

PROMETHEUS: THE CLASSICAL AND THE ROMANTIC CONCEPTION

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By

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John W. Vaughn", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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To My Husband

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INTRODUCTION

Among ancient classical myths, the myth of Prometheus is strongly appealing since it contains the elements of all human development. Prometheus, the anthropomorphic deity who according to the early Greeks played the role of fire - bringer to men, stands as both the symbol of rebellion against power as well as the benefactor of mankind. The Greek myth-makers thought of Prometheus as the fire-bringer, the champion of mankind to whom he gave the precious gift of fire, the use of metals and the handicrafts on which civilization was built.[1]

The Promethean myth attracted the attention and inspired many writers of modern times. Among those who have touched upon this theme in their verse or elaborated it as the subject matter of a poem or drama are the Spanish poet Calderon, the Italian Monti, the Germans Herder, Schlegel and Goethe, the Frenchman Voltaire, Victor Hugo and Edgar Quinet and many others.[2] Many English poets, like Byron and Milton,

were also influenced by the Titan's character and used him in their work. The fullest treatment, however, is found in Shelley's lyric drama Prometheus Unbound.

The present study will attempt to compare Aeschylus' and Shelley's treatment of Prometheus' character in their works Prometheus Bound and Prometheus Unbound respectively. By focusing primarily on the influence of the Romantic Rebellion, I will demonstrate the similarities and differences between the modern work and its ancient prototype with emphasis on the various methods of adaptation of ancient mythological figures by a later author. Hesiod's account of the myth in both the Theogony and the Works and Days will also be taken into consideration.

CHAPTER I

Prometheus In Hesiod's Works

The story of Prometheus appears for the first time in Greek Literature in Hesiod, both in the Theogony and the Works and Days. Hesiod's approach is basically genealogical. He mentions the children of Iapetus and Clymene and stresses their relationship to Zeus. Since all of Iapetus' sons had been punished by Zeus, Hesiod is interested in using Iapetus' family as an example of the dangers involved in violating the will of Zeus. The epithets that Hesiod uses to characterize the four brothers κρατερόφρονα "violent spirited", υπερκύδαντα "proud-spirited" ποικίλον αιολόμητιν "cunning trickster" and αμαρτινόον "one with wrong thinking" reveal Hesiod's negative attitude towards them (Theog. 506-512)

Κούρην δ' Ἰαπετός καλλισφυρον Ὠκεανίνην
ἡγάγετο Κλυμένην καὶ ὁμόν λέχος εἰσανέβαινε·
ἦ δέ οἱ Ἀτλάντα κρατερόφρονα γείνατο παῖδα·
τίκτε δ' υπερκύδαντα Μενόϊπιον ἠδὲ Προμηθεά·
ποικίλον αἰολόμητιν, αμαρτινόον τ' Ἐπιμηθέα,
ὃς κακὸν ἐξ ἀρχῆς γένετ' ἀνδράσιν ἀλφειστήσιν·

In the Theogony, Prometheus' rebellion is presented as a challenge to Zeus' authority and wisdom.

He deceives Zeus twice on behalf of mankind and for this reason he is severely punished. Prometheus is first introduced with a description of his punishment which is followed by an explanation of the reason of the punishment. Thus at the very beginning we learn the end of the story, the reconciliation of Zeus with Prometheus. Only then Hesiod describes the acts of Prometheus. In other words Hesiod follows a Homeric device, starting in medias res, obviously in order to emphasize from the beginning that Prometheus was finally freed, therefore Zeus was not the pitiless tyrant.

Δῆσε δ' ἀλυκτοπέδῃσι Προμηθεῖα καικιλόβουλον
 δεσμοῖς ἀργαλέοισι μέσον διὰ κλον' ἐλάσσας·
 καὶ οἱ ἐπ' αἰετὸν ὄρσε τανύπτερον· αὐτὰρ δ' γ' ἦπαρ
 ἦσθιεν ἀθάνατον, τό δ' ἀέξετο ἴσον ἀπάντη
 νυκτός, ὅσον πρόπαρ ἡμᾶρ ἔδοι τανυσίπτερος ὄρνις.

(Theog. 521-525)

When he concludes his story, however, he does not fail to mention the fact that Heracles freed Prometheus according to Zeus' will, who gave up his anger for the glory of his son. (Theog. 526-530)[3]

Hesiod then turns to the causes of the punishment and begins with the gathering at Mecone. (Theog. 535ff) On the strife which arose over the sacrifices between gods and men, Prometheus intended to deceive Zeus. He divided a huge ox into two parts, one for the gods and

one for the men. In one part he put all the flesh and the rich substances of the animal wrapped up in the skin and in the other he put the bones carefully concealed in fat. His cunning nature made him attempt to trick Zeus into choosing the inferior portion.

τῷ δ' αὖτ' ὁστέα λευκά βοός βολίη ἐπὶ τέχνῃ
εὐθετίσας κατέθηκε καλύψας ἀργέτι δημῷ

(Theog. 540f.)

According to Hesiod, Zeus saw the trick but he deliberately chose the inferior portion just to have a reason to punish mankind.[4]

West argues that in the original story Zeus did not see through the trick and was completely deceived.[5] My impression is that Solmsen [6] is right to argue that given the Greek sacrificial customs Hesiod could not alter this part of the story. Moreover, for Hesiod Zeus is the ἀφθίτα μήδεα εἰδώς "the all knowing" god. He could not therefore have been tricked. Instead, the poet prefers to create a contradiction just for the sake of the glory of the gods' father. It has often been suggested[7] that the Theogony is especially concerned with celebrating the wisdom and majesty of Zeus. In a work that essentially aims at praising Zeus' supreme power, Prometheus' myth

has to be altered accordingly. This is why we should not be surprised to see that Zeus is described as

ἀφθιτα μήδεα εἰδώς (Theog. 545, 550, 561),

whereas Prometheus is the ἀγκυλομήτης ("cunning" Theog. 546), ποικίλος αἰολόμητις ("one with intricate and twisting mind" Theog. 511), ποικιλόβουλος ("subtle mind", Theog. 521).

As a result of Prometheus' deceit, Zeus in revenge and anger withheld fire from men. But wily Prometheus did not stop there. He stole fire from Zeus, hid it in a hollow stalk and gave it back to men. The theft of fire is the second action by which he outwits Zeus.

ἀλλά μιν ἐξαπάτησεν εὖς πάϊς Ἰαπετοῖο
κλέψας ἀκαμάτοιο πυρὸς τηλέσκοπον αὐγὴν
ἐν κοίλῳ νάρθηκι.

(Theog. 565ff.)

When Zeus saw men using fire, he was even more furious and contrived what he must have considered as the ultimate punishment for the human race, the creation of woman

κάλὸν κακὸν ἀντ' ἀγαθοῖο

(Theog. 585)

The poet concludes the passage with a lengthy generalization that explains how women are an evil to men. In the Theogony it has been the poet's conviction that Prometheus' quarrel with Zeus and Zeus' wrath on

that occasion had had a decisive and lasting influence on the conditions of man's life. The point here is that, just as Prometheus did not escape punishment for violating the will of Zeus, so man cannot escape suffering for his part in Prometheus' activities.

In the Works and Days Hesiod uses the same mythical material (ll.42-104) but he approaches the matter from a different point of view. The Works and Days concerns man, not the gods. Hesiod's purpose in his narrative is an explanation of the evils which plague the lives of men as well as of the difficulty of gaining livelihood. As H. Edmundson remarks " The central idea of the myth has shifted from the Mecone sacrifice in which we discerned a model for man's place in a universe characterized by divine confrontation, to a very physical and practical world in which men struggle to obtain the barest necessities for human existence".[8] The remarkable point which is not mentioned at all in the Theogony is the use of fire as a symbol for $\beta\acute{\iota}\omicron\varsigma$. Dumezil [9] has shown that in Hesiod fire is of great importance. It may not be the fire that brings civilization but it is the means for man to feed himself. Vernant [10] states that in

Hesiod's eyes, Zeus' actions of depriving men of fire is equivalent to taking their βίος away from them.

By giving man fire Prometheus guaranteed an easy, blessed life for mankind. On the other hand, the use of fire by man would tend to void the separation between men and gods by enabling men to lead an easier and therefore more blessed life. In order to create a balance Zeus had to create Pandora and consequently all ills and evils. Although man's life had become better after the theft of fire, it would not be without woes. This idea is summarized in Zeus'a speech to Prometheus:

τοῖς δ' ἐγὼ ἀντὶ πυρὸς δώσω κακόν
(Works and Days 57)

The Promethean myth of Hesiod has been interpreted as if Zeus hated or disliked mankind and as if the Titan's philanthropy was an attempt to rescue it from destruction. Hesiod does not say why Prometheus wants to benefit mankind. It is taken for granted that he has a special relationship with them. Early accounts, such as Hesiod's, speak of Prometheus as a benefactor of the human race. Later ones, like Ovid and Apollodorus consider him the creator of man as well.[11]

The figure of Prometheus is capable of a wide range of interpretations. According to Mayerson he is a

combination of culture - bringer and trickster who brings the elements of civilization to man.[12] He may be a creator, a savior, a thief, a rebel, a benefactor and more. At this point, a question can be raised whether Prometheus was the great benefactor of mankind. Hesiod makes it clear that some of the benefits of Prometheus can turn out to be curses to those he wishes to help. His cunning provoked catastrophies which eventually turned against him and man in general, to such a degree that he may appear imprudent and thoughtless. He became the competitor of Zeus for the welfare of mankind and made his moves according to his own cunning mind.

οὐνεκ' ἐρίζετο βουλὰς ὑπερμενεί Κρονίωνι

(Theog. 534)

As we shall see, this will be the case in the Aeschylean Prometheus

ἰδίᾳ γνώμῃ σέβῃ θνατοὺς ἄγαν, Προμηθεῦ.

(Aesch.Prom. Bound 544)

Summarizing Hesiod's characterization of Prometheus, the Titan has "an intricate and twisting mind" (ποικίλος αἰολόμητης ,Theog.511), "a subtle mind" (ποικιλόβουλος ,521). He is ἀγκυλομήτης

("devious in his thinking", Theog. 546; Works and Days 48).[13] Indeed, he broke the law of Zeus twice, and thus committed crimes, even if these crimes were for the benefit of mankind.

CHAPTER II

Prometheus The Aeschylean Hero

The next exponent of the Promethean myth after Hesiod is Aeschylus. Aeschylus uses the same myth that we have seen in Hesiod's Theogony, so that it can be shown that the Theogony was the starting point for his own approach.

Although both authors use the same mythical material, a number of details sets the two works apart. In Hesiod (Theog. 507ff.) Prometheus is the son of Clymene and Iapetus whereas in Aeschylus he is presented as the son of Gaea. As we shall see later, by strengthening Gaea's connection with Prometheus, Aeschylus makes more effective dramatic use of the secret. Another point in which the accounts of Hesiod and Aeschylus differ is the fact that the former does not seem to consider whether Zeus was cruel and unjust. Prometheus deceived Zeus and aroused his wrath. This fact suffices for Hesiod but not for Aeschylus who presents it as the ultimate injustice. [14] Aeschylus, at this point, ignores completely the sacrificial

division. For him Prometheus is not the crafty schemer who deceived Zeus but the hero of human civilization. Moreover the enmity between Zeus and Prometheus has much deeper causes than in Hesiod. Under the touch of Aeschylus, the myth takes on a deeper meaning.

Indeed the Athenian dramatist is the only writer of classical antiquity who described fully the character of the Titan who associated himself with humanity. For Aeschylus, Prometheus is the exponent of justified rebellion and forceful movement towards liberalism and progress. The Titan became an exponent of the religious and political idealism of the great tragedian. The conflict that Aeschylus sets up in this play between Zeus and Prometheus is a conflict of intellectual and political principles.

The drama has political and religious connotations for the Greeks of the 5th century B.C.. Tyranny played an important role in ancient Greek history and as a political system was much debated. Many city states in Greece had experienced tyrannical rule a few generations earlier and many remembered the evils of that era. Peisistratus, the tyrant of Athens is a great example. As Grene notes: "The Greeks knew the kind of outrage citizens had suffered at their hands, the

innovations in established custom and ritual and in the conventional governmental attitudes of mercy, the unwritten laws." [15]

Tyranny and rebellion were common concerns during Aeschylus' lifetime and one of the purposes of the play was to enlarge the Athenian understanding of this political conflict. Zeus is presented as a tyrant, Prometheus as being in open rebellion against him. Aeschylus philosophizes about politics when he has the chorus call authority "that hard to capture rule"

τὰν δυσάλωτον ἔλη τις ἀρχάν (1.166)

whereas Hephaestus comments, in lines 34-35, on the harshness of the new rulers:

Διὸς γὰρ δυσπαράιτητοι φρένες·
ἅπας δὲ τραχὺς ὅστις ἂν νέον κρατῇ.

Podlecki [16] viewing Prometheus Bound politically, states that it presents "a preoccupation with tyranny as a political system, and it formulates perhaps for the first time, many of the changes which the young democracy must have been making against the tyrants, both its own and those around it".

The date and context of the Prometheus Bound are unknown.[17] The play however, seems to be the only surviving play in a trilogy about the quarrel between Zeus and Prometheus and their ultimate reconciliation.

The play begins with a scene where Hephaestus with Zeus' two attendants, Might and Kratos, is sent to bind Prometheus on the rock. The Titan's act of disobedience is characterized by Kratos as *ἁμαρτία* (1.9) while the ruthless servant of Zeus sees something wrong in Prometheus' philanthropy from which the Titan has to desist (9-11):

ἁμαρτίας σφέ δει θεοῖς δοῦναι δίκην,
ὥς ἂν διδαχθῇ τὴν Διὸς τυραννίδα
στέργειν, φιλανθρώπου δὲ παύεσθαι τρόπου.

Even Hephaestus who sympathizes with Prometheus' troubles and unwillingly executes the order of his master, cannot deny that Prometheus has done wrong. The references to mankind (1. 8,11,21,28,30) suggest that Prometheus has in effect alienated himself from all gods, because he helped and honoured humanity *πέρα δίκης* (1.30) more than it was appropriate to the divine order.

Prometheus is silent during the tormenting scene. He is the suffering hero who appeals to compassion. After the Titan is left alone with desolate nature, he invokes the aether, the winds, the rivers, the ocean, Mother Earth and the Sun to witness his unjust treatment:

ὦ δῖος αἰθήρ καὶ ταχύπτεροι πνοαὶ
 ποταμῶν τε πηγαὶ ποντίων τε κυμάτων
 ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα παμμήτορ τε γῆ,
 καὶ τὸν πανόπτην κύκλον ἡλίου καλῶ,
 ἴδεσθὲ μ' οἷα πρὸς θεῶν πάσχω θεός.
 Δέρχθηθ' οἷαις αἰκίαισιν
 διακναιόμενος τὸν μυριετη
 χρόνον ἀθλεύσω.

(1. 88-95)

He begins to complain of his undeserved fate and
 explains the reason of his suffering:

διὰ τὴν λίαν φιλότητα βροτῶν (1.123)

and the cause of the punishment:

ναρθηκοπλήρωτον δὲ θηρῶμαι πυρός
 πηγὴν κλοπαίαν, ἢ διδάσκαλος τέχνης
 πάσης βροτοῖς πέφηνε καὶ μέγας πόρος.

(1.109-111)

Prometheus is visited first by the Oceanids, who also
 express deep sympathy for him. They anxiously desire
 him to explain the cause for which he is made to
 suffer. Prometheus charges Zeus with ingratitude as
 well as cruelty when he tells the chorus that he now
 suffers so shamefully despite the fact that it was he
 who helped Zeus to obtain his present power. He goes on
 to say that he not only saved mortals from ruin but

that he also gave them the gift of hope, which prevented them from premeditating death [18] and above all the gift of fire by means of which they would learn many arts.

ΠΡ.—Θνητούς γ' ἔπαυσα μὴ προδέρκεσθαι μόρον.

ΧΟ.—Τὸ ποῖον εὐρώων τῆσδε φάρμακον νόσου ;

ΠΡ.—Τυφλάς ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐλπίδας κατῴκισα.

ΧΟ.—Μέγ' ὠφέλημα τοῦτ' ἐδωρήσω βροτοῖς.

ΠΡ.—Πρὸς τοῖσδε μέντοι πῦρ ἐγὼ σφιν ὤπασα.

ΧΟ.—Καὶ νῦν φλογώπὸν πῦρ ἔχουσ' ἐφήμεροι ;

ΠΡ.—'Αφ' οὗ γε πολλὰς ἐκμαθήσονται τέχνας.

(1. 247-254)

To this the Oceanids reply with sympathy but not with complete comprehension of the unbending will of Prometheus:

ΧΟ.—Σὺ μὲν θρασύς τε καὶ πικραῖς
δύαισιν οὐδέν ἐπιχαλᾷς,
ἄγαν δ' ἐλευθεροστομεῖς

(1. 178-180)

and they ask whether he is aware of the fact that, after all, he has sinned. They grieve over this thought and they wish there were some way for Prometheus to extricate himself from the sin:

ΧΟ.—Δόξει δὲ πῶς ; τίς ἐλπίς ; οὐχ ὄρθς ὅτι
ἡμαρτες ; ὥς δ' ἡμαρτες οὐτ' ἐμοὶ λέγειν
καθ' ἡδονὴν σοὶ τ' ἄλγος

(1. 259-261)

Prometheus replies by accepting that he erred with his own will (l. 266):

ἐκὼν ἐκὼν ἥμαρτον, οὐκ ἀρνέσσομαι [19]

This "confession" however, should not be taken as a reflection of Aeschylus' feelings about Prometheus' actions. The chorus may think that the Titan had sinned in giving men fire but this does not necessarily reflect Aeschylus' views. Throughout the play, Zeus is consistently presented as a cruel and ungrateful ruler so that Prometheus appears to be more blameless. As Farnell remarks [20] Prometheus does not accept that his activity was a sin but an error of judgement, since he was not able to foresee that Zeus would punish him with such cruelty.

Prometheus' weapon against Zeus is the "secret" that the Titan knows, a secret on which Zeus' rule depends. The first hint of this secret appears already in lines 167-177 in Prometheus' speech to the sea-nymphs and later when he speaks to his fellow sufferer Io [21] (l. 764ff.)

Prometheus' knowledge and cleverness appear to rival or excel Zeus's. Without Prometheus Zeus would not have known how to defeat the Titans (l. 199-221)

and without his advice he will fall from his throne. Prometheus knows from his mother Themis or Gaea the secret on which Zeus' reign depends. If Zeus marries Thetis she will bear him a son greater than his father. In other words Zeus is destined to fall by his son just like his father Kronos was overthrown by Zeus. It is very interesting that Aeschylus chose to have Themis (Justice) as Prometheus' mother. As the offspring of Themis Prometheus can be taken as the natural heir and representative of Justice in the world. On the other hand we know that in Aeschylus' other plays as well as in Hesiod, Zeus is the champion of justice. By making Justice Prometheus' mother and presenting Zeus as the savage persecutor of Prometheus, Aeschylus was perhaps making the point that the power of the tyrants is not necessarily accompanied by Justice.

In a conversation between Prometheus and the chorus the Titan declares that Zeus cannot escape what has been fated (l. 518):

ΠΡ.—Οὐκ οὖν ἂν ἐκφύγοι γε τὴν πεπωμένην.

More significant throughout the play is the emphasis on the fact that Prometheus has the power to check Zeus' will. It was Prometheus who saved mankind in opposition

to Zeus and it is Prometheus who has the secret knowledge which Zeus must acquire if he is to maintain his power.

The following scene with Oceanus shows once more Prometheus' firm conviction about the rightfulness of his actions. Oceanus himself comes as a sympathizer, yet one who believes that it would be better to yield to the will of Zeus. Oceanus attempts to persuade Prometheus, stating that he wants the best for him. He knows that Prometheus is clever and his advice comes as a warning. Prometheus here is shown to be lacking the proud wisdom to which he has repeatedly laid claim. According to Oceanus, the Titan does not know himself:

γίγνωσκε σαυτὸν καὶ μεθάρμοσαι τρόπους·
νέους· νέος γάρ καὶ τύραννος ἐν θεοῖς·

(11. 309-310)

Yet the Titan, confident in himself, rejects Oceanus views (333).

In his speech (436ff.) Prometheus continues the account of his contribution to mankind and defines his role himself. Previously men were νήπιος, and he made them ἔννοος and φρενῶν ἐπηβόλους (1.443-444). The tone of his speech is clearly selfish. He introduces the enumeration of his gifts to man with the words:

Καίτοι θεοῖσι τοῖς νέοις τούτοις γέρα
τίς ἄλλος ἢ ἡ γὰ παντελῶς διώρισεν ;

(1. 439-441)

The gifts that Prometheus lists in detail comprise the whole range of arts and sciences. All of man's cultural and intellectual activity is based on the gifts of Prometheus. Agriculture and carpentry (1.450-53) meteorology and astronomy (1.454-58), numbers and writing (1.459-61) domestication and harnessing of animals (1. 464-6), sailing (1. 467-8) medicine (1.478-83) prophecy through dreams, omens, augury, and sacrifice (1. 484-99) and finally mining (1.500-503).[22] Prometheus therefore stands as the symbol of all cultural and intellectual achievement. In particular, Prometheus claims to have taught mankind all the crafts that raised them from simple existence to civilization. "All the arts that mortals know come from Prometheus" is his concluding statement:

πᾶσαι τέχναι βροτοῖσιν ἐκ Προμηθέως. (1.506)

Up to this point we have seen that Prometheus is frequently censured by friends and foes alike for his high thoughts (αἰπυμῆτης , 1. 18), his free tongue (11. 178-180):

ΧΟ.—Σὺ μὲν θρασὺς τε καὶ πικρὰς
δύαισιν οὐδὲν ἐπιχαλᾷς,
ἄγαν δ' ἐλευθεροστομεῖς

and his rough and sharp temper. He fails to recognize his obligation to the new ruler of the gods and he follows the devices of his own will. Probably this was his fatal mistake. To put it in Smyth's words "persuaded of the nobility of his intentions he seduces himself into the deception that his rebellion was founded on a higher justice than the justice of Zeus".[23] It seems that he has no other thought than of his own aims and his own merit, which he recounts at length by expressing the satisfaction of his pride.

The cruelty of Zeus and Prometheus' determination to resist to the end are more and more clearly revealed. Zeus, although not present, is the antagonist of Prometheus and throughout the play he is characterized as cruel, tyrannical, stubborn and ungrateful. He has all the characteristics of a new ruler and as the Oceanids tell us he rules in a despotic fashion under new laws:

νέοι γάρ οἱ α-
κονόμοι κρατοῖσ' Ὀλύμπου
νεοχμοῖς δὲ δὴ νόμοις Ζεὺς
ἀθέτως κρατύνει,
τὰ πρὶν δὲ πελώρια νῦν ἄιστοῖ.

(l. 149-152)

Prometheus, on the other hand is often presented as an arrogant, stubborn rebel, in some respects similar to

Zeus. Podlecki notes [24] that if we examine more carefully both antagonists' characters we will find great similarities. Prometheus will perhaps be shown to be guilty of many of the same faults he accuses Zeus of. Stubbornness and self-will apply to both of them. The accusation of αὐθαδία that defines the character of Prometheus is used by Hermes three times.

(11.964-65; 1012-13; 1034-35). The epithet τραχὺς is used for both Prometheus and Zeus by Oceanus:

τραχὺς μόναρχος οὐδ' ὑπεύθυνος κρατεῖ. (1.324)

and:

εἰ δ' ὧδε τραχεῖς καὶ τεθηγμένους λόγους ῥίψεις. (1.311)

The conversation with Hermes itself is another example of his stubbornness. Prometheus declares he will never reveal the secret, no matter what the penalty before Zeus releases him from his chains. Even during his downfall he does not change his mind. There remain threats and calls for revenge. Indeed the last words of the Titan are not complaints at his misfortune, but mighty proclamations against his suffering.

ὦ μητρόεσσι μέγιστον σέβας. ὦ πάντων
αἰθέρῃ κοινὸν φάος εἰλίσσων,
ἔσορξαι μ' ὥς ἐκδικα πάσχω; (1.1091-93)

"Persuasion" is another theme which is double-edged. Prometheus warns Oceanus that his good offices with Zeus will be fruitless:

πάντως γὰρ οὐ πείσεις νιν· οὐ γὰρ εὐπιθής (1.333)

but he does not realize that he reacts in the same way when he tells the chorus:

καί μ' οὔτε μελιγλώσσοις πειθοῦς

ἐπαιδαῖσιν θέλξει

(1.172-173)

Prometheus makes certain accusations against Zeus without realizing that some of these could apply to his own character. Finley [25] remarks "Prometheus falls out with Zeus not because he is unlike him but because he is like him".

At this point a question can be raised. Was Prometheus the victim of injustice or did he deserve his fate? The guilt of Prometheus, measured from one base, is unquestionable. He stole the fire, the prerogative of the Olympians, and gave it to mortals. Why did he do it? His action is very well explained throughout the play and the reader is left to decide of his guilt or innocence.[26] Aeschylus, however, is not that much concerned with Prometheus' guilt or innocence. Prometheus and the related myth seem to be

the means to carry out some other ideas. On the human level, Prometheus' actions result in civilization. Mortals benefit from his deeds and this is what counts most. It is worth mentioning that Aeschylus does not mention the reason why Zeus withheld fire from man. This point remains beyond the sphere of his interest. It is only the outcome that counts in this case. On the other hand, on the divine level, Prometheus' actions pose a question on Zeus' ability to remain in power. Zeus gained his power by overthrowing his cruel and savage predecessors. By punishing Prometheus, however, his former ally, he has proved himself to be no better than Cronus and Uranus. Therefore, his future need not be different than theirs. This is what Prometheus is trying to make Zeus understand by holding his secret. Prometheus may have been wrong in stealing the fire and this is why Aeschylus does not present the portrait of a perfect Prometheus. Even so, Aeschylus' point is different. Prometheus is Zeus' chance to prove himself to be a better ruler, one who deserves the authority that his predecessors lost.

Summarizing, we may say that Prometheus has broken the laws of Zeus not out of selfish interest but for

the benefit of mankind. His quarrel with the supreme authority is not an everyday occurrence. In Rasis' words: "it is the Greek way of symbolizing the universal conflict at the heart of things-liberalism against reaction, human dignity against oppression, the endurance of the human spirit struggling toward a free civilization." [27]

CHAPTER III

Shelley's Romantic Prometheus

The myth of Prometheus passed from antiquity to the literature of modern times. For the purpose of the present paper I will focus my attention on 19th century English literature which saw Prometheus as the symbol of protest against traditional religion, traditional prejudice and the abuses of political power.

Romanticism favoured Prometheus as an exponent of a revolution against political and religious tyranny, social injustice and cruelty while the industrial development naturally made Prometheus, who stole fire for man's use, one of the favorite, if not the actual favorite mythological figure among poets.[28]

The Romantic model of Prometheus was first created by Byron and then Shelley. Byron in his short lyric Prometheus did not have the intention to recreate the ancient myth. Byron was taken by the theme rather than the actual myth of Prometheus. As Rasis states [29] " Prometheus' relentless revolution against the unjust powers that tormented the physical and spiritual life

of man constituted for Byron and his many disciples an ideal means of self-expression and self-justification". Many of the lyric poems on Prometheus written in the Nineteenth Century followed this Byronic pattern.

Shelley was one of the first who was influenced by Byron, but yet his presentation of the myth is closer to the Aeschylean. One difference is that Shelley refuses to accept the reconciliation between Zeus the tyrant and Prometheus the rebel. We have reasons to believe that at the end of the Aeschylean Prometheia, Zeus had ceased being a symbol of injustice and reconciliation between him and the Titan was made possible. For Shelley the change of tyrant's evil attitude into good was in opposition to his own beliefs. For the English poet, Prometheus should resist till the end until Jupiter ceases to exist. By utilizing the Christian elements of love and forgiveness and presenting Prometheus as Savior Christ, Jupiter is brought to his destruction.

Shelley's Prometheus Unbound presents many problems as a play. Critics have called it "epic", "a sequence of odes", "a symphony", "an Old Testament rhapsodical drama", "a masque" or "an Italian Opera".[30] Shelley himself subtitled his poem "a

lyrical drama in four acts" and considered it the most significant and characteristic of his works because it presents his ideas and beliefs and states the social and political problems of his time. In this play he explores the Romantic idea of imagination, dreams, visions, his vision of a new world in particular, which the poet saw at times as an inevitable reality in the future. Yet in this drama the poet has pointed out his indebtedness to Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound. In his Preface to the drama, Shelley states: "My purpose has been simply to familiarize the highly refined imagination of the most select classes of political readers with beautiful idealisms of moral excellence". Shelley borrows the myth of Prometheus from the Greek tragedian but then he creates his own. The general situation and especially the first Act are modelled on Aeschylus' play, but the rest of the poem and the spirit that dominates all of it are Shelley's conceptions.

The main difference between the two poets' treatment of the myth is the fact that Shelley does not accept the reconciliation between Jupiter and Prometheus. In his drama Jupiter is dethroned by Demogorgon. Since Shelley's rebellion against the

oppressive conventions of his time would be fulfilled by a complete final victory and triumph over oppression in his drama, Shelley's Jupiter as the symbol of tyranny is destroyed and Prometheus comes out as the victor. As Raizis points out [31] this is the only solution that a romantic poet could give and one of the most characteristic elements of romantic idealism. The reconciliation of the two opponents in Aeschylus' trilogy is a realistic solution which could either be the result of a mythological tradition or reflect the possibility of reconciliation or compromise on the political level in Aeschylus' time. For Shelley's Romantic mind no compromise can be accepted. Victory or death are the Romantic solutions.

Prometheus Unbound is an expression of Shelley's beliefs, feelings, thoughts and attitudes. The poem illustrates his desire for changes in the political and social system. As we shall see, Prometheus for Shelley is "the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and truest motives to the best and noblest ends" [32]. In order to achieve this type of moral perfection, Prometheus must undergo conflict. He must recognize the need to destroy

within himself the violent power that for so long motivated him. Prometheus is flawed, but he learns through suffering of his flaw and corrects it. As Shelley portrays Prometheus, the Titan forgives and pities, rather than hates Jupiter. It is exactly his ability for compassion that brings his own liberation and the downfall of the tyrant.

Shelley's play opens with Prometheus in chains, still enduring the torments he has suffered for three thousand years. What sustains Prometheus in his resistance is the certainty that Jupiter's power is doomed to come to an end. Three thousand years before the opening of the drama, as Asia tells us:

... Prometheus
gave wisdom, which is strength, to Jupiter,
and with this law alone "let man be free,"
clothed him with the dominion of wide Heaven.

(Act 11, 1V 43-46)

Under Jupiters's sovereignty, toil, disease and strife appear on earth. Prometheus granted man hope and love and the knowledge of the sciences and the arts in order to relieve him from the pain. But Prometheus was punished for this act of benevolence and was chained on

the rocky mountain of Caucasus. After so many years of pain and torture he remains there, full of hatred for Jupiter and full of hope. Prometheus chained on the rock by Jupiter represents the whole race of humanity suffering in a tyrannical world just as Shelley saw his time.

In his long opening speech, Prometheus defines his attitude towards his oppressor, Jupiter. At first Prometheus is proud for enduring his fate:

Monarch of Gods and Demons, and all Spirits
but one who throng those bright and rolling worlds
which thou and I alone of living things
behold with sleepless eyes!

(Act I, 11.1-4).

Then his mood changes into self-pity, summed up in his words:

Ah me! alas, pain, pain ever, for ever!

(Act I, l. 23 and 30)

but he endures, apparently with no hope:

No change, no pause, no hope! Yet I endure!

(Act I, l. 24)

Prometheus has been made wise by suffering. The first step toward the regeneration of Prometheus occurs

when he realizes the meaning of his error and moral failure. Still hanging on the rock, the Titan cries out that he no longer hates Jupiter but pities him for his fate:

Disdain! Ah no! I pity thou. What ruin
Will hunt thee undefended through wide Heaven!
How will thy soul, cliven to its depth with terror,
Gape like a hell within! I speak in grief,
Not exultation, for I hate no more,
As then ere misery made me wise.

(Act I, 11.53-58)

The change of Prometheus' feelings towards Zeus shows that he has moved from ignorance to wisdom, that is from hatred through disdain, to pity. As Baker states, this indicates that Prometheus has reached "the point of growth" at which the fall can take place.[33] Prometheus must achieve purification through pain, before the ruin of Jupiter takes place. After he renounces hatred, his desire is to recall the curse that he put upon Jupiter and says that the "evil wish is dead within" (Act.I, 1.70) and "no memory of hate remains". He turns for help to his mother Earth and the four Voices, but unfortunately they cannot remind him

of the curse, once put upon Jupiter. Instead, they describe the effects of the curse on each of them. Finally the Phantasm of Jupiter comes and pronounces the curse. The curse itself reveals the relationship between Prometheus and Jupiter.

All that thou canst inflict I bid thee do;
 Foul Tyrant both of Gods and Human - kind,
 One only being shalt thou not subdue.

(Act.I,11.263-265)

Prometheus proclaims his defiance by challenging Jupiter, the Tyrant, to do his worst, because no matter how painful the torment is, nothing can break his decision. He continues by enumerating the benefits and the help he has offered Jupiter. It was Prometheus who invested Jupiter with the power to rule and helped him in the revolt against Saturn.

O'er all things but thyself I gave thee power,
 And my own will.

(Act I,11.273-274)

He sums up angrily his hatred for Jupiter:

I curse thee! let the sufferer's curse
 Clasp thee, his torturer, like remorse;
 Till thine Infinity shall be

A robe of envenomed agony;
And thine Omnipotence a crown of pain,
To cling like burning gold round thy dissolving/
brain.

(Act I, ll. 286-291)

Prometheus finds it hard to believe that he actually said these words, but after Earth assures him that indeed these were his own words he confesses his guilt and professes his repentance:

It doth repent me: words are quick and vain:
Grief for awhile is blind, and so was mine.
I wish no living thing to suffer pain.

(Act I, ll. 303-305)

The change in Prometheus' character is obvious from what we have seen so far. The hero that we saw in the opening lines is much different from the Prometheus who cursed Jupiter. The change comes because Prometheus has conquered evil in his heart.

When Mercury arrives with the Furies, he makes every effort, like Hermes in the Greek play, to persuade Prometheus to reveal the secret which will transfer the power of Jupiter to some other power. But nothing can change the Titan's purpose; neither the

prospect of further torture nor the reward to dwell among the gods.

And Mercury suggests:

Smiling reproach. Wise art thou, firm and good,
but vainly wouldst stand forth alone in strife
against the omnipotent;

(Act I, ll. 360-361)

and:

bend thy soul in prayer,
and like a suppliant in some gorgeous fane,
Let the will kneel within thy haughty heart:
For benefits and meek submission tame
The fiercest and the mightiest.

(Act I, ll. 376-380)

Prometheus answers that there can be no compromise with evil because " Evil minds/ Change good to their own nature" (ll. 380-381). He complains about Jupiter's behavior. He gave him all and in return he was tortured. But what is Prometheus' reaction now? Endurance. Like Christ, he refuses to quit his Golgotha and his agonies yet to come because he knows that the reign of evil will end. And he answers to Mercury:

I wait,

Enduring thus, the retributive hour
Which since we spake is even nearer now.

(Act I, 11.405-407)

When will this hour come? Nobody knows. Not even Prometheus. And this is one of the significant changes Shelley made in the myth, the knowledge of the secret. He transforms the nature of the secret itself. In the Aeschylean version, Prometheus knows a secret, Zeus' fatal marriage, and the hope of Zeus' destruction sustains him. Shelley's Prometheus does not really know a secret. He only endures and hopes that some day Jupiter's downfall "must come".

I know but this, that it must come.

(Act I, 1.413)

Shelley saw Prometheus with his long suffering, his endless hope and endurance, his gentleness, virtue and wisdom as another Christ. With all physical torture having been useless for thirty thousand years Prometheus has to undergo an inner torment that Shelley pictures in the Furies' scene. The Furies bring in front of him the evil of the soul of mankind and the calamities that befall men in consequence of the evil.

Prometheus' crucifixion on Caucasus gives Shelley an excellent parallel (in the form of a mythological model) to Christ's suffering on the cross. For Shelley state and church in the sense of dogmatic religion were the two institutions that expressed tyranny. The tragedy and the reason for the failure of the French Revolution were the perversion of the Christian virtue into despotism because of the absence of love. Jupiter and Christianity usurped truth, freedom and equality exactly because truth and freedom had not been bred by love (Act I. ll. 567-572)

See a disenchanted nation
 Springs like day from desolution;
 To Truth its state is dedicate,
 And Freedom leads it forth, her mate;
 A legioned band of linked brothers
 whom love calls children-

Prometheus as a hero represented the rebellion against the political and religious tyranny of Zeus. Prometheus' vision as Christ relates the mythological hero to the political state of Shelley's time and Christianity. Thus when the Furies remove the veil and

Prometheus sees destruction and burning cities

(ll. 550-553) Shelley is apparently thinking of France during and after the French Revolution. When the Furies force Prometheus to look at the figure of Christ at the cross he can recognize in Christ an image of himself (ll. 815-817). Wasserman notes that [34]: "Shelley's syncretic mythopoeia provides that Prometheus tortured with a vision of himself in Christ, also have a vision of a nation, presumably France, rebelling against slavery, only to see in horror that it then impatiently becomes the victim of a tyranny like that of Christianity and Jupiter".

Prometheus himself is a symbol of Christ, the spirit of love. He is a creative spirit of man, which builds a new world. Prometheus never becomes evil. The relationship between Prometheus and Jupiter as Shelley presents it is one of opposition. Prometheus is good and Jupiter is evil.[35] He never gives the impression of being stubborn or stiffnecked as does the Aeschylean hero. Yet there are moments when it would seem that he has nothing but a strong will to overcome his torturer. As Ione and Panthea state, love strengthens his will

but yet it is not love alone which sustains him (Act I ll. 825 ff). His strong will alone holds him to his ultimate goal, makes him endure his pain and holds the force of his spirit against Jupiter. At the end of the first act Prometheus has realized that only through love can he be freed. All he can do now is to endure and willingly accept his destiny as "the Saviour":

I would fain
be what it is my destiny to be,
the Saviour and the strength of suffering man.

(Act 1 815-817)

Prometheus' main characteristic is compassion which arises from pain. In both the Greek and English version, the Titan is in pain and is presented as the sufferer. Weaver [36] states that although in the English drama Shelley uses words of pain and suffering less often, nevertheless he stresses more this idea. When he curses Jupiter his curse is characterized as the "sufferer's curse". The phantasm of Jupiter calls the Titan "a proud sufferer" and Mercury further addresses him as "awful sufferer". Shelley's purpose in stressing this idea is to give emphasis to the fact

that Prometheus is not only the foe of Jupiter but also the saviour of man.

Yet this Romantic hero has human qualities. He loves , hates, repents, complains. But he is not modeled after a man. Shelley's hero is an idealistic expression of a champion of man. Moreover, Shelley's Prometheus is a reformer. Shelley's concern is reform, reform in all kinds of human activity and knowledge, and the necessity of reform is for him indispensable.[37] In Cameron's [38] words "Prometheus represents the intelligentsia of the period who sympathize with the oppressed social classes and are aware of the need for political reform".

The second Act is devoted to Asia as the first Act is devoted to Prometheus. We have seen the separation of Prometheus and Asia in Act I when Prometheus expresses his feelings towards her:

Through whose o'ershadowing woods I wandered once
With Asia, drinking life from her loved eyes;

(Act I, ll. 122-123)

Their separation is painful for Prometheus as the following lines express:

How fair these airborne shapes! and yet I feel

Most vain all hope but love; and thou art far,
 Asia! who, when my being overflowed,
 wert like a golden chalice to bright wine
 Which else had sunk into the thirsty dust.

(Act I, ll. 807-811)

As we saw before, this separation came as punishment because Prometheus' heart was full of hatred. Now that he has cleansed himself of this hatred, Prometheus is about to be united with her. The separation and reunion of Prometheus and Asia are the results of the fall and regeneration of Prometheus. The struggle of the Titan's spirit brings him the truth that Love is the sole hope for the regeneration of humanity. And through the reunion of Prometheus and Asia love attains its full realization. In the opening of the play the Titan is imperfect and far away from what Shelley calls him in his Preface: "the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature". The curse against Zeus, the hatred, the scorn and the defiance make him impure. In order to achieve purity he must endure the long suffering and torture and learn to forgive. As soon as he reaches this stage of forgiveness, as Bhalla states, "Prometheus emerges a conqueror over his own mind".[39]

With the spiritual reformation of the Titan the tone of the drama changes. The catharsis of Prometheus is caused by compassion and love which are powers that overwhelm the evil in Jupiter and cause his downfall. The rest of the poem is concerned with the unbinding of Prometheus and his reunion with Asia.

In Act III, Hercules unbinds Prometheus as probably happened in the lost Greek play, and restores him to Asia. In Bush's words "Ideal man is reunited with the creative spirit of life and love and nature; in full and harmonious possession of all his powers, he can in time become master of the universe".[40] What man achieves by the unbinding of Prometheus is well illustrated in the closing lines of Act III:

The loathsome mask has fallen, the man remains
 Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man
 equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,
 exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king
 Over himself; just, gentle, wise; but man
 Passionless?- no, yet free from guilt or pain.

(Act III, Sc. IV ll. 193-198)

A few months after completing Act III, Shelley had a new inspiration and added Act IV. This Act does not add

anything to the plot of the play. It is a concluding hymn of praise and triumph of love, and a celebration for the new world. Prometheus' release is symbolic of the unbinding of the entire world from the bonds of hate and fear.

Shelley ends his drama with an ode beseeching man to love, to forgive, to hope....

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;
To defy power, which seems omnipotent;
To love and bear; to hope till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory.

(Act IV, ll. 570-573)

Shelley's Prometheus, and thus mankind, finally wins through belief in the good with the aspiration and will attained through suffering and toil.

CONCLUSION

The present study has been mainly concerned with an examination of Prometheus' character in the works of Hesiod, Aeschylus and Shelley. We saw Hesiod's negative attitude towards the Titan. For him Prometheus is a trickster. He deceived Zeus and stole fire from heaven to benefit mankind. Even if the Titan, in this case, is presented as benefactor, Hesiod focuses on the fact that Prometheus' actions brought calamity on mankind and some of his benefits turned out to be curses for mortals. Yet, for Hesiod, Prometheus remains cunning and devious in mind.

A few centuries later Aeschylus makes Prometheus the hero who not only stole fire for mankind but also taught man all the arts that lead to civilization. His hero has acted with noble motives but he still suffers unjustly cruel punishment. The Aeschylean Prometheus is not the perfect hero. He has sinned in the sense that he tried to deceive Zeus hoping that he could overcome Zeus' divine authority by his intellect.

Following its Greek model, Shelley's play presents us with a hero who, although flawed, resolves his inner conflict early, and through compassion, pain and endurance triumphs over his oppressor. He represents the spirit of resistance to the power and the corrupting influence of tyranny. For Shelley the Titan must persist till the end, until Jupiter ceases to exist. As long as Prometheus holds out, man has not lost his hope, his strength and his capacity for freedom.

Through the centuries Prometheus has been connected with humanity either as benefactor or as champion of mankind to the point that he is even presented as the human mind.[41] Regardless of the many different interpretations of the myth at different periods of history, Prometheus will always remain a symbol of man's high aspiration and potential achievement.

NOTES

- 1) G. Highet, The Classical Tradition (Oxford 1953) p. 522.
- 2) H.A. Clark, Ancient Myths in Modern Poets 1953 p.56.
- 3) These lines present a problem because they appear to say that Prometheus was released, but in l. 616 we find out that he is still bound. According to West, Hesiod does not say that Heracles released Prometheus but that he only killed the eagle and delivered him from the torment.
- 4) D.J. Conacher, Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound: a literary commentary (Toronto 1980)p. 11
- 5) M.L. West, Hesiod Theogony (Oxford 1966)p.313
- 6) F. Solmsen, Hesiod and Aeschylus (Ithaca 1949) pp. 48-49.
- 7) see Solmsen, Chapter 1.
- 8) H. Edmundson, Aspects of the Prometheus Myth in ancient Greek Literature and Art (Diss. Univ. of Texas, 1977) pp. 96-97
- 9) G. Dumézil, Le festin d' immortalite (Paris 1924) Chapter 4.
- 10) J.P. Vernant, Myth and Thought among the Greeks (London 1983) p. 239
- 11) Ovid, Metamorphoses Book I ll.82ff.
Apollodorus, The Library, trans. by Sir James G. Frazer, Loeb Classical Library (London 1912-21) pp. 51-52.
- 12) P. Mayerson, Classical Mythology in Literature, Art and Music (New York 1984) p.41.

- 13) The word ἀγκυλομήτης is used 7 times by Hesiod:
5 times of Kronos (18,137,168,473,495) and 2 times
of Prometheus (see above)
- 14 F. Solmsen, Hesiod and Aeschylus (Ithaca 1949)
p.133.
- 15 D.Green, Aeschylus vol 1. Complete Greek
Tragedies, (Univ. of Chicago Press 1959) p.305.
- 16 A. Podlecki, The Political Background of
Aeschylean Tragedy (Ann Arbor 1966) p.124.
- 17) M. Griffith, The Authenticity of Prometheus Bound
(Cambridge 1977) Cptr.2.
- 18) Man's illness was the awareness of deaths for which
Prometheus found a remedy in blind hopes.
- 19) References of ἁμαρτία: 1.112, 260, 563, 578, 620,
945.
- 20) L. R. Farnell, "The Paradox of the Prometheus
Vinctus", JHS 53 (1933) p.45.
- 21) With the introduction of Io into the story, Zeus'
cruelty is further emphasized. Zeus in his lust for
Io has subjected her to a life of torment which
Prometheus outlines in all of its painful detail.
- 22) M. Griffith, Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound
(Cambridge 1983) p.166.
- 23) H. Smyth, Aeschylean Tragedy,
(Univ. of California Press 1924) p.109.
- 24) A. Podlecki, "Reciprocity in Prometheus Bound"
GRBS 10, (1969) p.287-292.
- 25) J. Finley, Pindar and Aeschylus (Cambridge 1955)
p.222.
- 26) Some modern critics condemn Prometheus and side
with Zeus. Lloyd -Jones, JHS 76, 1956 p.56 and
E. Dodds, The Ancient Concept of Progress,
(Oxford 1973) p.26-44.
- 27) M. Raisis, From Caucasus to Pittsburgh,

(Gnosis Publishing 1983) p.221.

- 28) Northop, Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays
(Princeton Univ. Press 1925)p. 155
- 29) Raizis, M., From Caucasus to Pittsburgh
(Athens 1983) p. 212
- 30) Zillman, L.J. Shelley's Prometheus Unbound
(Seattle: Univ. of Wash.Press 1959) p.58
- 31) See above note 2, p. 86.
- 32) Rogers N. Percy Bysshe Shelley: Selected Poetry
(Houghton Mifflin Company 1968) pp. 61-64
- 33) Baker, Carlos, Shelley's Major Poetry: The Fabric of a Vision (Princeton 1948)p. 96.
- 34) Wasserman E. Shelley: A Critical Reading (John Hopkins press 1978) p.303
- 35) Hilderbrand W., Shelley's Polar Paradise
(Salzburg 1974) p. 1
- 36) Weaver, Bennett, "Prometheus Bound and Prometheus Unbound" PMLA 64, 1949 pp. 115-133.
- 37) Rasis, see above (p.79)
- 38) Cameron, Kenneth, "The Political Symbolism in Shelley's Prometheus Unbound" PMLA LVIII, 1943 pp. 728-753.
- 39) Bhalla, M.M. Studies in Shelley (New Delhi 1973)p.77
- 40) Bush, D. Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry (Cambridge 1969) p.149
- 41) Solve, Melvin Shelley: His Theory of Poetry
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