Prometheus Bound Study Guide

Prometheus Bound by Aeschylus

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites".

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers".

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

Aeschylus, considered by many scholars as the founder of Greek tragedy, wrote during a period destined to become the Greek Renaissance or Golden Age. Born in 525 B.C. about fourteen miles from Athens into a wealthy, aristocratic family, Aeschylus came of age as his homeland, which had been ruled by the tyrannical dictator Pisistratus and his sons, emerged to become a republic ruled democratically but by the elite. Aeschylus saw battle when Athens had fought against the powerful Persian empire, winning victories at Marathon (490 B.C.) and Sala-mis (480 B.C.), which have become legendary because of the skill with which the outnumbered Athenians defeated far superior forces.

Athens' s role in the Persian wars led it to become the capital of the Dalian League, a collective of Greek city-states, and peace and prosperity led to a cultural flowering rarely equaled in history. In addition to Aeschylus, the century that followed saw such dramatists as Sophocles and Aristophanes, as well as philosophers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. The importance of Aeschylus lies in his position at the beginning of this exciting period in the development of Western culture. His plays and ideas influenced much of what followed.

Aeschylus's importance in theatre history stems from his dramatic innovations which changed Greek tragedy. Traditionally, Greek tragedy consisted of a performance by one actor and the chorus. Aristotle credits Aeschylus as the first playwright to intro duce a second actor, thereby allowing true dialogue to create powerful dramatic conflict. Though *Prometheus Bound* contains almost no physical action, extensive character development and emotionally charged psychological action make this a dynamic drama of ideas.

A minority of scholars debate Aeschylus's authorship of *Prometheus Bound.* Because of positions the play presents on various religious and cultural issues, as well as because of certain poetic peculiarities, some believe it written by another author. Most scholars do believe Aeschylus wrote *Prometheus Bound,*however, and in any event, the authorship debate does not detract from the play's powerful drama.

Author Biography

Aeschylus was born in 525 B.C. in Eleusis, Greece. His father, Euphorion, headed a wealthy, aristocratic family. Little is known about Aeschylus's childhood. Growing up during the Persian Wars, he fought in the battle of Marathon (490 B.C.), in which a citizen army of Athenians proved victorious against the numerically superior invading army. His brother, Cynegirus, died at Marathon, though Aeschylus fought on. Many scholars believe the playwright also participated in the battle at Salamis (480 B.C.), among other engagements.

Following Greek resistance of the Persian Empire, Athens established its independence as a democracy of the elite and intellectual. Aeschylus came of age during this exciting time, when Athens became the headquarters of the Dalian League of Greek city-states. This brought prosperity to the city and made Athens the center of the Greek cultural world. Critics point to the relationship between the problems and challenges facing the emerging Attic republic and the themes Aeschylus treats in his plays: crime and punishment, law and revenge, tyranny and revolution.

Although scholars credit Aeschylus with writing more than ninety tragedies and satyr plays, only seven exist today in their entirety. They are: *The Persians* (first presented in 472 B.C.); *Seven against Thebes* (467 B.C.); *The Suppliant Maidens* (463 B.C.); the *Oresteia* trilogy, comprised of *Agamemnon,* the *Choephoroe* (also known as and the *Eumenides* (also known as *The Kindly Ones),* which was first presented in 458 B.C.); and *Prometheus Bound* (probably written in the 450s B.C. but first produced after Aeschylus's death in 456 B.C.). These plays were presented during the dramatic competitions held during religious festivals for Dionysus. Aeschylus first competition was around 500 B.C., and he won first prize thirteen times.

Scholars believe that tragedy, which had a complex social and religious function in Greek society, grew out of ritualized recitations. Such readings, like those of Homer's *Iliad* or *Odyssey,* might be social, while others conducted at temples on feast days might be religious. Early drama, such as that presented by Thespis, included only one actor and the chorus. Aristotle credits Aeschylus as the first to introduce a second actor, reduce the significance of the chorus, and highlight the role of dialogue. This accounts for why many scholars consider Aeschylus the founder of Greek tragedy because the actor he added enabled true dialogue and dramatic conflict to take place.

Aeschylus died in 456 B.C., in the Greek colony of Gela, Sicily. According to legend, he met his death when an eagle, trying to crack a tortoise's shell, dropped it on the playwright's head. Aeschylus wrote the epitaph for his own tombstone, which underscores his military activities but makes no mention of his plays. Some critics interpret this to suggest that Aeschylus believed his plays contributed to Attic religious and political culture, and in that sense, that he regarded the role of playwright itself as patriotic.

Plot Summary

A peak in the Caucasus Mountains. Force and Violence have conveyed Prometheus to the mountain, where Hephestus, the god of fire, binds Prometheus to the mountain, expressing pity and reluctance. Force, the pragmatic agent of Zeus, urges Hephestus on, condemning his sympathy for the rebellious Titan as useless and threatening reprisals from Zeus. Force declares that suffering will make Prometheus accept Zeus's authority, and Hephestus states that in time, Zeus's tyranny may moderate. Throughout their exchange, Violence says nothing.

Force, Violence, and Hephestus exit. Prometheus speaks a soliloquy which begs sympathy from his mother Earth, condemns Zeus' s tyranny, and identifies the cause of his predicament, that he "loved man too well." Prometheus indicates that he realized the consequences of his actions before he intervened to save humanity, saying "All, all I knew before, all that should be." This shows Prometheus's foresight, which is the meaning of his name. His foresight proves ambiguous, however, for later in the play, the Titan will express surprise at the intensity of his punishment. Here, though, he stoically councils himself to "Bear without struggle what must be. Necessity is strong and ends our strife." This statement also proves important later, for while Force has claimed that "No one is free but Zeus," the play shows that everyone, even Zeus, must bow to Necessity (i.e. destiny and justice). For Prometheus, this realization proves a revelation.

The Chorus of sea nymphs, the Oceanides, enters, riding in a winged car. The Oceanides sympathize with Prometheus, their kinsman, informing him that "By new laws Zeus is ruling without law," for he has cast the defeated Titans into Tarturus. Prometheus indicates his knowledge of the way by which Zeus will fall from power and his refusal to reconcile with the tyrant. This and similar statements undermine the audience's faith in Prometheus' s foreknowledge, as the Athenian audience knew that Zeus would not fall. The Titan has knowledge of future events, but in some ways his insight remains incomplete and ambiguous. Prometheus himself contributes to this ambiguity when he says, hopefully, "yet some time he [Zeus] shall be mild of mood ... and run to meet me. Then peace will come and love between us two."

The rebel Titan then explains how he came to this predicament, his support for Zeus's rebellion, his pity for humanity, and his subsequent punishment for stealing fire from heaven and giving it to people. With fire, he gave humanity knowledge of medicine, astronomy, agriculture, and other things, as well as "blind hopes."

Ocean enters, riding on a four-footed bird, an image that would appear ridiculous to the audience and thus identifies this as a comic interlude. As Prometheus's kinsman, Ocean feels sympathy, but primarily a pompous wind-bag, he mostly expresses self-importance. Ocean, believing that Zeus respects him, offers to intercede for Prometheus with the tyrant, if only the rebel will control his temper and moderate his behavior. Prometheus thanks Ocean for his wisdom, which, ironically, allowed him to escape the punishment Zeus inflicted on the other Titans. Prometheus expresses his pity for his brother Atlas, who now shoulders the world, and for Typhon, a dragon, both

punished by Zeus. He then advises Ocean to leave, suggesting that Zeus might punish him for trying to help Prometheus. Driven primarily by fear and self-interest, Ocean departs.

The Chorus speaks of Zeus's tyranny, while Prometheus tells of human suffering and his attempt to alleviate it. The Chorus claims that "Zeus orders all things," but Prometheus corrects them, indicating that even Zeus must be subordinate to Necessity. The sinner's destiny results from "Retribution" for a past wrong which "unforgetting .. . Fate" never fails to punish. This dialogue also reveals that Prometheus, like the human race he aided, has "blind hope" that justice will be victorious and that his situation will improve.

Io enters, telling her tragic history. The half-mortal daughter of the sea god, she is romantically pursued by Zeus. Zeus's wife, Hera, has discovered her husband's love for Io and punished the innocent girl, having her followed first by Argos, whose thousand eyes watch her constantly, and then by a gadfly. Through no fault of her own, Io falls victim to Zeus' s lust and Hera's jealousy. Prometheus tells Io about her future revenge, which is tied with his own. Prometheus reveals that he knows the circumstances surrounding Zeus's ultimate fall: Zeus will impregnate Io, and one of her distant descendants, Hercules, will destroy the tyrant. As Normand Berlin observed in *The Secret Cause: A Discussion of Tragedy,* the "meeting of Io and Prometheus is the central episode of the play. It tells us of the future; it reminds us of the past; it covers the geography of the known world." Io's tale moves the Chorus, and, as she exits, they express sympathy for her and fear of finding themselves in a similar situation.

Hermes enters, telling Prometheus that Zeus has heard his boasts of knowing about his downfall. Hermes demands to know the name of the sexual liaison which will lead to Zeus's destruction. Prometheus mocks Hermes as a child and refuses to tell him anything. Hermes threatens additional punishment and predicts future torments.

The Chorus remains with Prometheus as Hermes departs, and his prediction comes true. Amid thunder and lightening, the earth cracks, ready to swallow up the rebel Titan. As the play ends, Prometheus cries out, "I am wronged."

Detailed Summary & Analysis

Summary

The tragic drama *Prometheus Bound* is based on the ancient myth of Prometheus, the Greek god responsible for bringing fire to mankind. It is part of a trilogy of related plays written in the 5th century BC by Aeschylus, one of the three most famous classical Greek dramatists. Only the first play, *Prometheus Bound*, survived in its entirety; the second play was preserved in fragments while the third was lost completely. Yet even considered alone, *Prometheus Bound* is filled with such striking dialogue, principled characters and provocative themes that it has held people's interest for over two and a half millennia.

The audience of Aeschylus's day would have immediately recognized the following characters in the play: Prometheus, the god of Forethought, who often aided mankind; Zeus, the supreme ruler of the gods (who has just ascended to his throne); Hermes, the god of music and persuasion and Hephaestus, a crippled divinity whose talent was for forging metals. That audience would also have known the ancient myth that tells how Prometheus stole fire from the divine realm of the gods and gave it to mortals on earth. By doing so, he directly defied the god Zeus. In retaliation, Zeus ordered Prometheus to be chained to a desolate rock at the end of the world, alone and suffering, for many thousands of years.

The play opens with Prometheus being riveted to a great rock by his fellow god. Once bound in these chains, Prometheus will be fixed in a posture that prevents him from sleeping, moving or relaxing. Hephaestus regrets having to do his duty, and only does the job because Zeus's agents, Power and Violence (who is mute), stand over him and compel him to follow orders. (These two figures are needed by the god Zeus to enforce his authority; they are not divinities but mere symbolic personages.) When Hephaestus pauses to speak of how hard Zeus's heart is, Power impatiently warns him to stop sympathizing with the enemy. Every job is a burden, adds Power, but no one is free except Zeus. Watching closely, Power insists that tight, unyielding shackles be forged around Prometheus and firm spikes put through him. During this whole episode, the tortured god remains utterly silent.

Finally, when the other three leave him, Prometheus calls aloud to the various gods of the sky, earth, ocean and sun. He laments his miserable treatment, and claims it is unjust for one god to punish another. At the same time, these events do not surprise him, since he is able to know the future (i.e., seeing future events is included among his gift of forethought). "I must bear my allotted doom as lightly as I can," he says, fully aware that he cannot escape the powers of Fate. He admits to having secretly passed fire along to mortals by stealing it from the gods and hiding it in a stalk of grass while he transported it. Fire greatly improved the conditions for mankind, and "has proved a teacher to mortals in every art and a means to mighty ends," according to Prometheus.

At this point, Prometheus is interrupted by the arrival of the first of many visitors, the Chorus.

Here let us note that the play's dramatic structure is linked to the requirements of staging. Since Prometheus is spiked to a cliff, he must remain immobile for the whole play. All dramatic action results, therefore, from the arrival and departure of the other characters. Three different individuals will visit Prometheus, talk with him and then leave before the next visitor arrives. The Chorus, meanwhile, remains on stage with him the entire time. They witness each conversation and comment upon the meeting afterwards.

This Chorus is composed of many winged, barefoot girls, daughters of the ocean god, Oceanus. They flutter onto the stage, singing and dancing, and speak all together. They let Prometheus know how quickly they came when they heard of his troubles and they complain about the new ruler Zeus, whose inflexible and oppressive authority inspires widespread fear. "He rules beyond the law," they say, and accuse their ruler of wrongly abandoning the old, noble way of governing. Zeus is unpopular and will be overthrown, they predict, but until then Prometheus will suffer.

Prometheus agrees that Zeus is indeed vulnerable to losing his power; furthermore, he claims to know exactly what event will cause the great god to eventually fall from power. Yet he vows never to divulge this secret, under any torture, threat or persuasion, until Zeus sets him free and makes amends for the imprisonment. He predicts that one day Zeus will grow less stubborn and more cooperative, which will eventually enable them to be friends again. Hearing of his secret, the Chorus members grow curious and beg to know more details.

Prometheus then tells them the tale of how Zeus came to power by overthrowing the previous generation of gods, the Titans. The Titans were led by Cronus, Zeus's own father, but they were outwitted by Zeus's generation of gods (the Olympians) and were cast into the pit of Tartarus. Bitterly, Prometheus admits that he even helped Zeus come to power, but he did so only because he'd foreseen Zeus's victory was inevitable. Prometheus adds that Zeus had planned to let mankind die out entirely and fashion a new species to replace them. Somehow, Prometheus intervened and saved human race from extinction.

The Chorus asks if Prometheus ever did anything else for mortals, and he responds that he caused humans to stop "foreseeing their doom" (in the myth, mortals apparently knew the day of their own death, until Prometheus took that knowledge away from them). Now they have instead "blind hopes" and so their short lives are more bearable. The Chorus approves of this gift of ignorance. However, when Prometheus confesses that he gave divine fire to the humans, the Chorus disapproves; this time he has gone too far. At the same time, they feel pity for him in his present situation, since the punishment is quite out of proportion to the crime. They advise him to find a way to break free. Prometheus asks them to stay with him and they promise sit upon his rock and hear his sorrows to the end. They sit down and wait.

Prometheus's first visitor (apart from the Chorus) is the figure 'Ocean,' a god who flies in on a great creature that is half-bird, half-horse. Ocean is both kinsman and friend to Prometheus; both of them are from the older generation of gods overthrown by Zeus. Ocean thinks he is doing something dangerous by opposing the new ruler. He advises his friend to give in, rather than bragging and rebelling. He thinks it's best to keep a low profile around the new tyrant. Finally, he promises to intervene by plead Prometheus's case to Zeus and asking for mercy. Prometheus, however, responds with sarcasm and ingratitude, telling Ocean his help isn't wanted. He recalls the other victims of Zeus's tyrannical and arbitrary power, including his own brother, Atlas (who holds up the earth) and Typhoon the storm-demon. When Ocean realizes that his efforts to help are only enraging Prometheus further, he departs.

Ocean rides away on his bird, and the Chorus resumes singing. They say that all the races of earth sympathize with Prometheus, their benefactor. Prometheus is inspired to elaborate upon the human condition, which was a bleak affair until he intervened. Mortals were plagued by blindness and helplessness before he aided them with forethought. Humans had eyes but still didn't see the purposes of things. They "handled all things in bewilderment and confusion" and were unable to make any plans for the future or any protection against the elements. People couldn't even tell when the seasons would change or figure out the best time for planting crops. The simplest things like building houses, working wood and even remembering things were impossible. Only after Prometheus brought them astronomy and numbers could people finally make calendars, predict the seasons and regulate their crops. He taught them shipbuilding, navigation, and medicine and mining. As the god of forethought, Prometheus made humans "masters of their own thought" and reduced their dependency on the protection of the gods.

The Chorus tells him to look after his own interests rather than those of humanity, given his present predicament. They ask him difficult questions about whether or not his efforts were worth the trouble. What advantage did he gain from helping mankind, those "creatures of a day?" they ask him. It seems he has helped blind mortals for nothing. Why should he suffer so much for mere mortals, when life can be so sweet and full of hope, they wonder. Moreover, why should the plans of blind, ephemeral humans take precedence over the designs of the divine Zeus? Having posed these questions, they recede again into the background.

A second new character, Io, bursts onto the scene. She is a beautiful mortal girl whom Zeus tried to seduce during one of his many romantic escapades. The wife of Zeus grew jealous and revenged herself on Io by changing the girl into a white cow. Then she condemned her to wander the earth for ages while being chased by a stinging gadfly (or horsefly, in some accounts). Constantly on the run, Io has now lost her way and is suffering from fatigue, hunger and dread. She wonders aloud when her troubles will end and begs the heavens for rest, even if it comes as death.

Prometheus recognizes her and introduces himself. Aware that he is the god who has knowledge of the future, she asks him when she will be freed from this curse. At first, not wanting to break her spirit, he refuses to tell her. The Chorus asks instead for details

on Io's history, and so the girl tells how Zeus first began appearing to her in dreams, asking her to meet him in the fields at night. Disturbed by this, she told her family and they all consulted the religious oracle (a priestess who tells the future in riddles). The oracle commanded Io to be cast out from her home. Then she was changed into a cow by Zeus's wife and forced to wander the earth. As if she didn't have enough troubles, the fly that torments her everywhere she goes has almost driven her mad.

The Chorus sympathizes and Prometheus decides to tell her about her future. She will be driven through many foreign lands, following the coastline, until she comes to the high Caucasus Mountains. Beyond them, she will find the country of the Amazons, and then she will move into Asia. After long wanderings, she will eventually reach the Nile River. Seeing how far she will have to go, Io interrupts and asks why she should even bother to live anymore. Prometheus says she's lucky if she can do so; he himself is immortal and his suffering will continue until Zeus falls from power. Io asks if Zeus can ever be defeated, prompting Prometheus to tell his secret of Zeus's downfall. It seems to be ordained that if Zeus makes a certain marriage, a son will be born who will overthrow him, just as Zeus deposed his own father. The trouble for Zeus is that he doesn't know which woman is the one who will lead to his destruction. The only hope for Zeus is to make a deal with his captive. If Zeus agrees to free Prometheus, he will then (and only then) reveal the details of this 'marriage-secret.' Somewhat paradoxically, it has also been fated already that Prometheus will only be freed in another way: by a hero who is not yet born.

Now Prometheus has his audience interested in two related questions. When and how will Io's wanderings cease, and how will his own imprisonment end? He continues the story of Io's destiny: she will traverse Europe and Asia, passing monsters like the griffins and the gorgons, and will finally arrive at the Nile River. There she will be returned to her human shape by the touch of Zeus and will bear his son. Her descendents will become a great colony, and one of them will someday set Prometheus free. As soon as Prometheus has finished the prediction, the horsefly returns to plague her. Its sharp sting sends her into a senseless frenzy and she runs away, with no aim and no direction, only trying to escape the unbearable stings.

The Chorus observes the importance of marrying within one's own rank and not consorting with gods as unhappy Io has done. Prometheus repeats his prediction of Zeus's downfall through a certain marriage. Zeus will, he vows, be plunged into shame, ruin and slavery. The Chorus warns that Zeus may take offense at these loud, boastful threats. Prometheus responds that he cares 'less than nothing' for Zeus.

Prometheus's challenge to the heavens does not go unnoticed. The third visitor, the messenger god Hermes, descends. Prometheus insolently greets him as Zeus's errand boy. On behalf of Zeus, Hermes demands the details about the secret Prometheus claims to know. He asks the prisoner to reply in clear terms and no riddles. Prometheus refuses, calls him a 'minion' and tells him to scurry back home. Prometheus refuses to 'crouch before your gods—so new—and tremble.' Regarding the ill-fated marriage, he gives no information whatsoever. Hermes notes that such stubbornness is what got Prometheus chained to a rock in the first place. Prometheus retorts that he prefers his

own punishment to running errands for Zeus, as Hermes does. Hermes asks him if it is really better "to serve a rock for eternity rather than be the trusted messenger of Zeus?"

Prometheus vows again that no threat and no inventive torture device will provoke him to tell what he knows. Hermes counsels him as a 'friend' that such an attitude is unwise, needlessly rebellious and against his own best interests. Prometheus firmly responds that Hermes might as well advise the waves. He will not beg for mercy, and his rebellion knows no limits. "I hate this pack of gods," he says, in a famous line. He has been betrayed and punished by the very gods whom he'd helped come to power.

Hermes remarks that stubbornness without wisdom merely makes a person vulnerable and weak. He warns of the terrible additional woes that Zeus will inflict on Prometheus: a bolt of lightning will soon cleave the rock in half, burying Prometheus in darkness. An eagle will be sent to feast upon his liver each day. Before long, Prometheus will yearn for his death. Hermes urges Prometheus to reconsider his position in light of these threats. The Chorus sides with Hermes and advises Prometheus to give up his secret. The sensible answer, they say, is to cooperate with Zeus by telling him what he wants to know. Knowing how much Prometheus cares about his own honor, they remind him that a wrong decision always results in great shame. He may save his pride for the moment, but eventually he will appear a fool if he refuses to cooperate.

Prometheus responds that there is no shame in suffering at an enemy's hand, if there is mutual hate. Come what may, he knows that Zeus can cause him pain but can never kill him, an immortal being.

Hermes thinks Prometheus's grand speeches only prove his own madness. He advises the Chorus to quit standing around sympathetically, as the wrath of Zeus will shortly arrive. Surprisingly, the Chorus refuses to leave, explaining that to do so after all this time would be 'base' and 'improper.' They will stay and bear what they must, honorably. Nothing is worse than treachery and betraying a friend, they add firmly.

Hermes reminds all listeners that he tried his best to persuade Prometheus to relent. When Prometheus finds himself suffering beyond his wildest predictions, he shouldn't blame Zeus or pretend he was ignorant of what was coming, he adds. Such a lack of good sense will trap him in a net of ruin, from which none can rescue him, concludes Hermes.

The negotiations have failed utterly and little more remains to be said. Prometheus's final words simply describe the immense, dreadful storm that he sees brewing: thunder and lightning fill the sky, winds cause the earth and sea to whirl together and the clouds darken. He asks his mother Themis (the Earth goddess) to witness his unjust sufferings. The play ends on this note of suspense and imminent doom. Soon the first lightning bolt will strike Prometheus' rock and send him into agonized suffering.

Analysis

The entire trilogy by Aeschylus is called the *Promethia*; it includes *Prometheus Bound*, *Prometheus Unbound*, and *Prometheus the Fire Bearer*. The first play focuses on the beginning of Prometheus's punishment. The second play, Prometheus Unbound, tells how the hero is set free when he reconciles with Zeus. Until recently, only the first play was studied (the second one only exists in fragments and the third not at all). Taken alone, Prometheus Bound tells an incomplete, but provocative story that influenced many writers and thinkers up to and including the present day.

Why are we still interested in a play written over two thousand years ago? *Prometheus Bound* explores the fundamental relationship of mankind's dependency on the gods. The play also addresses political questions concerning the proper relationship between a ruler and his subjects. How should authority be exercised; when is resistance justified? If a ruler shows himself to be arbitrary and oppressive, does he remain a legitimate authority? These questions are answered over the course of the entire trilogy, as we will see later.

Written in an era when the gods and goddesses were still thought to inhabit the earth, and when myths were valid explanations of how and why things are as they are, the play draws upon the myths used to explain the basic facts of our worldly existence, such as the origin and importance of fire. Fire must have seemed like a miracle to ancient mankind. It would have first appeared as a bolt of lightning from the heavens (the lightning bolt is one of Zeus's divine weapons, so that in the logic of myth, fire/lightning came from Zeus). Eventually, people learned they could also kindle fires with sticks (such as the one Prometheus used to smuggle fire to mortals). Discovering how making fire was the first step in the transition from savage existence to human civilization. Fire, and the crafts and technologies that it enabled, helped humans to protect themselves against nature's whims by their own intelligence and industry. Now, instead of praying to the gods for prosperity and safety, they could obtain those things by their own practical skills and forethought. Their dependence on the gods was greatly reduced (although their reliance on technology might present a separate set of problems). Thus, Prometheus, the god of Forethought, brought both technology and forethought to human beings. Fire is the symbol of technology and the arts and crafts; it also is a key element in human's developing forethought in general. This is seen in the when Prometheus takes credit for bringing various arts and methods to mankind that enable a more comfortable existence, such as numbers, astronomy and building arts, to mankind. So the question remains, why should he be so severely punished for this action, bringing fire to mortals?

Interestingly enough, this question can be answered differently, depending on whether one takes Prometheus Bound as a single play or as the first element in the trilogy. The usual interpretation is based on the single play, and it simply says that Zeus is a tyrant and Prometheus is a noble, rebellious friend of mankind. However, if one takes into account the rest of the trilogy, we see a larger picture in which Zeus evolves into a respected ruler of the cosmos. In the overall scheme of things, one can argue that

Prometheus's gift of fire disrupted the cosmic order by allowing humans to develop dangerous and murderous technologies (weapons, for example); only Zeus's wiser leadership can bring order back into the universe.

Either way, Prometheus remains a classic example of the tragic hero. In ancient Greek tragic drama, the tragic hero was often caught in a conflict between his or her own individual aims and those of the larger social or cosmic order. By doing exactly what he considered morally correct or virtuous, the tragic hero nevertheless failed because his actions were at odds with some unknowable divine or cosmic order. In this case, Prometheus incurred the wrath of Zeus by an act that seemed correct at the time; his gift of fire to man was motivated by good intentions as well as by his nature as the god of forethought. Yet the new political order under Zeus means he will pay a severe penalty.

Structurally, *Prometheus Bound* adheres to the classical ideal. The action takes place in a single time and place, without breaks. The restrictive, even static form, however, does not limit the excitement, because Aeschylus has selected such a crucial moment to explore. Actions from the distant past reach their culmination point, forcing a dramatic confrontation in which their destinies are revealed.

This crucial moment brings together three characters whose fates are linked by both past and future events: Prometheus, Io, and Zeus. Prometheus has been asking for trouble for some time. Previous trickery on his part (having to do with deceptive presentation of sacrificial meat, keeping better portion for mortals) led to Zeus withholding fire from mankind. Prometheus ignored Zeus' orders and stole fire from the heavens, returning it to earth in a hollow plant stem. Io also has a long history with Zeus; the young girl has been fleeing his attentions and his wife's revenge for years, and she still has no idea when her sufferings will end. Finally, Zeus is encountering a vital moment in his dominion over the universe, as he needs to stabilize his authority in order to remain in power and carry out his long-term plans. Therefore, Aeschylus has situated his drama in a moment of great structural and political change.

In fact, the story involving Prometheus, Io and Zeus will not be resolved until thirty thousand years later. Io will then stop her wanderings at the touch of Zeus's hand, and will bear his child. Eventually, her descendent Heracles (known also as Hercules) will set Prometheus free, with Zeus's approval. Prometheus and Zeus will reconcile in the distant future. These conclusions do not take place, of course, until later on in the trilogy; but one sees again that the play appears to say something slightly different when taken alone than it does when taken as setting up the entire trilogy. Thus, one can arrive at different interpretations of the same play, depending on the context assigned to it. A detailed analysis of the play's content will help show how these different interpretations arise.

The dramatic structure of *Prometheus Bound* and its static form are ingenious solutions to the problem of staging a drama around a perfectly stationary character. Fettered to a rock, Prometheus stays perfectly immobile during the whole play. Only the arrival and departure of other characters provides action and change.

Three individual visitors visit Prometheus: Ocean, Io and Hermes. These visitors to Prometheus's rock perform two functions. First, they reveal more about the background of the events, Prometheus's relation to mankind, and Zeus's regime. Second, they often counsel Prometheus to soften his rebellious tone and negotiate with Zeus. His resistance to their counsels, and his increasingly bold threats directed at Zeus, drive the plot forward to its climax.

When Hephaestus is binding Prometheus to the rock, one sees the first noble signs of his character; he endures the pain without a sound. There is nothing he can say in response to such mindless, brutal violence. Immediately one sees one of the play's main themes—the clash between physical force and mental agility. Zeus resorts to physical power (note that Violence, agent of Zeus, never speaks) while Prometheus, god of forethought, uses his critical knowledge of the future as his own threat against Zeus.

Once Prometheus is left alone, the Chorus is the first entity to enter and confront him. They show pity for him, listen to his tale, ask questions and give sensible advice. Generally, in Greek drama the role of the Chorus was to represent the typical emotions of the general public, echoing and giving voice to the reactions that might be taking place in the audience as they watch the play. Here, the Chorus makes clear the sensible, well-considered position one should take towards Prometheus. His gift of fire was indeed disobedient and wrong, but the punishment is too severe. They advise him to negotiate with Zeus, but when he refuses, they steadfastly stand by him, demonstrating that loyalty is one of the great civic virtues. The Chorus remains onstage the entire time, as witnesses and counselors, while the three visitors come and go.

The first visitor, Ocean, merely demonstrates how powerless the old Titanic gods (the generation overthrown by Zeus, of which Ocean is a member) have become. This conversation also shows Prometheus's stubborn resistance. His rebellious attitude towards authority is so different from Ocean's compliant one that the two gods find no common ground. The theme of the rebel versus the tyrant emerges here, and the reader learns that Zeus has little regard for the old laws.

When Ocean leaves, the Chorus and Prometheus discuss Prometheus's gifts to mankind and they debate whether or not his effort was worth the trouble. Prometheus enumerates all the different gifts he has given to mankind, from fire to the arts and crafts to astronomy. Prometheus now appears as the greatest benefactor of the human race, a champion who preserved humans against Zeus's plans to destroy and refashion them.

Even though Prometheus is a god, his similarity to mortals makes him a symbol for man standing up to against uncaring, omnipotent gods. His relative powerlessness compared with Zeus, his emphasis on practical affairs and his desire to strengthening human arts and civilization make him a character with whom mortals can easily identify.

When Io arrives on the scene, Prometheus sees that Zeus too persecutes her unfairly. Like him, she faces many years of misery before she will be free. Her situation complements his; she is doomed to wander aimlessly while he is trapped in place.

Prometheus feels that Zeus has abused his new powers and needlessly brought misery to him, Io, and many others (like Typhoon and Prometheus's brother Atlas). Even though he knows that Io's troubles will eventually end and that her own descendent Heracles will bring about his deliverance, he is unable to control his rage and frustration at his present sufferings. Addressing the heavens with a speech of pure defiance, he taunts Zeus with the secret of his downfall.

Prometheus uses his ability to see the future as a means of resistance to Zeus's force. Only he knows that Zeus will bring about his own downfall if Zeus marries a certain woman and has a son by her. Since the supreme god has many affairs with mortals and divinities alike, he is justifiably concerned. The theme of intelligence versus force is evident in the way Prometheus counters Zeus's violence with his own threatening knowledge.

Hermes comes down to discover the marriage-secret but cannot convince Prometheus to negotiate, even though he warns that unbearable tortures will result. In trying to get the information from the captive, Hermes takes on different faces, alternating between the role of persuasive friend and the role of a neutral administrator of torture and threats. When he finally fails to break the stubborn prisoner's will, Hermes departs and leaves Prometheus alone with the Chorus, whose unexpected decision to remain with Prometheus provides one of the few touching moments in the play. Their empathy and fidelity seems meant to arouse a similar loyalty in the audience. Prometheus himself remains steadfast and firm in his opposition to Zeus, the tyrant, until the end. The play ends just as the lightning storm descends on him; that is, just before any real action begins. The silence and violence which began the play are also present at its ending. Aeschylus has masterfully created dramatic tension and movement, with nearly no actual activity on the stage.

When people *Prometheus Bound* as a single play they tend to admire the hero's sufferings and generosity to humans, thus they see it as a tale of rebellion against tyranny, intelligence against force, humanity against hostile gods. In modern times, we value our freedom and independence, and so we normally sympathize with the rebellious, proud intelligent Prometheus who resists the brute authority of Zeus. Karl Marx approvingly quoted Prometheus's famous insult to Hermes, "Be sure of this, I would not change my state of evil fortune for your servitude. Better to be the servant of this rock, than to be faithful boy to Father Zeus." Marx saw Prometheus as a symbol of an intelligent person realizing he no longer needs the gods. Even more, man comes to ask himself if the gods might be, perhaps, an invention of humans themselves. Perhaps the gods are simply created when we falsely attribute our own powers of reason and action onto an imaginary persona, a divinity to whom he must then submit, said Marx. Thus, the play represented for many the victory of intelligent, practical, fire-using mankind over the oppressive whims of the privileged gods.

Besides this traditional interpretation, a more subtle reading of the play can be found. Rather than simplifying the characters into brutal, tyrannical ruler and uncompromising, indomitable rebel, Prometheus and Zeus can be seen as two overly extreme figures, each of whom needed to learn through suffering in order to reconcile themselves with

each other and discover their appropriate places in the new political order. This is especially evident when one considers the fragments of *Prometheus Unbound.*

The events in *Prometheus Unbound* take place thirty thousand years later. Prometheus has suffered unspeakably for all these ages; an eagle comes each day to tear out his liver, and each evening it regenerates so the cycle can repeat endlessly. Though Prometheus once bragged that Zeus could never kill him, now he prays for death. Zeus's attitude has also changed somewhat, and he has become more tolerant and just, earning him widespread support. He has released the earlier generation of gods, the Titans, and has reconciled with his deposed father Cronus. Having assured his position and his dignity, Zeus longer risks being overthrown and can finally make peace with his prisoner. Prometheus is saved as foretold by a descendent of Io, the hero Heracles. With Zeus's blessing, Heracles slays the vicious eagle tormenting Prometheus and sets him free.

Prometheus grew more accepting of the new order and Zeus became a just, fair ruler who relied upon law instead of force, less susceptible to overthrow. Thus when Prometheus finally divulges the secret of the marriage that will bring Zeus down, it is merely a formality and no real danger.

According to the Greek philosopher Aristotle, tragedy shows complex characters that are not simplified into 'good guys' and bad guys'; instead, they pass through changes of fortune that illuminate their characters. This is true of the characters if they are viewed throughout the entire trilogy.

Prometheus is not purely innocent; he did defy Zeus and give a dangerous gift to mortals that allowed them to develop technical capabilities to completely alter their existence, both for better (arts and crafts) and for worse (weapons). In the overall plan, one can argue that Prometheus' good intentions and admirable rebellion were short sighted. He failed to anticipate Zeus's ability to become a wise and just ruler, with a vision for a more perfect universe. He didn't see that humans require more than just technology to live together in a harmonious society. Zeus himself, though initially portrayed as a tyrant using force and torture, evolves into a wiser, more just ruler with less of a need for compulsion and repression. He will eventually give mortals the other tools and beliefs that they need in order to live together in society: a sense of justice, modesty and concern for others.

The reconciliation between Prometheus and Zeus will come about after each character has gained more understanding and wisdom through his own experience and personal suffering. Even Io's miserable existence will eventually come to a happy conclusion and the creation of a new nation. Though it takes thousands of years to accomplish, the trilogy in its entirety can be seen as a way of reconciling the divine and human orders. This reconciliation is a far cry from the point of mute, non-negotiable opposition found at the end of *Prometheus Bound.*

Characters

Chorus of Oceanids

Earth and Sky are the parents of Oceanus and Tethys, who are the parents of the Oceanids. Aeschylus's mythology, which names Prometheus's mother as Earth, makes the Titan uncle to the Oceanids. Like their father Oceanus, they sympathize with Prometheus, but more bravely. Partially out of fear of Zeus, however, they disapprove of Prometheus's behavior, urging him to attempt a reconciliation. Fear of Zeus strikes the Oceanids when they learn of Io's suffering, but still they remain with Prometheus at the end of the play, when he is cast into Tartarus.

Force and Violence

As the play opens, Force and Violence accompany Hephestus as he impales Prometheus to a peak in the Caucasus mountains. Force remains blindly obedient to Zeus, showing no pity for the Titan and respecting only Zeus's pure power. Force's attitude is realistic. When Hephestus laments that it was his skill at metallurgy that led Zeus to select him for the task of fastening Prometheus to the mountain, Force admonishes him, "Why blame your skill? These troubles here were never caused by it." Force's reverence for Zeus's power leads him to error, however, when he states that "No one is free but Zeus." As the drama unfolds, it is revealed that even Zeus remains subject to Necessity. Note that Force and Violence, who does not speak, travel together, one symbolizing power and the other the way power manifests itself. In spite of their power, Force, Violence, and even Zeus require the intelligence and foresight of Prometheus to understand the cosmos truly.

Hephestus

The god of fire, Hephestus has a distant relation with Prometheus through Uranos. As the god of fire, he is directly affected by Prometheus's theft of fire and his subsequent gift of the element to humanity. Despite this challenge to his jurisdiction and power, however, Hephestus remains sympathetic to Prometheus's suffering. Associated with the forge and volcanos, Hephestus pities Prometheus but does his duty, mostly because he fears Zeus.

Hermes

Child of Zeus and Maia, Hermes is the messenger of the gods. He enters at the play's end, trying to convince Prometheus to reveal the secret that will lead to Zeus's downfall, but the Titan refuses. Hermes taunts Prometheus and threatens him with further punishment, but the Titan ridicules him. Young and inexperienced, Hermes proves a

poor mediator between Zeus and Prometheus, ultimately appearing juvenile and intemperate

Io

Niece of the Chorus, Io is the half-human daughter of a river god. Through no fault of her own, she finds herself desired by Zeus and therefore persecuted by his jealous wife Hera. She has been pursued and watched, first by Argos, whose thousand eyes never close, and then by a gadfly which seems Argos's spirit. Like Prometheus, she too suffers the injustice of Zeus's tyranny, though she is completely innocent of any transgression. Prometheus predicts that one of Io's decedents, Hercules, will revenge her by overcoming Zeus and killing the eagle that daily feeds on Prometheus's liver. This prediction becomes partially true: Hercules does kill the eagle, but Prometheus and Zeus reconcile, leaving Zeus ruler. Thematically, Io's movement contrasts with Prometheus's stasis. Physically, Io appears to be half woman-half cow.

Ocean

A titan who rules the watery elements, he is brother to Earth, Prometheus's mother, and so the rebel's uncle and father to the Oceanid chorus. Pretentious and foppish, Ocean offers to intervene with Zeus on Prometheus's behalf, showing off an influence with Zeus which he does not have. He advises reconciliation, but he cowers before Zeus's authority. Some critics see him as comic relief. In his role as the foolish advisor, he is reminiscent of Polonius in Shakespeare's *Hamlet.*

Prometheus

Greek cosmology describes three generations of gods, (1) Heaven (Earth and Sky) and the Titans, (2) Kronos, and (3) Zeus and his Olympian hierarchy. Prometheus was the son of Iapetus, a Titan, and Clymene, an ocean nymph.

Prometheus helped Zeus defeat the Titans and helped eliminate conflicts among the gods by assigning each specific jurisdictions.

During this time, humanity, created, according to some versions of the myth, by Prometheus, lived a primitive existence without hope. Zeus decided to let humanity perish, so he could create a new race himself, but Prometheus pitied people and gave them fire stolen from heaven. Fire, as Prometheus explains in his monologue, brought with it technology and astronomy, mathematics and language, agriculture and medicine, but most of all, hope. Zeus, angered by Prometheus's interference in his plans, punishes the Titan by impaling him on a mountain peak, where he is partially devoured by an eagle each day. Prometheus knows but refuses to tell how Zeus will fall. In time, Zeus gains sympathy and Prometheus humility. They reconcile. Zeus forgives the Titans and Prometheus. Acknowledging Zeus's power, the rebel exchanges a chain of flowers for the metal chain he wore.

Themes

Guilt and Innocence

Aeschylus believed that the gods punished those guilty of human pride (hubris) by trapping them in a web of crime and revenge, from which only the gods could free them. While the reasons behind the gods' actions remain mysterious, for Aeschylus, humanity must subordinate itself to divine will, which ultimately achieves justice. In *Prometheus Bound,* this notion of inherited guilt emerges during the Titan's discussion of Necessity.

Love and Passion

Zeus feels lust for Io and follows her, hoping to seduce her. Although Io wants nothing to do with Zeus, he infects her dreams, causes her to be driven from her family and home, and sees her tormented by his jealous wife, Hera. His lust makes him behave unreasonably and Io, an innocent person, suffers because of him. According to classical ethics, as exemplified by Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics,* for example, moderate, reasonable be havior best suits one for a happy and ethical life.

Jealousy

Io's suffering stems from the jealousy of Zeus' s wife, Hera. Suspecting Zeus of desiring this innocent woman, Hera has her followed by Argos, whose thousand eyes never entirely close and then tormented by a gadfly. Io has committed no offense, however, and suffers unjust punishment. Jealousy, like lust, interferes with a person's judgement and makes them behave unreasonably.

Rebellion

Although the reasons for Prometheus's rebellion may provoke sympathy, such behavior can disrupt social order. At the same time, Zeus's tyrannical behavior deserves, even requires, resistance. Significantly, the play presents the conflict between two value systems personified by two powerful individuals. In *Prometheus Bound,* rebe llion seems justified, though within what is known of the *Prometheia* trilogy, mercy and patience in the end become the order of the day.

Parent-Child Relations

To some degree, every generation of children finds themselves in conflict with their parents' value system. Parents require obedience, children independence. Parents see their children in a specific way and act toward them according to that image. The children themselves may have outgrown that image, though, and see themselves

differently. In any event, children must make a place for themselves in the world and do so with some degree of independence. *Prometheus Bound* presents a variety of parent-child relationships, from Kronos patricide to Zeus's rebellion to the positive connection between Prometheus and his mother, Earth. Further reading in Classical mythology will reveal additional examples of fond and problematic family relations.

Atonement and Forgiveness

Most viewers see Prometheus, particularly as he appears in this first play of the *Prometheia* trilogy, as a benevolent rebel struggling against tyranny, suffering because of his love of humanity. In this respect, he resembles Jesus, who according to Christian theology suffered to save humanity. In art and religion, such struggle and pain is often linked with spirituality and redemption. A final element□forgiveness□also commonly occurs, as seen when Christ forgives his murderers ("Father forgive them for they know not what they do") and, in what is known of the now lost *Prometheus Unbound,* when the rebellious Titan reconciles with Zeus.

Law and Order

On one level, *Prometheus Bound* presents a conflict between two models of law, one, Zeus's, aligned with Power and another, Prometheus's, identified with sympathy. From Zeus's perspective, his monarchy requires obedience and Prometheus, by helping humanity, has broken the law and deserves punishment. Prometheus, however, has to negotiate between two codes of law, Zeus's rule in which might makes right and his own, motivated by his pity for humanity. The play explores the relationships among law, justice, and mercy, the latter a theme of greater significance in the context of the three play trilogy, the *Prometheia*. From fragments of the now lost sequels, it is known that Prometheus does acknowledge Zeus's law, exchanging his chains of steel for chains of flowers, and Zeus learns to show mercy, freeing the imprisoned Titans, including Prometheus.

Style

Chorus

In Greek tragedy, a dozen or so men comprise the chorus, who comment on and interpret the action unfolding on stage and underscore the play's themes and conflicts. In many ways, they stand in for the audience. For example, the Oceanides react to Prometheus and Io much as the audience would; they ask the questions and express the emotions likely to arise during an audience's viewing of the play. The Chorus performed their lyrics in song and dance, though the music and choreography have been lost.

Tragedy

According to Aristotle's *Poetics,* a drama about an elevated hero who, because of some tragic character flaw or misdeed (a hamartia), brings ruin on himself. While not exactly a flaw, Prometheus's love for humanity can be seen as the element of his character which precipitates his imprisonment, for it leads him to go against Zeus will and challenge his authority. Prometheus exhibits an element of pride (hubris) in his belief that he knows better than Zeus (even if it is agreed that, in his sympathetic attitude toward humanity, he does) and his desire for revenge against Zeus.

Hamartia

In a tragedy, the event or act that causes the hero's or heroine's downfall is known as hamartia. In *Prometheus Bound,* the Titan's rebellion against Zeus in giving fire to humanity sets the tragedy in motion and leads to his imprisonment.

Catharsis

At the end of a successful tragedy, the spectators experience a release of energy, catharsis, because they have felt pity and fear, pity for the person suffering the tragic fate, then fear that a similar fate might befall them. Viewers might feel this toward Prometheus, afraid that they might find themselves facing an ethical dilemma on a grand scale. On the other hand, audiences might more generally experience catharsis in regard to Io, an innocent person who suffers through no fault of her own□the viewer hopes that such a capricious fate never stri kes them.

Tetralogy

During dramatic com petition in Athens, held annually to celebrate the god Dionysus, called the Dionysia, winning playwrights presented a tetralogy of four related dramatic works, which usually consisted of three tragedies and a satyr play.

Satyr Play

A broad comedy performed with three tragedies that usually burlesqued the same legend dramatized by the tragedies.

Historical Context

When Aeschylus was born in 525 B.C. outside Athens, the city could be characterized as an unimportant polis (i.e. city-state) ruled by the tyrant Hippias. In 510 B.C., a political reformer, Clisthenes, overthrew the tyrant and developed the government into a republic ruled democratically by the elite. Reforms lessened the power of the nobility and allowed non-noble landowners to participate in government. Though conflicts between the nobility and commoners (known as the demos, hence the word democracy) remained, Athens developed into a well governed city-state led by a vital, informed citizenry.

Those citizens proved to be competent soldiers as well and fought bravely against invasion by the Persian empire. Athens and the Greeks defeated the Persians, winning land and sea victories at Marathon (490 B.C.) and Salamis (480 B.C.), respectively, against numerically superior forces.

Athens' s victorious role in the Persian wars led to its selection as capital of the Dalian League, a collective of Greek city-states, and peace and prosperity led to a cultural flowering rarely equaled in history. Athens evolved into one of the most important cultural and trading centers in the world. The next century was considered a Greek Golden Age, which saw such dramatists as Sophocles and Aristophanes, as well as philosophers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.

Greek tragedies like those of Aeschylus were performed in Athens as part of the Great Dionysia, an annual religious festival dedicated to the god Dionysus held in early Spring. First, a statue of Dionysus was removed from his temple within sight of the theatre, carried in procession to the country, and returned to Athens. Next followed four days of performances, three of tragedies and one of comedies. The tragedies were selected in a contest among competing dramatists, a contest which Aeschylus won thirteen times. Each winning dramatist then presented a tetralogy of three tragedies and a satyr play, in performances which began in the morning and lasted most of the day.

All of Athens became involved in the celebration. A local magistrate organized the procession and selected playwrights for the competition. He identified wealthy citizens to pay for masks and costumes and to select a chorus. Sponsors also may have had some input into selection of the contest judges and the plays selected for competition, though the playwright retained responsibility for his cast. Citizen judges swore to remain impartial and authorities severely punished misconduct of any kind during the celebration.

In Athens, performances took place outdoors in a huge theatre constructed on the hillside of the Acropolis. To imagine the theatre, picture a large, semi-circular fan. The orchestra, where the actors performed, and an altar, stood in the middle of the semi-circle. A stage building called a skene, in which actors donned masks and costumes, stood behind the orchestra. Stage sets of temples or landscapes could be displayed on the front of the skene. Benches for seating an audience of as many as 15,000 people

radiated out around the orchestra. Women and children could attend, though they may have been seated apart from the men.

These theatre festivals began during the sixth century with displays of individual and choral songs and dancing. Credit for the first tragedy goes to Thespis in 536-533 B.C.; the play featured a Chorus of perhaps a dozen men and a single actor. Tragic theatre evolved under Aeschylus, who introduced the second actor, and developed further under Sophocles, who introduced the third. Actors wore masks and tunics, which may have been colored to indicate their roles (e.g. mourners in black, priests in white, kings in purple). Actors needed strong voices to make themselves heard in the large theatre and the ability to impersonate, since each actor played several characters in each play.

As the center of the Dalian League, Athens fast became the most important city in Greece, an intellectual and cultural as well as commercial and mercantile center. The Great Dionysia festival drew audiences from throughout the Mediterranean, and everyone from commoners to nobles, from merchants to ambassadors attended.

Critical Overview

The title character of *Prometheus Bound,* perhaps more than any other hero, serves scholars as a sort of critical mirror. Reformers, for example, consider Prometheus a revolutionary hero, like Satan, a principled rebel who sacrifices himself for others, like Jesus, or an ethical individual who suffers in the face of absolute power, like Job. Authoritarian critics, on the other hand, understand Prometheus's urge to save humanity but condemn his disregard for hierarchical authority in doing so. Freudian and psychoanalytic critics discuss the play's complicated parent-child relations (e.g. Zeus's overthrow of his father, Kronos; Prometheus's connection with his mother). Historical and cultural critics discuss the play in terms of contemporary events, analyzing, for example, Aeschylus' s use of medical terminology in character dialogue and considering what this tells scholars about scientific knowledge at the time.

What may account for the popularity of Prometheus as a character is that fact that all these opinions seem right, if not in *Prometheus Bound* itself, then in the context of the *Prometheia* trilogy. Though two of the three plays have been lost, there exist enough fragments and commentary to understand how the story would have been resolved. The result is a rich and complex symbolic narrative of ideas.

Of foremost consideration is what the play tells audiences about Aeschylus' s thinking on the human condition and tragedy. Because Prometheus's intervention to minimize human suffering comes from pity, Normand Berlin saw him as "a creature of feeling." As Berlin wrote in *The Secret Cause: A Discussion of Tragedy, Prometheus Bound* offers "the tragic condition, here encompassing god and man, macrocosm and microcosm, and brilliantly displaying the contradictory perspective of tragedy, whereby the victorious tyrant is the victim of destiny and his defeated, suffering victim is victorious in possessing knowledge of that destiny□while intelligent mankind victoriously piercing through layer and after layer of ignorance and chaos, progressing in the course of time to mastery of his world, remains helpless beneath the arbitrary and dark control of both Zeus and destiny."

On the other hand, some critics believe that present circumstance did play a role in Aeschylus's choice and treatment of subject matter. They discuss the play's exploration of themes like tyranny and revolution in the context of Athens' s evolution from tyranny to democracy which accompanied its defeat of the Persian Empire. As the play opens, Zeus's cosmic government appears as brutal despotism. He acts, according to George Thomson, as a complete tyrant: ruling without laws, contemplating the murder of humanity, seducing female subjects, and suspicious even of his allies. For James Scully, Prometheus's predicament resembles that of any political prisoner being brainwashed; he has been isolated by Zeus, tortured by Hephaistos and Force, and interrogated and brow-beaten by Hermes, an official of the police state.

Although *Prometheus Bound* dramatizes a righteous rebellion against a tyrant, Philo M. Buck, Jr. pointed out that it tells only part of the story. As the first part in a trilogy, much

of which has been lost, the viewer must turn to existing fragments of the sequels to learn of Prometheus's ultimate reconciliation with Zeus.

Buck believed that Zeus's actions result from his inexperience as a leader and his unstable grasp on power. Zeus's goal, to establish order after overthrowing the anarchy of the earlier divine rulers, seems laudable, and requires, at least initially, a strong ruler. Zeus must punish the disobedient Prometheus, despite his noble reasons for revolt. Still, according to fragments of the second and third plays in the *Prometheia,* Zeus later moderates his tyranny and learns mercy, forgiving the Titans and ultimately reconciling himself with Prometheus. Justice, according to Buck, must never be arbitrary but rather human and reasonable. If Prometheus, like Socrates, has been unjustly convicted, "he must wait for justice to release him. And this was done in the last and lost play, where allegorically the mutual claims of justice and mercy are reconciled in the reign of intelligent law." *Prometheus Bound,* which explores such themes as justice, "the tyranny of the majority, the caprice of misdirected reformers, " conveys an important social message to "Athens, now embarked after the anarchy of the wars and the Tyrants in an effort to build a just constitution and establish human law."

Finally, space and time, movement and stasis, memory and history all prove important motifs in *Prometheus Bound*. Almost no physical action takes place during the play, where the drama focuses on character. Consequently, stasis becomes thematically important. Central to the play are the conversations between Prometheus, doomed to remain trapped on a rock, and Io, a wanderer doomed to wander still farther. She tells Prometheus about her journeys and past, then Prometheus foretells her journeys and future. That prediction includes the story of Hercules, Io's distant relation and avenger, whose life also consists of journeys and sufferings. According to myth, Prometheus aids Hercules by helping him accomplish his labors, after which Hercules kills the eagle which feeds on the Titan's liver.

Zeus has victimized both Prometheus, who remains stationary, and Io, who seems doomed to wander. As Berlin pointed out, Io's experiences "span the ages, while her wanderings which seem to take in the known world of the time, widen the canvas□so that Aeschylus's *Prometheus,* having already presented the progress of human consciousness through the years, seems to gather all time and all space to itself, thereby making the mood of fatalism pervasive and extensive." Thus, memory and foreknowledge□movement in time□ connect with Io's and Hercules' s journeying□movement in space. Together, their stories (and that of the *Promethia)* comprise a history that reaches from the rise of human civilization to the fifth century present, and takes in every country from one end of the known world to the other. Memory becomes history, while geography becomes empire.

In the end, regardless of which critic's argument readers find most persuasive, *Prometheus Bound* remains a moving text that leaves everyone with plenty to think about. And ultimately, its story remains optimistic. As Scully observed in a translation of *Prometheus Bound,* the "general drift of the trilogy . . . [is] a universal progress from confusion and torment, at all levels of the universe, toward peace and joy."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Schmidt is a professor of English at California State University, Stanislaus. In this essay he examines the myth of Prometheus, discussing the missing plays of the trilogy that concluded the Titan's tale and also appraising Aeschylus's play as a psycho-drama a struggle in personality and ethics between the title character and Zeus.

Poets and scholars have traditionally read the tale of Prometheus as a lesson in revolution, seeing the imprisoned Titan as an emblem of the lone individual in heroic rebellion against mindless tyranny. This view became more common during the French Revolution and Napoleonic periods of the nineteenth century, when Prometheus became a symbol first of freedom, and later, of the leader Napoleon himself. We encounter this image of Prometheus in poems by various Romantic era poets, in particular Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Shelley, himself an accomplished classical scholar who translated works by Plato and the other notable Greek dramatists, wrote *Prometheus Unbound,* his version of Aeschylus's work that speculates what might have occurred when the Titan became free.

Remember that *Prometheus Bound* forms only the first part of Aeschylus's trilogy□commonly known as the *Prometheia*□whose other plays have been lost. We know, for example that the story of *Prometheus Bound* continued in *Prometheus Unbound* and *Prometheus the Fire-Bearer*. Significantly, Shelley's version ends with Zeus defeated, dragged down into darkness by Demogorgon, a figure of Necessity. Everything we know about Aeschylus's version of the play, however, tells another tale, that of reconciliation between the rebel and the tyrant. While the romantic version retains a certain appeal in its representation of heroic individualism and its vision of redemptive love leading to an earthly utopia, Aeschylus's version raises a different set of intriguing themes and questions. Enough fragments of the lost *Prometheia* plays remain to provide an outline of Aeschylus's conclusion, indicating that after thousands of years, Zeus and Prometheus reconciled, the tyrant learning mercy and the rebel obedience.

If we consider *Prometheus Bound* in the context of themes laid out in the trilogy, the *Prometheia* can be read as a psychological and political allegory, representing the human microcosm (i.e. the mind) and macrocosm (i.e. society). Arguably, the play suggests that freedom and authority must be balanced in any ethical person, leader, and/or society. We might see this as a shift in the notion of the hero, evolving from that of Homer's Odysseus, a wily trickster given to spontaneity and temper, to the moderate, reasonable individual validated in Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*. Since Homer comes before Aeschylus and Aristotle afterward, the *Prometheia* may mark a transition between these two models of the hero. After all, the Prometheus of *Prometheus Bound* resembles Odysseus in many ways, and what we know about the reconciled Prometheus of *Prometheus Unbound* exhibits many of the characteristics Aristotle applauds. This contradicts those wanting to read the Prometheus myth as solely a struggle between two absolutes: tyranny and freedom. Instead, being an ethical, individual ruler or society requires balance.

Prometheus faces a classic ethical dilemma, in which he must choose between two mutually exclusive systems of law. From the Olympian point of view, Prometheus wrongly disobeys authority, given classical society's need and respect for hierarchy, but he acts with noble purpose, to save humanity from destruction. Like Antigone (who defied her ruler by performing a forbidden funeral ritual for her slain brother), Prometheus commits the lesser wrong□disobeying a tyrant□and prevents the greater wrong□the destruction of the helpless human race. Seen from the human perspective, Prometheus' s actions seem heroic, while seen from the vantage point of Olympus, they seem like betrayal.

So far, we have discussed what the *Prometheia* says about society, about the ruler and the ruled. By reading this play as a psychodrama, we can see that Zeus and Prometheus can represent two sides of a single personality. After all, their personalities share much in common: pride, temper, stubbornness, vengefulness. If at first this seems a stretch, consider that in many ways, Prometheus's character and behavior appear ambiguous. He presents himself as the sympathetic champion of humanity, but he aided Zeus in overturning his father Kronos and the Titans. That means Prometheus also overturned the authority of his own father, the Titan Iapetus, who with the others ends up imprisoned in Tarturus.

This raises the question: why does Prometheus help humanity? He claims he feels pity for peoples' suffering, but might part of his motive to be to challenge Zeus? After all, Prometheus, having already seen the overthrow of two dynasties, now participates in the founding of a third. Remember that Zeus cannot win without the help of Prometheus, who explains that Zeus will win, not by force, but by strategy, by freeing some giants who will fight against the Titans. Thus intelligence and not physical power alone allows the overthrow of Kronos and the rise of Zeus.

Hesiod' s *Theogony* describes three generations of gods, (1) Heaven (i.e. Earth and Sky [Uranus]) and the Titans, (2) Kronos, and (3) Zeus and his Olympian hierarchy. Kronos overturned his father Uranus just as Zeus overthrew him, so these first two dynasties prove violent and chaotic. Zeus's reign eliminated the anarchy that existed among the Titans and earlier gods. His success cannot be viewed as a solitary success, however. Zeus created a sense of order because Prometheus assigned different jurisdictions to the various Olympian gods. Good social order comes from a balance between Zeus's power and Prometheus's intelligence. Neither can succeed entirely without the other. Given his importance to helping Zeus gain power, might not Prometheus feel too proud to be subservient?

If this accurately characterizes the struggle between the tyrant and the Titan, what makes Zeus change his mind? Much time has passed since Prometheus's original offense, and Zeus has begun to soften□according to the *Prometheia,* in part because he pities Hercules, the mortal child he fathered with Io's descendent Alcmene.

James Scully's edition of *Prometheus Bound,* contains several fragments from the lost trilogy. According to book four of his *Geography,* the Greek geographer Strabo (64 B.C. to 21 A.D.) quoted from the now lost version of *Prometheus Unbound*. Hercules,

threatened during his Labor to retrieve the golden apples from the Hesperides. Prometheus predicts that Zeus will help Hercules, saying, "You'll come upon / the Ligyes, a horde / that doesn't know what fear is ... / As fate has it: you'll run out of weapons,... / But Zeus will see you / bewildered there / and pity you." Zeus thus comes to Hercules's aid and saves his life.

Zeus' s reconciliation with Prometheus involves a compromise on both their parts, with Zeus learning to feel pity and the Titan learning submission. Zeus indicates his victory gently, however. The *Deipnosophistae*, written about 200 A.D. by the Greco-Egyptian scholar Athenaeus, explained that in *Prometheus Unbound,* when Zeus frees Prometheus, the Titan agrees to substitute a chain of flowers for his chain of steel. Prometheus would wear the garland as painless punishment for his resistance to Zeus and as a symbol of his submission to his law and authority.

Zeus will impregnate her, and one of her decedents will arrive in the Egyptian city of Canopus, where after five generations, fifty sisters will resist marriage with their "near of kin" and will murder the men. "One girl, bound by love's spell, will change / her purpose, and she will not kill the man she lay beside," and in time, "she will bear a kingly child" whose descendent, Hercules, will set the Titan free. After Hermes tells Prometheus about the eagle which will daily consume his liver, the messenger says the Titan will find "no ending to this agony / until a god will freely suffer for you, will take on him your pain, and in your stead / descend to where the sun is turned to darkness, / the black depths of death." This occurs when Chiron, the immortal centaur renowned for his wisdom and virtue, agrees to die in Prometheus's place.

According to E. A. Havelock, *Prometheus Bound* differs from most tragedies in which the hero fails and dies, because Prometheus triumphs and lives. Both Zeus and Prometheus have learned and grown in the process. As R. D. Murry pointed out in *The Motif of Io in Aeschylus's "Suppliants,*" the "release of Io from her woes is to provide the initial indication of the increasing wisdom of Zeus and the concomitant sowing of the seeds of compassion for humanity." Hercules's freeing of Prometheus "marks the coming of age of the divine wisdom and the synthesis of Promethean knowledge and hu-manitarianism with the effective Jovian power. The trilogy is a paean in honor of the Greek mind, but above all an affirmation of the dignity of man and wise majesty of god, qualities attained through the perfecting course of evolution. Zeus the tyrant and Prometheus the forethinker coalesce" in a process of "learning through suffering."

As we have seen, the *Prometheia's* dramatic struggles between law and justice, mercy and punishment resonate with both individuals and society. Reading *Prometheus Bound* less as an object lesson about revolution and more as a resolution of ethical dilemmas becomes more meaningful if we situate the play within the context of Aeschylus' s historical moment. He wrote after the political reformer Clisthenes overthrew the tyrant Hippias and developed a republican government. Reforms lessened the power of the nobility and allowed non-noble landowners to participate in government. Conflicts between the nobility and commoners remained, however, and Athens had to develop an attitude of compromise and cooperation.

Thus, the same problems and challenges facing the characters in the *Prometheia*□crime and revenge, tyranny and revolution□also faced the young Attic republic. The citizens and rulers of Athens had to come to terms with these issues, and achieve balance freedom and authority, in themselves individually and in their society. This is in keeping with the way Scully described the "general drift of the trilogy ... [as showing] a universal progress from confusion and torment, at all levels of the universe, toward peace and joy."

Source: Arnold *Schmidt for Drama for Students,* Gale, 1999.

Critical Essay #2

In this excerpt, Mossman discusses the imagery in Prometheus Bound, *illustrating the large role it plays in relating the drama.*

Very little to do with the exact context of *Prometheus Bound* can be proved, because of the poor state of the evidence, but several scholars, most recently Griffith, have argued convincingly that there was a trilogy by someone consisting of *Prometheus Firebearer (Pyrphoros), Prometheus Bound,* and *Prometheus Unbound* in that order, and in what follows it is assumed that that was the case. There are some fragments which suggest that images familiar from Prometheus Bound appeared in the other two plays as well; to these I shall return, but first the imagery within the play we actually have should be considered in some detail.

The major interest of *Prometheus Bound* is the characterization of the relationship between Zeus and Prometheus, and the tracing of Prometheus' emotional movement from despair to renewed self-respect. After the opening binding scene, where the brutal treatment he receives is graphically described and carried out on stage, Prometheus is in a pitiful state, frightened even by the rushing wings of the gentle chorus. But their sympathy, and his account of his wrongs, restore some of his spirit, as his dialogue with Ocean shows, and his great central speeches about his benefactions to mankind help him further and embolden him to mention that he knows a secret which he can hold over Zeus. The Io scene, where his gift of prophecy comes into its own, increases his confidence still further; he threatens Zeus, and remains steadfast even in the face of Hermes and a yet more terrible punishment. The imagery of the play has an important role to play in underlining the characterization of Zeus and Prometheus, and in characterizing Zeus further by means of delineating his treatment of Io. Io is linked to Prometheus by images of horse-breaking or domestication of animals, and of sickness and disease....

Prometheus' bonds are described with technical terms from horse-breaking; the effect of this is to show how Zeus' regime attempts to reduce him to animal status: it adds an edge to the brutality of the binding scene. This is a relatively non-figurative use of the metaphor, since although Prometheus is not a real animal, the bonds are solid enough. The metaphor ... used to describe the methods which Zeus uses to force Inachus to drive out Io, is obviously a more figurative one, since there is no indication that real bonds are involved. But it still makes sense to see it in the context of the bonds of Prometheus, since Zeus' treatment of Inachus is similarly violent and harsh. Harder to place is the more elaborate metaphor in Hermes' words to Prometheus [near the play's end].... Here the stress is on Prometheus' activity rather than on the nature of the bonds, as in the earlier passages, and this reflects Prometheus' greater self-confidence (or unruliness, from Hermes' point of view) at this later stage in the play. Are the bit and reins against which he struggles actually his bonds, or are they more figuratively metaphorical? Hermes leaves it delicately uncertain.

The use of such images to portray Io covers a wider register of figurative and non-figurative. Imagery from domestication and horse-breaking is regularly used in sexual, nuptial, and sometimes sacrificial contexts, of young girls in early lyric poetry and in tragedy; but here, because Io is in dramatic reality half-cow, half-human, the passages which describe her as bovine are ambiguous: they can be understood simultaneously directly and as metaphors. . . . All this metaphorical domestication should be compared to the domestication of real animals as taught by Prometheus to mortals.... There it is one of Prometheus' benefactions, used to the benefit of civilization, but in the metaphors it represents Zeus' outrages....

Less complex, with a more discernible range of figurative and non-figurative forming a more discernible pattern, is the metaphor of binding; from the actual binding instantiated on stage in the first scene, we then find a series of images of binding and entanglement, culminating in the chorus's being entangled in the net of disaster... .This is of course often combined with the images from horsebreaking which have just been discussed, and the two should probably not be separated out as clearly as they have been here. The real binding of Prometheus remains a dramatic fact throughout the play, but from the first scene on there are lines where the metaphoric dimension of binding is used to describe features of that real binding.. . .

The images which represent what is wrong with Zeus' rule, domestication and sickness ... have their most literal expression in the speeches of Prometheus, and Zeus' actions are thus characterized as perverting the benefits which Prometheus conferred on mortals, and which Zeus should be conferring and is not. Io and Prometheus are linked as victims of Zeus' cruelty by these images, and by using the cow imagery previously used of Io of the earth at the very end of the play, it may be implied that the whole earth is Zeus' victim too....

In suggesting the perversion of Prometheus' gifts by Zeus, the sickness and domestication images behave in a parallel way to the other gifts he has given mankind: fire and prophecy. The fire which Prometheus stole to benefit mankind is used to punish him . . . and the emphasis on the fiery nature of the thunderbolt.... Zeus' coercion of Inachus by means of oracles may also imply that he is perverting another of Prometheus' gifts, namely prophecy: but in general this is the one gift of Prometheus that Zeus cannot control or pervert, and it is this which will provide the means of escape... which initially seems so far out of reach. And it is supremely appropriate that in giving the benefit of his prophetic skill to an individual mortal, Io, a representative of the mortals he describes himself as helping, Prometheus should work out his own salvation too, both in the short term spiritually, by giving himself courage to threaten Zeus, and in the long term by using prophecy as a weapon and causing his predictions to become self-fulfilling....

Critical Essay #3

Goetsch discusses the techniques necessary for the staging of Prometheus Bound, while also addressing the debate over the play's authorship. She concludes that it was possible for the play to have been written and performed during Aeschylus's time (although she notes that someone other than Aeschylus could have been its author), discussing several key elements of the play and how they could have been staged.

Prometheus Bound is a peculiarly controversial play. Scholars continue to debate both its authorship and its date□not to mention its quality□with considerable passion and not inconsiderable arguments. The major reason for dating the play late in the fifth century B.C.E. and thereby denying Aeschylus's authorship stems from the apparent demands for elaborate mechanical devices that were unavailable earlier in the century. A close examination, however, yields the opposite conclusion: performance of *Prometheus* does not require stage equipment or technology beyond what was available to Aeschylus in the early-mid fifth century B.C.E. In fact, within the performance traditions of Athens, *Prometheus* would have been easiest to produce before the *skene* was introduced into the Theater of Dionysus. Since the *skene* had to be in existence by the year 458, when Aeschylus produced the *Oresteia,* we have a *terminus ante quem* of about 460 B.C.E.

The idea of *Prometheus* as a play best enacted without a permanent scene-building in place has been with us at least since the time of Margarete Bieber, who pointed out that if Prometheus was to seem to disappear into the earth, it would be easiest to have the actor fall off the edge of the retaining wall at the back of the *orchestra*. Even this argument betrays the prejudices of a theatergoer accustomed to blackouts and curtains which allow actors to appear and disappear suddenly, an expectation that Prometheus must indeed be seen to be swallowed into the earth at the end of the play. Audiences, who had never known anything but outdoor performances in broad daylight and who were capable of accepting the convention of actually seeing actors waiting for hours or days at a certain place onstage suddenly take up positions and become characters, would not necessarily have required the same kind of realism. Conventions of representation in and out of the theater evolved over the course of the fifth century and down into the fourth, and *Prometheus* is a play written for the conventions belonging to the theater Aeschylus grew up with in the first half of the fifth century.

The most notable difficulties that *Prometheus* poses to a would-be producer are as follows: first, the binding of Prometheus to the rock; second, the entry of the chorus in their winged chariots; third, the entry of Okeanos on his four-footed bird; and fourth, the final cataclysm which engulfs Prometheus and the chorus. Each of these points has subsidiary problems, such as the fact that Okeanos and the chorus make no mention of or address to one another. The basic challenge involved in staging *Prometheus* can be expressed in fairly simple terms: how are all these flying characters to fly and how is the cataclysm to be effected?

Aeschylus scholars have taxed their imaginations to the fullest over these points and provided a great number of possible solutions, most of them a considerable strain on

fifth-century technology. (Indeed, most of them would be a considerable strain on twentieth-century technology.) Most of them also assume the existence of both *skene* and *mechane,* except for N.G.L. Hammond, who holds out for a natural outcropping of rock at the edge of the *orchestra* as the site of Prometheus's binding and prefers rolling mechanisms to flying mechanisms for the winged conveyances of Okeanos and his daughters. One of the biggest difficulties with this suggestion is that the cars would have to be propelled by their riders, and the scooter or skateboard type constructions which Hammond envisions would not only have been beyond the mechanical capability of fifth-century Athenians but would also have been useless on an unpaved surface. Donald Mastronarde suggests cars rolled onto the roof of the *skene;* others have claimed that all twelve or fifteen choreuts were swung from one or several cranes.

The problem with these proposed stagings goes beyond the purely practical issue of whether the stage equipment was up to it. As Oliver Taplin said in *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus,* "What on earth would be the point of this abnormal scenic technique? " Perhaps Aeschylus or one of his contemporaries or successors could have done it, but why bother?

Yet Taplin dismisses the simplest and most elegant solution, that the various spectacular flying effects were achieved by means of dance, almost as soon as he raises it. For how, he asks, could the chorus mime chariots and then step down from them? And how could Okeanos provide a "four-footed bird" by dancing alone?

These objections are trivial compared with the difficulties of any of the other proposals, and a more systematic examination of the possibilities of mimetic dance demonstrates that this simple and elegant solution is a viable one, perhaps the *only* viable one if we look at certain other indications of the text.

The very first lines of *Prometheus* stress the complete barrenness of the scene: "We are come to the farthest boundaries of earth, to the Scythian land, to a desert empty of mortal things" (1-2). Not much further on, Hephaistos refers to the "crag apart from humanity, where [Prometheus] will perceive neither voice nor body of mortals" (20-22). Both of these statements argue against the presence of a *skene*. No extant play which was written after the advent of the *skene* ignores its existence. Even in Euripides's *Suppliants,* where no one goes inside the *skene,* it is important: Evadne commits suicide by jumping off of it. Sophocles transforms the *skene* into caves and groves, and Aristophanes into all manner of things, but all plays from the *Oresteia* onwards use it. Even though *Eumenides* ignores the *skene* in its latter half, the building is necessary to that play's prologue and parodos. It is therefore hard to see where the *skene* would fit into the barren setting of *Prometheus Bound*.

The only thing referred to in the text of *Prometheus* which might conceivably be identified as the *skene* is the rock to which Prometheus is chained. And while a *skene* might be a sheer-cliffed crag as easily as a cave, pinioning Prometheus to it would make it difficult for the chorus to remain so long out of his sight. A real rock would be a more convincing rock than a wooden building would, and there was in fact no reason not to use one. The Persian sack of the Acropolis in 480/79 had left debris all over the

Acropolis and Agora, and the process of clearing and rebuilding lasted late into the 440s. Although the floor of the *orchestra* was graded earth and not bedrock, it could easily have supported the weight of a rock the size of a column drum.

An actual rock has advantages besides visual verisimiltude. It would be solid enough to stand up to a good deal of lunging and struggling on Prometheus' s part, and to support real metal chains. It would make striking ringing noises when Hephaistos hammered it, providing the clangor to which the Oceanids respond. The noise would also contribute to the illusion, if such is necessary, that Prometheus's very flesh is pierced during the binding process. The chains could in actuality be fixed to a single spike at the rear of the plinth so as to be easy to remove for the final exit. (Actual rocks and chains might not have been a problem for fifth-century theater technicians, but actual binding would have posed a severe difficulty to the actor playing Prometheus!)

So where in our *skene-free* performance space would this rock have been placed? A position at the center of the orchestra would be most convenient for the actor playing Prometheus, for both visual focus and acoustic clarity. Kratos, Bia, and Hephaistos could then drag Prometheus on from the stage-left eisodos, that is, the hostile side of the stage, and affix him to it, emphasizing by crossing that space the isolation to which they are leaving him. They are coming to Scythia from the known world, the Greek world, and are therefore traveling east, reinforcing the probability of a stage-left entrance.

This positioning would also place Prometheus far enough downstage that the chorus, Okeanos, Io, and Hermes could enter out of his sight, emphasizing his vulnerability by putting his back to the door, so to speak, as well as explaining the fact that he hears and smells the chorus before he sees them and that Io spots him long before he does her.

We come then to the second problem, the entry of the chorus. We have Prometheus, thoroughly, visibly bound, completely static, standing and obviously able to breathe well enough to sing, since he embarks on what he imagines will be a lonely lament. In this, however, he is mistaken. "What sound, what smell, comes to me without sight?" Prometheus asks at 115, and then indulges in a lengthy bout of speculation. At line 128, apparently still outside of Prometheus's line of sight, the chorus assures him of its friendly intent.

An arrival by means of the *mechane,* if such were feasible, would at least account for the chorus's being out of Prometheus's line of sight. But while such an entrance might bring the Oceanids on the scene in motion, they would have to hover afterwards, creating a very still tableau. The point of choosing barefoot nymphs in winged vehicles for the chorus must surely have been to contrast their constant and rapid movement with Prometheus's utter immobility, an effect which would have been completely lost if they had to hover on the crane or crowd together on the *skene* roof.

The freedom implicit in dancing, however, is entirely consistent with maintaining this contrast conceptually and visually. The racing contest of the chorus's entry could begin just before Prometheus' s "What sound," which itself could as easily refer to the playing

of the musician who always accompanied the chorus as to running feet and fluttering wings. Athenian audiences were clearly willing to accept dancing as a representation of flying at least as late as the production of Aristophanes's *Birds* in 414, when the chorus of birds appears at ground-level in the *orchestra*. If Prometheus is downstage center the chorus can enter via the stage-right *eisodos* (since they are friendly to Prometheus), "flying," and remain out of Prometheus's sight.

The wings themselves are a problem easily solved by means of long scarves or streamers like those used in Chinese dances of the Han period or the draperies of Loie Fuller. They would provide a spectacular visual effect and probably a rippling sound effect as well, which the chorus would need constant motion to maintain. (One reason the choral odes of *Prometheus* are so short may be the physical demands of the dancing.) And while we have no evidence for this particular technique in Greece, long strips of cloth were a common enough product of fifth-century Athens. Choruses of flying creatures had been in existence in Athens since at least the sixth century, so the representation of wings on stage was not an unusual problem for the fifth-century equivalent of a costume designer.

The objection which Taplin raises to the dance theory is, as previously mentioned, that the wings on which the Oceanids are flying are not their own: they claim to be carried on "winged chariots" (135). A streamer held in the hand is more obviously a separate object than one attached directly to a costume, but the fact that the chorus has to *tell* the audience that they are in chariots implies that the visual distinction was not immediately obvious. (In *Agamemnon,* for instance, Agamemnon does not make an explicit statement that his chariot is pulled by a horse, as the fact is unmistakable.) To "dismount " from the chariots, the choreuts would need only to set their streamers aside. In doing so they would most likely move to the edges of the *orchestra* so as not to risk tripping over the streamers in their later odes.

It is important in reconstructing the staging to get the chorus out of the way before Okeanos enters, and not only because they take no part in that scene. Even with a winged steed, Okeanos's entrance would not have been very dramatic if the chorus was still flying around the *orchestra*. If the crane existed and he were on it, he might have managed to draw attention to himself despite their movement, but why should he be flying on a higher plane, and via a different scenic convention, than the chorus? And the motion/immobility dichotomy, the fact that his departing lines (393-6) indicate he has never dismounted or touched the ground, argue strongly for constant movement from Okeanos which would have been impossible if the actor were suspended in midair.

How, then, does Okeanos accomplish mimetic dance of his four-legged bird? By using another dancer, of course. Chinese lion-dancers and the Balinese Barong are both four-footed creatures animated by two dancers apiece, and provide obvious visual parallels to Okeanos's mount? Neither one, however, supports a rider; and Athens' s own tradition appears to have allowed a single person to enact the role of a four-footed animal and dance while being ridden. Having a human being in the role of the gryphon certainly explains Okeanos's ability to control it without reins.

Since Okeanos returns to his own home, he exits by the same route he entered. Io enters, like Okeanos and the chorus, from the known world, that is, from the West, but Prometheus specifically directs her to go *East,* toward the rising sun (707), so she exits by the opposite *eisodos*.. Hermes will enter from the same direction to predict further doom.

We come then to the final challenge, the cataclysm which swallows Prometheus and the chorus. Dance again provides the simplest solution to the challenge of presenting an earthquake. Twelve choreuts, especially if accompanied by a drum, could very easily have produced a sound of the earth shaking and indeed an accompanying whirlwind, and could have swept Prometheus off in their midst when making a final exit□through, of course, the stage-left, eastern *eisodos*. (Simply unhooking the chains from the back of the rock would suffice to free him.)

I should add that those who live in earthquake prone areas readily believe that there is a tremor in progress: any rumbling noise can be mistaken for an earthquake. Modern lighting effects would be nice for the lightnings which Prometheus sees, but since lighting effects were totally impossible in fifth-century Athens, no one in the audience would have expected or missed them.

So we come to the end of the play and discover that it is perfectly possible to stage *Prometheus* with *pre-skenetechnology, and far easier and less expensive than it would have been to try to use the mechane. On the basis of its staging alone, Prometheus Bound could be very early indeed. The language, however, continues to point to a later date of composition and performance. The brevity of the choral odes may be accounted for by the strenuous-ness of the dances, hich would not leave the choreuts with enormous amounts of breath, but the other stylistic elements which Michael Griffith and others point out are not quite so easy to dismiss. For that reason I think that Prometheus is only just a pre-skene play, and dates to the late 460s. As for its authorship, I leave that to others to debate.*

Source: Sallie Goetsch, "Staging and Date of *Prometheus Bound,'* in *Theatre History Studies,* Volume XV, June, 1995, pp. 219-24.

Topics for Further Study

One of the questions raised by *Prometheus Bound* pertains to the meaning of justice and the power to make and enforce laws. Most readers would agree that Prometheus does no wrong in helping a suffering humanity which Zeus seems prepared to allow to perish. From Zeus's point of view, though, Prometheus seems a rebel, going behind his ruler's back and against his wishes. Have you encountered a similar situation in literature, a story from the news, or an episode from your life, one in which two different value systems compete to create an ethical dilemma? How would you make such a decision? More specifically, what criteria would you use to help you arrive at an ethical decision?

Consider the issue of gender in Greek mythology and the ways it presents images of men and women. For example, both Prometheus and Io suffer because of Zeus, but the Titan, active, suffers as a consequence of his action, while Io, passive, suffers because Zeus finds her sexually attractive. Compare Io to Earth, who seems knowing and sympathetic. Or research other versions of the Prometheus myth. Based on further research into classical culture, how do Greek myths represent women? Men?

In addition to fire, *Prometheus Bound* says that the Titan brought many gifts to humanity, including mathematics, language, medicine, and agriculture. Myths like this serve to explain the origins of a society, how it began and evolved. Study the role of mythology in creating social and cultural identity and as a vehicle of history and spirituality.

Consider the the tale of *Prometheus Bound* from Zeus's point of view. How might he view Prometheus's rebellion, his interference with humanity, his threats? Can you present an image of Zeus that justifies Prometheus's imprisonment?

Compare and Contrast

525-456 B.C.: In 510 B.C., a political reformer named Clisthenes overthrows the tyrant Hippias and establishes in Athens a republic ruled by popular democracy.

Today: Democracy in its various forms remains one of the most important philosophies of world government. While democracy today takes various forms□direct, representative, presidential, parliamentary□all these concepts have their genesis with the Attic republic.

525-456 B.C.: As the capital of the Dalian League, Athens evolves into a commercial and cultural center, with visitors and residents from throughout the known world. Teachers, artists, philosophers, and religious leaders gather at public forums to discuss their ideas and opinions.

Today: American society mirrors Athens in its emphasis on freedom of speech and religion, and its belief in the strength of diversity and multiculturalism.

525-456 B.C.: Theatre in Athens is largely comprised of a religious festival celebrating the god Dionysus. Very large outdoor theatres hold as many as 15,000 people in festivals which last several days.

Today: Theatre is a mostly secular form of entertainment. Plays are viewed in theatres much smaller than those of the Greeks. Festivals that celebrate drama still exist, though they pale in size to similar events featuring musical performers.

525-456 B.C.: In classical Greece, only the upper- and upper middle-classes of men receive an education. Generally, they study with tutors at home and then attend an academy such as the ones run by Plato and Aristotle.

Today: In America, compulsory education for all citizens through high school presents opportunities for men and women, as does the possibility of pursuing one's studies by attending college.

What Do I Read Next?

Some have compared Prometheus with the figure of Satan, particularly the way Milton presents him in *Paradise Lost,* where his rebellion has political overtones. Students might consider what it means to be a hero and compare Satan with Milton's version of the story. offers another tale in which a proud individual suffers, learns a lesson in humility and inner strength, and sacrifices himself for what seems a worthy cause.

Prometheus Bound offers themes of law and justice that are familiar to many of William Shakespeare's plays. *Merchant of Venice* explores the relationship between justice and mercy while *Measure for Measure,* treats the same themes from the perspective of the ideal ruler.

The myth of Prometheus became tremendously popular during the nineteenth century. Two well-known retellings of the myth come from a husband and wife, Mary Shelley and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Mary Shelley's version of the myth, her *Frankenstein: The Modern Prometheus,* is considered a masterpiece of horror fiction and has been adapted into numerous plays and films. Based on his study of Greek literature and philosophy, Percy Shelley composed what he believed might be a conclusion for *Prometheus Bound*, entitled *Prometheus Unbound*.. Written in verse, many consider this his finest composition.

After the French Revolution, the rebel Prometheus became synonymous with Napoleon and such romantic poets as Byron and Shelley wrote poems on this theme. For the historically minded, many good biographies tell the story of the Corsican who rose from artillery officer to Emperor of the French empire, though J. Christopher Herold's *The Age of Napoleon* may be one place to begin. Several twentieth century figures take on Promethean dimensions, suffering individual pain while struggling against tyranny for the good of humanity, including Mahatma Ghandi and Martin Luther King.

Further Study

Bullfinch, Thomas. *Bullfinch's Mythology,* Avenel, 1979.

One of the best□if a bit old fashioned□collections of information on classical mythology, as well as on Arthurian legend and many other myths and legends.

Fitts, Dudley, editor. *Greek Plays in Modern Translation,* Dial, 1947.

Contains a selection of Greek plays, including *King Oedipus* translated by William Butler Yeats, and *Prometheus Bound*. It closes with insightful, though brief, comments on the various plays.

Havelock, E. A. *The Crucifixion of Intellectual Man,* Beacon, 1951.

Breezy discussion of Aeschylus's tragedy, though concluding with a particularly useful appendix on Hesiod's *:Theogony,* Aeschylus's mythology, and the lost plays of the Prometheus cycle.

Herington, John. *Aeschylus,* Yale University Press, 1986.

This offers substantial background on Aeschylus's worldview, his historical moment, and Greek theatrical conventions, as well as a chapter on each of the existing plays, including one on *Prometheus Bound*.

Hogan, James C. *A Commentary on the Complete Greek Tragedies: Aeschylus,* University of Chicago Press, 1984.

In addition to a solid introduction about Aeschylus and the Attic theatrical tradition, this book contains an almost line-by-line commentary on Aeschylus's plays, including *Prometheus Bound*. Hogan clarifies vocabulary and mythology, and summarizes many commentators views on various crucial textual and critical

McCall, Marsh H. Jr., editor. *Aeschylus: A Collection ofCritical Essays,* Prentice-Hall, 1972.

This fine essay collection discusses Aeschylus's major plays as well as his tragic vision, though only one essay deals entirely with *Prometheus Bound.*

Scodel, Ruth. *Aeschylus,* Twayne, 1982.

With substantial material covering the playwright's biography and Greek culture, it includes discussion of all the plays, with a chapter on *Prometheus Bound*. Of particular interest is the brief analysis of contemporary Greek scientific medical knowledge and Prometheus's "condition."

Scully, James and C. J. Herington. *Aeschylus's* Prometheus Bound, Oxford University Press, 1975.

Prometheus Bound.

Thomson, George. "Prometheia" in Aeschylus: A Collection of Critical Essays, Prentice-Hall, 1972, pp. 124-47.

Offers important background about Hesiod' s version of the Prometheus myth and the changes Aeschylus made in his dramatic adaptation. Also contains extensive material regarding the Prometheus cycle and discusses Prometheus Bound's meaning in the context of those lost plays.

Thomson, George. *Prometheus Bound,* Cambridge University Press, 1932.

In addition to an edition of play, Thomson's background and reference material situates the play in the context of Greek history and philosophy.

Bibliography

Berlin, Normand. *T he Secret Cause: A Discussion of Tragedy,* University of Massachusetts Press, 1981.

BOOKRAGS

Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Drama for Students*.

Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

Permissions
Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Drama for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535