

Prometheus Now: How *Prometheus Unbound: A Lyrical Drama* is Speaking to Us

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1. Mia Alvarez

And those foul shapes,--abhorred by god and man,
Which, under many a name and many a form
Strange, savage, ghastly, dark, and execrable,
Were Jupiter, the tyrant of the world,
And which the nations, panic-stricken, served
With blood, and hearts broken by long hope, and love
Dragged to his altars soiled and garlandless,
And slain among men's unreclaiming tears,
Flattering the thing they feared, which fear was hate,--
(3.4.180- 188)

This passage from *Prometheus Unbound* is from The Spirit of the Hour in Act 3, when Jupiter has fallen and Prometheus is free from the cliff, The Spirit recounts what has become of the earth now that mankind is liberated from Jupiter's tyranny. I chose this passage because I see a connection to the ongoing genocide in Palestine, and the tyrannical power that is the U.S and Israel who have advanced this genocide over last 190 days. In the text, Shelley refers to the "foul shapes" Jupiter once inhabited on earth that had many names and forms. Though Jupiter is a single entity (god), we can understand that his tyranny on earth manifested physically and socially, not taking a singular form but evident everywhere. This reminded me of the U.S and Israel and the way both settler colonial states, as tyrannical entities, manifest in the world in different "foul shapes" of violence and authoritarianism. One way this can be observed is in the shared policing and militancy between the U.S police, ICE, and the IDF. The genocide in Palestine demonstrates how when looking at the U.S and Israel as Jupiter--a single tyrannical entity with various shared institutions and systems of power—their violence takes shape in the same inhuman forms to debilitate, control, and kill marginalized communities, such as Palestinians are enduring.

Near the end of the passage Shelley writes that the "nations panic-stricken" flattered "the thing they feared, which fear was hate." In the context of the tyranny in our world today, I do not think those who are the victims of authoritarian power such as state violence "flatter" our leaders. Marginalized groups don't have the privilege to flatter the things they fear, they have to be outspoken against forms of tyranny

because as history has shown, no one else will on their behalf. Such is the case with movements like Black Lives Matter and Free Palestine, resistance requires using our fear (which is hate) to fuel change on the basis of a culture of love, humanity and liberation from all forms/structures of tyrannical power.

Nadine Naber, “When Abolitionists Say Free Them All, We Mean Palestine Too”

<https://truthout.org/articles/when-abolitionists-say-free-them-all-we-mean-palestine-too/>

2. Erin Boyle

I wandering went
 Among the haunts and dwellings of mankind,
 And first was disappointed not to see
 Such mighty change as I had felt within
 Expressed in outward things; but soon I looked,
 And behold, thrones were kingless, and men walked
 One with the other even as spirits do--
 None fawned, none trampled; hate, disdain, or fear,
 Self-love or self-contempt, on human brows
 No more inscribed, as o'er the gate of hell,
 'All hope abandon, ye who enter here.' I wandering went

(3.4.126-136)

I connected this passage to a song by the artist Weyes Blood called “Children of the Empire” off her 2022 album. This dream pop 70s-inspired anthem is a song about the necessity of change, especially within an empire with “blood on their hands” and the yearning of those within a system for freedom. In the current day, I think this song speaks to the isolation and guilt many Americans feel towards our government, from the wars of our past and the continued violence throughout the world carried out by our bloated military spending. Interestingly, the song has a lot of fire imagery which connects to *Prometheus Unbound*. Continually the song says: “We don’t have time to be afraid anymore/Children of the Empire want to change”. I see the song as being a prequel to the actions of the play, in that it expresses the urgency and hope for a change to a better world and the passage shows what a free, post-empire place might look like.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TMAK05tpoI4>

3. Lileana Cavallo

Evil minds

Change good to their own nature. I gave all

He has; and in return he chains me here

Years, age, night and day: whether the Sun

Split my parched skin, or in the moon night

The chrystal winged snow cling round my hair -

Whist my belived race is trampled down

By his thought executing ministers.

Such tyrants recompense tis just.

He who is evil can recieve no good;

And for a world bestowed, or a friend lost,

He can feel hate, fear, shame - not gratitude:

He but requites me for his own misdeed:

Kindness to such is a keep reproach, which breaks

With bitter stings the light sleep of Revenge

Submission dost but the fatal word;

The death seal of mankind's captivity

(1.380 – 397)

I chose this passage because it made me think of the current protests that are going on at various college campuses throughout the U.S.

Both students and faculty have been participating in protests of the ongoing war in Israel/Palestine, These protests have been met with push back from college administration and law enforcement; with schools such as Columbia and Emory going as far as having students arrested on campus. Students are also facing disciplinary threats. In this passage Prometheus argues why it does no good to submit to authority figures. To submit is a "fatal word" and a "death seal." Anti-war protests and free speech should not be silenced. College students have a right to voice their opinions, and to threaten their access to education as well as bring police on campus as an intimidation tactic is oppressive and should be criticized. Students voicing their opinions on current global political issues and questioning the involvement of their government should be uplifted, not silenced.

<https://apnews.com/article/student-protest-gaza-war-arrest-amnesty-ae235703d6a9b99114078fca13a530a0>

4. Elizabeth Dunn

Thrones, altars, judgment-seats, and prisons, wherein,
 And beside which, by wretched men were borne
 Sceptres, tiaras, swords, and chains, and tomes
 Of reasoned wrong, glozed on by ignorance,
 Were like those monstrous and barbaric shapes,
 The ghosts of a no-more-remembered fame
 Which from their unworn obelisks, look forth
 In triumph o'er the palaces and tombs
 Of those who were their conquerors; mouldering round,
 Those imaged to the pride of kings and priests
 A dark yet mighty faith, a power as wide
 As is the world it wasted, and are now
 But an astonishment; even so the tools
 And emblems of its last captivity,
 Amid the dwellings of the peopled earth,
 Stand, not o'erthrown, but unregarded now.
 And those foul shapes,--abhorred by god and man,
 Which, under many a name and many a form
 Strange, savage, ghastly, dark, and execrable,
 Were Jupiter, the tyrant of the world,
 And which the nations, panic-stricken, served
 With blood, and hearts broken by long hope, and love
 Dragged to his altars soiled and garlandless,
 And slain among men's unreclaiming tears,
 Flattering the thing they feared, which fear was hate,--
 Frown, mouldering fast, o'er their abandoned shrines.
 The painted veil, by those who were, called life,
 Which mimicked, as with colors idly spread,
 All men believed and hoped, is torn aside;
 The loathsome mask has fallen, the man remains
 Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man
 Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,
 Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king
 Over himself; just, gentle, wise; but man
 Passionless--no, yet free from guilt or pain,
 Which were, for his will made or suffered them;
 Nor yet exempt, though ruling them like slaves,

From chance, and death, and mutability,
 The clogs of that which else might oversoar
 The loftiest star of unascended heaven,
 Pinnacled dim in the intense inane.

(3.4.164-204)

In this moment there is a call for the equality of man to no longer be bound to the will of the Gods and the pain of servitude. While reading this passage all I could hear in my head was the song “Let the Sunshine In” by the group 5th Dimension. It is call for freedom and the autonomy to work with the love that humankind is capable of. The dream of Prometheus’s to gift humanity with fire is not unlike the wish of real-world activists to gift freedom in contrast to those who would keep humankind downtrodden and servile in service of the people and institutions that hold power over them. In a world where blind loyalty is demanded by the powerful in order to maintain their positions, the most radical act can be to strip them of their influence by cursing them with forgiveness.

https://youtu.be/ajgeaOt_HTQ?feature=shared

5. Sophie Hobbs

All things confess his strength. Through the cold mass
 Of marble and of color his dreams pass--
 Bright threads whence mothers weave the robes their children wear;
 Language is a perpetual Orphic song,
 Which rules with dædal harmony a throng
 Of thoughts and forms, which else senseless and shapeless were.

The lightning is his slave; heaven's utmost deep
 Gives up her stars, and like a flock of sheep
 They pass before his eye, are numbered, and roll on!
 The tempest is his steed, he strides the air;
 And the abyss shouts from her depth laid bare,
 'Heaven, hast thou secrets? Man unveils me; I have none'

(4.412-423)

In this passage, the Earth describes how the world now belongs to man and man now controls everything, even the lightning. When reading this passage, I was put in the mind of the current state of the climate and how, in a way, man does control the elements, or perhaps better said: man now has the power to affect the weather.

Different from *Prometheus Unbound*, this is not some good and almost magical thing, it is a tragic and scary thing. Human behavior is a major contributor to climate change and has been for a long time. Human behavior has caused normal weather cycles to alter, causing for extreme heat, rising sea levels, and extreme storms (Can man finally truly control lightning now?). Consumed with this control the Earth speaks of, humans have gone too far and are now no longer the creatures found in *Prometheus Unbound*. In some ways, humans share traits more with the gods, who seem to not care much about the earth and its other inhabitants.

<https://www.nrdc.org/stories/what-are-causes-climate-change#natural>

6. Charisma Johnson

The somewhat tragic figure of the disgraced Titan Prometheus has stayed relevant through time. Where some myths have died out, it has been made clear that this one will not. This is emphasized by the multitude of references and portrayals of the Titan. Many influential authors of their respective times have made this possible. In the early nineteenth century there was most notably Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, also known as *The Modern Prometheus*. In the modern day one very influential author (in my opinion) named Rick Riordan gave Prometheus a character revival in multiple books. Namely *The Last Olympian*. As well as *The Sea of Monsters* and *The Burning Maze*. A very heavily viewed and therefore notable appearance of Prometheus' myth in the modern day was in season eight of *Supernatural*, a live action fantasy tv show on the CW network. In season eight episode sixteen of the show aptly titled "Remember The Titans," we see a depiction of Prometheus who has amnesia. Despite not knowing who he is due to an avalanche on a mountain, Prometheus is still cursed. Prometheus' main characteristics stay consistent to his portrayal in *Prometheus Unbound*. He seems to care about the world and people around him as well as displaying great bravery. He goes as far as to sacrifice himself to kill Zeus and save his son (who much to Zeus' delight suffers the same curse as his father) from the wrath of the gods.

7. Bella Lavalle

The lines I will be referencing from *Prometheus Unbound* is from Act 1, lines 648-655: "Nature's sacred watchwords— they/Were borne aloft in bright emblazonry./The nations thronged around, and cried aloud/As with one voice, "Truth, liberty and love!"/Suddenly fierce confusion fell from Heaven/Among them— there was strife, deceit and fear;/Tyrants rushed in, and did divide the spoil./This

was the shadow of the truth I saw." I think this quote relates to what is going on currently in Ukraine because it reflects how many Ukrainians are unable to unify amongst the horrors happening in their country as the overarching possibility of defeat looms over the country. Volodymyr Zelenskyy became the face of Ukrainian resistance, and served as a universal symbol of resilience for fellow Ukrainians. However, as the fighting still continues and the end doesn't seem to be coming any closer, moral is lowering. This relates to the "strife, deceit and fear" in the quote.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-68778338>

8. Izzy Pokrzywinski

I want to talk about an overarching theme, that popped up in class discussion recently -- critical thinking. Comparing it to modern literature or any media in general, it does the work for you or is criticized for not being easy to understand. Sure, this kind of commentary might have been around since publishing but I feel it's relevant today, and in this piece especially. Jupiter's monologue is overwhelmingly confusing and hard to unravel. The passage I have chosen is describing what Jupiter calls "the fatal child", in which the footnote then elaborates, rather clarifies, that this is the son of Jupiter and Thetis. Jupiter is convinced that this child will be the physical form of Demogorgon, a character that has not previously been a concrete body. "... That fatal Child, the terror of the Earth, Who waits but till the destined Hour arrive, Bearing from Demogorgon's vacant throne.." (Shelley 842, Line 19). Why I bring up the modern views on literature and a lack of critical thinking skills from many major audiences is that this passage required an explanation -- like many texts we've had to read -- for this passage it seemed incredibly necessary. It's obviously very complex: Demogorgon does not have a physical form and our class discussion dived into the physicality of absence, and Jupiter does not outright state the name of who he is referring to as the fatal child. Many factors are intertwining with each other to create this narrative that is almost universally hard to understand. The difficulty of this brought up a lack of energy from modern audiences where a lot of people don't want to really interpret a text for themselves but rather have the text serve them instead of make you think like a piece of art should. A good example of this is the rise of Marvel movies and similar media which is immensely simple with almost no room to interpret for yourself as it tells you what it is and what it's doing. These being a major part of the cultural zeitgeist has led to intense criticism of films outside of these bounds, which is apparent by online reviews and receptions. It also has generated an idea around character complexity where characters are so one

dimensional, and perfect people, that when one is presented with a character unfitting to that standard they write them off as bad people -- or one would write off a whole piece of media for containing something of the sort. I feel like viewing anything with this contemporary view point will lead someone to a bad reading experience, they do not allow themselves to interpret or enjoy something that isn't conforming to the new standard of modern media complexity.

9. Kelan Scott

Dost thou boast the clear knowledge thou waken'dst for man?
 Then was kindled within him a thirst which outran
 Those perishing waters: a thirst of fierce fever,
 Hope, love, doubt, desire—which consume him forever.
 (1.542-45)

I chose this passage because weirdly enough it immediately reminded me of Beyonce. This passage comes from the scene where the fates are taunting Prometheus and shaming him for his decision to giving knowledge to humans. Their disappointment in him comes from a place of fear within themselves because they know that knowledge can lead to the destruction of their empire. So, how does this relate to Beyonce? Recently, Beyonce released her seventh studio-album *Cowboy Carter*. This sparked a lot of controversy, and she was ridiculed for daring to venture into a genre that she isn't known for actively participating in. This country-infused album is the second part of a three-act project in which she reclaims genres of music that were first pioneered by Black American artists. However, not many people are aware of this fact. In her album, Beyonce explores themes of family, love, racial identity, and the idea of breaking generational curses. This also explores music as an artform and emphasizes the importance of not allowing genre to confine the artist and their work. This album challenged listeners to step outside of what they've known and introduced them to infinite potential that can be unlocked when artists are given the freedom to explore all types of music. Listeners are pulled into her mind and are given a taste of what she thinks country music would sound like today if black artists were able to navigate this genre without the limitations of racial politics. For this, she received cold reviews from the country music community, but despite the bitter reactions to the album it was still able to obtain record-breaking achievements after its release. This isn't to say that this passage directly relates to the current situation in music, but there is a general concern surrounding the artform. There are parallels to where this fear comes from in that the fear that the Fates have come from the loss of their control, and the fear that surrounds music is the loss of an identity/culture that is attached to one genre. Country music has a culture attached to it, and it is

only ever validated through other members of that culture. Beyonce is seen as an outsider to the culture because she is a pop artist, but she has roots in Southern culture. She argues in her album that those roots go even deeper than the roots that most country artists have to the genre, so in some ways she's more country than those country artists. Therefore, she argues that she has more of a right to be in that genre than those artists.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/04/opinion/beyonce-cowboy-carter-country.html>

10. Ivan Tedroe

My passage reads as follows, when Prometheus laments his own pain and how his physical suffering interacts with his righteous anger at Jupiter's tyranny:

Ah woe! Alas! pain, pain ever, forever!
 I close my tearless eyes, but see more clear
 Thy works within my woe-illumined mind,
 Thou subtle Tyrant! ...Peace is in the grave---
 The grave hides all things beautiful and good---
 I am a god and cannot find it there,
 Nor would I seek it: for, through dread revenge,
 This is defeat, fierce King, not victory.
 (I.635-42)

The relevant - but by no means new - topic I was reminded of the most was the bleak reality of protest through self-immolation and the tyranny that inspires it to occur. This form of conscious protest was recently in the news with regards to Aaron Bushnell and one other unnamed protester, who self-immolated in order to express the strongest dissent against the ongoing genocide in Palestine. *Prometheus Unbound* is already acquainted with themes of justice through physical suffering, the relationship between bodily pain and injustice, sacrifice/loss, and knowledge as an active agent of change, but I found this particular passage to be extremely evocative of these concepts in Prometheus's psyche. Here, as Prometheus chooses to take away his sight through closing his own eyes, he is able to clearly understand the authoritarian reign of Jupiter; this is a small but telling example of how Prometheus's physical hardship leads him to his own political understanding and conviction. Prometheus also describes his mind as "woe-illumined," which suggests a sort of spiritual conviction born of his suffering. Although neither Bushnell nor Thich Quang Duc fit a traditional savior or martyr narrative, Prometheus also never claims to "save" the humans on Earth - he merely brought

them a form of wisdom that he regarded as their birthright that was wrongfully seized.

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/mar/04/self-immolation-protest-sacrifice>

11. Sia Patel

I curse thee! let a sufferer's curse
 Clasp thee, his torturer, like remorse;
 Till thine Infinity shall be
 A robe of envenomed agony;
 And thine Omnipotence a crown of pain,
 To cling like burning gold round thy dissolving brain!
 (1.286)

In this quote, Prometheus wishes for Jupiter to be punished for his wrongdoings and abuse of power, foreseeing a future where he is consumed by guilt and where his power will begin to morph into a torturous burden. To me, this concept resonates with modern day politics, where leaders who disregard the will of their people find that their power becomes a source of suffering, leading to problems that could have been avoided. For instance, in the environmental activism movement led by figures like Greta Thunberg, similar parallels can be drawn. Just as Prometheus foresaw/wished for Jupiter's power to turn into agony, politicians neglecting urgent issues like climate change will encounter increasingly difficult challenges with their power in a world plagued by floods, extreme weather, and depleting fossil fuels. Shelley's exploration of power, responsibility, and justice remains relevant as we witness the potential consequences of those in authority abusing their power or neglecting their duties.

<https://www.npr.org/2019/09/23/763452863/transcript-greta-thunbergs-speech-at-the-u-n-climate-action-summit>