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Promethean Mnemotechnics: Memory, Forgetting, Episodic Future Thought and Nonviolent Revolution

Abstract: In his *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley reinterprets the Promethean mythologeme historicistically and psychodynamically as a response to his time's political and ideological crisis. The Titan is resemiotised as the central figure of a metapsychological drama, in which the dialectic between the protagonist and his different chronoceptions, represented in the text as characters, takes the form of a complex multivocal negotiation between different types of memory and forgetting, synchronicist contemplations of the present and protensive anticipations towards the future. These elements converge into a powerful strategy of mental action, or *Promethean mnemotechnics*, through which the protagonist first releases himself from the captivity of the tyrant Jupiter and then becomes a pragmatic model, to be followed in the reader's extratextual dimension.

Keywords: P.B. Shelley; *Prometheus Unbound*; Chronoception; Prophetic Poetry; Episodic Future Thinking; Memory and Forgetting; Memories of the Future.

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**“No change, no pause, no hope!
Yet I endure” (PU, I.24)**

When Shelley wrote *Prometheus Unbound*, between 1818 and 1820 (from now on indicated as *PU*)¹, the circumstances of the composition of this lyrical drama were not dissimilar from his other major political works². Europe was witnessing a crucial historical moment³, where the return to the *Ancien Régime*, after the political and ideological failure of the French Revolution and the collapse of Bonapartism could, according to Shelley, trigger a new revolution, a new *Terreur*, even bloodier than the previous one⁴. He, and the other members of the English Reform Movement (Burdett, Cochrane)⁵, shared the urge to intervene in contemporary history, by reacting promptly to these foreseen incoming dangers and preventing the severe moral and social crisis that could easily be its natural outcome⁶. Unlike the English Radicals (Cobbet, John and Leigh Hunt, Cartwright), who advocated a robust response to these events, even in the form of violent revolution, Shelley's tendency was to propound a position of civil

and nonviolent resistance through writing, symbolic protest and noncooperation as tools to achieve social and political change, in a way which anticipated and later influenced Thoreau's and Mahatma Gandhi's later positions on civil disobedience⁷.

Like the Titan, society was "bound to the precipice"⁸, poised between victory and disaster, caught in the midst of the night of the collective soul, still marked by the memory of Jacobin violence and in a permanent state of *κρίνειν*. Etymologically, the term indicates a 'decisive moment', and since the mid-16th century denotes, in the English language, "the turning-point of a disease for better or worse" (*OED*, "crisis": 1), a situation that can evolve towards restoring health or degrade into irreversible systemic entropy, that is destruction and death. The occasion is crucial. Shelley seizes it with extraordinary artistic promptness and political farsightedness: he composes a politically connoted work to influence history through the pragmatic force of the poetic genius he describes in *A Defence of Poetry*, half "hierophant" (a visionary communicator of secret, occult knowledge, here related to the archetypes of brotherhood, equality, and universal Love) and half "unacknowledged legislator of the world" (endowed with the power of imagination and therefore entitled to affect consciences, through indirect communication and artistic suggestion)⁹. The role of poets and intellectuals is then Promethean: to "endure" (*PU*, I.24) in the climax of desperate suffering ("No change, no pause, no hope!", *PU*, I.24) without succumbing to the arrogance of power, and at the same time seizing the opportunity to change crisis into an occasion, to make an alternate history to the current one.

The Titan is accordingly resemiotised as the central figure of a metapsychological drama, "drawn from the operations of the human mind" ("Preface", in *Works*, p. 230), in which the other characters, including Jupiter, but also the topical space of the action, are respectively allegorical embodiments and objective correlates of the psychic contents of Prometheus' mind¹⁰. Moreover, the protagonist's dialectical interplay with his different perceptions of time (past, present and future) is a device serving as a mediating tool, as Jung would put it, within the cathartic path of individuation of the personal and collective Self, made through the dialogic interaction between the conscious and the unconscious parts Prometheus' psyche.

More specifically, and as we will see, the Promethean mythologeme becomes a historicistic laboratory in which the poet can test a possible solution to the present crisis through literary modelling and allegory and then affect the reader's conscience through the performative force of the *exemplum*. For these reasons, the Titan functions as both the epitome of the epochal crisis, which contextualises the drama, and at the same time acts as a pragmatic model of strategic mental action to be followed and, most of all, put into action by the reader/audience. Prometheus is thus destined to trigger (as Shelley says in "Preface") a "fervid awakening of the public mind", and produce an "unimaginable change" both in our "social condition" and in the "opinions which cement it" (*Works*, p. 231).

As I will try to show, Shelley builds his communicative and expressive strategy on the temporal paradigm. More specifically, the entire macrotextual and psychodynamic structure of the drama is based on

the notion of *chronoception*, or perception of time, a fundamental component of human awareness through which we shape our sense of self-identity by connecting the memories of the past, the everchanging sensations of the present, and the varied expectations we grow about the future¹¹.

This choice stems from two primary components of his worldview. First of all, his Hegelian and Whig philosophy of history consists of a spiraliform and teleological model describing historical evolution as a struggle, on the stage of individual and collective history, of two historical, sociopolitical and metapsychological factors: Tyranny and Liberty. Tyranny brings forth the conflicting countervalues of despotism, violence, hatred, despair and moral aberration, which Shelley attributes to Jacobin violence and the authoritarianism of absolutist regimes. Liberty promotes the collaborative values of equanimity, love, peace, hope and brotherhood. These opposite and complementary poles contend perpetually, with periodic alternations, till Liberty will gradually overcome, then prevail definitely over Tyranny, as only the former participates in the ontological nature of the One Power, the Hegelian transhistorical and transindividual force that governs individual and collective fate¹².

Furthermore, as far as political action and its effectiveness are concerned, success depends on the level of consciousness of the acting subject, not solely on external circumstances. Many scholars have pointed out that Shelley's epistemology and social philosophy is radically idealistic, with Berkeleyan undertones¹³. In Shelley's philosophy, as he suggests in the closure of "Mont Blanc" (1816)¹⁴, the notion of 'reality' is inseparable from individual perception

and understanding, being a mental construct that cannot be disjointed from the plane of innate ideas. More than in any other of his writings, in *Prometheus Unbound*, this *esse est percipi* principle ('to be is to be perceived, or to perceive') becomes a function of present consciousness that, in the fatal moment of individual and collective crisis, brings forth different narrations of the past, alternate to the hegemonic ones, prefigures new possible futures and finally determines a different course of action, where Liberty prevails over Tyranny, both in the internalised reality of the mind and in the external world, therefore changing objective reality through the ideal.

Correspondingly, Shelley structures the drama as a complex but strategically ordered series of time-biased *tableaux*, alternately oriented according to the three macro-directions of the past, present and future, and acting as psychodynamic tools for the discursive negotiation of sense, both individual and collective. Prometheus's consciousness, his ability to perceive the world around him in ontological terms, as a coherent system of emergent properties of reality, and, ultimately, his sense of identity evolve and are shaped upon the screen of his varied perception of time: through memories of the past, present sensations and expectations about the future. Through this mnemotechnical process, we are gradually told an alternate story, in which the harbingers of Liberty are already inscribed in the folds of the memorial past, can be seized visionarily in the epiphanic present and are linked to oracular breakthroughs that unexpectedly bring characters in contact with the future, where their revolutionary expectations reside and in which the liberation of Prometheus from

the yoke of Jupiter and the regeneration of the whole world, with the restoration of the Pre-Olympic Golden Age (Liberty), are already teleologically determined and therefore accessible in the *hic et nunc* of the enunciation.

Past-oriented discourse. As to the past, we have two kinds of mnestic projection: 1) *autobiographic memory*, that is, the recalling of the mythological events that occurred between Prometheus and Jupiter, their causes and outcomes (I.1-19, 57, 73-129, 153-175, 175-179); 2) *collective memory*, relative to the shared body of knowledge about the past and the present ecosystemic apocalypse (I.159-179). These memories are evoked, through collaborative recall, by the goddess Earth (I.159-178) and the six Elemental Spirits who speak in turn in Act I (I.690-800), sharing with Prometheus their *collected memories*, that is, to use Olick's descriptive category, "aggregated individual memories of members of a group"¹⁵.

The drama also displays the opposite and complementary pole of memory, *forgetting*. This latter takes two different forms. The first one is a kind of *unintentional forgetting*, that is, Prometheus' temporary, as well as involuntary, amnesia concerning the curse he cast against Jupiter (I.72-73, 262-301): he cannot remember the words he uttered (I.58-59, 73: "What was that curse?") and must even rely on the Phantasm of Jupiter himself, evoked through Earth's mediation, to recall it (I.262-301). The second is a form of *directed forgetting*, the voluntary inhibition of unpleasant memories, for the sake of psychological balance after traumatic experiences, exerting the beneficial effect of increasing brain flexibility, cognitive awareness, creativity and resilience¹⁶. In *PU*, a specific

form of directed forgetting, *selective directed forgetting*¹⁷, that is the discarding of only specified sets of mnestic data among a more significant number of memories concerning a specific past experience, makes Prometheus, since the beginning of Act I, deliberately forget the regressive drives inherent in his *hybris*, thymically dysphoric and potentially destructive, such as the "evil wishe[s]" (I.70) of "hate" (I.72), "despair" (I.260) and "revenge" (I.215) that led him to curse Jupiter and consequently break the ecosystemic order, by directing the compass of history towards Tyranny and away from Liberty. This voluntary process of selective forgetting is part of Prometheus' cathartic strategy, and it expands throughout the text to involve the other characters in Act IV, when they join him in collectively discarding the memory of Jupiter's tyranny and its adverse emotional outcomes by deliberately choosing to live happily in the new Golden Age dominated by the virtues of justice and compassion (I.796). Since this last kind of selective forgetting leads to the interpersonal and political reconciliation and forgiveness which prevails in Act IV, it also corresponds to Conner-ton's second type of forgetting, "prescriptive forgetting"¹⁸, the purposeful discard of memories for the general good and political reconciliation, made in the "interest of all parties" and crucial for peaceful conflict resolution¹⁹.

Present-oriented discourse. We can also detect, in the drama, a form of chronoception which is both transhistorical and transpersonal, as it concerns the shared collective knowledge of the atemporal dimension of the Absolute, where the happy fate of Prometheus resides. This dimension is consistent with a kind of teleological awareness,

personified by Asia and conveyed through the monologues of goddess Earth and the Elemental Spirits in Act I, as scholars have long established²⁰. This awareness draws from the eternal repository of the universal ethical values such as “Wisdom, Justice, Love, and Peace” (I.796) and of the noetic knowledge of ontological truths, such as the existence of the two languages that separate life and death (I.159-151), the structure of the cosmos (I.191-207), the nature of death and war (III.ii.110-123). When the goddess Earth informs Prometheus of his true nature and fate (I.140-145, 152-153, 180-186), it is from this repository of eternal truths that she draws her knowledge. Since these revelations take the form of an eidolic unveiling of deeper ontological truths, within the protagonist’s consciousness, during his first dialogue with Earth (he suddenly remembers them as an innate knowledge to which he temporarily could not have access: I.107-221), this kind of memory is analogous to Platonic *anamnesis* (*Meno*, 81b-c; *Phaedo*, 74b-76c), which Shelley knew from his acquaintance with ancient Greek philosophy²¹.

Future-oriented discourse. The text is intertwined with recurrent moments of episodic future thinking, that is, narrations directed towards events that still have to come in the diachronic timeline of history²². These are not mere futures. More specifically, these textual segments are projections on the axis of desire, determining future action in the revolutionary plot. For our purposes, some key concepts taken from the fertile field of Future Studies are worth mentioning, which will facilitate our understanding of this phenomenon.

First, Luhmann’s notion of *present future* is of great use for our purposes. In

a seminal book (Luhmann 1976), he distinguishes between *future presents* (events which still have to come, the future proper) and *present futures*. These latter are not merely images of the future but future actions and states of events that we imagine or project in the present. Present futures are closely connected with the *horizons of expectations*²³, as they not only are cataphoric projections in the direction of *what is not yet*, but they also entail, as Jedlowsky puts it, a “complex set of expectations partially formulated on the basis of past experiences, which contributes to confer meaning to the present and make choices that will produce the future”²⁴. This set of expectations is shaped individually, through what we have experienced in the past, or the “space of experience”, as Koselleck terms it²⁵, partly through our “affects and sensations”²⁶ and partly socially, through collective experiences, as these anticipations also depend, and therefore acquire meaning and value, on the socially shared definitions of what is preferable, or appropriate, to aspire to, as it occurs in collective memories, according to J. Assmann²⁷.

Futurity is vast and central in the drama. Textual segments representing episodic future thinking in terms of *present future* and its horizon of expectations abound and have a high distributive value. In Act I, out of a total of 58 textual segments conveying the time paradigm, 24 relate to episodic future thinking, for a total of 41%; in Act II, 18 out of 20 (90%); in Act III, 9 out of 12 (75%); in Act IV 2 out of 7 (28.6%), the other remaining consisting in visionary contemplations of the present, where the incoming victory over the tyrant is still perceivable (IV.1-156 and 534-578), and in the constative declarations of the

individual and collective change that has just occurred in the world (IV.319-381 and 424-553), with only one analeptic textual segment (IV.270-318).

The discourse of futurity constitutes, in *PU*, the core of the individual and collective negotiation of meaning concerning the actions and attitudes that can help disengage the characters from their current state of crisis and slavery, tiding back individual and collective history into the direction of Liberty. This eventuality is related to futurity as, in “contrast to past discourse, future discourse is intimately connected with modality since the future, in contrast to the past, is necessarily unknown and undetermined. Consequently, future discourse is inherently modal, in the sense of being about possible worlds that characterise ways in which the world may develop”²⁸. Therefore, it is easy to understand why Prometheus’ *mnemotechnics*, a strategy of mental action directed towards performativity in the extratextual world of experience, hinges on future discourse.

In *PU*, there are five different types of episodic future thinking as *present future*: intentional future, prospective future, possible future, prophecy, and memories of the future. As we will see, they are part of Prometheus’s strategic mental action of emancipation from oppression through the nonviolent revolution of consciousness.

“Fire is left for future burning”
(*PU*, I.507)

By *intentional future*, I indicate Prometheus’ cataphoric projections into events or states of affairs that he is determined to accomplish, as in the declarative statements of I.24 (“No change, no pause,

no hope! Yet I endure”) and I.400 (“I will not yield”). Future discourse is here closely related to Shelleyan titanism and his ideal of a nonviolent revolution since it functions as the expressive device the author uses to convey the protagonist’s heroic resolution to revolt, rebellion against authority through stern endurance and passive resistance for an indefinite time, as long as oppression lasts.

On the other side, I call *prospective futures* the characters’ mental action of looking forward to the future, in a sempiternal dimension of waiting and suspension of time, precluding imminent and inevitable change. For instance, the Sixth Spirit’s monologue of I.772-779 conveys this attitude, in the form of a confident expectation of Prometheus’ release, whose premonitory signs are perceptible in the present as prophetic intimations (cfr. the “Prophecy” sub-category further in the discussion) and make the Spirits hail him as their deliverer (“he whom now/ we greet”, I.779). The same attitude can be detected when, in the cave of Demogorgon, Asia mentions the personified collective expectations concerning the world’s deliverance from Jupiter’s yoke, who patiently wait for Prometheus’ revolutionary action to manifest itself as arrayed soldiers waiting for the opportunity to protect Liberty (“legioned hopes which sleep”, II.iv.59).

Possible futures are cataphoric time frames containing imaginative projections of events that may occur in the future. These events are probable but uncertain. In *Prometheus Unbound*, possible futures are axiologically-biased. According to the degree of greater or lesser correspondence with the general teleological horizon of expectation (the ideal of the Golden Age in which Liberty prevails over Tyranny),

they can be either thymically euphoric or dysphoric. Thymically euphoric projections imaginatively anticipating the events which may lead to Prometheus' fateful release can be detected in the Spirits' monologues (I.672-800), in Asia's vision of the Young spirit (II.iv.163-174), in the imaginative projections of the Chorus of Spirits (IV.157-158).

On the other side, the thymically dysphoric examples convey opposite and complementary projections pointing to a gloomy possible future, a sort of uchronic state of affairs dominated by violence and despair, alternate to the positive one, in which Prometheus has failed, and Tyranny has won over Liberty. One example of this negative mode can be found in the Furies' monologues (I.338-633), whose actantial function is to hamper Prometheus' programme of action by wearing out his moral strength, causing him to lose confidence in himself and his values and which are symmetrically opposite to the thymically positive and 'motivational' monologues uttered by the Spirits in I.672-800.

As for *prophecies*, the drama abounds in moments of foretelling or predictions of what is to come. Reasons of space prevent me from addressing them in sufficient detail, and since a relatively large and distinguished body of criticism has already explored these components of Shelley's writing, through the analysis of prophetic rhetoric, the futurity and historicity of prophetic speech, and the symbolism of prophetic poetry in the British Romantics, I refer readers to these studies for more details about this subject²⁹. To state it briefly, in *PU*, prophecies occur in the text either in the form of inspired utterances, directly emanating from the dimension of

the Spirit and conveyed through the voice of archetypal characters, such as Earth's predictions on the fate of her titanic son (I.191, III.i.85-106). In other instances, prophetic utterances convey individual or collective insights on the incoming return to the Golden Age, inspired by the transpersonal and transhistorical dimension of the Absolute (I.403-5). Moreover, in *PU*, prophecies always convey a personal and, at the same time, collective meaning since Prometheus shares his destiny with all living beings, as their champion and synecdochic representative. Therefore, when he boldly states, addressing Jupiter, "What ruin/ Will hunt thee" (I.52-53), he is speaking as an advocate of the whole existent, as the elemental Spirit's monologues of I.75-106 collectively suggest, through emphasis to their empathetic sharing of the Titan's suffering.

Finally, the drama displays one last form of episodic future thinking. This latter is more complex if compared with the others in that it dynamically involves the three main dimensions of perceived time (past, present, future) and exerts a decisive role in the epistemic and actantial dimensions of the characters' phenomenology concerning the notions of teleological fate, self-awareness, decisive action and nonviolent revolution. This last form of relationship with time falls under the macro-category of *memories of the future*.

Ingvar was the first to introduce the term in the field of neurological studies to refer to memories of action plans and expectations of the future that, once stored in the frontal and prefrontal cortex of the brain, can be reactivated by the organism when facing situations that are similar to previous ones³⁰. In Sociology and Future

Studies, the term indicates the memorial discourse practices concerning projects, predictions, aspirations, concerns, and general visions of the future that were imagined in the past and then recollected by the subject in the present. As Jedlowsky puts it, memories of the future are explicit “recollections of what individuals and groups expected in the past”³¹.

In *PU*, memories of the future can be classified into three sub-categories: *remembered prophecies*, *remembered prophetic dreams* and *mantic topography*.

Remembered prophecies. Foretellings or predictions made in the past, in some cases formerly left unnoticed but recalled in the here-now of enunciation through memory narratives, fall under this first sub-category. This happens in three key episodes: a long passage dedicated to the five prophecies of the hopeful Spirits who inhabit human thought (I.690-800); the prophetic song of Silenus, reported by the Second Faun (II.ii.88-97) and the Spirit of the Hour’s report on a change that has just occurred among humans, towards the pole of Liberty (III.iv. 99-204). All these prophecies occur in analeptic frames and anticipate, again, Prometheus’ release and the subsequent deliverance of the world.

Remembered prophecies bring to light a well-known psychological fact, concerning the way human consciousness realises some inner truths, with the aid of the recursive memory of episodic future thinking, that is, through its varied and interrelated perceptions of time. They spring up in present consciousness during inspired moments of synchronistic awareness, meaningful coincidences³² during which, as Jung would put it, the inner and outer dimensions of the subjects’ experience integrate each other in

a single unity, and exert a profound cathartic effect in their present consciousness. In *PU*, this result becomes evident at the level of the plot, as a sudden unblocking of the many actantial and psychological *impasses* caused in both characters and environment due to Prometheus’ imprisonment. The first remembered prophecy, for instance, exerts the function of unblocking the psychological and actantial *impasse* in which the Furies, who personify Prometheus’ regressive drives of doubt and remorse, had thrown the protagonist through their bad omens, trying to make despair prevail over hope. Through the Spirits’ speeches, the sudden re-emergence of the memory of past hopes turns the psychological compass back into the direction of hope and away from despair. A similar cathartic effect is also brought by the second remembered prophecy, when the reported song of Silenus by the Second Faun, which prophesies Prometheus’ release, leads to another unblocking of the actantial *impasse*, as the volcanic imagery, with its “oracular vapours” (II. iii.4), suggests. As Matthews noted, Shelley often uses volcanic metaphors to depict the rising of revolutionary spirit as in both “irrepressible collective energy contained by repressive power” comes out with great strength³³. Finally, the third remembered prophecy, the Spirit of the Hour’s speech on the moral renewal occurring among humans (III.iv.99-204), reverberates, with greater emphasis, in the whole Act IV, to involve all characters, the environment and the cosmos.

Prophetic dreams. The second kind of the memories of the future occurring in *PU* corresponds to Panthea’s two prophetic dreams, which Asia interprets in II.i.35-126 and 133-141, through her clairvoyant

sight. Again, they belong to this category as they consist in moments of episodic future thinking: the content of the two dreams reenacts the twin prophecies concerning Prometheus' fate, again, his release and the consequent renewal of the world (II.i.107), respectively. Secondly, they occur in the text through a retrospective narrative: Panthea had these dreams in the past, without noticing their relevance, and now she recollects them through Asia's mediation.

Asia's reading of the two dreams is reminiscent, besides some popular divinatory techniques, of the ancient Greek practices of divination (*mantikē*) applied to dream interpretation and described by Macrobius' Neoplatonic commentary on Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* (Book I, Chapter III). Shelley could have learned about Macrobius through his reading of Volney's *Les ruines* (1791), a text he used since *Queen Mab* (1813) and *Laon and Cythna* (1817) to "Ozymandias" (1818) for his political philosophy and to convey the idea that "all power will turn into dust"³⁴. Besides Shelley's familiarity with Cicero³⁵, he could have had direct access to this ancient source through early nineteenth school selections of Cicero's writings available to the poet, as Feistat notes³⁶.

More precisely, when Asia reads and interprets Panthea's first dream, she begins her divination by fixing her gaze on her sister's eyes, as in the popular magic practice of *oculomancy*, or divination through scrying of the questioner's eyes ("lift up thine eyes, / And let me read thy dream", II.i.55-56; "Oh, lift/Thine eyes, that I may read his written soul!", II.i.109-110). Moreover, the interpretation of the second dream results from a visionary moment during which a suddenly altered state of consciousness

opens up Asia's mind to the revelation of higher truths concerning the future and coming from teleological collective memory (here represented by Love's "immortal shape" II.i.72). She then also performs the revelation of oracular dreams (*chrēmatis-mos*) through which the Greek gods were said to give advice to men³⁷, by the mediation of a divinatory expert, like a *mantis*, *hiereus*, or *oneiropolos*, such as those Achilles cites among those who might be able to reveal the reasons behind Zeus' wrath against the Greek army and the cause of the plague, in *Iliad* (I.63). These methods of divination are consistent with Æschylus' hypotext since, as Shelley knew well, they occur among the mantic techniques which Prometheus, as a paradigmatic culture hero, lists in a well-known monologue, among the other many things he claims to have done for mortals' sake (ll. 484-99): cledonancy, augury, the reading of entrails, empyromancy and, in fact, dream interpretation³⁸.

Mantic topography. In *PU*, there is a third type of memory of the future: the many prophetic signs scattered all over the remembered landscape, or memoryscape, which Asia and Panthea recall collaboratively during the inspired reading of the second prophetic dream, in II.i.134-163. In this landscape, the naturalistic detail of the "blown down" (II.i.138) "flower-in-folding blossoms" on a "lightning-blasted almond tree" (II.i.135-136) symbolise the temporary condition of affliction and slavery of the world, under the yoke of Jupiter, being the almond an emblem of hope and expectation and as the Hebrew word for almond also means 'hasten' (*Jeremiah*, 1:11-12), so that this reference is a possible appropriation by Shelley of Biblical

symbolism, as Wasserman has noted³⁹. However, Panthea also remembers that in the dream, each leaf of these blossoms carried the message “O, FOLLOW FOLLOW!” (II.i.141), magically stamped on their surfaces and fuelling the revolution against the tyrant. Asia cooperates with this collaborative recall by adding to this *tableau* other significant detail she recovers from the same reservoir of memory she now intuitively shares with her sister by the effect of the *mantikē*. Therefore, she also gradually recollects, through this kind of visionary reminiscence, the fact that in that same memoryscape, the message (II.i.153: “FOLLOW, O; FOLLOW!”) could also be seen in “the shadows of the moving clouds/ Athwart the purple mountain slope” (II.i.151), in the “clinging music” of the wind among the “pines” (II.i.156-157) and in Panthea’s same eyes, when Asia, still in the dream, looked at her, as she is doing now in the scene, then analogously as in a *mise en abyme* of the divination currently in progress (“in the depth of those beloved eyes/ Still I saw, FOLLOW, FOLLOW!”; II.i.161-162).

The imagery conveys the idea, itself consistent with Titanic psychodynamics, that present grief coexists with powerful revolutionary drives in the mind of the oppressed. In the stamped “leaves”, the implied Biblical symbolism of the almond as an emblem of hope and expectation, as well as of ‘hasten’, suggests this, while the mythologemic reference to “Apollo’s written grief” (cfr. the simile in II.i.140) which could be read in the “blue bells / Of Hyacinth” (II.i.139-140) refers to the ambit of suffering, *via* Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* 10⁴⁰. As for the “shadows of the moving clouds”, the reference to the igneous colour in the

“purple mountain slope” and their oblique (“Athwart”) advance down the mountain’s “slope”, besides being reminiscent of Coleridge’s poetic vision in “Kubla Khan”, which proceeds “Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover” (l. 13) and goes so far as to manifest acoustically the numinous “voices prophesying war” (l. 30), is iconically suggestive of a catabatic downwards movement, which could also be psychic, by analogy with the metaphorically descending emotional movement of the psyche during the perception of grief and despair. At the same time, though, it suggests in a stylised way the volcanic imagery that Shelley often uses to advocate the inevitability of revolution⁴¹: a purple mountain slope with clouds is similar to the volcano’s side, covered with lava and surrounded by vapours, during the eruption. Finally, the wind among the pines alludes, synthetically, to two symbols Shelley uses for the Spirit of revolution (wind) and the suffering of the people under the yoke of despotism (pines), as it occurs, respectively, in the “Ode to the West Wind”, through the central symbol of the wind, and in *PU* itself, through the pun between the name of the tree (“pine”) and the intransitive form of the verb (“pine”), meaning ‘to suffer, to endure pain’, as it occurs in I.128 (“the groans of pining slaves”, alluding to the living creatures under Jupiter’s oppression) and in I.669 (“And, hark! is it the music of the pines?”, when Panthea feels that the Spirit of revolution is beginning to soar in the world).

Asia and Panthea are caught by the vision that propagates in their minds collaboratively as they complete it dialogically, each by adding new detail to it (II.i.134-208). Furthermore, the remembered dream gradually acquires ontological

consistency before their senses when it enters the scene as a disembodied character (“*Dream*”, II.i.132) who at first anticipates the recovery of the message in the form of a voice that creeps in between the pauses of the maidens’ dialogue (“Follow! Follow!”, II.i.132), and then repeats it, as an echo (“*Echo*”, II.i.163) which multiplies itself (“*Echoes, unseen*”, II.i.165; “*Echoes*”, II.i.173, 177, 196) and finally replicates what are now the words referred to by Asia and Panthea in their dialogue and then reenacted by Asia at the end of the scene (II.i.208).

This third form of memory of the future has the peculiarity of crystallising remembered futurity, that is, time, into the spatial dimension of the present action, therefore embedding the characters’ horizon of expectation into the experiential space and opening up chronoception to the possibility that the timeline quantistically curves into a seamless continuity between these past unheeded prophecies, stamped in the landscape as sorts of Paracelsian magic signatures anticipating the happy future destiny, and their inevitable fulfilment. Asia’s and Panthea’s pivotal location in the present, between these two chronoceptual complementaries, puts them in the strategic position of experiencing this collation between different time dimensions within the same space of the remembered dream as an episode of synchronicity. In other words, they experience them as meaningfully and causally interrelated, even though there is no evidence, apart from analogy, that the oracular past led to this visionary present, and that both will lead to *that* expected future. It is the opening of their minds to the possibility of experiencing reality through the activation of the acausal

logic of the unconscious, rather than the causal logic of conscious thought, that allows them to experience synchronicity and, with that, to reach a heightened and enhanced state of consciousness, dominated by intuition and imagination, in which they can have a different perception of both their shared past and present, where the signs of the revolution were still available to a more sensitive perception, and of the future as the dimension in which their expectations will come true, as prophecies surely destined to be fulfilled⁴².

**Conclusions: “The prophecy /
Which begins and ends in thee!”
(*PU*, I.690-691)**

If the first five types of futurity introduce in the text a series of optative, but at the same time utopian visions of the desired future, still to be reached, the performative force of episodic future thinking, as a textual element that makes revolutionary agency accessible to the character’s consciousness, lies instead in the memories of the future, thanks to the modal force of synchronicity.

Tyranny, conveyed in the dialogues with the despotic Jupiter and the demotivating Furies, is a psychodynamic system of defuturisation⁴³. It selectively inhibits memory and at the same time “bereaves the future of its openness and uncertainty”⁴⁴, leading to the renunciation of any utopian impulse, any possibility of heroic and revolutionary action directed to constructing alternative futures. Its result is the crushing of nonconforming individuals, of anyone not in agreement with or in obedience to tyrannic power, under a presentist imperative that, in turn, prescribes to bear, accept and

even love their present condition, to forget past expectations and renounce any innovative drive. Not surprisingly, the textual segments that introduce defuturisation in the drama also coincide, in the plot, with moments of actantial and psychological *impasse* and concentrate in Act I, where the memory of Jupiter's tyrannic power and Prometheus' ancient desire for revenge dominate⁴⁵.

On the other hand, and as we have seen, when the discourse of the future is hegemonic, we can detect in the character's voices an increased hope in their possibilities to change for the better their present condition. The immediate consequences are the untangling of memory, the reactivation of the present action at the individual and collective levels and the characters' opening to the future (desired, planned or seen through oracular insights). Defuturisation gives way to futurisation, Tyranny recedes in favour of Liberty, as this latter is now hegemonic on the order of discourse, and the restoration of the agency overcomes the *impasse* at both the individual and collective levels of consciousness⁴⁶.

The autobiographical and collective forms of memory contribute to this cathartic strategy as they bring to light, in the textual space, the individual and collective events related to the victims of Jupiter, that is, Prometheus and all living beings (I. 159-179). Psychologically and sociologically, the private and public negotiation of meaning, through sharing the auto-noetic knowledge conveyed by autobiographic and collective memory, is a necessary and unavoidable step in any process of redemption from trauma and suffered violence as we have learned after decades of Trauma Studies⁴⁷. Consequently, every story of oppression must turn into a narration made

by the oppressed victims, as Beatrice Cenci reminds us in Shelley's drama of 1819.

On the other hand, anamnesis keeps alive in the text the superconscious, noetic and collective system of the universal ethical values implied in Liberty (brotherhood, love, equanimity, compassion), pre-existing and subsequent to the sinusoidal course of history, as it is located in the transhistorical domain of the Absolute, the transcendent and spiritual *One Power*.

Finally, unintentional forgetting erases even the unconscious mnemonic traces of the violence Prometheus inflicted on Jupiter through his ancient curse. At the same time, selective directed forgetting, which represents the conscious side of this cathartic process, allows the protagonist to deliberately discard from his mind the emotional memory of the effects of oppression (hatred, fear, despair), as when he acknowledges having "no memory [...] / Of what is hate" (I.70-71). This attitude opens him to the possibility of experiencing different behaviours (collaborative, empathetic, compassionate), alternate to those ascribable to Tyranny, even directed towards his oppressor – as when he declares, "I wish no living thing to suffer pain" (I.305) – thus alien to any desire for revenge.

As it happens to Ozymandias in the sonnet of 1818, to Bonaparte in the closure of "Lines Written on Hearing the News of the Death of Napoleon" (1821) and to the traumatic past, at the end of *Hellas* (1822)⁴⁸, in the third Act of *PU*, the tyrant is condemned to everlasting oblivion: Jupiter disappears with Demogorgon into the abyssal depths of eternity (III.i.52-83). In the last Act, all residual information concerning the tyrant and the devastating effects of his despotism recedes from the

stage of history, the characters' consciousness and collective discursive practices. They eventually choose to live happily in fraternal communion, that is, to selectively perceive, in the space of experience, the pole of Liberty instead of Tyranny, as in "an ocean of splendour and harmony" (IV.134), that sets their minds free from "Death, Chaos, and Night" (IV.144).

Thus, in line with the "arbitrary discretion" ("Preface", in *Works*, p. 206) Shelley declares to have introduced in his drama if compared to his classical source, Prometheus' mental action does not lead to a compromising submission to his enemy (as in the Æschylean hypotext), nor a renewed act of oppression against another living being, no matter how cruel he is. This would have turned history's wheel into another era of hatred and violence, under the yoke of a renewed form of Tyranny, a new *Terreur*, now even of Titanic proportions.

Since the actantial and psychodynamic complementarity between the two protagonists has exhausted its function, Prometheus also disappears from the drama, and he does so early, at the end of the third Act, without appearing again on stage. At the end of Act IV, in a different way from Byron's version, where Prometheus is still the egotistically sublime hero who

overcomes "Death" with his Titanic "Victory"⁴⁹, the Shelleyan character has been transfigured, instead, into an archetypal symbol of Liberty, more a living book, a crystallised set of exemplary universal values ("Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free", IV.575-578), than a real character.

Prometheus' mnemotechnics has proved successful. In the rhapsodic, visionary Act IV, what seemed irreversible has become reversible, despair has turned into hope, and actantial *impasse* has resulted in decisive action. Cosmoethical awareness, related to Liberty, ignited by a renewed hope, in the closing of the drama, spreads mystically, as "shapes of light" (IV.78) and "[w]ells of unfathomed fire" (IV.284), from consciousness to consciousness. This new horizon of expectation, reborn as the phoenix from its ashes, supplants the dysphoric one definitively, even if it "seemed omnipotent" (IV.572). The Titanic nonviolent revolution is now ready to spread beyond these verses, in the readers' consciousness, through the poetic words that, as "seeds cast into the highway of life" ("Preface", in *Works*, p. 209), are now ready to sprout and bear fruit for the benefit of present generations and, as we read in the *Philosophical View of Reform* (1819-1820), for "the sake of a future and more universal advantage".⁵⁰

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NOTES

1. Unless otherwise specified, all references to Shelley's poetical works are from Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2002, and they will be indicated with the abbreviation *Works*, followed by page numbers.
2. To cite the most important ones: the Irish *pamphlets* (1812), *Queen Mab* (1813), "A Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote" (1817), *The Revolt of Islam* (1818), "Ozymandias" (1818), *The Mask of Anarchy* (1819), *Philosophical View of Reform* (1819-1820), *Oedipus Tyrannus, Or, Swellfoot the Tyrant* (1820), *Ode to Liberty*, *Ode to Naples* (1820), *Hellas* (1822), "Lines Written on Hearing the News on the Death of Napoleon" (1822).

3. The circumstances of the composition of *PU* are in Mary Shelley's journal (Abinger MSS, Reel 10). For a detailed historical account cfr. Neil Fraistat, *The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts*, gen. ed. Donald H. Reiman, 23 vols., New York & London, Garland Publishing, 1986-2001, vol. IX, pp. lxii-lxxv.
4. Cfr. Michael Scrivener, "Politics, Protest, and Social Reform", in Michael O'Neill *et al.* (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2013, pp. 132-176.
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8. Percy B. Shelley, *PU*, Act I, Stage directions.
9. *Ibidem*, *Works*, pp. 512-513.
10. James B. Twitchell, "Shelley's Metapsychological System in Act IV of 'Prometheus Unbound'", in *Keats-Shelley Journal*, vol. 24, 1975, pp. 29-48. Cfr. also Jacqueline Mulhallen, *The Theatre of Shelley*, Cambridge (UK), Cambridge Open Book Publishers, 2010, pp. 80-101.
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12. Cfr. Kenneth N. Cameron, "The Social Philosophy of Shelley", in *The Sewanee Review*, vol. 50, n. 4, Oct.-Dec. 1942, pp. 457-466.
13. Earl R. Wasserman, *Shelley. A Critical Reading*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins UP, 1971, p. 143, note 36.
14. "And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea, / If to the human mind's imaginings / Silence and solitude were vacancy?" (ll. 142-144).
15. Jeffrey K. Olick, "Collective Memory: The Two Cultures", in *Sociological Theory*, vol. 17, n. 3, 1999, pp. 333-348, p. 338.
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22. Cfr. Michael C. Corballis, *The Recursive Mind. The Origins of Human Language, Thought, and Civilization*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 2014, p. 100; Cristina M. Atance and Daniela K. O'Neill, "The Emergence of Episodic Future Thinking in Humans", in *Learning and Motivation*, n. 36, 2005, pp. 126-144, also suggest the term "episodic foresight".

23. Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, transl. and with an Introduction by Keith Tribe, New York, Columbia UP, 1979 (1985), p. 270 and Paul Ricoeur, "Memory, Forgetfulness, and History", in *Iyyun: The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly / וייע: פוסטוליס וועבר*, n. 45, July 1996, pp. 13-24, pp. 13-14.
24. Paolo Jedlowski, "Memories of the Future", in A.L. Tota and T. Hagen (ed.), *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies*, London and New York, Routledge, 2016, pp. 121-130, p. 122.
25. Reinhart Koselleck, *Op. cit.*, p. 273.
26. Arjun Appadurai, *The Future as Cultural Fact. Essays on the Global Condition*, London, Verso, 2013, p. 287.
27. Jan Assmann and J. Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity", in *New German Critique*, n. 65, 1995, pp. 125-133.
28. M. Ryan Bochnak, L. Matthewson, *Methodologies in Semantic Fieldwork*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2015, p. 337.
29. *To mention the most important contributions on this subject:* Geoffrey Hartman, "The Poetics of Prophecy", in Lawrence Lipking (ed.), *High Romantic Argument: Essays for M.H. Abrams*, Ithaca (NY), Cornell UP, 1981, pp. 15-40; Terence A. Hoagwood, *Prophecy and the Philosophy of Mind: Traditions of Blake and Shelley*, Mobile (AL), University of Alabama Press, 1985; Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Minneapolis, Fortress, 2001; Ian Balfour, *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy*, Stanford, Stanford UP, 2002.
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34. Wessel Krul, "Volney, *Frankenstein*, and the Lessons of History", in W.M. Verhoeven (ed.), *Revolutionary Histories. Romanticism in Perspective: Texts, Cultures, Histories*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, pp. 26-47.
35. Cfr. the seminal Eli E. Burriss, "The Classical Culture of Percy Bysshe Shelley", in *The Classical Journal*, vol. 21, n. 5, 1926, pp. 344-354 and Anthony J. Harding, "Shelley, Mythology, and the Classical Tradition", in Michael O'Neill et al., *Op. cit.*, pp. 427-443.
36. For the classical sources available to Shelley at the time of the composition of *PU* cfr. Neil Fraistat, *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins UP, 1999, Vol. 1, p. 252.
37. Cfr. Macrobius, *Commentarii in somnium Scipionis (On the Dream of Scipio)*, 1.3; cfr. also Artemidorus, *Oneirocritica (Interpretation of Dreams)*, 1.1-2 for virtually the same categories.
38. Sarah I. Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination*, Chichester, John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2008, pp. 7-8.
39. Earl R. Wasserman, *Op. cit.*, p. 309.
40. After Hyacinthus was killed by the jealous Zephyrus, Apollo, who loved the young man, changed his blood into the flower with the same name and wrote, on its petals, his lament "Ai" ('alas' in Greek); cfr. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 10.162-219.
41. Cfr. Alan Bewell, "Percy Shelley and Revolutionary Climatology", in *Romanticism and Colonial Disease*, Baltimore (MD), Johns Hopkins UP, 1999, pp. 209-219.
42. Again, reasons of space prevent me from discussing all the examples I examined in sufficient detail. A second example of mantic topography, exerting the function of remembered prophecy (memory of the future) occurs in III.iii.124-175, where Earth mentions her Cavern. This latter is possibly the same that was previously described by Prometheus to Asia, in III.iii.10, as the site of a thymically euphoric expectation horizon concerning the desired restoration of the Golden Age.

The detail of the “untransmitted torch of hope” (III.iii.171) that propagated from generation to generation through time, re-encodes the temple as another prophetic element of the landscape, therefore as another example of memory of the future conveyed by the device of mantic topography, as Prometheus’ fire will blast again as before, in the immediate future, that is in Act IV, after Jupiter’s defeat (III.ii.53-83).

43. Rubem Alves, *A Theology of Human Hope*, St. Meinrad (IN), *Abbey Press*, 1972 (1969), p. 113.
44. Werner Bergmann, “Das Problem der Zeit in der Soziologie” [“The Problem of Time in Sociology”], in *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, vol. 35, n. 3, 1983, pp. 462-504, p. 469.
45. Act I: 1-19; 73-179; 180-183; 380-390; 561-563; 610-633; 646-655; 656-663; 672-691.
46. Act I: 53, 56, 71-72, 303, 632, 634-645, 692-693; Act II: ii.1-49; Act III: i.84 and iv.3-85; Act IV: 1-156 and 534-578.
47. Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience. Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins UP, 1996; Michael Pickering, Emily Keightley, “Trauma, Discourse and Communicative Limits”, in *Critical Discourse Studies*, vol. 6, n. 4, 2009, pp. 237-249.
48. “The world is weary of the past, / Oh might it die or rest at last!”, ll. 1100-1101.
49. “Triumphant where it dares defy, / And making Death a Victory”, ll. 58-59.
50. Percy B. Shelley, “A Philosophical View of Reform”, in Zachary Leader and Michael O’Neill, *The Major Works*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2009, p. 641.