convey Divine light, then, must be considered a part of his difficulty in expressing the ineffable: the Divine light of God is filtered throughout the material universe demonstrating God's unity and the diversity in which His light is reflected. At the same time, the description of the moon's light from the natural world is something that readers might be able to imagine, and thus be brought into Dante's vision.

The poet also continually resorts to images of human love to express the Divine Love of God for his creation. Again, using the moon to illustrate, in Canto II when Dante and Beatrice enter the moon, Dante asks Beatrice how it is that two bodies are able to occupy one space:

Per entro sé l'etterna margarita
ne ricevette, com' acqua recepe
raggio di luce permanendo unita.
S'io era corpo, e qui non si concepe
com' una dimensione altra patio,
ch'esser convien se corpo in corpo repe
accender ne dovria più il disio
di veder quella essenza in che si vede

come nostra natura e Dio s'unio. (*Paradiso;* Canto II; lines 34-42)

That eternal celestial pearl took us into itself,

Receiving us as water takes in light,

Its indivisibility intact

If I was a body (on earth, we cannot think,

in terms of solid form within a solid,

as we must here, since body enters body)

So much more should longing burn in us

To see that being in whom we can behold

The union of God's nature with our own. (Musa; *Paradise;* Canto II; lines 34-42)

The physical impossibility of two bodies occupying the same space refers literally to the way the Pilgrim and Beatrice enter the moon in Canto II. However, the poet also uses the concrete image of the pearl to express the Divine mystery of the Incarnation, the embodiment of God the Son in Jesus Christ, in whom man beholds "the union of God's nature with our own" (Musa; *Paradise;* Canto II; lines 41-42). Yet this union is described in terms of human love: in the act of love, two bodies do occupy the same space, giving and receiving. And although it is a commonplace to discuss the members of the Trinity as loving one another, the poet's diction of the verb to "burn" in relation to his desire to see Christ seems especially associated with Eros, with lust, and Eros is concerned with only the

mortal body, not the spiritual body promised by heaven. The poet's attempt to express what is ineffable is met with failure: Just at the moment the poet attempts to transcend the human, he falls back on human Eros to convey immense spiritual joy. The poet's failure is to find a language appropriate to expressing Divine Love. Dante's recourse to Eros as a way of speaking of Divine mysteries of spiritual transformation is nevertheless a tradition in the Christianity that reader can connect with

The poet resorts to Eros as well when he uses Beatrice's smile as a sustained image that signifies the Divine Love and light of Heaven. As Beatrice instructs the Pilgrim, and he concedes to her in all matters of divine instruction, he speaks of Beatrice "conquering my will with her smiles' splendor" (Musa; *Paradise*; Canto 18; line 19). Sometimes the smile is withheld; sometimes the smile expresses Beatrice's dismay that the Pilgrim does not understand the instruction. Usually, though the smile signifies that the Pilgrim is growing in spiritual understanding, and as he does so, he is lifted from sphere to sphere towards the Empyrean, literally propelled there by Beatrice's smile. Although Beatrice's smiles at Dante's spiritual progress are intended by the poet as reflections of Divine Love, the female smile has not quite the same signification as a male smile; it carries erotic connotations, or in the very least, the smile is a *human* expression of light. Dante's recourse to the smile, to the trappings of courtly love, seems an inadequate metaphor in *Paradise* for conveying Divine Love and the light of heaven.

When Dante at last descends to the Empyrean, where God and the blessed inhabit, the poet uses the concrete image of the book, the final image of *Paradise,* to convey God's order in universe, as opposed to the inverted order of the earthly church that Dante discusses in *Inferno* XIX:

Nel suo profondo vidi che s'interna,

legato con amore in un volume,

ciò che per l'universo si squaderna:

sustanze e accidenti e lor costume

quasi conflati insieme, per tal modo

che ciò ch'i' dico è un semplice lume. (*Paradise,* Canto XXXIII; lines 85-90)

I saw how it contained within its depths

All things bound in a single book by love

Of which creation is the scattered leaves

How substance, accident, and their relation

Were fused in such a way that what I now

Describe is but a glimmer of that Light. (Musa; *Paradise,* Canto XXXIII; lines 85-90)

Dante convey through the image of the book the mystery of God's ordered, harmonious cosmos. In a book, everything stands together as a system of relationships; thus, a book is representative of a cosmos that is rational, ordered. Further, a book, like God's cosmos, can only be comprehended through

preparation of the intellect, not unlike the intellectual preparation that Pilgrim must undergo to move from sphere to sphere in order to reach the Empyrean. Further, the book, as an emblem of truth, is representative of light. Despite the seeming appropriateness of the metaphor, the poet admits to the failure of his imagery: the image of a book is "but a glimmer of that Light" (Musa; *Paradise;* Canto XXXIII; line 90) that he had hoped to describe. The poet laments here that he can only approximate the celestial through a physical image. Nonetheless, without the book imagery to anchor the reader, the reader would be unable to apprehend Dante's vision of *Paradise* at all.

In the second part of the chapter, I turn to the strategies that Shelley borrows from Dante to create the feeling of a paradise on Earth in Act IV of *Prometheus Unbound.* To begin, just as Dante resorts to Eros to initiate a transformation in the Pilgrim, Shelley uses Eros to set in motion a transformation that comes over the earth. Prometheus and Asia who figured so prominently in Acts II and III are literally absent from Act IV because they are in their cave consummating their love. Outside their cave, Ione and Panthea, as in Acts II and III, serve as our guides through the action. They describe Prometheus and Asia's spirits now permeate all the universe and cause the death of "the hours." The chorus declares to Ione and Panthea:

> 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. (*Prometheus Unbound;* Act IV; lines 10-15)

Shelley speaks here of a particular aspect of time that has died: time that is still, unchanging, and imprisoning. Prometheus's hate had arrested everything in the living world including time, but once "Shelley's Prometheus…disowns the hate that kept him trapped within theogonic time and expresses sorrow for those who cannot disown their hate" (Peterfreund qtd. in Braida 110), time is no longer arrested. The dead hours are replaced with a new notion of time that does not imprison, but brings change: The Chorus of the Hours sings of new hours that "weave the dance on the floor of the breeze"/ […] [and] "enchant the day that swiftly flees" (*Prometheus Unbound;* lines 69-71). After the hours and Spirits fly away, Ione and Panthea remain to witness the vision of Act IV.

In addition to resorting to Eros to convey a transformation, Shelley sustains the change in atmosphere from Act III to IV by borrowing from Dante's idea of the moon filtering down its light, which represents Divine love, through the universe to the earth. In Dante's *Paradise,* as God's light filters down through the universe, it is differentiated; that is, as light combines with matter, it interacts with the unique properties of each body. Some bodies have the capacity to receive more light than others; each body receives the only the amount of light it is capable of receiving and reflecting back. As in Dante's cosmos, in which the light of the moon filters down to the earth, in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, the new moon accompanies the renewal of the earth. The vision of renewal will be delivered by the spirit of the Moon and the spirit of the Earth, who both appear in

chariots. Ione sees “a chariot like that thinnest boat/ In which the mother of months is borne” (*Prometheus Unbound*; Act IV; lines 206-207). Inside the chariot is a representation of the new Moon: It appears crescent shaped or “curved” (*Prometheus Unbound*; Act IV; line 210), and it bears the shadow of the old moon, thus it is described as “an orblike canopy/ Of gentle darkness, and the hills and woods/ Distinctly seen through that dusky aery veil” (*Prometheus Unbound*; Act IV; line 210-211). In Dante’s *Paradise* of heaven*,* as light filters down, Divine Love and joy filters down through the spheres, and extends itself to the moon. Similarly, in Shelley’s paradise on earth, as the light of the moon hits the Earth, the love that is spread to the earth is described as filled with “boundless, overflowing, bursting gladness” (*Prometheus Unbound;* Act IV; lines 319-320). This gladness shoots “like a beam” towards the moon and “penetrates [her] frozen frame/ […] “with love [and] deep melody” (*Prometheus Unbound*; Act IV; lines 327-330).

The new moon and earth, then, that are a part of the promise of Shelley’s earthly paradise are accompanied by their own music, which compares to the music of the spheres in Dante’s *Paradise*. In Dante, the movement of the planets in *Paradise* is signified through the music of the spheres. Similarly, in Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound*, the spirit of the Earth is described as “A sphere, which is as many thousand spheres/ […] Purple and azure, white and green and golden/ […] sphere within sphere” (*Prometheus Unbound*; Act IV; lines 238-242). The planets dance in circles; the spheres are described as in motion: “they whirl/ Over each other with a thousand motions (*Prometheus Unbound*; Act IV; lines

246-247). This movement of the earth is accompanied by music; Panthea declares:

> ‘Tis the deep music of the rolling world
>
> Kindling within the strings of the waved air
>
> Aeolian modulations.
>
> […] Listen too,
>
> How every pause is filled with under-notes,
>
> Clear, silver, icy, keen, awakening tones
>
> Which pierce the sense and live within the soul […] (*Prometheus Unbound;* Act IV; lines 186-192)

While music in Dante aids in the pilgrim’s spiritual transformation and understanding of God’s ordered universe, music in Shelley’s paradise signifies not only a renewal of the universe, and of Prometheus and Asia, but of the souls of all mankind. As in Dante’s *Paradise*, in *Prometheus Unbound*, an atmosphere of pageantry and celebration of the promise of renewal and hope is created through music.

All throughout *Paradise*, the Dante continually apologizes for failing to “transhumanize,” or find ways to describe his vision that “go beyond human.” Dante repeatedly laments the inadequacy of his memory to recall his vision, his disappointment in his skill as a poet, and the failure to find precise words and images that convey his vision, as when he says, “*Da questo passo vinto mi concedo/ più che già mai da punto di suo tema/ soprato fosse comico o tragedo,”* “At this point I admit to my defeat:/ no poet, comic or tragic, ever was/ more

outdone by his theme then I am now" (Musa; *Paradise;* Canto XXX; lines 22-24). Early on, Dante admits to not only to his own difficulty in rendering his vision, but the difficulty he imagines and anticipates for his reader. Dante warns the reader in a direct address: *"O voi che siete in piccioletta barca,/ desiderosi d'ascoltar, seguiti/ […] / tornate a riveder li vostri liti:/ non vi mettete in pelago, ché forse,/ perdendo me, rimarreste smarriti,"* "All you who in your wish to hear my words/ […] /go back now while you still can see these shores;/do not attempt the deep: it well could be/that losing me, you would be lost yourselves" (Musa; *Paradise;* Canto II; lines 1-6). If the reader is not Dante's ideal reader, that is, one who is prepared spiritually and intellectually to enter *Paradise*, he is counseled to turn back. Yet what readers have felt is that despite the difficulty, following Dante's metaphor, it is worth proceeding ahead with the poet in their little boats. The reader is never entirely lost, for the poet is never entirely reduced to silence. Despite the difficulty of expressing what is ultimately inexpressible, after each admission of defeat, Dante's imagination and courage rally as he searches for the words and images that will leave the reader with a sense of what he has seen in his vision of *Paradise*. C. S. Lewis charges Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* with lacking realism, but Shelley, like Dante, I have shown, leaves the reader with a sense of what a paradise would be like.

IV. CONCLUSION

As Friedrick Shelling once noted, "*The Divine Comedy…* [creates] a world by itself" (qtd. in Pite 22). This study of allusion in *Prometheus Unbound* has shown that Dante's use of language in *Purgatory* and *Paradise* influenced Shelley's construction of worlds in *Prometheus Unbound*. This study further suggests that when poets construct imaginary realms, they rely as much on narrative as lyricism. Dante and Shelley's narratives contains sensory details, how things look, feel, smell, or sound. These sensory details, in turn, allow the poet to reach the reader *emotionally*; they provide a sense of immediacy, so that the reader is transported to the realms that the poet creates.

Shelley borrows from Dante's language to evoke an entire atmosphere of oppression in Shelley's own world-building. Shelley and Dante also create through language an ineffable realm of joy and liberation. Dante creates an oppressive atmosphere in *Purgatory* XXX and XXXI through Beatrice who withholds her pity from Dante. Through the sensory details of the harshness and the cold of Dante's language, Dante transports the reader to Mount Purgatory. Similarly, Shelley borrows from Dante's language and narrative to create the feeling of gloom and misery in Act II and III of *Prometheus Unbound*. By suspending love in a frozen vale apart from the living world, the reader can imagine an oppressive realm trapped in time and hate. In the creation of

ineffable realms, Dante must search for concrete words, phrases, and images that will convey to the reader a place of pure spiritual joy. If Shelley’s earthly paradise has less realism, then he nonetheless borrows from Dante the attempt to search for physical equivalents to convey the promise of transcendence, hope, and joy.

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