

The Problem with Prometheus: Myth, Abolition, and Radicalism

'Prometheus delivered'

Come, Outcast of the human race,
Prometheus, hail thy destined place!
Death shall not sap thy wall of clay,
That penal being mocks decay;
Live, conscious inmate of the grave,
Live, outcast, captive, victim, slave!
The Furies ceased; the wrathful strain
Prometheus hears, and, pierced with pain,
Rolls far around his hopeless gaze,
His realm of wretchedness surveys;
Then maddening with convulsive breath,
He moans or raves, imploring death.
Thus hours on hours unnumbered past,
And each more lingering than the last;
When Lo! before his glazed sight,
Appears a form, in dauntless might.
'Tis he! Alcides, lord of fame!
The friend of man, his noblest name!
Swift from his bow the arrow flies,
And prone the bleeding vulture lies.
He smites the rock, he rends the chain,
Prometheus rises man again!

Such, Africa, thy suffering state!
Outcast of nations, such thy fate!
The ruthless rock, the den of pain,
Were thine—oh long deplored in vain,
Whilst Britain's virtue slept! At length
She rose in majesty and strength;
And when thy martyr'd limbs she viewed,
Thy wounds unhealed, and still renewed,
She wept; but soon with graceful pride,
The vulture, Avarice, she defied,
And wrenched him from thy reeking side;
In Britain's name then called thee forth,
Sad exile, to the social hearth,
From baleful Error's realm of night,
To Freedom's breath and Reason's light.

So begins the poem that explains the vignette decorating the cover of a widely disseminated collection of poems by three British authors. It was published in order to

celebrate the passing of the 1807 Slave Trade bill [fig. 8.1]. The vision projected by this collection of poems was part of the process by which Prometheus became thoroughly – if problematically -- identified with slaves in the contemporary world, and with not just the British but the international movement to abolish their captive status. In the picture, Prometheus is depicted as of ambiguous race or, as some have asserted, even passably African;¹ in the poem, Prometheus is explicitly equated with Africa, while Hercules ('Alcides') represents Britain. The verses open with a resounding reference to the opening scenario of the Aeschylean tragedy *Prometheus Bound*,² in which personifications of Strength and Violence hammer Prometheus to the rocks of the Caucasus. The Furies, whose vindictive voices here gloat on the desolate fate awaiting Prometheus, have been borrowed from another Aeschylean tragedy, *Eumenides*.

The engraving was taken from a picture commissioned from Robert Smirke Senior (father of the more famous architect who bore the same name), Academician, anti-monarchist, and avowed democrat. The authors of the poems in the collection -- James Montgomery, Elizabeth Benger, and James Grahame (sometimes spelt Graham) -- were minor literary figures, each of whom had travelled their own unconventional route to the cause of abolition. Montgomery was a hymn-writer and supporter of radical causes in Sheffield; Benger was a feminist eccentric and aspiring dramatist, whose enthusiasm for abolition, along with prison reform and the rights of native Americans, is evident in her didactic-romantic novel *The Heart and the Fancy* (1813); Grahame (1765-1811), the author of 'Prometheus delivered', was a devout Christian, but eventually his politics became so extreme that his relatives suppressed his *Fragments of a Tour through the*

Universe, which attacked not only slavery and the press-gang, but also war and even the monarchy.³

Anna Letitia Barbauld remarked in 1789, as the British parliamentary campaign for abolition began to gain momentum, that slaves could not be heard unless people were willing to hear them: 'The voice of the Negroes could not have made itself heard but by the ear of pity; they might have been oppressed for ages more with impunity, if we had so pleased'.⁴ The most striking thing about this Prometheus poem, in comparison with the Aeschylean play, is indeed Prometheus' inability to make himself heard. The Greek tragic Prometheus is a formidable orator. He delivers a number of extraordinary speeches, ranging in time from prehistory to the far distant future, which express his unambivalent hatred of Zeus, anger at the injustice he suffers, and barely suppressed desire to be compensated for his sufferings. On the other hand, the Georgian poet Grahame gives a voice to the Furies (representing the planters, merchants and political figures who defended slavery), and agency to Britain in the form of Hercules, who liberated Prometheus in the lost *Prometheus Unbound* of Aeschylus. But to Prometheus – fettered, tortured, and finally delivered – there is granted in Grahame's poem little more than the status of scrutinised object and the capacity to suffer. He may breathe convulsively, moaning and 'imploring death', but he plays no role in his own emancipation, and unlike the Aeschylean hero has no apparent intellectual grasp of the historical reasons for his past servitude and imminent emancipation. The focus of the poem shifts speedily and decisively from him to his heroic (British) deliverer, who 'rends the chain'. For the slaves themselves to be thus overshadowed, or replaced altogether by self-congratulatory

personifications of Britain, British justice and busts of Wilberforce, was standard practice in the British iconography of the day,⁵ as exemplified in the Frontispiece to our volume.

Grahame's ineffectual, silenced Prometheus, in Smirke's vignette significantly still on his rock rather than standing side-by-side with Hercules, reflects what Marcus Wood has called 'the utterly problematic nature of the visual representation of slavery in Europe and North America'.⁶ The purposes of this chapter are threefold. It documents some key moments in the process by which Prometheus became adopted in abolitionist propaganda, but it also stresses how thinking about Prometheus can focus our attention on the 'utterly problematic nature' of the visual *and* literary representation of slavery, as well as the delicate relationship between abolitionism and other, more radical political causes.

The abolitionists' suffering, physical Prometheus ousted the intellectual Prometheus, derived ultimately from Hesiod, who had bestowed the light of human reason on matters obscured by religion and superstition, and therefore become an important point of identification for the European Enlightenment:⁷ the torch of the Enlightenment Prometheus, according to Rousseau, had been 'the torch of the Sciences made to quicken great geniuses'.⁸ The new abolitionist configuration of the hero in some ways harked back to the Prometheus of the Renaissance and Early Modern period, whose suffering on the rock was felt to anticipate Christ's passion on the cross;⁹ a particularly affecting depiction was the famous picture of Prometheus writhing under the eagle's onslaught painted by Rubens and Snyders in 1618. Prometheus' traditional omniscience, and his role in the physical creation of humans,¹⁰ meant that Christian fathers as early as Tertullian had compared him with their god (*Apol.* 18). But between the patristic, Renaissance and Early Modern thinkers and the abolitionists lay not only the

Enlightenment Prometheus but the Romantic Prometheus of Herder and Goethe, the poet-demiurge, whose gift of fire as inspiration could remake the world anew--an aesthetic and psychological revolutionary. Henry Fuseli reflects the general shift in contemporary responses to the Prometheus myth when in the first decade of the 19th century he created his unforgettable watercolour-and-pencil illustration of the brutal Aeschylean chaining of a physically vulnerable Prometheus to the mountain,¹¹ whereas in 1770-1 he had envisaged the chained Prometheus as a cosmic creator figure, bestowing fire on planet earth from an elevated celestial position.¹² The Aeschylean rather than the Hesiodic Prometheus also lies behind Grahame's antislavery poem and the illustration of it with which this chapter began.

Aeschylus had not been become available in any modern language, including English, until the 1770s. The possibility that Aeschylus might profitably be translated was entertained after the appearance of the Marquis J. J. Le Franc de Pompignan's French version of 1770, and the first English rendering of *Prometheus Bound*, by Handel's erstwhile librettist Thomas Morell, was incorporated into his attractive edition of 1773; this had reached a relatively wide audience since the leading figure in the contemporary theatre world, David Garrick, who had a strong interest in Greek tragedy, had been responsible for raising the subscription. Morell's edition was followed by the complete 1777 translation of Aeschylus by the Norfolk abolitionist Robert Potter, the massive effect of which was felt even earlier on visual artists than on poets and other writers.¹³ Potter, while having his portrait painted by George Romney, had told him the stories contained in Aeschylus' plays, and in 1778 Romney produced his famous series of chalk 'cartoons' of scenes from Aeschylus, including a powerful image illustrating the first

scene of *Prometheus Bound*.¹⁴ Shortly afterwards, in 1774, J.G. Schlosser published his German translation *Prometheus in Fesseln* in Basel, soon followed by versions in other European languages, including Ferenc Verseghy's Hungarian translation of 1792 and Melchiorre Cesarotti's Italian of 1794. The sudden accessibility of Aeschylus' play certainly lies behind the ease with which Prometheus became such a pervasive political icon for the Romantic period, representing, as Curran has shown, the ultimate triumph of liberty through steadfastness and courage against the evils of a tyrannical regime.¹⁵

At a time when slavery was climbing ever higher on the political agenda, however, any image of the chaining and fettering of a naked body almost inevitably triggered a connection with the terrible descriptions and images of punishments of slaves in the contemporary world that abolitionists were ensuring achieved widespread circulation. As Marcus Wood has documented, a pressing concern of the period was 'the ways in which artists in England and America drew, engraved, sculpted and painted the slave body as a site for the infliction of physical pain'.¹⁶ Even today, in a recent production of the *Aeschylus Bound* (directed David Kerr), which made no explicit reference whatsoever to slavery, critics remarked that it was absolutely impossible not to think about the history of the Atlantic slave trade and antebellum plantations when faced with the shackled body of the black actor David Oyelowo [Fig. 8.2]. In late 18th century and early 19th centuries, 'enchained Prometheus' pictures would have put their viewers in mind of the types of image of binding, fettering, whipping and other tortures that had been made all too familiar through the widely disseminated publication by Captain John Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Slaves of Surinam in*

Guiana (1793; a revised version with plates by William Blake including **Fig. 8.3** was published in 1796).¹⁷

The edition of the Greek text of Aeschylus by the renowned English classicist Richard Porson was published in 1795, interleaved with engravings by Tommaso Piroli of illustrations by John Flaxman, the artist so closely associated with Josiah Wedgwood (who also produced the famous 'Am I not a man and a brother' cameo).¹⁸ These engravings were published separately during the same year. *Prometheus Bound* could now be easily read in English, and its effect in performance helpfully visualised. The pictures of the binding scene and the Oceanids cowering at Prometheus' feet in Flaxman's 'The Storm' reveal an attempt to give the bearded Titan a distinctive, craggy physiognomy as well as a massive physique [**Fig. 8.4**]; the contrast with the familiar lineaments of the face of Hephaestus in profile above him in the binding scene is also quite marked. In 'The Storm', especially in Prometheus' overhanging forehead and angry, rolling eyes, more apparent in profile, there are traces of an attempt to make him suggestive of an angry African slave. It was through Potter's translation that access to the Aeschylean titan-victim-hero was suddenly offered to readers well beyond the classically trained elite in Britain in the late 1770s,¹⁹ at precisely the time when the abolitionist cause was beginning to make serious headway. It was through Flaxman's illustrations, however, that the abolitionists visualised Prometheus as an archetypal slave in need of unbinding.²⁰

Goethe's unfinished *Prometheus* (c. 1773) chronologically coincides with the rise of abolitionism, but also points forward to the problems presented to reformers by the victimised Titan. Goethe's poem begins to reveal unease with the threat of uncontrollable violence inherent within Promethean rebellion; for the Romantics, the problem with

Prometheus was that humanistic ideals and violence were ambiguously blended within a single figure.²¹ The 'Freiheit' for which Prometheus called, as the spokesman of *Sturm und Drang*, was tainted with arrogance and the threat of lawlessness, chaos and violent retaliation. Moreover, once Napoleon had forced the Holy Roman Empire to dissolve itself in 1806, a more explicitly political Prometheus appeared. The parallel was increasingly drawn by Napoleon's admirers, such as Goethe and the Italian poet and Homerist Vincenzo Monto, between the Titan and the man perceived as the brilliant, enlightened, modernising new Emperor who had dared challenge the authority of the rulers of the world.²² When disillusionment gradually crept into the Romantic presentation of Napoleon, however, especially after his confinement on Elba and his death, the parallel became most fully developed as this modern Titan's power was wrested from him. The ambivalence towards the 'magnificent failure' of Napoleon's project was illuminated by reference to the end of the Aeschylean *Prometheus Bound*, especially in the works of Byron and Blake, as Harold Bloom long ago demonstrated.²³

The 'dark side' of the politicised Romantic Prometheus, moreover, became welded with an older poetic antihero. In the English-speaking world at least, ever since Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Prometheus had also displayed diabolical features.²⁴ Consider these lines from Satan's speech to his confederate Beelzebub about God's superior strength (*Paradise Lost* 1.91-6):

...into what Pit thou seest

From what highth fal'n, so much the stronger prov'd

He with his Thunder: and till then who knew

The force of those dire Arms? yet not for those

Nor what the Potent Victor in his rage

Can else inflict do I repent or change...

In his note on this passage, Milton's 18th-century editor Thomas Newton plausibly commented:

Milton in this and other passages, where he is describing the fierce and unrelenting spirit of Satan, seems very plainly to have copied after the picture that Aeschylus gives of Prometheus.²⁵

Newton then quotes (in Greek) the Aeschylean Prometheus, where the Titan tells Hermes, Zeus' henchman, that that he will never reveal the secret which Zeus so desperately wants to hear:

So let his blazing lightning be hurled forth

And with the white-winged snow and subterranean

Thunder let him confound the world and make it reel!

For none of these things will bend my will to make me speak...²⁶

The Satanic associations of Prometheus reverberate through much Romantic literature, especially Shelley's profoundly Miltonic *Prometheus Unbound*, and are connected with the reception of the more dangerous side of Prometheus' intellectual prowess. This

Prometheus directly anticipates Carl Kerényi's archetypal trickster god of 'crooked' counsel in his classic work *Prometheus: das griechische Mythologem von der menschlichen Existenz* (first published at a time of profound meditation on the failure of another gargantuan imperialist enterprise in 1946).

The dangerous side of the Aeschylean Prometheus perhaps emerges most strongly in the surprising connections sometimes drawn by the Romantics between him and another unusual hero swallowed up into the underworld at the end of his story, Don Juan or Don Giovanni. The Satanic Don's ways of spending his time on earth may differ widely from those of the philanthropic and omniscient Titan, but the two figures are alike in suffering because they remain true to their convictions and defiantly refuse to give in to a higher power. In what today seems a strange imaginative leap, in 1817 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who was undoubtedly thinking of the Aeschylean drama, pointed out in chapter 23 of *Biographia Literaria* that the figures of Prometheus in chains and the remorse-free Don Giovanni are similarly unyielding and noble in the face of torment. In a comment on the final scene of Shadwell's Jacobean drama *The Libertine* (1676), where Don John tells the statue-ghost that is he is constitutionally unable to relent, Coleridge asks: 'Who also can deny a portion of sublimity to the tremendous consistency with which he stands out the last fearful trial, like a second Prometheus?'²⁷ Prometheus thus shared characteristics with a whole range of figures on the moral spectrum, from Christ as benefactor of mankind, tortured by a tyrannical state power, to the most intransigent archetypal sex-addicted libertine of the European imagination.

The Satanic aspect to Prometheus was never going to appeal to James Grahame, the author of our abolition poem 'Prometheus Delivered'. As a young man he always

carried a Greek or Latin classical author around in his pocket by day, but obsessively perused the Greek New Testament he kept at his bedside. He was a zealous Christian, even by the standards of the late 18th-century Glaswegian middle class: his biographer records that he once returned from a walk on Arthur's Seat near Edinburgh to spend 'the night alone in pouring out extempore hymns to god' in 'an enthusiasm of devotion.'²⁸ He was also capable of extremely vigorous articulation of his anger about social injustice, for example in his best-known poem 'The Sabbath', written in 1802. This includes a furious denunciation of the plantocrats who profess Christianity, but who enslave other men,

Stolen from their country, borne across the deep,
En'chain'd, endungeon'd, forced by stripes to live,
Doom'd to behold their wives, their little ones
Tremble beneath the white man's fiend-like frown!²⁹

He continues with the arresting scenario of the slave merchant 'whose trade is blood', convening 'his ruffian crew' on deck to hear the sacred service read on the Sabbath, enunciating the commandment 'Thou shalt do no murder' even as an African woman expires before her child's very eyes.

The difference between Grahame's Prometheus and the wrathful, morally outraged narrator of 'The Sabbath' is marked. So is the difference between his Prometheus and the voluble, articulate, angry protagonist of the ancient Greek play. So is the difference between Grahame's Prometheus and the enraged hero and first-person narrator of Goethe's, who sneers at Zeus with anger, condescension and implacable

antagonism.³⁰ So, for that matter, is the difference between Grahame's Prometheus and the hero of the poem 'Prometheus' published by the American James Russell Lowell in *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* (August 1843), who addresses Zeus in allegorical ways that associate him with the pro-slavery lobby, while predicting that his own 'patience...at last shall overcome'. But this patient Prometheus is a safely white member of Lowell's own radical clique on the reformist left wing of the Democratic Party.³¹

Grahame's poem therefore offers an important insight into the central theme of this chapter -- the difficulties faced by abolitionists when searching for source texts and archetypal images in classical myth and history with which to authorise their campaign. As Marcus Wood has argued, the slave had to be presented in very specific ways if his or her cause 'were to stimulate notions of guilt and culpability on the part of an educated English audience, while at the same time not frightening such an audience off through fear or disgust.'³² Despite his obvious similarities, as impaled philanthropist, with Jesus Christ, the inherently rebellious Prometheus did not correspond precisely enough to the sort of slave abolitionists needed to portray if they were to win over mainstream public opinion. Their iconic slave would be docile, acceptably Christian, very grateful, and once emancipated would present absolutely no further challenge to civilised society.

The challenge presented by Prometheus (as by 19th-century slaves) was what happened *after* his delivery. As Jean-Paul Sartre scathingly asked his white compatriots when they faced losing their colonies after World War II, 'When you removed the gag that was keeping these black mouths shut, what were you hoping for? That they would sing your praises? Did you think that when they raised themselves up again, you would

read adoration in the eyes of these heads that our fathers had forced to bend down in the very ground?'³³ It is perhaps helpful to think about the way that other ancient heroes have been found to fit – or not to fit – the experience of slaves and their descendants. In the later 19th and 20th centuries, several ancient Greek authors and mythical figures have become closely associated with the experience of slavery in works by former slaves and subsequently by anticolonial and postcolonial writers of ultimately African descent. It has been remarked that in Pauline Hopkins' *Contending Forces* (1900), the name of the beautiful Sappho, which associates her with one of the very few female poets of antiquity, signifies Hopkins' project as she 'fictionalizes women's collective efforts to create a countermythology'.³⁴ In *The Souls of Black Folk* W.E.B. Du Bois articulated the risk of black people taking 'one step forward and two back' during the industrialisation of the South by recounting the myth of Atalanta, tricked into a relationship with Hippomenes through the lure of golden apples;³⁵ he also returned repeatedly to the myth of the quest for the golden fleece, above all in his novel *The Quest for the Silver Fleece*, in which the ancient story, compressed from Apollonius' *Argonautica*, is actually narrated.³⁶ The fleece, for Du Bois, resonated profoundly with the involvement of expatriated and enslaved Africans in the cotton industry.

For Orlando Patterson in *The Children of Sisyphus* (1964), it was Sisyphus' punishment that represented the endless travail of the poor, descended from slaves, condemned in eternity to labour fruitlessly for tiny wages.³⁷ Countée Cullen's personal investment in the racial strife he saw depicted in Euripides' *Medea*, an investment revealed in his version of 1935, is transparent; although Toni Morrison has distanced herself from the connections critics have drawn between her *Beloved* (1987) and 19th-

century associations of Margaret Garner with the mythical Medea, it is incontrovertible that for many female novelists as well as theatre writers considering the experience of women under slavery, Medea has attracted attention on account of her ethnic difference from Jason, his arrogant assumption that she has no right to expect respect on account of bearing his children, and his failure to take responsibility for them and their future social status.³⁸ In the Caribbean and North America, for Aimé Césaire in *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939), for Ralph Waldo Ellison in *Invisible Man* (1952) and for Wilson Harris in *The Mask of the Beggar* (2003) as well as Derek Walcott in *Sea Grapes* and *Omeros*, the encounter between Odysseus and the Cyclops has been the focus of much analysis as the archetypal colonial encounter.³⁹ And in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, when the armoury of anti-slavery imagery was under construction, Prometheus was by no means the only classical mythical hero on whom abolitionist experiments were conducted.

Jean de Pechméja, for example, was intrigued by the story of Telephus, the son of Hercules with two ethnic identities – biologically Greek but culturally Mysian – who spent some of his life as a slave in the palace of Argive royal family.⁴⁰ Inspired by the novelistic form of Fénelon's *Les Aventures de Télémaque* (1699), but the political ideas of Montesquieu and Rousseau, in book VI of his utopian novel *Téléphe* (1780), Pechméja set out a plan for a system of free colonial labour. Acting as intermediary for a large band of fugitive slaves, Pechméja's *Téléphe* proposes to their former masters that they be recalled to the plantations 'not as slaves, but as citizens'.⁴¹ *Téléphe* was a useful enough figure for the anti-slavery sentiments at the time, since although he endured temporary enslavement and was brought up abroad he was of divine birth on his father's side and of

aristocratic Greek descent on his mother's. But it is hardly surprising that this relatively minor mythical figure failed to ignite the imaginations of most other activists.

American audiences looked to another Titan in addition to Prometheus. Joel Barlow's first edition of his epic of the 'discovery' and foundation of America (1787), then entitled *The Vision of Columbus*, did not yet contain the appeal for the slave that was put in the 1807 revised version with its newly Homeric title *The Columbiad*. Book 8 of the revised epic contained a whole new polemical episode in which Atlas, 'Great brother guardian of old Afric's clime',⁴² denounces to Hesper (America) the enslavement of Africans (Barlow, incidentally, was in contact with Robert Smirke, the painter of the vignette reproduced above, who also provided illustrations for Barlow's epic).⁴³

Enslave my tribes! What, half mankind imban,
Then read, expound, enforce the rights of man!
Prove plain and clear how nature's hand of old
Cast all men equal in her human mould!⁴⁴

Two paintings by J.M.W. Turner suggest that revenge for the inhuman crime of slavery can be inflicted by elemental natural forces, which are allegorically associated with two massive Greek mythical figures not dissimilar to Titans. In *Ulysses Deriding Polyphemus* (1829), it has been argued that Odysseus' ship, threatened by the vengeful fury of the bellowing Cyclops, consciously suggests an ancient slave galley; in *The Slave Ship or Slavers Throwing overboard the Dead and Dying — Typhon coming on* (1840), the violence of the oncoming storm may be rendered more powerful by the alternative title's

suggestion that it activated by the mythical personification of the whirlwind, and son of Earth, Typhon himself.⁴⁵

When a British playwright attempted to find a satisfactory hero in a Greek myth to stage in a tragedy to celebrate the 1833 abolition of slavery, he encountered such difficulties that was forced to invent a new pseudo-Greek tragic mythical plot and slave-hero altogether. In 1836 Thomas Noon Talfourd, a radical Liberal MP, abolitionist and Chartist sympathizer, adapted Euripides' *Ion* in order to celebrate all the reforms instigated by the Liberal party, especially the Great Reform Act of 1832, which had massively extended the male franchise. The play was performed at Covent Garden, to great acclaim, with the avowed Republican William Charles Macready in the starring role [Fig. 8.5]. But in Talfourd's attempt to write a play more specifically about slavery, *The Athenian Captive* (1838), he had to invent a plot involving a male slave (Thoas, a Euripidean name) who (somewhat like both Oedipus and Ion) does not know that he is the long-lost son of the Corinthian tyrant Creon and his wife, an Athenian aristocrat. The (apparently) ordinary citizen Athenian Thoas, now a prisoner of war and enslaved, refuses to take off his helmet in front of the king; when offered the choice of slavery or death, he responds, 'Dost dare | Insult a son of Athens by the doubt | Thy words imply?' The play's most theatrically powerful feature is the contrast between Thoas' first armoured, helmeted entry in Act I and his second, in a slave's garb, in Act II. When Lycus, the wicked slave-master comes to give him servile dress, Thoas laments,

Must an Athenian warrior's free-born limbs
Be clad in withering symbols of the power
By which man marks his property in flesh . . . ?

Talfourd did really mean it: the *Reading Mercury* of 5 May 1838 reports that he spoke with considerable passion on the subject of ‘Negro Emancipation’ at a public meeting in his constituency. The action of his play underlines the equality of all members of mankind and the inhumanity of slavery, especially in the friendship between Hyllus and Thoas, which transcends superficial markers of status and race, and Hyllus’ fantasy that he and Thoas can exchange clothes and thus erase the social boundary dividing them.⁴⁶

The more mature members of Macready's public at the performance of *The Athenian Captive* will have recalled that, twenty years before, he had starred as Gambia, the African slave who leads a revolt in Surinam in Thomas Morton's *The Slave: A Musical Drama*, 'as performed at the Theatre-Royal, Covent-Garden. The Musick by Mr Bishop'.⁴⁷ Set in Surinam, the drama begins with the suppression of a slave revolt. The hero is Gambia, an African slave, who loves Zelinda, a ‘Quadroon’ slave, also beloved by Clifton, a captain in the English army. William Macready played Gambia and Miss Stephens played Zelinda, and the play is a celebration of the 1807 legislation. In the same year, Macready had also made his debut and caused a stir in the role of his notably – and as such much noted -- sympathetic black Othello.

Pechméja's plantation reformer Telephus, Barlow's new debate on slavery between an oratorical Titan Atlas and a personification of the West (an *agon* with no identifiable classical precedent), Turner's Polyphemus and Typhon, and Talfourd's invented, self-sacrificing mythical Greek idealist Thoas, therefore represented some experiments with giving abolition a mythical lustre without having to deal with the inherently troublesome Prometheus. The figure of the Titan's liberator, Hercules,

presented other difficulties, exemplified in *The New World*, a remarkable poem criticizing American slavery written in 1848-1850 by Marx and Engel's associate, the Chartist Ernest Jones, when in prison convicted of sedition. In the opening section Jones focuses on North America, conveying the doubleness of the British radical's view of that new nation after the abolition of slavery in the British colonies. Jones' poem offers an a useful context in which to explore how the often strained applications of ancient mythology in the political imagery of this period can elucidate the complexity of the relationship between the abolitionist movement and campaigns for other types of reform.⁴⁸ Since the American War of Independence, the new republic had offered an inspirational example at this time to British radicals and republicans, and Jones configures not the old but the new country, after independence had been secured, as a young Hercules who even as an infant could slay the British monarchy and religious intolerance.

Young Nation-Hercules! whose infant-grasp
Kingcraft and churchcraft slew, the twinborn asp!
What glorious visions for thy manhood rise,
When thy full stature swells upon our eyes!⁴⁹

Yet in Jones' picture the virtue of the new country is utterly compromised by its practice of slavery, which it has not outlawed despite the example set by the British abolitionism:

Ah! that the wisdom here so dearly bought
Would sanctify thy wild, luxuriant thought,
And righteously efface the stripes of slaves
From that proud flag where heaven's high splendour waves!

This Hercules, grown from revolutionary babyhood to corrupt adulthood, plays no further part in Jones' vision of the future and Prometheus does not appear. Towards the end of the poem, what Jones sees as the millennia-long persecution and domination of Africa comes to symbolize the oppression of the working people of the entire world, the victims of capitalist classes at home and imperialism abroad; as I have shown elsewhere, this procedure entails, remarkably for a Briton writing at this time, drawing a connection between British exploitation of colonial India and Britain's implication in the history of the slave trade.⁵⁰

Jones, the imprisoned Chartist, presents himself allegorically as an African, soon to take over first Europe and then the rest of the planet. Here Jones reveals the problems inherent in using ancient mythology when negotiating the perilous ideological seas between abolition and socialist revolution: he turns, rather than to myth, to the historical figure of Spartacus, supplemented (since Jones had received an excellent training in Classics at a German gymnasium, an education he was keen to display) by the much less familiar Ennus (or Eunus). This rebellious slave had led a Sicilian slave revolt in the second century BCE.⁵¹ Africa's example, configured by Jones as a resurrection of the *historical* ancient slave rebels Ennus/Eunus and Spartacus, can fire the dream of universal liberty dreamt by the new 'chained men' of Britain – the Chartist prisoners:

Deep in the burning south a cloud appears,
The smouldering wrath of full four thousand years,
Whatever name caprice of history gave,
Moor, Afrit, Ethiop, Negro, still meant slave!
But from the gathering evil springs redress,
And sin is punished by its own excess.../.../
Near and more near, and fiercer and more fierce,
East, West, and South, the sable legions pierce;
On! to the site, where ancient Rome once rose,
And modern towns in meaner dust repose.
Up, Ennus! tip! and Spartacus! awake!
Now, if you still can feel, your vengeance slake!

Ennus and Spartacus, whose example has liberated the world's slaves, can now help – in the imagination at least – to usher in universal suffrage.

The references in classically educated writers such as Jones and Talfourd (who had been Head Boy of Reading School under the ardent Hellenist Richard Valpy⁵²) are products of an age when Classics as a subject was becoming institutionalised on the school curriculum, and professionalised at university level in Europe and North America. This was at approximately the same time as the cultural imagination, Romantic and Gothic, became obsessed with slavery and was concomitantly expressing the social tensions created by political revolution and social liberation.⁵³ As Chris Baldick has

described it, humanity was seizing responsibility for 'recreating the world, for violently reshaping its natural environment and its inherited social and political forms, for remaking itself'.⁵⁴ Campaigners for women's rights, for example, inevitably saw the common ground shared by slaves and women themselves as un-enfranchised subjects. Mary Wollstonecraft had unambiguously identified the relationship of a married man to his wife with that of an owner to a slave in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792),⁵⁵ and feminist scholars have shown how important the anti-slavery movement was to the development of the movement for women's rights in both Britain and North America.⁵⁶ Indeed, one of the problems involved in the use of mythical references for slavery may have been that so many of the early abolitionists were women, and none of the obvious candidates – Prometheus, Atlas, or Telephus (let alone the historical Spartacus) – provided any point of identification for them, except insofar as the very few who wanted to display their knowledge of Greek, like Elizabeth Barrett Browning, could perhaps simultaneously display their commitment to antislavery when they published a translation of *Prometheus Bound*.⁵⁷

Paradoxically, however, one instantiation of the Prometheus myth that has been discussed intensively in relation to slavery is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* (1818). Malchow has argued in detail that the novel taps into contemporary ideas about non-whites, and in particular on fears and hopes of abolition in the West Indies. Malchow notes that in stage productions of *Frankenstein* the idea that the monster somehow expressed societal fears about emancipated slaves was made explicit through costume and other aspects of appearance.⁵⁸ Other critics have seen the monster, rather, as an expression of fears of electoral and parliamentary reform, indeed of

wholesale French-style revolution. But the point is surely that the mythical reference was multivalent. Promethean liberation meant different things to different captors and captives: Byron used Prometheus to stand for homegrown Irish rebels in 'The Irish avatar' (1821).⁵⁹ The Prometheus of the other Shelley (Percy Bysshe) in *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) is perhaps the darkest and most threatening of all, since he is essentially another version of the same character as the tyrant Jupiter, in accordance with Shelley's cyclical view of history. The slave, when liberated, may become the despot himself. As Stuart Curran has pointed out, Jupiter's final speech in *Prometheus Unbound* act III, scene i, which relates his descent into the abyss with Demogorgon, imitates the progression of Prometheus' dialogue throughout act I ('Ai! Ai! / . . . I sink . . . /Dizzily down—ever, forever, down...'). Jupiter is ousted from his throne, the subject rather than the tyrant of fate embodied in the figure of Demogorgon or 'Eternity' (III, i, 79-83; 52). Throughout Jupiter's dialogue, Shelley uses the volcanic imagery associated throughout act II with Demogorgon and revolutionary change.⁶⁰ Indeed, in the face of his punishment, the tyrant Jupiter himself becomes suddenly becomes a slave, appealing for mercy from Prometheus, and ultimately displaying as much nobility of character as his former torture victim, reconciling himself to his fate, even as he is slowly swallowed up by flame and smoke.⁶¹

Yet in the Prometheus myth's great strength as a fluid category for the representation of ethical, aesthetic and socio-political concerns, which explains its pervasive attractiveness in the era under discussion, also lay the greatest problem it presented to artists and campaigners for abolition. Promethean politics, if allowed to get out of hand, might lead to the total breakdown of all inhibitions, restrictions, controlling

mechanisms and structures that upheld hierarchies, taboos and imperatives -- and therefore civilisation itself. It was not simply a fear of the revenge that many who opposed abolition assumed emancipated slaves would inevitably take in the form of savage reprisals against their former oppressors, although such fears were indeed a factor. Nor was it anxiety about the practical problems involved in transferring large groups of people from one legal and economic status to another in the immediate aftermath of emancipation, an anxiety which was shown to be fully justified when the ending of slavery in each different context ‘was followed by a variety of adjustments and struggles’ over ex-slaves’ terms and opportunities for labour, as well as their civil and legal rights.⁶² ‘Promethean’ politics had a particular resonance in an era which was seeing the emergence of international socialism. Talfourd himself talked about the ‘Promethean’ heat of class struggle after the Peterloo massacre of 1819,⁶³ the man who actually invented the term ‘communism’, a 19th-century Christian socialist and Chartist named John Goodwyn Barmby, in 1842 published the first issue of his call for socialism and entitled it *The Promethean; or Communist Apostle*. The case of Prometheus shows more clearly than any classical point of reference during this period the impossibility of keeping abolition isolated from other issues of social and legislative reform.

Needing to distance themselves from class politics, Chartism, and communism, abolitionists, especially in America, emphasised that Prometheus was the *victim* of arbitrary and despotic violence. By the early 1840s, American sources can be seen adopting the victim Prometheus as abolitionist figurehead enthusiastically. A good example is the massive, elemental Prometheus picture (now in San Francisco) on which the British-born American painter Thomas Cole embarked on his in 1846 [Fig. 8.6]; it

was designed from the outset to be a major piece of public art for display in a prominent venue, the exhibition held at Westminster Hall, London as part of a competition for new pictures to hang in the Houses of Parliament, newly rebuilt after the fire of 1834. Cole, a passionate believer in the morally and politically transformative power of art, in 1846 had cited as his example as an artist an ancient Greek anecdote. This was Plutarch's story in his *Life of Nicias* ch. 29 of 'the Athenian captives whom the poetry of Euripides saved from slavery and death'. Cole appended to his discussion of this tale the comment, 'Nor have the plastic arts been without their touching incidents, though often unrecorded perhaps'.⁶⁴

The art critic Patricia Junker notes that Cole was inspired to paint Prometheus shortly after the notable abolitionist Henry David Thoreau had published his own translation of *Prometheus Bound* in the *Dial* (January 1843), introducing it merely by saying he had been attracted to the play on account of 'the increasing value which this great allegory is acquiring'.⁶⁵ Like all transcendentalists, Thoreau loved Greek myth and used it often,⁶⁶ but Junker adds that the decision was taken in the immediate aftermath of the rapturous reception accorded to Hiram Powers' sculpture *The Greek Slave*, unveiled in London in 1845 [Fig. 8.7]. Powers' chained naked woman is very white, and was herself originally conceived in response to tales of atrocities committed on Greek women by the Ottoman Turks in the 1820s. But Power was (like Cole) a committed abolitionist, and in America the sculpture undoubtedly fed antislavery sentiments to an extent that made a considerable political impact.⁶⁷ It seems that Cole had a specific political reason for choosing to portray the fettered Titan, a reason he shared with another American painter of an anti-slavery Prometheus picture at this time, William Page, who was explicit

that 'Prometheus is not a dead Greek fable but to us a living type'⁶⁸ (without saying exactly a living type of *what*).

By the date of Powers' statue it was also possible to recognise a reference to the myth of the tortured Titan and his need for delivery from even lightly referenced images. The cover of the *American Anti-Slavery Almanac* for 1844, for instance, offers an unmistakable allusion to the myth through the simple position of the vulnerable black slave mother, prone on the ground but shielding her baby from the onslaught of the aggressive eagle [Fig. 8.8]. Near the patriotic symbol of the Capitol building, the stars and stripes floating overhead (the symbolism of both of which is ironically subverted), the American eagle is co-opted as a vicious raptor in a clear but inexplicit reference to the Prometheus myth.⁶⁹ But the very substitution of a woman with a very young baby for a muscular Titan offers another clue to the difficulties that Prometheus presented to abolitionists, who were casting the proponents of slavery in the role of Zeus. If you free Prometheus, then where will the challenges he presents to the established order end? By the 1840s, as we have seen, Prometheus was widely associated with revolutionary politics that went far beyond the abolition of slavery. Karl Marx represented the censorship imposed on his revolutionary newspaper *Die rheinische Zeitung* as a scene from *Aeschylus Bound*: Marx is chained to his printing press, tortured by the eagle of Prussian censorship, and comforted by Oceanids who have become fused with Rhine maidens [Fig. 8.9]. When addressing a mainstream North American audience, it was much more strategic to present Prometheus as a helpless and vulnerable mother and infant in need of protection. The dangerous potential for social upheaval unleashed by delivering Prometheus is almost certainly why Frederick Douglass seems to have stepped back

from making too obvious the debt his self-representation owed to the archetypal tale of Prometheus' defiant 'anti-conversion' in his biography. Along with the even more problematic Miltonic Satan, Prometheus lurks beneath his account of his momentous decision to fight the brutal 'slave-breaker' Edward Covey rather than submit to yet another beating. Douglass is here presented as one who moves 'outside the social structure and ideational superstructure of the white gods',⁷⁰ but the overwhelming dominance of the Christian element in the abolitionist movement made the subversive Titan far too problematic to be adopted as a simple mythical forebear.

At least one scholar has argued that the issue came down fundamentally to colour and race. According to this view, it was difficult for any but the most radical opponents of slavery (whose views went far beyond abolition of slavery to extend to equality for all men legally, electorally and economically) even to *imagine* a Greek hero like Prometheus as anything other than white-skinned. In the days of a nearly universal European and North American white subscription to the idea that the Greeks were biologically as well as (after William Jones' researches in India) linguistically descended, like the Britons and Teutons from white Indo-Europeans, black Greeks were almost inconceivable. Jared Hickman, for example, has asserted that the insistence 'on Prometheus's whiteness....was more than yet another expression of the white sentimental imagination's inability to countenance black suffering except as registered in its own visceral response.'⁷¹ From America, Hickman cites an anonymous poem in an 1853 issue of *The National Era*, 'Freedom's Apostles,' which presented not the black slave but the white abolitionist as the Promethean captive, 'fettered on the shore of Freedom's sea.' He could have added the Yale-educated James Gates Percival's massive poem 'Prometheus' (1859), which

contrasts the (ludicrously idealised) 'free' ancient Greek world, identified with Prometheus and with abolitionists, and the corrupt disrespect for freedom that marks his contemporary world.⁷²

Matters were further complicated by the association of Prometheus with the site of his confinement in the Caucasus, since this territory had recently been identified by the Göttingen polygenist Christoph Meiners, and subsequently in the craniometric racial theories of Johann Blumenbach, as the place where the ideal white western Europeans had originated. Blumenbach's *De generis humani varietate nativa (On the Natural Varieties of Mankind)*, a University of Göttingen dissertation published in 1776, was one of the most influential works in the development of subsequent concepts of human 'races' and the new meaning of the term 'Caucasian'. It was a simple enough conceptual move in the 1830s to 1850s to connect (white) Caucasian and Circassian rebels against tsarist serfdom, such as Sufi Shamil, with Prometheus, as both Russian and American writers did regularly; Shamil's fellow serfs, rather than the 1832 British Reform Act, are celebrated in this apostrophe to the Titan in Thomas Kibble Hervey's 'Prometheus' poem (which was, according to its author, directly inspired by Aeschylus' play):⁷³

Forgotten never! – Spirit unsubdued!
Amid that land of frozen plains and souls,
Are beating hearts that wake long, weary nights,
Unseen, to listen to thy far-off sigh;
And stealthily the serf, amid his toils
Looks up to see thy form against the sky.

O for the day of rising! When thy voice
Shall shake the mountains, and its trumpet tones
Wake up an hundred echoes on the plains...⁷⁴

It was however quite another matter to imagine what might happen if Promethean black men rebelled in the Caribbean or Tennessee. Indeed, Hickman points out that in a strange instance of the 'Promethean slave' trope, the blackness of a prominent slave rebel needed to be remarked upon in order to clarify the reference. In an *Atlantic Monthly* article (February 1860), Thomas Wentworth Higginson heroized the (by Higginson's time) near-legendary Jamaican Maroon uprising of the 1730s, led by Captain Cudjoe (an escaped slave descended from Ashanti people of the Gold Coast), by identifying them as 'the Circassians [i.e. Caucasians] of the New World, but they were black, instead of white.'⁷⁵ Cudjoe could only be conceived as a black congener of the 'true' Promethean, the Caucasian rebel Schamyl, leader of the largely Muslim but acceptably pale Dagestan and Chechen mountaineers. 'Promethean' black rebellion is here valorized only by reference to a white one.

Although there is some truth in these observations, it seems to me that the problem with Prometheus was far more serious and complicated than a simple matter of his skin colour. As we have seen, a black female Prometheus appeared on an American abolition publication in the 1830s; she almost certainly echoes Blake's *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), especially plate 6, in which the eagle's assault on the (female) rape victim Oothoon, the benign personification of America, is usually

understood as an allegorical representation of (amongst other things) American exploitation of its slaves.⁷⁶ This interpretation seems particularly plausible given what Bromion, the thunder-god who has raped her, says in the text close to this image:

Thy soft American plains are mine, and mine thy north & south:

Stamp't with my signet are the swarthy children of the sun;

They are obedient, they resist not, they obey the scourge:

Their daughters worship terrors and obey the violent.⁷⁷

Oothon represents the Arcadian natural environment of North America, superimposed on which are the 'swarthy children of the sun', who obey the scourge and the violent.

Another American Prometheus who was used in the most mainstream and least politically unsettling abolitionist culture of the mid-19th century was the equally helpless elderly Prometheus of Nathaniel Parker Willis' poem 'Parrhasius'. This strand in the reception of Prometheus allowed 'single-issue' poets to protest against the cruelty of slavery without incurring the risk of suggesting that any other social reform might be necessary or desirable. Martial's account of the execution of criminals sometimes taking the form of the amphitheatre staging of the death of Prometheus had circulated fairly widely in English-speaking poetic circles since Thomas May's English translation of *Selected Epigrams of Martial* had appeared in 1629:

As to the Scythian rock Prometheus bound,

Fed stil a bird with his breasts deathless wound

Laureolus on no false gibber nere,

So yeelds his brest a Calidonean beare
His torne bloud-dopping members liv'd one wound,
And in's whole body was no body found.
Sure he, that fuster'd thus, with impious sword
Murder'd his Father, or had staine his Lord;
Or rob'd the temples of their sacred gold,
Or tired Rome, What ere, that crime of old
His crime surpast; so what they did invent
Of t'others harme, was his true punishment.⁷⁸

But a much more useful Prometheus for the abolitionists was included in the appalling account preserved in the elder Seneca's *Controversiae* 10.5 of the Athenian artist Parrhasius, who tortured an aged slave taken at Olynthus to death in order to capture the authentic appearance of the figure of Prometheus.⁷⁹ One of the most striking North American mid-19th-century poems using Prometheus presents an upsetting dissection of one human's ability repudiate any moral responsibility for the ignoring – indeed instigating – of another's acute physical suffering. In his 'Parrhasius', Nathaniel Parker Willis, a poet from Maine famous in his day, retells the story in a poem, ostensibly to comment on the appalling lengths to which ambition will force an artist to go.⁸⁰ But the effect focuses visual attention far more on the dying man. While he is given no more actual words to speak than most abolitionist Prometheuses, the poet's strategy forces the reader to strain to hear his groans of agony.:

The poem begins in the slave market, with the 'gray-hair'd and majestic old man / Chained to a pillar'. Exhausted, 'he lean'd / Prone on his massy chain', and his gore-smeared body in this posture forcibly reminds the painter of Prometheus. Having bought the slave and brought him to his studio, Parrhasius orders him to be bound and repeatedly revived, however often he may lose consciousness from pain: 'bend him to the rack / Press down the poison'd links into his flesh / And tear agape that healing wound afresh!' With mounting excitement Parrhasius reproduces his writhings and the quivering of his bloodshot eye, regretting only that he cannot reproduce in paint the sound of a 'dying groan'. In his final death throes, however, the slave becomes almost an individual as Parrhasius describes what he can hear:

‘Shivering! Hark, he mutters
Brokenly now—that was a difficult breath—
Another? Wilt thou never come, O Death!
Look! How his temple flutters
Is his heart still? Aha! Lift up his head!
He shudders—gasps—Jove, help him!—so—he's dead.’

The old slave, although almost completely objectified by the painter's eye within the poem and by the poem's external audience, is heard – faintly – in his own voice as he dies in agony. His suffering is a spectacle that the free white Willis displays to his free white audience; the slave is also an ancient Greek himself rather than an African; any 'Promethean' threat he might pose to his vicious owner and to society after emancipation

is also evaded by making sure that he is so very palpably dead. But the poem's depiction of his suffering remains an unusually arresting use of a classical source in the slavery debate, perhaps the more so because the rest of Willis' oeuvre is so conservative, sentimental and anodyne. Indeed, it is not even clear that he was committed to abolition. His longtime domestic servant was Harriet Jacobs [Fig. 8.10], the redoubtable author of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861); in the latest edition of what has been called her 'veiled autobiography',⁸¹ Willis appears rather marginally as the singularly unappealing 'Mr Bruce', a sympathiser with the South. Willis was--if a reformer at all--only a single-issue one, and uses Prometheus only in the Titan's least threatening incarnation – aged, in agony, voiceless, a victim, and in the end conveniently dead.⁸²

This chapter has explored some ways in which classical mythology was used during the abolition debates between the late 18th century and the mid-19th century, in both Britain and North America. It has argued that mythological precedents and archetypes proved remarkably thin on the ground when it came to framing and elaborating the struggle for abolition, and that it was inevitable therefore that Prometheus, bound and unbound, came to dominate the world of classical mythical reference in the cultural discourse surrounding slavery. Prometheus, however, proved problematic. His association with dangerous rebels such as Milton's Satan and the libertine Don Juan compromised his status as a forerunner of the crucified Christ; his widespread adoption by very radical political causes, especially Chartism and revolutionary socialism, meant that single-issue abolitionists had to confine their appropriations of his myth to a very few of its dimensions: victimhood, suffering, and delivery by a superhero identified with benevolent whites. Prometheus was used extensively by abolitionists, in the face of a

shortage of alternative mythical candidates, but only after he had been silenced, deprived of his exceptional intelligence and foresight, stripped of his more threatening aspects (desire for revenge, implacability, ability to force major compromises with the established authority), and indeed often reconfigured as a vulnerable woman or a very old man.

Examining the problem that the abolitionists had with Prometheus therefore reveals much about the possibilities of uncovering strands in social and psychological history through enquiring into the shapes taken by the presence of the classical past. It is in the need to find authority from the past in the form of a classical hero in order to add both moral legitimacy and aesthetic sheen to a far-reaching reform, and also in the radical surgery that had to be performed on the hero to make him usable, that we can sense how deep the anxieties about emancipation ran. But its eventual and gradual success also kindled great hopes, inspired more extensive reform and underlay later 19th-century hopes for a fairer future. Not for nothing is Daniel Deronda, the radical agitator shackled by his health, likened implicitly to Prometheus on his rock in George Eliot's 1876 novel.⁸³ To conclude on a less depressing and appropriately edifying note, here is a short poem entitled simply 'Prometheus' by the Scotsman and utopian visionary Ebenezer Storey (or Storry) Hay (pen-name 'Fleta'), a solicitor who emigrated to New Zealand:⁸⁴ By leaving the second stanza metrically incomplete, 'Fleta' implies that history awaits a new chapter altogether. The problem with Prometheus was not so much that he was eventually unbound. The real problem was the danger he posed to the established order. He had unique knowledge which could either keep Zeus on his throne or depose him. This meant that he was able to force Zeus into a compromise of cosmic proportions: the

humans he had befriended never did give back fire, the world-transforming primordial privilege which Prometheus had wrested from the elite gods, the Olympian master class.

How long, devouring vultures, will ye pierce
With sharp and sluttish bills my flesh, and tear
With agonising wrench your bloody fare
From my exhaustless sides? Relentless, fierce,
Meet ministers of Jupiter ye are!
Whose gifts to men are massacre and war,
And trampling pride, and all that is averse
To that sweet lore I filched them from afar.

But I, who have foreknowledge of all things,
Know the predestined hour will come when He
And all the race of tyrants and of kings
Must fall, and man in brotherhood be free---
Then all these sleepless years and your foul stings
Shall have for guerdon Love and Liberty.⁸⁵

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- ¹ Hickman (2008), although he ascribes the poem, incorrectly, to James Montgomery.
- ² The question of the disputed authorship of the play is irrelevant to this chapter, since in the period under discussion hardly anyone doubted that it had been composed by Aeschylus.
- ³ The only known existing copy is held in the rare-book collection of the Newberry Library, Chicago. See Bayne (2004).
- ⁴ Barbauld (1825), vol. 1, 81.
- ⁵ Wood (2000), 4.
- ⁶ Wood (2000), 4.
- ⁷ See Raggio (1958); Jolle (2004), 398.
- ⁸ Cited in Ziolkowski (2000), 112-13.
- ⁹ The comparison receives its most fulsome expression in Edgar Quinet's dramatic poem *Préface à Prométhée* (1857), where Prometheus is liberated by two Archangels and converts to Christianity.
- ¹⁰ This tradition was derived from the account of his modelling of men from mud in Apollodorus' *Bibliothèque* i.7.1.
- ¹¹ Now in the City of Auckland Art Gallery, New Zealand, reproduced in Tate Gallery (1975), 81.
- ¹² Tate Gallery (1975), 84.
- ¹³ Hall and Macintosh (2005), 209-10.
- ¹⁴ The cartoon, which is held in Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool, is available to be studied permanently online at www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/walker/exhibitions/romney/cartoons/cartoons13.aspx.
- ¹⁵ Curran (1986b), 260-84.
- ¹⁶ Wood (2000), 216.
- ¹⁷ See Mellor (1995), 351-6.
- ¹⁸ See above p. 000 and fig. 000
- ¹⁹ See further Hall and Macintosh (2005), ch. 7.
- ²⁰ For the interplay between abolitionist iconography and Flaxman's illustrations of Aeschylus, see also Maurice Lee (2005), 185.
- ²¹ Leidner (1989), 178. For an excellent recent discussion of the Romantics' Prometheus see Corbeau (2005), esp. chs. 2-3.
- ²² See Trousson (1976), vol. 2, 336-9; Podlecki (2005), 52.
- ²³ Bloom (1960), 79-80.
- ²⁴ Werblowsky (1952), 47-8.
- ²⁵ Newton (1749), vol. 1, 17.
- ²⁶ Newton calls this *Prometheus Bound* lines 991-4; in modern colometry it is actually lines 992-5.
- ²⁷ Coleridge (1817), vol 2, 219; see further Quillin (2005).
- ²⁸ Clarke (1868), 203-4
- ²⁹ See the text reproduced in Clarke (1868), 234.
- ³⁰ See Jolle (2004), 396.
- ³¹ See further Junker (2000), 49-50.
- ³² Wood (2000), 23.
- ³³ Sartre (1969 [1948]), 5.
- ³⁴ Campbell (1986), 39.

- ³⁵ W. Du Bois (1966 [1903]), 263-6; see further Brodwin (1972), 307-9 and Cowherd (2003).
- ³⁶ W. Du Bois (1911), 71-3.
- ³⁷ Sisyphus provides an excellent example of the susceptibility of Greek mythical figures to appropriation by individuals holding diametrically opposing views. The well-educated South Carolina plantation owner Louisa McCord, a vociferous proslavery thinker, in a review of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had likened the southern slaveholders' need to refute 'foul load of slander and villainous aspersion' laid on their shoulders to the labour of Sisyphus, except that his punishment was in a sense of deserved, whereas the slaveholders were entirely innocent of any crime: McCord (1853), 81.
- ³⁸ See Wetmore (2003), ch. 4 and also Malamud, below pp. 000.
- ³⁹ See Hall (2008a), ch. 7 and McConnell (2009).
- ⁴⁰ The story was told in the fragmentary tragedy *Telephus* by Euripides, which was parodied in Aristophanes' extant *Acharnians*. See also Pausanias i.4.9 and Hyginus *Fab.* 100-101, Ovid, *Met.* 12.112, *Trist.* 5.2.15, *Remed. Am.* 47, *Epist. ex Ponto* ii. 26..
- ⁴¹ de Pechméja (1780), vol. 6, 216-17; see Seeber (1937), 157.
- ⁴² Barlow (1807), 292.
- ⁴³ The paintings were commissioned by the Pennsylvania Academy, which exhibited eleven of them in 1807, and reproductions included in the edition published that year, Barlow (1807).
- ⁴⁴ Barlow (1807), 293.
- ⁴⁵ Many critics have, I think incorrectly, assumed that 'Typhon' is an old way of spelling 'Typhoon', which would remove the sense of a primal divinity retaliating against the slave traders. But the spelling typhoon, according to the OED, was certainly standard by 1840: see for example Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* II.iv.170. For a fascinating discussion of *The Slave Ship* in relation to Thomas Sothard's proslavery engraving 'The Voyage of the Sable Venus' (1793), see Wood (2000), 53-4.
- ⁴⁶ See Hall and Macintosh (2005), 303-7.
- ⁴⁷ Morton (1816).
- ⁴⁸ On the ambivalent equation drawn by the Chartists between the British working class and black slaves, see Mays (2001).
- ⁴⁹ Citations from Jones' poem are taken from Jones (1857).
- ⁵⁰ Hall (2010b), 44-9.
- ⁵¹ For the ancient sources on the slave revolt led by Eunus at Enna, in central Sicily, see Diodorus Siculus 34/35.2.1-48 and Strabo 6.2.6. There is today a large bronze statue of Eunus ('Euno') breaking his chains beneath the walls of the Castello di Lombardia in Enna.
- ⁵² On Valpy, himself no antislavery campaigner, see this volume above, pp. 000.
- ⁵³ See e.g. Malchow (1993), 90.
- ⁵⁴ Baldick (1987), 5.
- ⁵⁵ See e.g. Wollstonecraft (1792), 144-5:
- ⁵⁶ Mellor (1995); Kearns (1960), 120.
- ⁵⁷ See Hardwick (2000).
- ⁵⁸ Malchow (1993).
- ⁵⁹ On the Romantic Prometheus in general see Dougherty (2006), 93-115.
- ⁶⁰ Curran (1986a), 201
- ⁶¹ Quillin (2005), 15.
- ⁶² Engerman, Drescher and Paquette (2001), 423.
- ⁶³ Brain (1904), 84-5.
- ⁶⁴ Cole, MS comment cited in Junker (2000), 47.

⁶⁵ So Junker (2000), 49. Thoreau also subsequently translated the *Seven against Thebes*, having begun to work on Aeschylus in 1839, during a period when he was in very close correspondence with Ralph Waldo Emerson. At this time Thoreau professed himself extremely interest in the figure of ‘the brave man’: see Kaiser (1960), 3. For discussions of Thoreau’s education and reading in the Classics, see Seybold (1951) and Kaiser (1953).

⁶⁶ Maurice Lee (2005), 186-7. Margaret Fuller, the transcendentalist whose twin causes were feminism and abolitionism, strongly encouraged other women to study Greek myth, especially stories involving figures such as Prometheus and Minerva who represented mental faculties. See Capper (1987), 517. Her study of German literature had included making a translation of Goethe’s ‘Prometheus’, according to Schulz (1942), 175.

⁶⁷ Junker (2000), especially 54 n.48.

⁶⁸ Unpublished and unfinished essay by Page on the poetry of Lowell, cited in Junker (2000), 50.

⁶⁹ Davis (1998), 71-2.

⁷⁰ Andrews (1986), 229.

⁷¹ Hickman (2008).

⁷² See Percival (1859), vol. 2.

⁷³ See the epigraph to the poem (reproduced in Hervey (1866), 225-7), which is discussed for its political fervour but without reference to the serf uprising in Trousson (1976), vol. 2, 344-5.

⁷⁴ Hervey (1866), 227.

⁷⁵ ‘The Maroons of Jamaica’, reproduced in Higginson (1889) 116-50 at p. 116.

⁷⁶ Curran (1986*a*), 444 with 448 fig. 2; Podlecki (2005), 57; Hutchings (2001).

⁷⁷ Blake (1965), 45.

⁷⁸ May (1629), no. 7 (no page number).

⁷⁹ For a brilliant discussion of the ancient text and its relevance to modern discussions of the limits of realism see Morales (1996).

⁸⁰ Willis (1850), 77-82.

⁸¹ Baker (1999,) 4.

⁸² The Parrhasius story was used after the American Civil War in a pseudo-classical tragedy by the Louisiana playwright Espy Williams, written in 1878, and performed often in New Orleans until at least 1889. The slavery issue was deracialised and complicated in another direction by making Parrhasius’ wife the longlost daughter of the slave whose torture was central to the plot. A shortened version of Williams’ *Parrhasius* was then produced by the famous Shakespearean actor Robert Mantell, with some success, in provincial theatres in San Francisco, Memphis and Kansas: see Nolan (1961).

⁸³ At the end of ch. 16, Deronda’s psychological suffering is likened to ‘the cry of Prometheus’; see also the motto at the head of ch. 38.

⁸⁴ Reproduced from Sladen (1888), 215; Hay had published some of his own poems in his study of Wordsworth (1881).

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