

Prometheus Hits *The Road*: Revising the Myth

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At the very end of *No Country for Old Men*, Cormac McCarthy has Sheriff Bell narrate his dream of riding a horse through the mountains where he sees his father “carryin fire in a horn” (309). It is a puzzling ending and seems as pregnant with symbolism as it is detached from the novel’s plot. As if worried that his readers would forget this earlier fire carrier, McCarthy’s *The Road*, published only a year later, features numerous dialogues in which the unnamed man and boy claim to be “carrying the fire” (83, 129, 216, 278, 283). While motif is replete with readings,¹ no one has yet firmly linked these fire carriers to their archetypal root: Prometheus, the Titan who stole fire from the gods. This study hopes to do just that, showing how Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* creates and reworks a Promethean character, pulling an edifying vision from the traditionally tragic archetype. I will begin with a brief introduction to the Prometheus myth, its appearances in literature, and its treatment in philosophy.² I will then discuss how McCarthy uses and revises these precedents to create his own Prometheus in *The Road*.

Prometheus from Hesiod to Nietzsche

Prometheus is first mentioned in Hesiod’s *Theogony* and *Works and Days* as the titanic son of Iapetus and Clymene. When he presides over a party in *Theogony*, Prometheus makes the grave mistake of cheating Zeus out of a portion of an ox. This causes Zeus to withhold fire from the humans, a punishment for Prometheus because (as we learn in later writings by Aesop) he and Athena had created the humans. In response to Zeus’s prohibition, Prometheus steals a flame from the gods and gives it to the humans himself. Zeus, in turn, ties the Titan to a rock, drives a wedge through his chest, and sets an eagle to the daily task of “gnawing / His undying liver” (75). It is not until centuries later that Zeus sends Hercules to kill the eagle and release Prometheus from the rock (75). In *Works and Days*, Zeus also curses humanity for accepting Prometheus’s fire, sending them Pandora: the source of all suffering (25). Hesiod’s Prometheus, then, has a twofold legacy of blessings and curses. He founds civilization with his gift of fire, but at the same time, his rash disregard for Zeus brings an avalanche of suffering upon both himself and the human race.

If the myth is born in Hesiod, it matures in Aeschylus’s tragic masterpiece, *Prometheus Bound*.³ In the play, Aeschylus makes an important revision of Hesiod’s story. As Károly Kerényi notes, “Aischylos [sic] does not, like Hesiod, explain that Zeus had denied men fire as punishment for a previous crime of Prometheus. According to the dramatist, the basis of the denial is ‘justice,’ *díkē*, the measure fixed by Zeus for gods and men” (87). In Aeschylus, then, Prometheus’s punishment is not the indirect result of a moral or spiritual shortcoming, such as an insufficient sacrifice. Instead, he is punished solely for his scorn of limitations and his compassion for the human race. He is punished because he “loved men too well” to accept Zeus’s inane limitations (Aeschylus I: 440). And while the Prometheus of *Prometheus Bound* exudes this righteous and stubborn defiance, scholars believe that the play’s sequel *Prometheus Unbound*, which now exists

only in fragments, features a reconciliation in which the Titan makes peace with Zeus, even explaining a crucial prophecy that saves Zeus's rule (Sommerstein III: 197).

Despite the likely reconciliation between Prometheus and Zeus in Aeschylus's sequel, the Romantic poets adopted and even exaggerated the scorn for boundaries and the celebration of human potential from *Prometheus Bound*. In his "Prometheus," for instance, Goethe suggests that the Titan created humans in his "own image" to rebel against Zeus, forming them:

To suffer, to weep,
To enjoy, to be glad—
And never to heed you,
Like me! (31)

Like Goethe, Percy Shelley with his *Prometheus Unbound* embraces the defiant Titan of Aeschylus's first play. Instead of making peace and cooperating with the gods, this Prometheus rebels and eventually triumphs over Jupiter, who falls from heaven in Act III. Shelley defends his revisionist drama in the play's preface, writing that he "was averse from a catastrophe so feeble as that of reconciling the Champion with the Oppressor of mankind" (120). Shelley goes on to argue that Prometheus's defiant courage places him in the top tier of heroes, reaching and even surpassing the Miltonic Satan, for "in addition to courage, and majesty, and firm and patient opposition to omnipotent force, he is...of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and truest motives" (120-121). In Prometheus, then, Shelley finds his ideal man: one who, like Satan, strains against seemingly unmovable boundaries and pits his ego against the world in the face of almost certain defeat, but who, unlike Satan, maintains his integrity throughout the struggle.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Friedrich Nietzsche further explores the connection between Greek and Judeo-Christian creation stories. Instead of equating Prometheus and Satan, however, Nietzsche compares the Titan to Eve, focusing on how both sinned against a deity, gained something for humanity, and were punished along with humanity. Nietzsche is especially interested in the two stories' disparate emphases. To him the story of the Fall expresses a passive fear of transgression and other "feminine frailties" that lock humanity into a fear of, and spite for, progress (64). When we reflect on Eve's sin, we focus on her punishment and the way Satan tricked her into eating the fruit—not what she gained for humanity, the knowledge of good and evil. Prometheus, on the other hand, is an analogue for active sin and masculine, Aryan progress. His "exalted notion of active sin" reminds us that humanity's "highest good must be bought with a crime and paid for by the flood of grief and suffering which the offended divinities visit upon the human race in its noble ambition" (63-64). According to Nietzsche, those who are exposed to the Greek myth feel called to emulate Prometheus in his defiance and urge toward progress, all the while expecting to take part in his suffering. Conversely, those who hear the story of Eve are encouraged to avoid her sin of pride completely.

Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* puts this discourse on Prometheus into a fictional context. The similarities between Nietzsche's prophet and Prometheus begin early in the novel, when the old hermit recognizes Zarathustra, saying, "No stranger to me is this wanderer: many years ago he passed this way. Zarathustra he was called, but he

has changed. At that time you carried your ashes to the mountains; would you now carry your fire into the valleys?" (10) The similarity continues with Zarathustra's wounding and subsequent suffering. Like Prometheus, Zarathustra brings humanity a fire of active sin that leads to progress, and he suffers for it. What further connects Nietzsche's Zarathustra to earlier manifestations of the myth is that, as Carl Jung contends in a 1936 seminar he taught on the novel, Zarathustra is entirely a materialist, representing Nietzsche's "complete and unmitigated belief in nature, in the natural life of man in the here and now" (937). Like Hesiod's Prometheus, who, indifferent to their spiritual consequences, brought humans the means for material progress, Zarathustra does not concern himself with teaching others about a world to come. Instead, he focuses on the world before him. It is to such an end that he tells the dying tight-rope-walker, "There is no devil and no hell. Your soul will be dead even before your body" (20). And it is to such an end that Zarathustra later advises the "afterworldly" to no longer "bury one's head in the sand of heavenly things, but to bear it freely, an earthly head, which creates a meaning for the earth" (32).

Thus Nietzsche explicates and exaggerates Prometheus's materialism. Zarathustra brings from his Mount Olympus the fire of a philosophy for the here and now, and the fire cuts both ways, both encouraging and discouraging men like the tight-rope walker, who is comforted with the specter of a soulless death but who, at the same time, regrets losing his spiritual dimension. "So," as Jung suggests, "every step forward is a Promethean sin without which there is no development; we cannot be creative *and* good [i.e. honor the gods], but can only be creative and pay the price for it" (936).

During this journey from Hesiod to Nietzsche, the Prometheus myth becomes an ever more provocative call for rebellion against limitations and an exhortation for civilized humanity to realize their potential by breaking traditional boundaries. Prometheus slowly moves from an ambivalently tragic figure who deals in both progress and suffering, to an ambitious and conventionally virtuous hero pitted against a malevolent deity, to a tragic hero for whom *hubris*, traditionally a flaw, is now a strength: a vise to enlarge our moral horizons, a lens to focus us on the material world, and a spur to urge our race on.

Prometheus in *The Road*

In his 2007 review of *The Road*, environmentalist George Monbiot calls McCarthy's novel "the most important environmental book ever written." He focuses on *The Road*'s grim, postapocalyptic setting and argues that the characters' bleak outlook in a world without a biosphere should remind readers of their own continued reliance on natural resources. From Monbiot's perspective, *The Road* shows the impossibility not only of human survival but of human virtue in the face of complete ecological disaster. For, when earth's other organisms disappear, humanity's "pre-existing social codes soon collapse and are replaced with organised butchery." According to Monbiot, McCarthy hopes the disturbing prospects of life in a world inhabited solely by humans will move his readers out of environmental apathy and into an appreciation for how their fates are intertwined with the fate of the biosphere.

Such a reading gains traction in light of *The Road*'s final paragraph. Like the man's reflections about the past throughout the novel, this final image of brook trout in a

mountain stream works as a foil for the novel's desolate backdrop. Not only are the trout beautiful and mysterious, coated with shapes "that were the maps of the world in its becoming" (287), but they are also irrevocably lost and function as symbols of a material world that can "not be put back. Not be made right again" (287). Here, the narrator reveres nature and, as Monbiot suggests, connects human existence to a lost environment where "all things were older than man" (287).

In his treatment of nature throughout the novel, McCarthy may seem, as Monbiot suggests, to endorse a form of materialism that is more broadly conscious than Nietzsche's, one that connects human virtue to humanity's reliance on all the other animals and plants on the earth. Such a reading is only possible, however, if one ignores the novel's main characters, for the man and the boy (although they are forced to adapt to the changing world) maintain the virtues associated with traditional ethics: love for family and respect for and hospitality towards strangers. Such reading of *The Road* would also need to ignore the novel's strangely uplifting ending for these two virtuous characters. From a materialist perspective, the end of the novel should be dreary out of necessity. There is no biosphere and no hope of reconstructing one; therefore, human virtue will deteriorate and the human race will dissolve into gloom. McCarthy, however, leaves his readers with a much more positive conclusion. The man dies in something more like religious ecstasy than ecological despair. And when the boy asks the man what he thinks will happen to a little boy from earlier in the story (the "little boy" here seeming to function as a mask for the boy's own worries about living in a world without the man), the man replies with final words of hope that seem out of step with the starvation and cannibalism that have followed him throughout the novel. "Goodness will find the little boy," he says. "It always has. It will again" (281).

Taken as a whole, with its depiction of postapocalyptic virtue and with its hopeful and strangely uplifting ending, *The Road* seems to suggest just the opposite of Monbiot's thesis, arguing that humanity (or, more specifically, *humaneness*) does not rely upon the biosphere but rather stems from something innately human that transcends environment, finding its origin somewhere within the human consciousness or soul. In *The Road* the Prometheus myth, which McCarthy alludes to with several textual hints, puts the novel into a productive dialogue with earlier versions of the myth, suggesting that a spiritual rather than material realm is responsible for traditional virtue.

References to Prometheus are sprinkled throughout *The Road*. And though the unnamed main characters do not discuss "carrying the fire" until midway through the novel, the myth shows up early on. One of the first sections reads:

He [the man] woke before dawn and watched the gray day break. Slow and half opaque. He rose while the boy slept and pulled on his shoes and wrapped in his blanket he walked out through the trees. He descended into a gryke in the stone and there he crouched coughing and he coughed for a long time. Then he just knelt in the ashes. He raised his face to the paling day. Are you there? He whispered. Will I see you at the last? Have you a neck by which to throttle you? Have you a heart? Damn you eternally have you a soul? Oh God, he whispered. Oh God. (11-12)

The section is unique in the novel in that the man wanders away from the boy without a specific purpose. He does not leave to gather food or to retrieve their belongings or to scout out the territory. He simply walks off and begins his monologue. The section also features distinctive language. The man crouches in a *gryke* (a geological term for a cleft in limestone) and on this barren rock he curses God in uncharacteristic, archaically constructed questions. McCarthy's shift into a dated prose style, complete with odd phrases (e.g. "at the last") and recurring subject/verb inversion (e.g. "Have you a heart?" instead of "Do you have a heart?"), suggest that he is reaching back into literary tradition; the dactylic meter resulting from McCarthy's subject/verb inversion (e.g. "Dāmn yōu ētērñāllŷ hāve yōu ā sōul?") seems to reference traditional Greek elegy; and all this combined with the content, a man suffering intensely and cursing God on a barren rock, suggests an allusion to Prometheus.

Along with the man's early Promethean monologue (and the novel's subsequent conversations about "carrying fire," which we will come to later), McCarthy includes more allusions to the Prometheus myth by persistently identifying the boy with the divine and with fire. Early in the novel, the man calls the boy "the word of God," and when the man and boy encounter Ely, the man suggests that the boy is "an angel" or even "a god" (5, 173). After the father kills the highwayman to save the boy, he thinks of the boy as a "[g]olden chalice, good to house a god" (75). Other references in the novel connect the boy to fire. At one point, he is described as "God's own fire-drake," an archaic word for *dragon* (31). Later, the man looks at the boy, sees a light, and thinks that "the light move[s] with him" (277). He then tells the boy that the fire they have been carrying is "inside you" (279). Though the *you* here could be an indefinite use of the second person, meaning that the fire is inside people or humanity, it still seems noteworthy that the man does not say the fire is "inside us." For the man, it seems, the divine fire that he carries is, or is at least especially present in, the boy.

In *The Road*, then, the man is a Prometheus type, and the boy is, in a sense, the fire the man carries down to the world. These mythic echoes invest our reading with perspective, placing the novel in a tradition reaching from Hesiod to the present. But more than merely stretching the novel's literary shadow, *The Road's* Prometheus strain departs from previous versions of the myth in key areas, and these departures seem to make up the novel's core message. This intersection between precedent and originality is perhaps clearest when the man muses upon his and the boy's new lives on the road, thinking, "All things of grace and beauty such that one holds them to one's heart have a common provenance in pain. Their birth in grief and ashes. So, he whispered to the sleeping boy. I have you" (54).

The man's thoughts here are not altogether new. In fact, they seem very close to Nietzsche's assertion that the "highest good" comes only with "a flood of grief and suffering" and Jung's belief that Promethean progress and guilt are intertwined (63-64; 936). The man agrees with Nietzsche and Jung and others that the greatest good is obtained only after struggling and going through pain. He disagrees with them, however, about what the greatest good is. Nietzsche's greatest good seems to be the progressive evolution of society: the moral amendments that come when people are bold enough to do the uncommon and conventionally immoral, bold enough to scorn the gods and take the fire. The man, on the other hand, cares little (at least explicitly) about social progress or constructing new morals. After all, in the postapocalyptic world, progress, which

depends upon a future, is meaningless. As the man says, “There is no later. This is later” (54). Rather than progress, the man values “things of grace and beauty,” things like the boy. McCarthy’s man departs from previous versions of the myth—especially Nietzsche’s interpretations—over the issue of values, over his son. And so, in order to understand McCarthy’s vision, we need to understand the boy.

In his essay on *The Road*, John Vanderheide discusses the novel’s fire-carrying conversations, noting “the ritualistic manner of the dialogue between the father and son” (109). Vanderheide proceeds to argue that instead of fulfilling the traditional purposes of dialogue (the transfer of information or the open discussion of opinions) the man and boy’s conversations about carrying the fire “establish and buffer a common understanding, a single point of view on the world shared by both interlocutors”(110). In short, the conversations show the boy who he is by providing him with an understanding of what he and the man value and by contrasting his identity with the identity of the people he meets on the road. So, while the conversations teach us about the fire that the man and boy carry, they also teach us about the boy and further strengthen the connection between him and the fire.

The first of the fire-carrying conversations helps the boy define himself in the face of the unknown. It takes place in a wrecked car outside of an unnamed city where the man and boy spend the night. From the car’s window, the man sees lights in the buildings, evidence of life. He asks himself what the people in the buildings eat to stay alive, and then, just before he falls asleep, the boy asks him, “Who are they, Papa?” (82) The man does not know how to answer. When the man and boy wake up, the boy’s first concern, perhaps thinking about the strangers from the city, is for safety. He asks:

We’re going to be okay, aren’t we Papa?
Yes. We are.
And nothing bad is going to happen to us.
That’s right.
Because we’re carrying the fire.
Yes. Because we’re carrying the fire.⁴ (83)

The conversation primarily establishes a sense of security. The boy is safe from the unknown, specifically the strange people in the city, because he carries the fire. The conversation also helps the boy define himself (though it is a foggy definition) as one who, like his father, carries the fire.

The next fire-carrying conversation brings the boy closer to a definition of self. This time, however, he defines himself negatively, in contrast to someone else, and he combines his sense of self with a sense of right and wrong. This second conversation comes on the heels of what is perhaps the novel’s most horrific image—a macabre pantry of half-eaten humans stored beneath a docile-seeming farmhouse—and so it is little wonder that the boy feels the need to reaffirm his moral identity. Here, the group of men and women who live in the farmhouse are something the boy is definitely not, something completely irreconcilable to his understanding of self, and so he can define himself in contrast to his definition of the people in the house. They are cannibals, and so the boy reasons that he and the man “wouldn’t ever eat anybody” (128). Furthermore, they are the bad guys, and so the boy says to the man, “We’re the good guys... And we’re carrying

the fire” (128-129). The boy’s now evolving definition of self, then, depends on a simple morality. He carries the fire and people who carry the fire abstain from cannibalism. Most people in the boy’s world, like the people in the farmhouse, stay alive by eating others. The boy, however, resolves to maintain his morality “[e]ven if [he and the man] were starving” (128). Later, the boy’s starved features echo his otherworldly ethics, and he takes on “the look of an alien” (129).

The third fire-carrying conversation helps the boy define himself in a broader, societal context. He and the man have finally made it to the ocean, and they find it just as desolate as the road. The boy asks what could be on the other side, wanting, it seems, to hear something hopeful. The man, in turn, suggests that there might be “a father and his little boy” on the other side (216). The boy responds: “And they could be carrying the fire too?...But we don’t know. ...So we have to be vigilant” (216). The boy now realizes that he and the man are part of a community of fire carriers, a community of people who refuse to live off others. At the same time, though, he realizes that many people do not belong to the community. And this realization requires vigilance, not only in the form of self-defense against those who do not carry the fire but also in the form of defense for those who cannot protect themselves.

Indeed, the boy seems naturally inclined to defend others even before he begins to refine his definition of fire carrying. This compassionate predisposition is probably best exemplified by the boy’s interaction with Ely: the half-blind old man who meets the man and boy in the middle of the novel and who rambles in his conversations with the man, making radical statements concerning humanity (“Things will be better when everybody’s gone”) and God (“There is no God and we are his prophets”) (172, 170). Ely seems out of place in the novel, hovering in a liminal space between the boy’s narrow categories of good and bad guys. Wherever he fits on the good/bad continuum, though, Ely is in profound need. McCarthy describes him as “a starved and threadbare buddha” who looked “like a pile of rags fallen off a cart” (168, 162). Despite this need, the man plans on ignoring Ely after he learns that he is harmless. The boy, on the other hand, empathizes with Ely on a level uncommon for his or any age, insisting on feeding the old man two meals.

Throughout the interaction with Ely, the man aligns himself with other materialistic Promethean characters. He is willing to suffer for his son. He even goes so far as to indulge the boy’s compassion. But he sets boundaries for charity, insisting, when the boy talks him into giving Ely a second meal, that they eventually quit feeding Ely, that “[o]kay means okay. It doesnt mean we negotiate another deal tomorrow” (165). The man is hesitant to help others because helping others implies spending resources he could use to help his son. The boy, on the other hand, wants to save everyone he meets. He gives without thought for himself. He gives without even expecting thanks, acting according to what Phillip A. Snyder calls “the Derridian notion that real hospitality exists without acknowledgment and without reciprocation; it exists as a gift, beyond anyone’s ability to articulate it” (81).

Later in the novel, the boy’s compassionate hospitality extends even to a thief, whom he undoubtedly would consider a “bad guy.” Shortly after they have their conversation about carrying the fire on the beach, someone steals the man and the boy’s cart and leaves them for dead. Once they track down the thief, the man, acting according to his *raison d’être* of protecting his son, approaches the situation with an eye-for-an-eye

perspective, telling the thief, "I'm going to leave you the way you left us" (257). The boy, on the other hand, acts according to his guiding principle of real hospitality and begs his father to treat the thief kindly. During the encounter, the boy's empathy takes the form of weeping and the repeated plea: "Papa please dont kill the man" (256). When the man and boy leave the thief, however, with their cart full of his clothes, the boy's compassion becomes more aggressive, and he insists that they go back and help the thief. The boy begins his argument by looking at the issue from the thief's perspective, claiming that the thief stole only out of hunger. When the man counters, arguing that the thief will die whether they help or not, the boy offers yet another argument from pathos: "He's so scared, Papa" (259). The man counters with a materialist response that attempts to dismiss the boy's compassion as naïve, explaining that the boy does not have "to worry about everything" (259). The boy, however, replies: "Yes I am...I am the one," as though he is responsible for everything in a spiritual sense—responsible for the world's edification or erosion of compassion (259). Coming fresh from the conversation on the beach in which he realized his place in a community of fire carriers, the boy now articulates his broad sense of responsibility for not only himself and the other fire carriers (like his father) but everyone who is in need—even the thief.

When the boy's arguments from empathy win out, the man returns to where he last saw the thief and leaves his clothes in a small pile. The scene is emblematic of the novel's reversal of the socialization process where, in the new world of *The Road*, the son teaches his father (instead of the father teaching his son) how to treat others. The completion of this reverse socialization process arrives with the man and boy's last fire-carrying conversation, which takes place on the man's deathbed. Unlike their former conversations, in which the boy invoked the phrase "carrying the fire" and used it to clarify his concept of self, others, and morality, the man brings up the phrase this time and confers the responsibility of carrying the fire upon his son.

Along with these changes in the conversation's structure and the speakers' roles, the conversation also announces a pronounced shift in the man's perception of his son and the world. At the beginning of the deathbed scene, the boy expresses his fear of being separated from his father and asks if he can follow the man into death. This was initially the man's plan. He refused to leave the boy alone on the road to be raped and murdered by highwaymen. But now, facing his own death, the man will not allow his son to commit suicide. He explains: "You cant [follow me]. You have to carry the fire" (278). The man, who formerly loved only the boy and would not hazard the boy's safety for anything, now embraces a broader charity, one that he seems to have learned from the boy. The man plans on leaving his son in the world not only because he "cant hold [his] son dead in [his] arms" but because he knows that the world needs his son to continue carrying the fire (279). Interestingly, this increased compassion for the world coincides with the man's increased trust in the world, his belief that "Goodness will find the little boy" (281). It seems that the man believes that his act of compassion, leaving the world his son, will not go unnoticed by the spiritual realm's overarching Goodness. And when the boy falls into the company of the "veteran of old skirmishes" who also claims to be "carrying the fire," the man's trust is vindicated, proving to be more than mere self-delusion (281, 283).

So *The Road* departs from other versions of the Prometheus archetype in its treatment of the fire that the Prometheus brings to humanity. The man does not bring a

fire of social or moral progress; he brings only his son, who embodies simple charity. And, although this charity is nothing new, it is shockingly foreign. Throughout the novel, those things thought to be conventional values—a regard for grace and beauty, a father’s love for his son, the choice to live without preying upon others—meet as much resistance and require as much perseverance as the unconventional values for which a Prometheus type normally suffers. McCarthy’s man strains as much as Aeschylus’s Prometheus against the current of gods and humans and brings earth only the boy and his resolutions to avoid cannibalism and take responsibility for others. And so in *The Road*’s stark, postapocalyptic landscape, commonplace morality assumes its actual, radical identity. The bravest thing the man can do is “[get] up this morning” (272). And the most revolutionary way for him and his son to live is to observe society’s traditional values.

The man dies happy, then, without knowing if his son will spawn civilization or manufacture social progress or even start a family and continue the human race, but sure that the boy will spread compassion. This reactionary Prometheus tests not the boundaries of morality or science or industry but the boundaries of the human heart. He takes part in a tradition of compassion that, however long established, will never stop seeming alien to the bleak world running throughout McCarthy’s oeuvre. Virtue is possible, McCarthy suggests, in even the direst of circumstances. And so the novel’s ultimately hopeful Promethean vision echoes the words of McCarthy’s literary forbearer William Faulkner, who believed “that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. The poet’s, the writer’s, duty is to write about these things” (4).

Notes

¹ For instance: in just one volume of *The Cormac McCarthy Journal*, various critics claim *The Road's* fire and fire carriers as symbols for civilization, hope, hospitality, ritual, the Holy Spirit, and the narrative of human existence (Ellis 30, Palmer 66, Snyder 84, Vanderheide 110, Tyburski 126, Wilhelm 138).

² For those especially interested in the Prometheus myth's effect on Western Culture, see Larry Kreitzer's *Prometheus and Adam*, which contains a near-exhaustive chronicle of artistic (literary, visual, and musical) renderings of Prometheus from Hesiod to the late 1980s.

³ In the introduction to his 2008 Loeb Classical Library translation of *Prometheus Bound*, Alan Sommerstein recognizes the mystery surrounding the Prometheus cycle, writing that "a majority of scholars" doubt that Aeschylus wrote *Prometheus Bound* or its immediate counterpart *Prometheus Unbound* (I: 433). Because the matter of authorship is inconsequential to this study and because scholars do not confidently (or consistently) suggest an alternative author, I will refer to *Prometheus Bound* as Aeschylus's.

⁴ I have reproduced this first fire-carrying conversation in full. Subsequent conversations about carrying the fire have the same call-response structure, with the boy leading and the man providing affirmation and repetition. Later quotes in this study from the fire-carrying conversations will omit the responder's speech.

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