

THE ANXIETY OF INFLUENCE UNBOUND SHELLEY'S *PROMETHEUS* AND PHILIPPIDE'S *PROMETHEUS* IN THE LOOKING GLASS

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Abstract

The paper draws a brief parallel between the works of Percy Bysshe Shelley Prometheus Unbound (1820) and of the Romanian Alexandru Philippide The Banishment of Prometheus (1922). It starts from the Greek writers' image of Prometheus in Hesiod's Works and Days and Theogony and in Aeschylus' Prometheus Unbound. It also discusses Harold Bloom's theory as it analyses the potential anxiety of influence of the Greek writers on Shelley and Philippide and it shows forth this effect seen as a "revisionary ratio" and named by Bloom (1973) a tessera, which means "completion and antithesis". Both authors create a complex Prometheus character who holds multiple facets. Both authors shape Prometheus as a figure that contains the Western core of values, be they positive or negative. Prometheus actually commits the original sin for man's sake. This haughty act can be compared to the biblical theft of forbidden knowledge. The author claims that the aim of this theft and the punishment meted out to Prometheus by Zeus are destined to estrange man from nature and from God and to push man into hubris. These also kindle man's Faustian propensity which turns man into his own divinity, or which recasts the divinity according to man's own design. If Shelley's Prometheus turns out to be the Romantic hero achieving moral and intellectual perfection, being uplifted by authentic, selfless and noble goals, Philippide's Prometheus is the disillusioned, bitter hero from a well-wrought ars poetica, who seeks another mankind on whom to bestow his love and selfless goodwill gestures. His poem represents a symbol of the artist living in his ivory tower failing to be understood by his fellow beings.

Keywords: anxiety of influence; *Prometheus Unbound*, PB Shelley; *The Banishment of Prometheus*, Alexandru Philippide; Greek myth of Prometheus;

1. Introduction

The study sets out to draw a fairly brief parallel between the works of Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) and of the Romanian poet Alexandru Philippide's *The Banishment of Prometheus* (1922). The author will dwell more on the Romanian poem as Philippide's work is much less known than Shelley's masterpiece. It shows forth how Shelley recast his Prometheus in comparison to the Greek myth told by Hesiod and Aeschylus and how Philippide crafted his Prometheus out of the previous literary models: Shelley's, Hesiod's and Aeschylus' creations.

The research also strives to find out if Harold Bloom's predicament that "all writers inevitably, to some degree, adopt, manipulate or alter and assimilate certain aspects of the content or subject matter, literary style or form from their predecessors" (Abrams & Harpham, 2009, pp. 155-156) can spell out the effect of this anxiety of influence as set out by Harold Bloom (1973).

It will also attempt at classifying this effect seen as one type of a “revisionary ratio” out of six which Bloom (1973. pp. 66-69) sets up and namely a *tessera*, which means “completion and antithesis”. In his original literary terminology, Bloom defines completion by explaining that a certain writer may “complete” his preceding writer’s work, preserving its terms but granting them a new meaning, “as though the precursor had failed to go far enough”:

In the *tessera*, the later poet provides what his imagination tells him would complete the otherwise “truncated” precursor poem and poet, a “completion” that is as much misprision as a revisionary swerve is. I take the *Tessera* or Completion and Antithesis term *tessera* from the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, whose own revisionary relationship to Freud might be given as an instance of *tessera* (Bloom, 1973, pp. 66-67).

To boot, the Greek word *tessera* actually reminds us of a small wood, stone or bone piece that completed with other matching pieces enabled one to reconstruct the whole object. Greek mystery cult rituals would employ such a *tessera* as a token of recognition. “In this sense of a completing link, the tessera represents any later poet’s attempt to persuade himself (and us) that the precursor’s Word would be worn out if not redeemed as a newly fulfilled and enlarged Word of the ephebe” (Bloom, 1973, p.67). As for antithesis, Bloom spells out his terminology as bearing a rhetorical thrust: “I am using the term ‘antithetical’ in its rhetorical meaning: the juxtaposition of contrasting ideas in balanced or parallel structures, phrases, words” (Bloom, 1973, p. 65)

This entails the fact that both Shelley and Philippide work upon the character of Prometheus already shaped by Hesiod and Aeschylus, keeping their original ideas but also reshaping them in novel ways, somewhat suggesting that the original writers stopped short of taking a stance and carrying it far enough in the first place.

That is why we shall present some features of Prometheus as seen by both Hesiod in *Theogony* and *Work and Days* and by Aeschylus in the *Prometheus Bound* before we proceed to the comments on Shelley’s and Philippide’s Prometheus. Both Shelley and Philippide (obviously drawing upon Shelley, too) make Prometheus over into a modern hero. The adjective “unbound” in the title implies that both Shelley and Philippide have somewhat unbound themselves from their anxious indebtedness to their Greek predecessors and here we set out to show the extent to which they are unbound. Finally, we should not forget that works of art implicitly and indirectly reflect the spirit of their time.

2. Hesiod’s Prometheus

In Hesiod’s *Theogony*, the story of Prometheus’ (failed) attempt to deceive Zeus is featured as part of an array of events meant to glorify Zeus’ power. The poem shows Zeus as he nears the accomplished status as an absolute Master (Dougherty, 2006, p. 34).

Here Prometheus challenges Zeus to an *agon* of wits, and the fact that Zeus’ wins out and Prometheus loses out is put down to Zeus’ superior wit. Hesiod tries a play upon words regarding Prometheus’ name and shows him forth as a trickster. It is Prometheus the one who steals the fire but unfortunately he ends up bringing about more misery rather than good things to the humans. Ultimately, Hesiod suggests that the *metis* (trickery) of Prometheus bodes ill for mankind.

Hesiod’s poems describe Prometheus as insightful, clever, and witty, and his foresight gift is alluded to in the *Works and Days* in his interaction with his brother Epimetheus, a name carrying an opposite meaning to Prometheus. Hesiod fails to dwell on Prometheus’ own

forethought gift and apart from the episode describing Hope tucked inside Pandora's Box, Hesiod sort of glosses over the issues of Prometheus bequeathing fire to mankind.

Moreover, Hesiod in *Work and Days* considers Prometheus, the bringer of fire as the unwilling instigator or catalyst bringing about mankind's demotion from the paradisiac Golden Age to the wearisome and back-breaking Iron Age (Dougherty, 2006, p. 30).

3. Aeschylus' Prometheus

Unlike Hesiod, Aeschylus in *Prometheus Bound* stands out by skilfully handling the allegory of Hope as she remained confined to Pandora's Box after all the other evils that would pester humanity later on had escaped into the world. It is true that Aeschylus shuts out Pandora from his Prometheus work and that he makes Hope stand out from the allegorical crowd of world's ills and touts it to mankind (Dougherty, 2006, pp. 71-73).

Dougherty (2006, p. 33) is right to observe that "Prometheus' gift of hope, together with that of fire, is given in the spirit of help, as a mortal strategy for coping with imperfect knowledge and the anxiety of the things to come". Prometheus makes good his fame and name as he is the bringer of Hope and the entire humanity is in dire need of it. Aeschylus dwells on the prophetic gift of Prometheus who bestows the pledge of continuity upon mankind.

Aware of the humans' ephemeral condition, Prometheus is sincere in his attempt to give mankind hope for what is to come and makes sure that humans know how to handle fire and put their skills to good use so that they should go about their daily pursuits in a good way. Dougherty (2006, p. 33) rightfully remarks that "hope is part of the human experience – another thing that separates mankind from the omniscient gods".

Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* fits out the springs of the clash action between Prometheus and Zeus with novel undertones. In a very theatrical way Prometheus' uproarious attitude stands up against the tyranny of Zeus. Aeschylus makes us understand that Zeus is eager to sip from the cup of immortal ambrosia and thus glutting his hunger for boundless power.

If Hesiod envisages the two opponents, Zeus and Prometheus, outdoing each other in an *agon* or battle of wits, Aeschylus has Prometheus behave like a real rebel flouting Zeus' injunctions. Moreover, we believe that Dougherty (2006, p. 31) is right to point out that "by making Zeus out to be an insecure and power-hungry tyrant, Aeschylus invokes a political designation with specific negative connotations in fifth-century Athens."

Dougherty (2006, pp. 71-73) goes on to remark that "although in its early uses the word *tyrannos* merely designated one whose sole rule was not inherited, by the fifth century, tyrants were known to be hubristic rulers with a tendency towards violence and a belief that they were a law unto themselves. Athens, in particular, was famous for its hatred of tyranny". If Hesiod's Prometheus fitted into the **trickster frame**, Aeschylus reshuffled the elements and made Prometheus out to be more of a seer than a swindler in *Prometheus Bound*. Tarnas (2018, p. 99) sees Prometheus as both the trickster, but also as the awakener.

Aeschylus' Prometheus comes across **more as a rebel than a trickster, a defender of humanity against the tyranny of the Zeus**. Aeschylus has Zeus hurl a threat at Prometheus that he can stamp out mankind and give rise to a new humanity and valiant Prometheus turns out to be ready to defy Zeus and stand up for the wretched humanity against Zeus' abuse of power. This is the point which Romantic poets will capitalise on as the uproarious aspect of Prometheus appeals to all the rebel-minded kindred spirits.

Unlike Hesiod, Aeschylus does not shrink back from taking advantage of the irony observable in his name at the outset of the *Prometheus Bound*. As Might sets out to leave Prometheus as he was bound to the mountain rock, he raps out an ironic line to Prometheus:

“The Gods named you **Forethought** falsely, for you yourself need forethought to find a way to escape from this device” (Aeschylus, 2012, pp. 86–87).

We agree with Dougherty remarking that Aeschylus’ Prometheus helps build one of the earliest and certainly most detailed accounts of progress in Greek literature. “I gave them fire [...] from which they will learn many **skills**” (Aeschylus, 2012, p. 87). One should remark here that skill renders the polysemous Greek word **techne**, also designating the crafts and arts, a word that has spawned the range of words like ‘technology’ and ‘technique’, aspects that bespeak civilization with all its material and immaterial components.

4. Shelley’s Prometheus

Shelley waters down the adversity of Prometheus and Zeus because he intends to utter his specific utopian outlook on *agape* and non-combat attitude. For this reason, Shelley means for his poem to carry the symbol of both victories over tyranny, and of humanity’s freedom from political, social or religious abuse into a more harmonious and loving relationship with nature.

In the *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley’s recast Prometheus touts hope as the solution to the redemption of mankind. Penned in 1818–19 in Venice and Rome amidst its ruins and among other places and published in 1820, the *Prometheus Unbound* ranked high among Shelley’s favourite works. Shelley’s Prometheus is still a hero of human liberation, clearly indebted to Aeschylus’ defiant titan who opposed the harsh tyranny of Zeus on behalf of mankind.

Let us see how Bloom’s **revisionary ratio** works here and how Shelley’s **tessera** takes shape in contradistinction to the Greek tradition of Hesiod and Aeschylus. Shelley departs from Aeschylus’ model in some significant ways. Seen from the angle of thirty-thousand years of torture, Shelley’s Prometheus has pin-pointed the mistake of his behaviour, and leaving the act of rebellion behind. Iapetus’ son strives for getting back no more as he seeks no power for himself (Dougherty, 2006, p. 104).

Instead of the revolutionary power and technological potential of Aeschylus, the new Promethean fire is the liberating power of love which can transform the human condition. Shelley comes up with this sweeping reinterpretation of Aeschylus’ homonymous lost play as Shelley blurs away the definitions of rebel and tyrant. By using the homonymous title, Shelley may admit of Aeschylus model, but he spells out in his preface that his ambition is greater than to restore the lost play. Shelley set about writing *Prometheus Unbound* showing his admiration for Aeschylus because he wrote a tragedy featuring the hero’s fight against tyranny (Highet, 1985, p. 423).

Instead, he re-imagines the conclusion to the Prometheus/Jupiter conflict at the heart of the myth, clearly wanting to somewhat skirt round the ending featuring the rebel reaching a compromise with the tyrant of mankind. One specific way in which Shelley restores the Promethean figures of his predecessors is by pushing the plot of his story several years after the initial act of rebellion. The focus thus shifts away from the conflict between tyrant and rebel towards a more idealistic and constructive pattern for life without any tyrannical constraints, whether they may be of political, intellectual, or religious kind. In spite of Shelley’s high-flung idealism apparent in the *Prometheus Unbound*, Bloom claims that in general “Shelley was a skeptic, and a kind of visionary materialist” (Bloom, 1973, p. 69).

Peterfreund (2002, p. 225) claims that Shelley’s *tessera* (in Bloom’s terms)

is not so much directed at the plot of this Aeschylean trilogy as it is at certain habits of mind that Shelley takes the plot of the original to emblemize. Reconciling with Jupiter on his terms would mean agreeing to think like that god in categories of reified, permanent,

despotic power and would result in Prometheus's own reification and dubious apotheosis.

And so Shelley's Prometheus is more about imagining an escape from the institution of tyranny than a lament on its limitations. Redeemed by many years of suffering, Shelley's Prometheus has become a paragon of moral and intellectual excellence, moved by authentic and noble goals.

As Shelley explains in the *Preface*, his imagery was "drawn from the operations of the human mind, and while the action of the play may be simple, the ideas involved are quite complex". In his *Preface to Prometheus Unbound* Shelley admits that he strays from the Aeschylus' plot, as Aeschylus has Jupiter (Zeus) and Prometheus compromise on the domination issue and Prometheus finally agrees to Jupiter's sway over the Earth. Shelley's Romantic hero puts up resistance to any compromise standing up to Jupiter's fierce will as in Act 1 he calls on Jupiter instead to "pour forth the cup of pain" (Shelley, 1959, *Preface*). Prometheus's refusal to support Jupiter's reign, which he feels it does not good to humanity, suggests that it is more heroic to actively support justice and morality for all than to reach a compromise with corrupt some kind of authority in order to achieve any personal gain.

For Shelley, the oppositional categories that have dominated political thought are formulated in a rather plain way, and the ambiguous richness of the Prometheus myth allows him to rethink them. Shelley's Prometheus revisits recent historical events and describes a better outcome, moving beyond the cycles of revolution to a vision of a **world without "thrones, altars, judgement-seats, and prisons"** (Shelley, 1959, p. 256, 3.4.164).

In this new world, these and other trappings of power, fear, and hatred "stand, not o'erthrown, but unregarded now" (Shelley, 1959, p. 256, 3.4.179). The age-old categories of tyrant and rebel, master and slave are no longer unflinching through the eternal opposition of Prometheus and Jupiter; rather they begin to blur into each other.

Certainly, Jupiter is presented as the all-powerful tyrant, but he was a rebel against his father. He is proud of the fact that his empire is built upon "Hell's coeval, fear" (Shelley, 1959, p. 256, 3.1.10). His punishments turn out to be harsh, and yet, Shelley's Jupiter also is a thrall to evil. "All spirits are enslaved who serve things evil" (Shelley, 1959, 2.4.110, p. 214).

Instead of representing the spirit of defiance in the *Prometheus Unbound*, **Prometheus stands as the symbol for passive resistance, forgiveness, and love**. By recalling the curse, Prometheus owns up to sharing Jupiter's responsibility for the troubles at the beginning of the play. His wrong actions make him an accomplice to Jupiter's tyranny, and guilty of bringing suffering to humans (Braxton, 1967, p. 13).

Shelley's Prometheus is somewhat to blame for Jupiter's tyranny because he was the one who bestowed power without wisdom on Jupiter/ Zeus, and this error in judgement makes him guilty as well. Whereas Jupiter remains a slave to his arrogance and his thirst for vengeance, Prometheus is freed by rejecting his curse. Shelley's drama thus resists Aeschylus' plan to resolve his trilogy by reconciling tyrant and rebel. For Shelley the most important concept from the Greek world was freedom. (Hightet, 1985, p. 423).

In addition to recasting the characters of Prometheus and Jupiter, Shelley recasts the role of mankind in the myth, emphasizing that it was not Jupiter who intended to thwart mankind, but that man was his own enslaver and liberator. Instead of advocating revolution, Shelley looks to Prometheus to imagine a way out of the endless cycle of tyranny. He aims to create a new Golden Age where men live in a state of political equality; each king of himself:

Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed – but man:

Equal, unclassed, tribeless and nationless;
Exempt from awe, worship, degree; the king
Over himself; just, gentle, wise – but man: (Shelley, 1959, p. 259, 3.4.194–97)

Man thus becomes an autonomous agent, a player in his own story rather than the victim of political abuse or the recipient of divine patronage (Dougherty, 2006, p. 97). By reshuffling the roles and relationships of the main characters in the Prometheus myth: Prometheus, Jupiter, and mankind, Shelley avails himself of the mythological tradition to cast doubt on the claim that a divine monarch sets up the best model for the human political universe.

Shelley dwells instead on the human capacity to change political destiny when he gives Prometheus the choice to forego a vindictive action of wreaking revenge thus preferring the path towards universal peace, equality and harmony.

Shelley reshuffles the mythological narrative to postulate equality for all and to reject violent change by bloody revolutions altogether. He is well aware of the fact that violence only begets more violence, and that mankind throws off the chains of tyranny rather than those of a particular ruling tyrant.

In the *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley uses Prometheus to help undo the myth of patriarchal power as it had been recently embodied by the historical figure of Napoleon. For Shelley, this political act is fundamentally one of the imagination, for, as he claims in the last line of his *Defence of Poetry*, “poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world” (Shelley, 2004, p. 96).

Prometheus serves as a powerful symbol of the imagination’s ability to break the chains of handed down myths and the familiar manners of imagining the world and man’s place in it. (Dougherty, 2006, p. 98). For many Romantic poets, Prometheus’ story contributed to the imaginative arts, shaping a new outlook on the unconventional but still gifted poet as the artful fire thief.

5. Philippide’s Prometheus

In the past more than 100 years, the figure of Prometheus has inspired many writers to air their views on sundry topics of the human condition that his myth has already broached in such complexity since its creation. 20th century writers still find all aspects of his story intriguing like the theft of fire, his subsequent punishment and liberation, his creation of humans. We understand that both with Romantic and with Neoromantic poets, Prometheus stands for the glowing and transcendent spirit of the artists.

It is also the Romanian poet, Alexandru Philippide, who used this myth in the 20th century. He was born in 1900 and died in 1979. He was also a writer, critic and translator, who received the Herder prize in 1965. He read Law and Philology at the University of Jassy, Romania between 1918 and 1921. He also studied in Germany and France between 1922 and 1928 and thereafter took up positions with the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs until 1947. He published volumes of poetry: *Barren Gold* (which contains *The Banishment of Prometheus*) in 1922, *Lightning-struck Crags* in 1930, *Dreams in Roaring Times* in 1939, *The Flower from the Abyss* (short stories) in 1942, *Monologue in Babylon* in 1967 and collections of essays on literature and aesthetics.

Alexandru Philippide was a busy and fruitful translator from German, French, English and Russian. So it is easy for us to presume that he read and internalised Shelley’s dramatic poem. He became a member of the Romanian Academy in 1963 and was awarded the Prize of the Romanian Writers’ Union in 1977. Some Romanian critics deemed Alexandru Philippide to be a Neoromantic writer with poetic streaks bordering on Symbolism.

Philippide claims that the subjection of emotion can give rise to wilful impressionability as a poetic principle drawing upon an array of poets from Novalis to Valery. The poet believes in the infinite power of the metaphor which reveals the imaginative mechanism and “which brings about the poetic state of mind through its suggestive indeterminacy” as characterised by the Romanian critic, Tudor Vianu (1960, p. 36).

Alexandru Philippide’s poem *The Banishment of Prometheus* written in 1922 (from *Barren Gold*) unfolds as a poignant monologue against an ancient Greek background. Philippide’s poem follows a similar format to Shelley’s work but it is much shorter than Shelley’s. Prometheus, the resourceful and undaunted hero, the son of Tethys and Iapetus stands chained in shackles to Mount Elbrus in the Caucasus Mountains and bemoans his cruel destiny of a generous divinity unjustly tarnished and spurned by those for whom he was actually their first benefactor. Alexandru Philippide tries to uncover new meanings by recasting the myth of Prometheus into a 20th century mould.

Philippide picks up the narrative thread and recasts Prometheus into the image of a crucified figure that can be identified with a cosmic element doomed to an unflinching position betokening initial resignation. His attitude here stems from the ungratefulness of people wanting to stone him in order to wreaking revenge on him for they assume that it is Prometheus to blame for all Pandora’s Box strings of evils.

This construal of Prometheus enables the author to weave an underground aesthetic underpinning in the guise of an **ars poetica**: like Prometheus, the poet is a solitary person destined to write perpetually like Sisyphus toiling hard never to be understood by his fellow human beings.

Alexandru Philippide provides the poetic discourse with stage directions showing forth a mob constantly breaking off Prometheus’ actual monologue by their unworthy exclamations as if the rabble were even aware of their unworthy part they are playing as Zeus himself stays silent throughout.

Prometheus’ anguished plight is made worse by his constant sway between two worlds and neither of them accepts him, being alien and hostile to him and unworthy of him. Demonstrating a tragic mind set, but a still bold one, Iapetus’ son takes in the mob underneath him streaming from afar for whose destiny the sacrifice of his body has seemed a foregone conclusion.

Nailed into position under the scorching summer heat and the ruthless winter cold, Prometheus brazens out the fate of crucifixion with sublime aloofness in defiance of Zeus’ wrath as the poet endows him with the attributes of love and generosity. Prometheus seems to be melting away into the “the old mountain, which groans” (Philippide, 1995, p. 22), as he gazes away into a distance held imprisoned by heavy “gold bars” (Philippide, 1995 p. 22), smarting direly during this martyrdom:

I can hardly feel the vulture gnawing at me
I can hardly feel that the gash runs deep
My body is a crag bound to a crag (Philippide, 1995, p. 21).

The abysmal stony presence of the mountain shaken by gusty winds is shrouded by the mob’s furious threats, who, once very needy, will come together here in order to stone their benefactor. It is exactly here that Philippide parts ways with the Greek tradition, availing himself of the margin as if allowed by Hesiod and Aeschylus. It is here that Philippide unbinds himself from the Greek authors’ narrative plot and pulls off a **revisionary ratio** feat as Bloom would call it a **tessera**.

The Romanian poet shapes a different destiny for Prometheus, which does not only betoken comfortable resignation as it was initially shown, but also perpetual struggle. Thus Philippide adds a completion and an antithesis exactly as Bloom would call this process of casting off this essential **anxiety of influence**.

Prometheus abiding under the sway of ruthless *moira* seems to declare that he taught mankind because he loved it. The crowd's attitudes make the fiery dormant powers well up in the hero's soul, which pent-up for so long boil over into a majestic gesture. The one who was initially meant to be sacrificed rises against his doomed condition and consequently grabs the eagle and "throttles it as if it were a pigeon" and shatters the shackles as now it is only the memory of the fire brought to mankind that ties him back to humanity. Shelley's Prometheus awaits the intervention of Hercules even if this is glossed over in few lines.

Prometheus is poignantly aware of the fact that he held Zeus in contempt for the sake of petty humans who fail to show themselves worthy of the beauty of sublime gestures and though a demi-god himself, he took upon himself the doom only to save those who now scorn him (Manolescu et al, 1972, pp. 89-90).

His uplifting gesture of freeing himself foreshadows the rebirth of another, more humane God who is able to topple the old order and give rise to a new one:

Woe, cry, I was waiting for you!
Throb, you blood!
You, life, shudder around in me! Crumble
In me again, you, alarm blare
Woe, my heart in the chest squeezes you
Tight like a fist! (Philippide, 1995, p. 23).

The hidden invocation to the divinity makes for a heightened aesthetic effect meaning to show that heretofore ruthless Zeus, if twinned with the one he has crucified, may save mankind through displaying kindness and solidarity towards the damned ones, including Prometheus. All of a sudden it dawns upon Prometheus that his gesture is useless for mankind, which does not deserve him ("Bleat, ye, herd! / You have enough time to cry afterwards"), (Philippide, 1995, p. 24) and that he stands alone in this. With his humane and kind nature topped by an astute and cautious mind (as the Greek etymology says) Prometheus sees through the beauty of a relationship with a co-operative god only for the world to become a better one: "Break your body like a loaf in two / And toss it to mankind, as they are hungry" (Philippide, 1995, p. 23)

Prometheus believes that being locked in infinity and immortality together with Zeus would seem to him easier to bear: "Give me thy hand, Zeus! Alone thou art like me, / In thy waste and ragged heaven [...] Thou art alone, Zeus! Alone am I, too" (Philippide, 1995, p. 24).

Prometheus gesture reaching out for Zeus' brotherhood falls flat. Zeus keeps silent and passes it by. Iapetus' son struggles with the tragic dilemma of any misunderstood artist and takes refuge in the pure domain of ideas.

Prometheus' anguished plight is made worse by his constant sway between two worlds and neither of them accepts him, being alien and hostile to him and unworthy of him. If the traditional plot has Heracles free Prometheus and look on as Prometheus attends to his wounds, Al. Philippide notches up another departure from the tradition, another feat of **tessera** by having Prometheus show his real mettle and reveal his moral stamina and his outright boldness in standing up against ignorance and malice.

Iapetus' son turns then to the unworthy rabble and looks down on them implying that he no longer recognises them, for whom he incurred the wrath of Zeus and whose tarnished gesture made his sacrifice seem in vain:

And ye, famished beasts, step back!
Alms ye are seeking?... This is so: it behooves
You to have something from me, too.
(he tosses the throttled eagle to them)
Take it away! It is still fresh
It is plump and fat with immortality.
Just stand on your all fours and dig in.
You, mankind! (Philippide, 1995, p. 26).

These words seethe with anger and bespeak a great deal of disappointment making for a gaping distance between the rabble and their saviour. Prometheus hurls words of abuse at Zeus calling him sundry names: "mad god" (Philippide, 1995, p. 24), "roguish god" (Philippide, 1995, p. 25), "thief of fate" (Philippide, 1995, p. 26) and "robber of eternities" (Philippide, 1995, p. 26), making Zeus come across as a character that is uselessly scorned within the borderless world as he tries to thwart the rebellious destiny of uproarious Prometheus by enchaining him to a mountain rock.

Having said this, Prometheus pursues his journey heavenwards as an unflinching titanic creator that removes suffering at the expense of his own ailment setting out to give rise to new worlds with sublime qualities:

I am going back to immortality
To seek another mankind instead of this one;
To give it the consuming fire, too;
And shackled by new chains,
To wait for another heaven to crumble,
To be barked at by another mankind (Philippide, 1995, p. 27)

Unhappy to flaunt his pride of struggling that branded him as an outcast Prometheus heads for his exile into heavens heeding the call of the Absolute that will engulf him for good and thus he parts with his surrounding world: "and thus from banishment to banishment / I am to carry my awkward laughter around Chaos" (Philippide, 1995, p. 27).

Far from being a defeated titan, Prometheus is the clear-headed but not indifferent Demiourgos, in whom one has discovered the ambitious seed of creation, who has become the embodiment of rebellion for the sake of freedom, continuously betrayed throughout the long historical experience of mankind (Vianu, 1960, pp. 48-49).

Like the poet in love with the Sun, Prometheus seeks to head for the Sun to win back his immortality. Iapetus' son chooses to dive into a whirlwind of light nourishing the hope that thereby he will reach the sacred dimension for which he was made as he carries aloft the spirit of outstanding nobility worthy of a Greek tragedy hero:

And now, in a seething whirlwind,
Like in a volcano let the light in me well up!
Flight, oh, to Heaven! Oh, wind, wings! To fly with!
So that I feel blind boundlessness rise in me...
Let the whirl of the swirling Sun

Forever engulf me! (Philippide, 1995, p. 27).

Standing aloof from the mob's perception of him, the hero looks on only to understand that the mob's cries are meant for the Almighty whose fall has just become foreseeable:

"Go ahead and shout!... In your desperation lies only my cry's victory, which is constantly soaring, From heaven to heaven! From Almighty God to Almighty God!" (Philippide, 1995, p. 27).

"The void" that swallows the hero comes over to the crowd in all its terrible aspect and the too small world of the Earth is doomed to fail to find its redemption. Sublime Prometheus vanishes into the thin air of the *kosmos*, showing forth once again the idea of perpetual commitment and unconditional sacrifice.

6. Conclusions

Both authors give rise to a complex Prometheus character that contains multitudes. Both authors shape Prometheus as a figure that encapsulates the Western core of values, be they positive or negative. Sagar (2012, pp. 1-2) says that:

The Prometheus myth lays the ground plan of what is most central in all subsequent Western history and literature. Prometheus himself subsumes God and Lucifer, Adam and Christ.(...) He seems to represent that which is indestructible in the human spirit - man's aspiration to raise himself above the condition of the brutes and become independent of both nature and the gods. If that spirit is an absolute, then it is also, for the Greeks, a *theos*, a god. Equally, he can be seen as an eternal image of the imperfection of man's nature, his greed, pride, violence, materialism, his blinkered intelligence.

We agree with Sagar (2012, p. 2) that Prometheus gift of fire bestowed upon mankind simultaneously contains the divine creative and destructive energy of the universe. This formidable energy makes man not only an empowered being, but also a vulnerable one of whom one can doubt that he is ever able to wield this power in safety. Man becomes something like Goethe's *Zauberlehrling* (the Sorcerer's Apprentice), a fragile being up against a terrible power to control.

Prometheus actually re-enacts the perpetration of original sin for man's sake. It can be likened to the biblical theft of forbidden knowledge. We also agree with Sagar when he claims that the purpose of this theft and the punishment meted out by Zeus to Prometheus are meant to sunder man from nature and from God and to egg man on to bask in the glaring light of *hubris*. This also emboldens man's Faustian spirit making man yearn to turn into his own divinity, or to recast the divinity according to his own design (Grayling, 2009, p. 64).

If Shelley's Prometheus is the political "type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends" (Dougherty, 2006, p. 98), Philippide's Prometheus is the disenchanting, bitter hero from a sophisticated *ars poetica*, who seeks another humanity on whom to lavish his love and selfless goodwill gestures. The poem also becomes a symbol of the artist living alone not understood by his fellow beings.

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