

"THE ROLE OF MYTHOLOGY IN THE TRAGEDY "PROMETHEUS BOUND"

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Abstract: Greek mythology is a vast spiritual treasure that has served as the foundation of world literature. Aeschylus's tragedy "Prometheus Bound" is recognized as one of the highest examples of this rich mythological heritage. Although the work is based on the legend of Prometheus, which had long existed in ancient Greek folklore, the dramatist does not merely retell it—he fundamentally reworks the mythological material, imbuing it with deep philosophical and socio-political meaning. This article examines the transition of the image of Prometheus from his initial depiction in Hesiod to the new interpretation in Aeschylus, the intrinsic connection between myth and the tragic genre, as well as the artistic and philosophical function of the mythological symbols within the work. The analysis demonstrates that mythology in this masterpiece serves not only as a source of the plot but also as a vehicle expressing humanity's struggle for freedom, progress, and justice.

Keywords: mythology, Aeschylus, ancient tragedy, Prometheus, Zeus, titan, fire motif, Hesiod, myth, (eternal image), ancient Greek drama.

In the history of literature, mythology has always been one of the earliest and richest sources of artistic creativity. In ancient times, attempting to understand the world and explain the phenomena of nature and society, humans created myths and legends. Over time, these narratives transitioned into written literature, acquiring a new artistic form. The ancient Greek dramatist Aeschylus—regarded as the "father" of the ancient tragedy genre—masterfully employed mythological plots to express the socio-philosophical problems of his era. Researchers note that among Aeschylus's surviving tragedies, "Prometheus Bound" holds a special place—this work tells the story of the heroism of the Titan Prometheus, who brought fire to humanity and was severely punished for it. Precise information regarding the composition date and staging of this tragedy has not survived; however, historians believe that the historical groundwork for its creation was the transitional process from primitive society to civilization. The legend of Prometheus existed long before Aeschylus. This figure was first mentioned

in the works of the poet Hesiod, who lived in the VIII century BC. In Hesiod's interpretation, Prometheus is depicted as a cunning hero who masterfully outwits Zeus. According to the legend, when Prometheus divides the meat of a sacrificed bull between the gods and humans, he secretly leaves the best portion for mankind. Discovering this, Zeus becomes infuriated and decides to withhold fire from humans; however, Prometheus secretly steals fire, bringing it to humanity inside a hollow stalk of fennel (reed). In the hands of Aeschylus, this plot changes significantly. His Prometheus is no longer a hero who merely employs trickery—he is a hero who consciously accepts suffering for the benefit of humanity, fully aware of his fate beforehand. At this exact point, the mythological material transforms into an artistic-literary image: the legend from oral folklore evolves into a complex character bearing profound philosophical and moral weight. Analyzing the works of Aeschylus, researchers propose examining the primary conflict in the tragedy "Prometheus Bound" on two levels. The first is the socio-political level: here, Prometheus is viewed as the symbol of progress and innovation, while Zeus is contrasted as the expression of an obsolete order and tyranny. The second is the philosophical level: here, the struggle between the two characters is interpreted as a universal conflict between the "old" and the "new." This approach demonstrates that Aeschylus utilized the mythological plot not merely in a religious-cult sense, but as a means to express the pressing ideas of his time. The motif of stealing fire is not just a mythical event—it is a symbol of knowledge, civilization, and human intellect.

Although Prometheus is chained, he does not waver from his convictions, which demonstrates his spiritual invincibility. The external structure of Aeschylus's tragedy is close to ancient choral song traditions, in which the parts of the leader alternate with choral stanzas. Researchers emphasize that the characters in this work, much like in Aeschylus's other plays, possess an integral and consistent nature—each character manifests as the embodiment of a specific idea, rather than being complex individuals with internal contradictions. There is almost no action in the play; it consists primarily of monologues and dialogues, and its style is grand-pathetic, rich in philosophical content. It is worth noting particularly that in "Prometheus Bound," unlike in other works by Aeschylus (such as the "Oresteia" trilogy), the choral responses occupy a relatively smaller place—even though the chorus traditionally played a crucial role in conveying the author's message in ancient tragedy. The content of the work begins as follows: The Titan Prometheus stands at the center of the tragedy. For defying Zeus and stealing fire for humanity, he is severely punished—the deities of Might (Strength) and Violence chain him to a rock. According to some variations of the myth, Prometheus's punishment was also connected to another reason—it is said

that he even created woman, which further intensified the wrath of Zeus. Throughout the play, Prometheus does not openly complain about his fate; only after his tormentors depart does he appeal to all of nature—the earth, sky, and sea—lamenting the injustice of Zeus. Various mythological characters visit Prometheus during the play—among them are the daughters of Oceanus (the Oceanids) and Io, who is fleeing from the wrath of Zeus. Prometheus converses with them, sharing his fate and prophecies about the future, yet he refuses to disclose the secret that could overthrow the rule of Zeus. The work concludes with the earth shaking as a result of Zeus's wrath, and Prometheus sinking into the depths of the earth along with the rock—which indicates the existence of a continuation to Aeschylus's trilogy.

The tragedy "Prometheus Bound" can be evaluated as a brilliant example of the process through which mythology transforms into artistic literature. Taking an ancient Greek legend, Aeschylus infuses it with new philosophical and socio-political meaning: the cunning hero of Hesiod becomes a spiritually magnificent figure in Aeschylus who consciously suffers for the sake of humanity. The mythological elements—Prometheus, Zeus, fire, chains, prophecy—all acquire a symbolic meaning, elevating the work from a simple mythical tale to the level of a profound philosophical and social drama. Furthermore, the fact that the image of Prometheus later became an eternal archetype in world literature, influencing numerous writers, renders the role of mythology in this work even more significant. Consequently, mythology in "Prometheus Bound" serves not only as a plot source but as the primary artistic-philosophical vehicle expressing the struggle of humanity for freedom, progress, and justice.

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