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### Androgyny as Mental Revolution in Act 4 of *Prometheus Unbound*

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#### ABSTRACT:

Apart from in his translation of Plato's *Symposium* as *The Banquet*, the word 'androgyny' does not appear within Shelley's writings, but androgynous images are extant throughout his works. *Prometheus Unbound* is the apotheosis of Shelley's revolutionary aesthetic, where the androgynous union of Asia and Prometheus, the ungendering of Demogorgon, and the Earth and the Moon's shifting gendered pronouns in Act 4 echoes Shelley's desire in 1812 for 'a future state of being' wherein 'these detestable distinctions [of male and female] will surely be abolished'. *The Banquet* is a catalyst for the lyrical drama's composition, wherein androgyny becomes Shelley's central strategy for inciting mental revolution in his audience of ideal readers. Shelley assumes the self-ordained role of Plato's ideal reader through his creative translation of *The Banquet*, where the mental union of writer and translator radically expands androgyny as the traditional union of the masculine and the feminine to include the psychic union of the poet and the reader. Drawing upon the dialogic, dramatic form of Plato's text, his subtle instruction of his reader, and his playfulness with gender, Shelley transmutes elements of *The Banquet* into verse in *Prometheus Unbound* in order to encourage a mental revolution in his own readership.

#### KEYWORDS:

Shelley; androgyny; Plato; *Symposium*; translation; gender

*Prometheus Unbound* is the apotheosis of Shelley's revolutionary aesthetic. The lyrical drama sees the poet testing androgyny as a 'psychic unity',<sup>1</sup> or a mental compact with the reader, in order to encourage and embody the dissolution of hierarchical forms of thought. These hierarchical constructs include the binaries of poet and reader, man and woman, and also original composition and translation, where Shelley's translation of Plato's *Symposium* as *The Banquet* is a catalyst for the composition of *Prometheus Unbound*. The final act of the lyrical drama presents a revolutionised universe that is harmonised in collective unity: the 'All' that responds to Demogorgon and exalts 'Man, oh, not men! a chain of linked thought' (4. 394).<sup>2</sup> Shelley's reimagining of 'Man' as 'one harmonious soul of many a soul, / Whose nature is its own divine control' frees 'Man' from its masculine connotations, positing instead a unified and ungendered soul indicated by the neuter pronoun 'it' (4. 400-1). 'No signifier can be radically representative, for every signifier is the site of a perpetual *méconnaissance*', Judith Butler writes, 'it produces the expectation of a unity, a full and final recognition that can never be achieved'; and yet, this failure is paradoxically 'what opens the signifier to new meanings and new possibilities for political resignification', ultimately allowing for 'a radical democratic notion of futurity'.<sup>3</sup> Resignification is precisely what Shelley aims to arouse in his

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, 'The Politics of Androgyny', *Women's Studies* 2 (1974): 151-60 (151). Gelpi writes of considering, and abandoning, 'the viability of androgyny as a feminist concept' in *Shelley's Goddess: Maternity, Language, Subjectivity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992): ix. Similar to Gelpi's definition, Diane Long Hoeveler describes androgyny as 'a merger of psychic characteristics within the imagination' in *Romantic Androgyny: The Women Within* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990): 250-1. Additional studies of Shelley and androgyny include: Teddi Chichester Bonca, *Shelley's Mirrors of Love: Narcissism, Sacrifice, and Sorority* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998); Nathaniel Brown, *Sexuality and Feminism in Shelley* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979); Warren Stevenson, *Romanticism and the Androgynous Sublime* (Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996); Ross Greig Woodman, 'The Androgyne in *Prometheus Unbound*', *Studies in Romanticism* 20.2 (1981): 225-47; Nathaniel Brown, "'The Double Soul": Virginia Woolf, Shelley, and Androgyny', *Keats-Shelley Journal* 33 (1984): 182-204; Diane Long Hoeveler, 'Shelley and Androgyny: Teaching *The Witch of Atlas*' in Spencer Hall, ed., *Approaches to Teaching Shelley's Poetry* (New York, NY: MLA, 1990): 93-5; and Hyun-Kyung Park, 'P. B. Shelley's Feminist Androgyny in *Prometheus Unbound*' 14.2 *Nineteenth Century Literature in English* (2010): 61-83.

<sup>2</sup> Shelley's poetry and prose are quoted from Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Major Works*, ed. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003; repr. 2009) unless stated otherwise, with line numbers to appear parenthetically within the text.

<sup>3</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993): 191.

readership's collectively unified mind, the one 'highly refined imagination' of Shelley's 'poetical readers'.<sup>4</sup> In reimagining 'Man' as freed from the word's patriarchal and hierarchical connotations, Shelley promotes the reader's active participation in poesis by putting into practice the expressions of the poet's mind which 'communicates itself to others, and gathers a sort of reduplication from that community'.<sup>5</sup> In the lyrical drama, Prometheus and Asia's androgynous reunion in Act 3 gives way to the harmonious mingling of Act 4,<sup>6</sup> where the Earth and Moon's reciprocal interpenetration promotes an imagined universe freed from the constraints imposed by the gender binary. *Prometheus Unbound* embodies androgyny as a process that dissolves the distinctions between male and female, and between poet and reader, through 'Love, which found a worthy poet in Plato alone of all the ancients' and whose 'music has penetrated the caverns of society'.<sup>7</sup> Harmony and lyricism accompany androgynous union in *Prometheus Unbound*, as Prometheus and Asia's union models the androgynous perfection that the renovated universe of Act 4 extends to all of the poem's participants, where the demarcations between hierarchical 'classes' dissolve into union.

In assuming the doubled state of reader-cum-poet through the act of translating Plato's work, and deeming Plato as 'essentially a poet',<sup>8</sup> Shelley envisages a similar psychic union between himself and the reader of his text, where 'Every man's mind [...] is the mirror upon which all forms are reflected, and in which they compose one form'.<sup>9</sup> Composing *The Banquet* equips Shelley with the construction of androgyny as a mental compact between poet and reader, constituting this Platonically-inflected 'one form'.<sup>10</sup> The androgynous union

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<sup>4</sup> Shelley, Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, 232.

<sup>5</sup> Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 676.

<sup>6</sup> On Asia and Prometheus' retirement to the cave as the formation of the 'androgynous', see Woodman, 'The Androgynous in *Prometheus Unbound*'.

<sup>7</sup> Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 691.

<sup>8</sup> Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 679.

<sup>9</sup> Shelley, Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, 231-2.

<sup>10</sup> On the compact between reader and poet, Stephen C. Behrendt writes that '[Walter J.] Ong's claim that author and reader form a compact in which the reader is required to play the role assigned by the author comes remarkably close to Shelley's view. [...] The dialogic form of this intellectual program is explicitly represented

that pervades *Prometheus Unbound* is inclusive of the poet and reader's mental mingling through what Ross Wilson terms 'interanimation', wherein 'the poem only lives in the reader's reading, but that, at the same time, the reader is brought more fully to life by the poem'.<sup>11</sup> In Shelley's poetry of revolution, this revelatory communication between poet and reader is achieved 'through a combination of theme and structure', Marlon B. Ross writes, 'in which characters are embedded in the text to serve as model readers'.<sup>12</sup> The characters most clearly serving this purpose are Panthea and Ione who, through their dissolving and merging dialogues, act as intermediaries between Prometheus and Asia, and between the poet and the reader. Panthea and Ione's 'interanimation' imitates Diotima's daemonic love at the centre of *The Banquet* who 'fills up that intermediate space between [...] two classes of beings, so as to bind together [...] the whole universe of things'.<sup>13</sup> The sisters' dramatic verse dialogues spotlight Plato's transformative influence upon Shelley's poetry, where the androgyny of *The Banquet* flows into *Prometheus Unbound*.<sup>14</sup>

The dialogic encounter between Asia and Demogorgon in Act 2, the turn and centre of the lyrical drama, is recast in Act 4 where the reader's mental response becomes key to unfolding the act's ambiguous events. Panthea and Ione's continued questions make a space for the reader's response, emulating a Socratic dialogue where the poet posits the reader as an active participant. Panthea and Ione's hurried observations, by lacking interpretative weight,

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in Plato's dialogues', *Shelley and His Audiences* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989): 5. Teddi Lynn Chichester also asserts that in *Prometheus Unbound* 'Shelley most powerfully implicates his reader', 'Entering the Stream of Sound: The Reader and the Masque in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*', *Colby Quarterly* 30.2 (1994): 85-97 (85). Similarly, Tilottama Rajan posits that Asia and Panthea alternate between embodying the roles of the 'implied author' and the 'implied reader': 'the reader desired by the author and one who "produces" the meaning of the text by intuitively grasping [the poet's] intention', 'Deconstruction or Reconstruction: Reading Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*', *Studies in Romanticism* 23.3 (1984): 317-338 (323).

<sup>11</sup> Ross Wilson, *Shelley and the Apprehension of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 19.

<sup>12</sup> Marlon B. Ross, 'Shelley's Wayward Dream-Poem: The Apprehending Reader in *Prometheus Unbound*', *Keats-Shelley Journal* 36 (1987): 110-133 (116).

<sup>13</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Percy Bysshe Shelley as *The Banquet*, 442. *The Banquet* and Shelley's prefatory fragments to the translation are quoted from James A. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1949).

<sup>14</sup> Behrendt, *Shelley and His Audiences*, 5.

empower the reader to complete the shared vision. ‘The mutual implication of author and reader in the text generates a process by which meanings come to be shared’, Ronald Tetreault writes, ‘but this process is a dialogical one in which the “otherness” of readers’ intentions is acknowledged’, where ‘[t]his dialogical interchange over meaning decentres authorial subjectivity and establishes an intersubjective basis for knowledge which allows an individual to transcend the self and become a social being’.<sup>15</sup> In ‘transcend[ing] the self and becom[ing] a social being’, the reader participates in an androgynous and amorous act, akin to Shelley’s description of love in the ‘Discourse on the Manners of the Antient Greeks’ as ‘the universal thirst for a communion not merely of the senses, but of our whole nature, intellectual, imaginative and sensitive’.<sup>16</sup> Rather than assimilating or appropriating the reader, the poet encourages a space for imaginative intermingling while maintaining subjective difference. Remaining conscious of ‘Man[’s] [...] state [as] a social being’, the dialogic form implies reciprocity and unity. The unity afforded by the dialogic form can be traced to Plato’s dialectics where ‘the quest for unity is at the heart of the journey towards understanding’, and Stephen C. Behrendt affirms that ‘[t]he dialogic form of [Shelley’s] intellectual program is explicitly represented in Plato’s dialogues’.<sup>17</sup> The quest for unity at the heart of Plato’s dialogues is predicated upon the appearance of discrepancies and disunion, and encourages the reader to alter their perspective in order to discern the dialogue’s underlying although elusive unity. Adopting the affordances of Plato’s dialogic structure and his subtle instruction of the reader, but refusing the *Symposium*’s rationale of hierarchical ascent, Shelley adapts his study of the *Symposium* to suit the aim of equality in *Prometheus Unbound*.

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<sup>15</sup> Ronald Tetreault, *The Poetry of Life: Shelley and Literary Form* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1987): 10 and 12.

<sup>16</sup> Shelley, ‘A Discourse on the Manners of the Antient Greeks Relative to the Subject of Love’, 408.

<sup>17</sup> A. K. Cotton, *Platonic Dialogue and the Education of the Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014): 188. Behrendt, *Shelley and His Audiences*, 5.

*Prometheus Unbound* strives, through its polyphonic universe, to implicate the reader in its unbinding of hierarchical constructs. It does this in no small part through Plato's example of 'kindl[ing] a harmony in thoughts divested of shape and action' and thereby rejecting 'determinate forms'.<sup>18</sup> The text's composite form of a lyrical drama strives to combine the poet's lyrical subjectivity with the dramatic audience's collective subjectivity, refusing dramatic action within the text in favour of the intersubjective activity of the poet and reader's harmonised mind. '[T]he idea [of androgyny] is implicit throughout [Shelley's] work', Nathaniel Brown writes, 'particularly in his portrayal of the sexes, with their harmonious blending of the traditionally masculine and the traditionally feminine'.<sup>19</sup> Indebted to Plato's implication of the reader as interlocutor, however, Shelley's idea, and ideal, of androgyny expands to include the 'harmonious blending' of poet and reader. Androgyny harmonises self and Other so that the poet and the reader become psychically unified and capable of imagining the same revolutionary vision. Starting from Ross Woodman's assertion that '[t]he androgyne [is] the archetype of social, moral, and political revolution' in *Prometheus Unbound*,<sup>20</sup> I will expand this claim to reveal how Shelley uses androgyny as strategy for enacting a mental revolution that is inclusive of his readership, with particular attention to Act 4 of the lyrical drama.

Love, 'or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action or person, not our own',<sup>21</sup> propels androgyny through its encouragement of identification, or union, with an Other within Shelley's writings. 'The single most important source for Shelley's treatment of love was Plato's *Symposium*', Diane Long Hoeveler affirms.<sup>22</sup> Androgyny, powered by love, enacts an

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<sup>18</sup> Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 679.

<sup>19</sup> Brown, *Sexuality and Feminism in Shelley*, 225.

<sup>20</sup> Woodman, 'The Androgyne in *Prometheus Unbound*', 225.

<sup>21</sup> Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 682.

<sup>22</sup> Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny*, 139.

intersubjective form of communion between poet and reader through poetry, responsive to how, for Plato, ‘Eros is the vitalizing rhythm of communication between the philosopher and Being’.<sup>23</sup> Love, by ‘going out’, flows ceaselessly between the poet and reader in moments of ‘interanimation’,<sup>24</sup> and becomes exceptionally androgynous in the orgiastic scene of merging between Asia, Panthea, and Prometheus in Act 2. This amorous event is psychological rather than physical, as it occurs in Panthea’s dream, where she perceives the feminine Prometheus’ ‘soft and flowing limbs, / And passion-parted lips’ enfold her in an atmosphere of ‘all-dissolving power’ (2. 1. 72-73 and 76), recalling the androgynous ‘Form’ encountered by the Narrator of *Laon and Cythna* who is gendered with the masculine pronoun ‘He’ but described in traditionally feminine terms as ‘Fairer than tongue can speak or thought may frame, / The radiance of whose limbs rose-like and warm / Flowed forth’ (*Laon and Cythna*, 1. 57. 507-09). Panthea and Prometheus are ‘condensed’ into one being, while Asia’s name resounds above a cacophony of sound, enveloping her into this wholly androgynous form (2. 1. 86). Androgyny becomes Shelley’s primary strategy to embody the revolutionary reciprocity between reader and poet in *Prometheus Unbound*, reaching its apotheosis in Act 4.

Shelley’s creative translation of *The Banquet* draws out the poetic strains of the philosopher’s thoughts and language, capturing ‘the splendour and harmony of [Plato’s] periods into one irresistible stream of musical impressions’.<sup>25</sup> The act of translating the

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<sup>23</sup> Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, 6.

<sup>24</sup> Wilson, *Shelley and the Apprehension of Life*, 19.

<sup>25</sup> Shelley, Preface to *The Banquet*, 402. On *The Banquet* and Shelley’s creative translations, see, along with Notopoulos’ *The Platonism of Shelley*, Michael O’Neill, *Shelleyan Reimaginings and Influence: New Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Michael Rossington, ‘Creative Translation’ in *The Oxford Handbook to British Romanticism*, ed. David Duff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018): 547-61; and Timothy Webb, *The Violet in the Crucible: Shelley and Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976). See also Benjamin Sudarsky, ‘*The Banquet*, Gender, and “Original Composition”’, *Keats-Shelley Journal* 66 (2017): 160-5; Stephanie Nelson, ‘Shelley and Plato’s *Symposium*: The Poet’s Revenge’, *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 14.1/2 (2007): 100-29; David K. O’Connor, ‘Platonic Selves in Shelley and Stevens’ in *Plato’s Symposium: Issues in Interpretation and Reception*, ed. J. H. Lesher, Debra Nails, and Frisbee C. C. Sheffield (Washington D. C.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2006): 360-75; and Ross Wilson ‘Shelley’s Plato’ in *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Philosophy*, ed. Piers Rawling and Philip Wilson (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2019): 345-57.

*Symposium* encourages a synthesising process wherein the translator becomes, through mental transportation and concurrent acts of reading and writing, a doubled being not unlike Aristophanes' prelapsarian androgynes. For Shelley, 'Plato was essentially a poet' and the poetic license of Shelley's translation of *The Banquet* enables him to collapse the seemingly opposed distinctions of philosopher and poet in claiming for Plato and for himself the doubled status of philosopher-poet.<sup>26</sup> James A. Notopoulos describes the mental activity of translating Plato's *Symposium* as offering Shelley 'the best way to assimilate the greatness of another mind', but the appropriative implications of 'assimilation' seem to discount the mutuality of the process whereby philosophy and poetry become inclusive of 'kindl[ing] a harmony in thoughts'.<sup>27</sup> Notopoulos's employment of the verb 'assimilate' problematically underscores the potential for androgyny to result in the male poet's 'cannibalistic absorption' of the female subject, as has been considered in great depth by Hoeveler.<sup>28</sup> However, it is not strictly through assimilation but through the mutual activity of translation that 'Shelley's reading of Plato [...] reveals the channel through which one creative mind affects another'.<sup>29</sup> The renovated universe of *Prometheus Unbound*'s final act implicates the androgynous enfolding of reader and writer as equally active agents capable of affecting mental revolution, where the dismantling of hierarchical thought within the drama anticipates a future outside of the text. Mental transportation accompanies Shelley's awareness of his reader, and his own status of reader, during the period of *The Banquet*'s composition. Shelley describes himself as being employed in 'translating into my fainting & inefficient periods the divine eloquence of Plato's Symposium—only as an exercise or perhaps to give Mary some idea of the manners & feelings of the Athenians', where Mary becomes the immediate audience, at once

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<sup>26</sup> Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 679.

<sup>27</sup> Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 679. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, 393.

<sup>28</sup> Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny*, 59.

<sup>29</sup> Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, 390.

actual and ideal reader, of the translation.<sup>30</sup> In reading and transcribing Shelley's translation, Mary assumes the role of writer and encourages a similar strain of sympathy to Maria Gisborne as reader, writing: 'It is true that in many particulars [the *Symposium*] shocks our present manners, but no one can be a reader of the works of antiquity unless they can transport themselves from these to other times and judge not by our but by their morality'.<sup>31</sup> Shelley's reading and translation of the *Symposium* in 1818 marks the locus of potentiality that motivates androgyny as a concurrent process of 'psychic unity' between textual figurations and between reader and writer. Act 4 of *Prometheus Unbound* builds upon Shelley's desire for 'a future state of being' wherein 'these detestable distinctions [of male and female] will surely be abolished',<sup>32</sup> where the distinctions of binary gender, alongside the categorical roles of reader and writer, dissolve into androgynous union.

Neil Fraistat writes that 'Act 4 seems to have originated in the love duet between the Spirits of the Earth and the Moon', emphasising the centrality of this scene to the act, and underscoring the importance of the celestial bodies' exchange.<sup>33</sup> Rather than 'embody[ing] a sexual relationship' in which the Earth is 'maturely male and the Moon maturely female', as Harold Bloom writes, the scene of celestial exchange culminates in ambiguously androgynous unity.<sup>34</sup> In contrast to Bloom's binary sexing of the celestial bodies, Colin Carman notes the 'gender bending' qualities of the characters of Moon and Earth in a queer reading of Act 4 that is sensitive to Shelley's presentation of 'sexual alterity' in order to

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<sup>30</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964) vol. 2, 20, hereafter quoted as *PBS Letters*.

<sup>31</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. Betty T. Bennett, 3 vols (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980-1988), vol. 1, 77.

<sup>32</sup> *PBS Letters*, vol. 1, 195.

<sup>33</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Prometheus Unbound Notebooks: A Facsimile of Bodleian MSS. Shelley e.1, e.2, and e.3*, ed. Neil Fraistat, vol. 9 of *The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts: A Facsimile Edition, with Full Transcriptions and Scholarly Apparatus* (New York, NY: Garland, 1991): lxxi.

<sup>34</sup> Harold Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959): 146.

subvert heteronormative thought in anticipation of modern-day marriage equality.<sup>35</sup> The gender-bending of the Moon and the Earth reflects Plato's ambivalence towards gender in the *Symposium*, wherein pregnancy becomes a human condition ascribed to mind and body. The dialogue ends with the Dionysian and double-gendered Alcibiades' uproarious entrance, accompanied by the flute girls who had been earlier excluded from the banquet, and the celebratory scene of liberation and androgynous union in Act 4 enacts a similar dismantling of boundaries.

While the Earth and Moon achieve androgynous union in Act 4, the terrestrial body's shifting gender extends beyond the final act. The Earth undergoes a series of transformations throughout the lyrical drama, and in doing so, emphasises the androgynously melded poet and reader's mental capacity to reimagine hierarchies of gender and upset their oppressive divisions. Initially appearing as Prometheus' mother, the Mother Earth of myth and tradition, the terrestrial orb is later imaged as the youthful, ungendered Spirit of the Earth, before assuming the masculine role of brother Earth playing incestuous counterpart to the feminine Moon in Act 4. This series of transformations, like Shelley's delayed addition of the final act, has attracted a variety of critical interpretations.<sup>36</sup> Rather than being a new character, the character of the Earth is one and the same as the character of the Spirit of the Earth, and its shifting from maternal body, to ungendered youth, to the Moon's brother reveals Shelley's responsiveness to Plato's own playfulness with gender. The Earth does not end its series of transformations with its masculine form of the Moon's brother; instead, in harmony with the

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<sup>35</sup> Colin Carman, "Freedom Leads it Forth": Queering the Epithalamium in *Prometheus Unbound*, *European Romantic Review* 24.5 (2013): 579-602 (580 and 594).

<sup>36</sup> For instance, Bloom reads three 'totally distinct' Earths in *Shelley's Mythmaking*, 146. Alternatively, Joanna E. Rapf reads the Spirits and spheres as undergoing a transformation from 'potential form, into actual form' in 'A Spirit in Search of Itself: Non-Narrative Structure in Act IV of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*', *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin* 30 (1979): 36-47 (42).

ungendered Demogorgon's appearance in Act 4, the Earth and the Moon, through the process of gazing upon one another, are designated with the ungendered pronoun, 'it' (4. 525).

Shelley redresses sexual inequality through Act 4's lack of masculine characters, where the poet accentuates even Prometheus' absence by means of placing the scene in 'A Part of the Forest *near* the Cave of Prometheus' (emphasis added). Prometheus and all other masculine characters are held at a distance from the final act in order to posit an imagined universe freed from societally constructed masculine superiority. Jupiter's fall in Act 3 marks not only the overthrow of tyrannical rule but also the eradication of the patriarchy. Undoing the arrival of the expected son to whom he may bequeath his throne: 'Feel'st thou not, O world, / The earthquake of his chariot thundering up / Olympus?' (3. 1. 49-51), Jupiter's anticipation of a male heir to continue the model of patriarchal succession is blasted by the appearance of the genderless Demogorgon, at whose presence Jupiter recoils and exclaims: 'Awful shape, what art thou? Speak!' (3. 1. 52). Although the majority of critics, with the exceptions of Jerrold E. Hogle and Michael O'Neill, gender Demogorgon as male, Shelley maintains its formless ambiguity through the use of the neuter pronoun, 'it'.<sup>37</sup> Presumably, critics have made this assumption due to the Song of Spirits' mention of '*his* throne' (emphasis added) immediately preceding Asia and Panthea's entry into Demogorgon's cave. However, a close inspection of the Spirits' prophetic chant reveals that this is a misreading. Guiding Asia and Panthea down to Demogorgon's realm, the Spirits proclaim:

That the Eternal, the Immortal,  
Must unloose through life's portal  
The snake-like Doom coiled underneath his throne  
By that alone. (2. 3. 95-8)

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<sup>37</sup> See Jerrold E. Hogle, *Shelley's Process: Radical Transference and the Development of His Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) and Michael O'Neill, 'Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*' in *A Companion to Romanticism*, ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999): 259-268 (261).

There are two entities being described in these lines: Demogorgon and Jupiter. Demogorgon, inhabiting the chthonic realm, is spatially ‘underneath [Jupiter’s] throne’. Demogorgon’s latent power, the ‘Doom’ it will unleash upon Jupiter, is waiting to be roused by Asia, indicated by its ‘coiled’ presence. The final line of the Spirits’ chant confirms the prophecy: Demogorgon alone will cast Jupiter from his heavenly throne down to the Tartarian depths. Jupiter’s demand for Demogorgon to name itself reinforces a patriarchal order, wherein the patronym that Jupiter’s masculine heir would adopt ensures ‘a social pact based on the Law of the Father, a patrilineal organization’.<sup>38</sup> As a mediating presence, both neuter and neutral, Demogorgon’s reply to Jupiter’s demand, ‘Eternity. Demand no direr name’ (3. 1. 53), undoes his hope. Its choice to name itself ‘Eternity’ ironically negates the patriarchal control of the name, since the ‘function of the name [is] to secure the identity of the subject over time’, and ‘Eternity’ is, according to Earl R. Wasserman, ‘the timelessness out of which time flows’.<sup>39</sup> Act 4, unlike the previous three acts which are tethered to temporality, ‘recreates the action of the first three acts on a level no longer bound by the conventions of measurable time and space’,<sup>40</sup> and consequently, acts as an area unconstrained by patriarchal control. The genderless Demogorgon’s subversion of Jupiter’s patriarchal control sets the stage, so to speak, for Act 4’s harmoniously androgynous finale.

Shelley’s presentation of a universe devoid of masculine control in Act 4 enables Panthea and Ione’s feminine voices to lead the reader into a space where the societal constructions of hierarchical, binary gender may be reimagined. This harmonising of gendered difference encourages a reimagining that is in line with Caroline Levine’s work on

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<sup>38</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 153.

<sup>39</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 153. Earl R. Wasserman, *Shelley: A Critical Reading* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971): 291.

<sup>40</sup> Rapf, ‘A Spirit in Search of Itself’, 38.

forms' transportability or 'capacity to endure across time and space'.<sup>41</sup> The ability to transcend temporal limitations affords forms, such as the gender binary, the power to either constrain or to unbind modes of communal thought. It is the gender binary's capacity 'to endure across time and space' that makes it a valid subject for the poet who 'beholds the future in the present'. Demogorgon's undoing of the universe's patrilineal organization anticipates the poet who 'participates in the eternal, the infinite and the one'; for Shelley, 'the future is contained within the present as the plant within the seed', and germination is made possible in 'the moment that two human beings co-exist', where coexistence is predicated upon 'equality, diversity, unity, contrast, [and] mutual dependence'.<sup>42</sup> Androgynous thought is inherently political in *Prometheus Unbound*, in that any hope of inciting social reform relies upon the 'mutual dependence' of the poet and the reader's mental meeting. Without the reader's imaginative involvement, Act 4 appears as nothing more than an epithalamium: a superficial display of Prometheus and Asia's sexual union. However, when considered as being imbued with androgynous thought, or the mental meeting of the poet and the imaginatively engaged reader, the act's endurance 'depends not on resolution and finality, but on repetitions that will extend past the time represented in the text'.<sup>43</sup> This affirmation recalls forms' ability to 'endure across time and space'; additionally, for Levine, '[a]s long as pliability—the susceptibility to development—falls on the feminine side of the gender binary', the text in question 'will have to be a feminine genre, even when its protagonists are male'.<sup>44</sup> Following this assertion, *Prometheus Unbound*'s status as a revolutionary work heralding sexual equality and unity is not troubled by its protagonist's masculinity. Prometheus' masculinity does not inhibit the lyrical drama's encouragement of mental

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<sup>41</sup> Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015): 12.

<sup>42</sup> Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 677.

<sup>43</sup> Levine, *Forms*, 41.

<sup>44</sup> Levine, *Forms*, 16.

liberation from sexual inequality due to the final act's development of a universe lead by the feminine voice to a space of androgynous unity. Shelley reveals his liberating aim in Act 4 by way of pressing the pliability of the gender binary, and nowhere more so than in the Earth and the Moon's exchange. Rather than entirely eliminating the gender binary, the masculine is reintegrated by and into the feminine, culminating in the androgynous equality achieved by the Moon and the Earth's exchange. This process follows Levine's suggestion that

While we might want to resist the dominance of unified wholes by crushing them, or by rupturing their boundaries, a productive alternative involves not the destruction of form but its multiplication. That is, an effective strategy for curtailing the power of harmfully totalizing and unifying wholes is nothing other than to introduce *more wholes*.<sup>45</sup>

Stuart Curran's reading of Act 4 is in line with Levine's discussion of forms; for Curran, '[t]he imaginative structure of Act IV is predicated not on a new force in the universe, but on a new vision of universal forces'.<sup>46</sup> As is illuminated by Shelley's preface to the lyrical drama, the poet seeks not to force upon readers an entirely unprecedented mode of conceptualisation, since such conversion would be in line with his abhorrence, didacticism, but to encourage the 'poetical readers' already in possession of a 'highly refined imagination' to put their collectively charged mind to positive moral use.<sup>47</sup> Reimagining and expanding upon existing forms is a more feasible means of achieving revolution than attempting to obliterate forms altogether. *Prometheus Unbound* explores how power can be equally redistributed through a reimagining of gender, conveyed through the imaging of androgyny, rather than an annihilation of it.

In *The Banquet*, the link between gender and communal mental processes is illuminated by Aristophanes' assertion that:

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<sup>45</sup> Levine, *Forms*, 45-6.

<sup>46</sup> Stuart Curran, *Shelley's Annus Mirabilis: The Maturing of an Epic Vision* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1975): 109.

<sup>47</sup> Shelley, Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, 232.

First, then, human beings were formerly not divided into two sexes, male and female; there was also a third, common to both the others, the name of which remains, though the sex itself has disappeared. The androgynous sex, both in appearance and in name, was common both to male and female; its name alone remains, which labours under a reproach.<sup>48</sup>

Aristophanes' speech emphasises language's ability to endure and to control. The term 'androgynous', originally 'common to both male and female', becomes rendered into a derogatory term that reinforces hierarchical divisions of gender rather than signifying sexual equality. As Robin Waterfield reveals, the term 'androgynous' was imbued with pejorative implications, and 'meant a coward, someone lacking in manliness'.<sup>49</sup> The final sentence of Aristophanes' speech quoted above emphasises the lack or loss inherent to the androgynous condition: 'its name alone remains', weighted down by the reproach that is maintained by the collective human imagination under societally formed notions of hierarchical masculinity. Shelley's reappropriation of androgyny as a term of unity rather than lack anticipates his discussion of vital, reciprocal language in his *Defence of Poetry*, wherein 'the pleasure resulting from the manner in which [poets] express the influence of society or nature upon their own minds, communicates itself to others, and gathers a sort of reduplication from that community'.<sup>50</sup> *Prometheus Unbound* focuses upon how societal strictures such as the imbalance sustained by the gender binary, previously interrogated through Cythna's questioning of how 'man [can] be free if woman be a slave' (*Laon and Cythna*, 2. 43. 1045),<sup>51</sup> may be reconceived or dissolved through poetical language. Significantly, this process of reconceiving language is a reciprocal one in which the poet's thoughts are 'reduplicat[ed]' by the receptive readership. In discussing the limiting and controlling power of language in *Prometheus Unbound*, Ross asserts that '[i]t is language which perpetuates the

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<sup>48</sup> Shelley, *The Banquet*, 429.

<sup>49</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Robin Waterfield, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004): 80.

<sup>50</sup> Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 676.

<sup>51</sup> *Laon and Cythna* is quoted from vol. 3 of *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Donald H. Reiman, Neil Fraistat, and Nora Crook, 3 vols to date (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000-).

perception of relations already apprehended and sustains those relations not for the sustenance of human intercourse or dialogue (a communicative community of equal minds) but for the imposition of monologic discourse', ultimately positing that the 'categorical perception of relations' sustained by language 'enables some human beings to abuse language by hierarchizing these relations and thus the social system it proffers'.<sup>52</sup>

*Prometheus Unbound* resolves to reappropriate the term 'androgynous' by emphasising equality through a mental dialogic process between poet and reader, and by imaging this same dialogic process, itself the grounds for 'a communicative community of equal minds', within the text. Following the culmination of the Earth and Moon's exchange, Ione and Panthea return to the act, engaged in dialogue. Ione perceives 'a sense of words upon mine ear', to which Panthea replies: 'An universal sound like words. Oh, list!' (4. 517-18). Shelley points up language's pliability through the sisters' sensing rather than hearing words, implying a revolutionised way of sharing and receiving language, while Panthea's receptivity to a 'universal sound like words' highlights the importance of communal consciousness to social reform. Panthea's imploring exclamation, 'Oh, list!', invites not only Ione, but also the reader to participate in the reformed universe. The poet maintains or transports the structural form of communication into the revolutionised universe that is Act 4, but suggests to the reader that words may be reimagined through a shift in communal receptivity and consciousness. Under the surface of this reciprocal exchange is Plato's dialectical form, where 'the reader's relationship with Plato's text is analogous to that of the respondent with the discussion leader', and where we as Shelley's or Plato's community of readers 'engage in a dialogue with the text parallel to theirs'.<sup>53</sup> Ultimately in Act 4, the Earth and Moon's attainment of androgynous unity is indicative of the pliability of gender, and of language.

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<sup>52</sup> Ross, 'Shelley's Wayward Dream-Poem', 113.

<sup>53</sup> Cotton, *Platonic Dialogue and the Education of the Reader*, 4.

Shelley reveals the malleability of words as they are sustained through communal thought, and in doing so, potentially redresses the term ‘androgynous’, lamentably reproached by society in Aristophanes’ speech.

Panthea and Ione’s experiences and perceptions part and converge throughout their dialogue, mimicking the undulations of the aural waves that permeate the poem, and also recalling the ‘two runnels of a rivulet’ making ‘their path of melody, like sisters / Who part with sighs that they may meet in smiles’ that initiate the Spirits of the Earth and Moon’s entrance into Act 4 (4. 196; 198-9). Early in Act 4, Panthea and Ione together observe

two openings in the forest  
Which hanging branches overcanopy,  
And where two runnels of a rivulet,  
Between the close moss, violet-inwoven,  
Have made their path of melody, like sisters  
Who part in sighs that they may meet in smiles,  
Turning dear disunion to an isle  
Of lovely grief, a wood of sweet sad thoughts;  
Two visions of strange radiance float upon  
The ocean-like enchantment of strong sound (4. 194-203)

The repetition of ‘two’ in this scene, culminating in the ‘Two visions of strange radiance’, is seemingly disrupted by the oxymoronic ‘dear disunion’ (4. 200); however, the alliteration sustains the doubling occurring in these lines and follows Aristophanes’ description of the androgynous beings in *The Banquet*:

Immediately after this division, as each desired to possess the other half of himself, these divided people threw their arms around and embraced each other, seeking to grow together; and from this resolution to do nothing without the other half, they died of hunger and weakness: when one half died and the other was left alive, that which was thus left sought the other and folded it to its bosom.<sup>54</sup>

Following Jupiter’s division of the androgynous beings, grief and love are inextricably linked, as one being ultimately dies while the other clings to it in the futile hope of achieving reunion. The appearance of disunion is also essential to Plato’s, and Shelley’s,

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<sup>54</sup> Shelley, *The Banquet*, 431.

encouragement of the reader to delve deeper into the quest for unity. In the *Symposium*, Eryximachus' speech alludes to the Heraclitan concept of disunion as difference, wherein harmony is created from the uniting of the unlike. In Shelley's translation, Eryximachus builds upon this concept through a consideration of rhythm as 'first being distinguished and opposed to each other, and then made accordant', producing the 'double Love' that may be drawn out through the harmony and rhythm of poetry.<sup>55</sup> Shelley, Michael O'Neill affirms, is 'aware both that "harmony" involves a necessary awareness of the possibility of discord and a commitment to the imagination'.<sup>56</sup> In these terms, disunion serves as a framework for Act 4. Apparent disunion or incongruity veils an intricately undulating structure, where the iambic rhythm of Panthea and Ione's dialogue enfolds the other characters' lyrics. Panthea and Ione's descriptions of the 'visions of strange radiance' they behold—the 'wingèd infant' clasping 'a quivering moonbeam', and the childlike Spirit of the Earth sleeping within a 'multitudinous Orb' (4. 219, 231, and 253)—are similar in that each entity is ungendered. Joanna E. Rapf notes that Ione identifies with and describes 'the Spirit of the Moon', whereas Panthea associates with 'the Spirit of the Earth'.<sup>57</sup> In this way, even when the Earth undergoes its masculine transformation, the act is not compromised by the potential return of patriarchal control because Panthea retains her identification with the Earth. The pairing of Ione with the Spirit of the Moon and Panthea with the Spirit of the Earth anticipates the celestial spheres' androgynous union, which commences when 'there is a transition, a tremendous transition, which is the birth of the Earth out of its sphere from spirit or potential form, into actual form. Symbolically, it is the birth of poetry itself, the spirit in search of itself and found'.<sup>58</sup> While Rapf does not consider androgyny, or the effects of the *Symposium* on

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<sup>55</sup> Shelley, *The Banquet*, 427.

<sup>56</sup> O'Neill, *Shelleyan Reimaginings*, 21.

<sup>57</sup> Rapf, 'A Spirit in Search of Itself', 40.

<sup>58</sup> Rapf, 'A Spirit in Search of Itself', 42.

Act 4 of *Prometheus Unbound*, the locating of this transition as a ‘spirit in search of itself and found’ carefully recalls Aristophanes’ speech.

The Moon, although feminine in Act 4, is androgynous in Aristophanes’ speech in *The Banquet*, where ‘at the beginning, the male was produced from the Sun, the female from the Earth; and the sex which participated in both sexes, from the Moon, by reason of the androgynous nature of the Moon’.<sup>59</sup> In her analysis of the horned moon of *Alastor* (646-7), Hoeveler traces Shelley’s androgynous moon to Aristophanes’ speech, writing that ‘Shelley knew through his translation of the *Symposium* that Plato considered the moon “androgynous”’.<sup>60</sup> However, it is not until 1817 that Shelley first seems to study the *Symposium* in depth.<sup>61</sup> In *Prometheus Unbound*, following Shelley’s composition of *The Banquet*, the moon becomes a symbol of markedly Platonic import. Following the Moon’s interpenetration of the Earth, the terrestrial orb’s exclamation ‘Man, oh, not men! a chain of linked thought’, culminating in the imaging of ‘Man’ as ‘one harmonious soul of many a soul, / Whose nature is its own divine control’, frees ‘Man’ from its masculine connotations, positing instead a unified humanity indicated by the neuter pronoun ‘it’ (4. 394; 400-1). Shelley encourages a reimagining of ‘man’ freed from the oppressive constraints of patriarchal hierarchy, and comprised equally of masculine and feminine portions. ‘Man, one harmonious soul of many a soul’ also recalls Shelley’s ‘One Mind’, of which pronouns do not mark ‘signs of any actual difference subsisting between the assemblage of thoughts thus indicated, but are merely marks employed to denote the different modifications of the one

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<sup>59</sup> Shelley, *The Banquet*, 430.

<sup>60</sup> Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny*, 61.

<sup>61</sup> Mary records Shelley’s reading of ‘Plato’s Convivium’ on 13 August 1817, and Michael Erkelenz notes that ‘[o]n 10-13 August, 1817, he returned to page 37 of adds. e. 16 to make notes on his reading of Plato’s *Symposium*’ in Mary Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley*, ed. Paula K. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), vol. 1: 178 and *BSM* vol. 11, ed. Michael Erkelenz (New York, NY: Garland, 1992): xxvii-xxviii.

mind'.<sup>62</sup> Ross Woodman associates the 'One Mind' with the 'androgynous', which he defines as the 'archetype of social, moral and political revolution', imaged by the reunion of Prometheus and Asia.<sup>63</sup> Though Woodman's equation of the 'androgynous' with the poet's revolutionary aims is apt, his assertion that androgyny represents 'man united with his feminine soul' seems less useful. This statement locates the masculine 'man' as the central, active agent, seeking to possess 'his feminine soul' (emphasis added).<sup>64</sup> Shelley's disruption of the gendered boundaries of 'Man' is revealed by the alternatingly masculine and feminine pronouns ending Earth's speech. The neutral gendering of man's 'nature' is contrasted with the masculinity of 'His will', imaged 'as a tempest-wingèd ship' that is controlled by the ungendered 'Love' (4. 406; 409-10). The nautical simile recalls Asia's effusive speech in Act 2 following her self-empowered rebirth:

My soul is an enchanted boat,  
Which, like a sleeping swan, doth float  
Upon the silver waves of thy sweet singing;  
And thine doth like an angel sit  
Beside the helm conducting it, (2. 5. 72-6)

The 'Voice' that conducts Asia's soul describes Asia's own voice as 'low and tender / Like the fairest, for it folds thee / From the sight, that liquid splendour' (2. 5. 61-3). The appearance of the verb 'fold' seems more than coincidental, and connects to the folding of the Earth and the Moon in Act 4. Neil Fraistat detects similarities between Acts 2 and 4 in noting that 'the erotic song of the Earth and Moon duet in Act 4 not only crystallizes many of the thematic and stylistic impulses of the earlier acts, but also may have influenced the creation of a similarly epithalamial duet when Asia's song was added to the song of the "Voice" at the end of Act 2'.<sup>65</sup> Asia's becoming folded into her own voice, embodied by

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<sup>62</sup> Shelley, 'On Life', 635-6.

<sup>63</sup> Woodman, 'The Androgynous in *Prometheus Unbound*', 225.

<sup>64</sup> Woodman, 'The Androgynous in *Prometheus Unbound*', 247.

<sup>65</sup> Fraistat, ed., *The Prometheus Unbound Notebooks: A Facsimile of Bodleian MSS. Shelley e.1, e.2, and e.3*, 14n, The Shelley-Godwin Archive

sound rather than image, also recalls Diotima's supreme state of Love that cannot 'be figured to the imagination like a beautiful face' because 'it is eternally uniform and consistent, and monoeidic with itself'.<sup>66</sup> Significantly, the supreme state of Love is neutrally gendered with the pronoun 'it' by Diotima, and this contrasts with its being gendered masculine by the male speakers of Shelley's *Banquet*. Shelley's neutering of Love also reveals a closeness to Plato's ambivalence towards the gendered distinctions of masculine and feminine: 'According to Proclus, Atticus points out that for Plato the supreme Good is ἀγαθόν, neuter, and not ἀγαθός, masculine'.<sup>67</sup> In neutering Diotima's description of Love, Shelley subtly encourages the reader to recall Aristophanes' androgynous beings, and the genderlessness of their prelapsarian state. The centre of *The Banquet* is marked by this meeting of dialogically engaged and equal-minded male and female characters: Socrates and Diotima.<sup>68</sup> Despite their apparent maleness and femaleness, Socrates and Diotima are not easily reconciled to distinctly and conventionally gendered states. Socrates is figured as maternal, where his pregnancy is first implied by Diotima's admission that 'they whose souls are far more pregnant than their bodies, conceive and produce that which is more suitable to the soul', namely, '[i]ntelligence, and every other power and excellence of the mind, of which all poets, and all other artists who are creative and inventive, are the authors'.<sup>69</sup> Angela Hobbs reveals that 'Diotima could have used *tiktein* or *gennan*, which can apply to either sex, but she does not. There is no escaping the fact that she – Plato – has selected a term [*kuousin*] which the other symposiasts and Plato's readers would have associated with women, despite the fact that it is here applied to all humans (*anthrōpoi*)', and Benjamin Sudarsky has recently

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<[http://shelleygodwinarchive.org/contents/prometheus\\_unbound/prometheus-unbound-introduction/#introduction](http://shelleygodwinarchive.org/contents/prometheus_unbound/prometheus-unbound-introduction/#introduction)> (accessed October 20, 2017).

<sup>66</sup> Shelley, *The Banquet*, 449.

<sup>67</sup> Paul Henry, 'The Place of Plotinus in the History of Thought', in Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna and intr. John Dillon (London: Penguin Books, 1991): lxi.

<sup>68</sup> Ross, 'Shelley's Wayward Dream-Poem', 113.

<sup>69</sup> Shelley, *The Banquet*, 447.

explored Shelley's 'gender-neutral' composition of *The Banquet*, noting that '[t]here is a feminist motive for [Shelley's word] choices'.<sup>70</sup> Alcibiades, himself an androgynous, Dionysian figure 'crowned with a thick crown of ivy and violets', echoes this imaging of Socrates as pregnant by approximating him to 'those Silenuses that sit in the sculptors' shops, and which are carved holding flutes or pipes, but which, when divided in two, are found to contain withinside the images of the Gods'.<sup>71</sup> The overtly phallic appearance of the Silenus is coupled with their being 'pregnant', or filled with smaller statues, disallowing Socrates to appear as distinctly male or female. Diotima is a similarly ambiguous figure, both in being conjured by Socrates, and in presenting the apothecic speech on Eros to a gathering from which women have been excluded. Socrates' radicalisation is complemented by Diotima's subversion of the patriarchal gathering, and that the shared subject of their discourse, Love, is ungendered, underscores Shelley's employment of androgynous thought as a means of encouraging mental liberation.

Shelley's shifting pronouns in Act 4 mirror the undulations of the Earth's gender in proximity to the Moon. Having renounced the masculine signifier 'men' in favour of the neutrally resignified 'Man', an androgynous reconceptualization of gendered language takes place. The Earth declares that 'All things confess his strength', where the masculine pronoun 'his' refers to man's retrospective state; contrastingly, man's dreams are revealed to emanate from a feminine source in the following line: 'Bright threads whence mothers weave the robes their children wear' (4. 414). This line recalls 'the airy children of our brain' of 'On Love',<sup>72</sup> where the first-person plural pronoun 'our', compounded with the cancelled 'creations of our mind', in turn evokes Shelley's androgynous One Mind. In addition, 'the

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<sup>70</sup> Angela Hobbs, 'Female Imagery in Plato' in *Plato's Symposium: Issues in Interpretation and Reception*, 252-271 (264 and 271). Sudarsky, 'The Banquet, Gender, and "Original Composition"', 164 and 165.

<sup>71</sup> Shelley, *The Banquet*, 450-1 and 453.

<sup>72</sup> Shelley, 'On Love', 631.

airy children of our brain' bears similarity to Diotima's assertion that those 'whose souls are far more pregnant than their bodies [...] are thus united and linked by a nobler community and a firmer love, as being the common parents of a lovelier and more enduring progeny than the parents of other children'.<sup>73</sup> The maternal imaging highlights the masculine Earth's concomitant role of Mother Earth, pointing up the celestial body's androgynous transformation. Whereas the first portion of the celestial bodies' exchange is predicated upon the interpenetration of one another, the reciprocated action in the second portion of their interlude involves an intermingling achieved through the act of folding. The Earth's remark that 'As the dissolving warmth of dawn may fold / A half-unfrozen dew-globe, green, and gold' (4. 431-32) anticipates the pair's pending union. The amorous act of folding encourages the Moon's transformation from barren satellite to fecund planet, and the self-reflexivity of its resemblance to the Earth looks back to Asia's transformative encounter with Demogorgon, and her remark that 'my heart gave / The response thou hast given' (2. 4. 121-22). Edward T. Duffy notes that the Moon's 'responsive language enacts the way Moon and Earth get their living together, and the one word that most signally performs the work of bonding these two together is the Shelleyan master-tone of "fold"'.<sup>74</sup> Fold is also the verb Shelley employs to describe Aristophanes' androgynous beings' attempt at regaining union, 'when one half died and the other was left alive, that which was thus left sought the other and folded it to its bosom', and its recurrence reveals the pervasive influence of Aristophanes' speech, and Plato's dialogue, on the lyrical drama.<sup>75</sup> Folding recalls Levine's discussion of the pliability of the gender binary, in that the act of folding one to another is not to absorb or dominate the other; two distinct selves remain, although now operating in synchronicity.

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<sup>73</sup> Shelley, *The Banquet*, 447 and 448.

<sup>74</sup> Edward T. Duffy, *The Constitution of Shelley's Poetry: The Argument of Language in Prometheus Unbound* (London: Anthem Press 2011): 225.

<sup>75</sup> Shelley, *The Banquet*, 431.

To return to Bloom's interpretation, rather than a scene of sexual union in which the Earth is 'maturely male and the Moon maturely female', the celestial bodies' exchange is reciprocal, upsetting the dominance and subservience implied by binary gender roles.<sup>76</sup> Duffy discusses the reciprocity of the Earth and Moon's relationship in terms of 'a self-reflexive representation of the poetic', founded on 'an interpersonal rendering and receiving' rather than 'a uni-directional transfer of energy'.<sup>77</sup> For instance, the Earth's initial penetration of the Moon, in line 328, is later reciprocated by the Moon's 'interpenetrat[ion] of [the Earth's] granite mass' (4. 370). The penetrative 'transfer of energy' loses its potentially overpowering masculine nuance when reflected back by the Moon's reciprocated act. This scene of mutual interpenetration also serves to subvert Jupiter's sexual violence and oppression of Thetis previously recalled in Act 3. Masculine in their penetration of one another, the Earth and the Moon are also feminine in their fecundity. The Moon's 'solid oceans flow', and 'Green stalks burst forth and bright flowers grow' (4. 358; 364), her influence causing the 'utmost leaves and delicatest flowers' to spread across the feminine Earth (4. 372). 'The Earth completes the Moon's lines', Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill note, 'answering her for the first time' by finishing her lines 'When the sunset sleeps / Upon its snow—' with 'And the weak day weeps / That it should be so' (4. 491-92).<sup>78</sup> The Earth's extension of the Moon's lines reciprocates the Moon's earlier interjection of 'Thou art folded, thou are lying / In the light which is undying' (4. 437-38). In both cases, Shelley indicates the interpenetrative quality of the pair's exchange by the use of a dash that visually marks the ending line; in doing so, he emphasises the space between the separated satellites, recalling Apollo's slicing of the androgynous beings in two, and anticipating their reunion. The pair's reciprocated

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<sup>76</sup> Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking*, 146.

<sup>77</sup> Duffy, *The Constitution of Shelley's Poetry*, 232 and 221.

<sup>78</sup> Leader and O'Neill, eds., *The Major Works*, 753n.

interjections are compounded by the subtle repetition of language and imagery, which becomes more evident when examined side by side:

*The Earth*

As the dissolving warmth of dawn may fold  
 A half-unfrozen dew-globe, green, and gold,  
 And crystalline, till it becomes a winged mist,  
 And wanders up the vault of the blue day,  
 Outlives the noon, and on the sun's last ray  
 Hangs o'er the sea, a fleece of fire and amethyst— (4. 431-36)

*The Moon*

As a violet's gentle eye  
 Gazes on the azure sky  
 Until its hue grows like what it beholds,  
 As a grey and watery mist  
 Grows like solid amethyst  
 Athwart the western mountain it enfolds,  
 When the sunset sleeps  
 Upon its snow— (4. 485-92)

The self-reflexivity of both speeches brings to mind Shelley's assertion in *A Defence of Poetry* that '[n]either the eye or the mind can see itself unless reflected upon that which it resembles'.<sup>79</sup> The Earth's description of the Moon's newly verdant state echoes its own image: 'A half-unfrozen dew-globe, green, and gold'. Rather than being an admittance of narcissism or solipsism, this assertion underscores the importance of sympathetic reciprocity to intellectual and moral betterment, and recalls Diotima's assertion that 'Love, then, is collectively the desire in men that good should be for ever present to them'.<sup>80</sup> The interrelation between love and moral rectitude, essential to Shelley's poetic philosophy, is founded on an aim that is created through man's collective consciousness. This reciprocal introspection is akin to the relationship of the poet to the imaginatively involved reader and highlights how the paired Moon and Earth and poet and reader's intersubjectivities interact by means of androgynous mental melding. The Earth's oxymoronic transmuting of the solid

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<sup>79</sup> Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 685.

<sup>80</sup> Shelley, *The Banquet*, 445.

satellite into ‘a winged mist’ is inverted and reflected by the Moon’s description of ‘a grey and watery mist’ that ‘Grows like solid amethyst’. Strikingly, both speeches culminate in the reconciling of elemental opposites: ‘a fleece of fire’ hangs above the sea, while ‘the sunset sleeps’ upon the snow. The androgynous, elemental mingling of Act 4 anticipates Shelley’s androgynous Witch, ‘like a sexless bee’ (*The Witch of Atlas*, 68. 589), who is herself the offspring of elemental opposites: ‘Her mother was one of the Atlantides’ and her father is Apollo in the form of ‘The all-beholding sun’ (2. 57 and 58). The Witch is born from her parents’ androgynous and elemental intermingling within a Promethean cave, where her father ‘kissed [her mother] with his beams, and made all golden / The chamber of grey rock in which she lay— / She, in that dream of joy, dissolved away’ (2. 62-4), where there is a striking similarity between Panthea’s ‘all-dissolving’ dream of Prometheus and the Witch’s mother’s ‘dream of joy’ in which she ‘dissolved away’. These elemental polarities also recall Aristophanes’ speech, wherein ‘the male was produced from the Sun...and that sex which participated in both sexes, from the Moon’.<sup>81</sup> The sublation of fire and sunlight, correlating with the masculine, with water and snow, relating to the feminine by means of the Moon’s ‘frozen frame’ (4. 328), intensifies the imaging of androgyny as an equilibrating state. Notably, one elemental force is not overcome or subsumed by the other. Fire ‘Hangs o’er the sea’, at once establishing closeness and maintaining distance; similarly, ‘the sunset sleeps / Upon [the mountain’s] snow’, a mountain which is in turn ‘enfold[ed]’ by mist. The ‘Shelleyan master-tone of fold’, or, ‘enfold’,<sup>82</sup> reinstates itself as the key movement to the androgynous process through an intimate closeness that simultaneously maintains difference.

The act of folding that occurs between the Moon and the Earth mirrors the poet and the reader’s intersubjective relationship, where difference is essential to ensuring the reader’s

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<sup>81</sup> Shelley, *The Banquet*, 430.

<sup>82</sup> Duffy, *The Constitution of Shelley’s Poetry*, 225.

intellectual autonomy and the subsequent endurance of the poet's participation in the eternal. Shelley, in the 'Discourse', draws a comparison between intellectual ability and the depth of one's eyes, remarking that, in the case of ancient Greece, 'the inferiority of women, recognized by law and by opinion', resulted in their degradation and deprivation of 'moral and intellectual loveliness'. 'Their eyes', Shelley writes, 'could not have been deep and intricate from the workings of the mind, and could have entangled no heart in soul-enwoven labyrinths'.<sup>83</sup> This emphasis on ocular ability suggests possibilities for reading the Moon's most sustained speech as an exaltation of feminine activity. The Moon exclaims:

I, a most-enamoured maiden,  
Whose weak brain is overladen  
With the pleasure of her love,  
Maniac-like around thee move,  
Gazing, an insatiate bride,  
On thy form from every side  
Like a Maenad, round the cup  
Which Agave lifted up (4. 467-74)

The maenadic Moon assumes the traditionally masculine role of the active, penetrative agent, gazing, and later piercing, the Earth's form. Her subversion of traditional gender roles, and her shifting away from a maternal to a masculine position, accords with her likening to Agave. Following the genderless Demogorgon's entry into Act 4, the Moon's initiated act of gazing is reciprocated by the Earth, and this moment of interlocked eyes belies the psychic unification that has been achieved through the androgynous intermixing that includes the poet and reader's own intellectual intermingling. Demogorgon's address to the united Moon and Earth confirms their androgynous melding by use of the neuter pronoun 'it'; Demogorgon proclaims:

Thou Moon, which gazest on the nightly Earth  
With wonder, as it gazes upon thee,  
Whilst each to men, and beasts, and the swift birth  
Of birds, is beauty, love, calm, harmony (4. 524-7)

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<sup>83</sup> Shelley, 'A Discourse on the Manners of the Antient Greeks', 408.

The celestial bodies' reciprocated gazing is intensified by the chiming end rhyme of 'thee' and 'harmony', where the address to 'thee', the Moon, seems simultaneously directed towards the reader. The addressee, 'thee', is implicated and enfolded within the 'harmony' of the poet's language. Act 4, much more than the simply sexual celebration of reconciled masculine and feminine counterparts, exalts universal unity by way of androgynous melding. The poet encourages his readership to participate 'in the eternal, the infinite and the one' through the mutual resignification of language, specifically as language relates to, constricts, and unbinds formations of gender. The act closes in a space of reverie that at once includes intersubjective mingling while also encouraging androgynous unification, and this is ultimately represented by the amalgamated 'All' who address Demogorgon with the imploring statement: 'Speak: thy strong words may never pass away' (4. 553). This line returns to Aristophanes' consideration of the word, 'androgynous', itself unable to 'pass away' despite the extinction of its referent. *Prometheus Unbound* involves its reader in the communal reimagining of androgyny as a liberating and equilibrating process, challenging the oppressive construct of the gender binary in the aim of inciting mental revolution.

Act 4 engages the reader in its celebration of androgyny's equalising, unifying potential. The imaginative interchange between the reader and the poet is the principal means of achieving mental liberation from oppressive, societally constructed forms of thought, and is mirrored by the androgynous exchange between feminine and masculine figurations within the text. Androgyny is Shelley's foremost strategy at inciting mental revolution in *Prometheus Unbound*, where the poet's desire for the abolishment of the gender binary's 'detestable distinctions' reaches a symphonic crescendo in the moment that the genderless Demogorgon acknowledges the interpenetrative gaze of the feminine Moon and masculine Earth through the use of the ungendered pronoun, 'it'. Shelley points up the political potential of resignifying language with the aim of inciting mental revolution in order to promote sexual

equality, and does so by exalting the feminine voice and the reader's imaginative involvement. Intersubjectivity operates alongside the androgynous exchange between the masculine Earth and the feminine Moon as an equating and empowering force. Following on from the transformative experience of creatively translating Plato's *Symposium* into *The Banquet*, Shelley encourages the reader's imaginative participation in *Prometheus Unbound*, and particularly within the final act. Androgyny exalts a freed and transformed universe and consequently promotes the potential for real political revolution outside of the text.

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