

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHORUS IN *PROMETHEUS BOUND*

WILLIAM C. SCOTT
Dartmouth College

ἄλλο τι φώνει καὶ παραμυθοῦ μ'
ὅ τι καὶ πείσεις· οὐ γὰρ δὴ που
τοῦτό γε τλητὸν παρέσυρας ἔπος.
πῶς με κελεύεις κακότητ' ἄσκειν;
μετὰ τοῦδ' ὅ τι χρὴ πάσχειν ἐθέλω·
τοὺς προδότας γὰρ μισεῖν ἔμαθον,
κοῦκ ἔστι νόσος
τῆςδ' ἦντιν' ἀπέπτουα μᾶλλον.

The final words of the Oceanids in the concluding scene of the *Prometheus Bound* (1063–70) are on any account surprising.¹ The water nymphs so strongly reject Hermes' direct commands that any audience must be struck not only by their resolve but also by the vehemence of their words. Yet critics have had difficulty in finding proper motivation for these final lines; does their will suddenly stiffen or has their resistance been growing from an earlier point to reach its strongest statement at the play's conclusion? This question is made no easier by the diplomatic tone of their immediately preceding speech urging Prometheus to rethink his own situation and to relax his

¹ I have used the Oxford Classical Text edited by D. Page (Oxford 1972). The following books and articles have been of special importance in the preparation of this article and will be cited only by the author's name:

Conacher, D. J., *Aeschylus' "Prometheus Bound": A Literary Commentary* (Toronto 1980).

Ewans, M., "Prometheus Bound" *Ramus* 6 (1977) 1–14.

Griffith, M., *The Authenticity of "Prometheus Bound"* (Cambridge 1977) = *Authenticity*.

———, *Aeschylus "Prometheus Bound"* (Cambridge 1983) = *APB*.

Inoue, E., "Prometheus as Teacher and the Chorus's Descent, *PV* 278ff.," *CQ* 27 (1977) 256–60.

Kranz, W., *Stasimon* (Berlin 1933).

Long, H. S., "Notes on Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*," *Proc. Amer. Phil. Soc.* 102 (1958) 229–80.

Sienkewicz, T. J., "The Chorus of *Prometheus Bound*: Harmony of Suffering," *Ramus* 13 (1984) 60–73.

Scott, W. C., *Musical Design in Aeschylean Theater* (Hanover, N.H. 1984).

Taplin, O., *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Oxford 1977) 270–72.

Thomson, G., *Aeschylus, The Prometheus Bound* (Cambridge 1932).

Unterberger, R., *Der Gefesselte Prometheus des Aischylos Tübinger Beiträge* 45 (Stuttgart 1968).

stubbornness (1036–39).² The reason for their new-found strength and the resultant change of tone is to be sought in the development of their will during the play. As they watch and participate in the events of the drama they lose not only their original naïveté but also their timidity.

From their first entrance the Oceanids are not presented as beings who are unfamiliar to those in the play and without character. As soon as they begin to sing, Prometheus immediately recognizes them as the daughters of Oceanus and Tethys (136–40). But since they live in a cave and seem to come forth seldom, they are not worldly wise; indeed, they state that they have had to persuade their father to let them seek out the source of the piercing sound which has startled them. In addition, they tell Prometheus that they have been able to come only after losing their usual serious sense of restraint (134). They present themselves as being airborne³ and thus feel securely separated from Prometheus, and they may well be costumed in light, flowing robes to contrast with the heavily shackled, rugged Titan.⁴ Even from this first appearance on stage they seem timid, inexperienced in the world outside their protected cave, unassertive by habit, and eager to remain detached. Throughout the play they consistently show sympathy for those in pain, and while they may not have solutions, they constantly express the hope that suffering will cease (principally 160–63, 181–84, 242–45, 397–402, 472–75, 536–41, and 687–95).⁵ They continually urge behavior which is moderate, in accordance with custom, and crosses no boundaries to cause upset or distress (148–51, 180, 259–62, 402–5, 526–35, 887–907, 1036–39).⁶

On the assumption that the Oceanids are consistently dominated by their conservative attitudes, critics claim to have discovered in their final

² See Griffith, *ad loc.*: “[this comment] expresses surprisingly firm support for Hermes’ view, even to the extent of echoing his key words . . .”

³ See the recent discussions of staging a flying choral entrance with relevant bibliography by M. L. West, “The Prometheus Trilogy,” *JHS* 99 (1979) 136–39, Conacher, Appendix 2, 182–85, and Sienkewicz 64–65.

⁴ The poetic stage direction given by F. A. Paley, *The Tragedies of Aeschylus* (London 1879) at line 127 captures much of the spirit of this entrance: “The introduction of the Ocean nymphs is a beautiful conception, and finely carried out. Their language throughout breathes the purest virtue, modesty, and beneficence. Their character, as ministers of mercy and consolation, was obviously designed as a contrast to the unbending obstinacy of Prometheus, just as a skilful painter brings out a dark foreground by contrast with a light sky.” I have suggested the costuming of light robes to suit the facts that they have come with no shoes (135) and that they speak about being borne along by the breezes (132 and 280–81) and being light and swift in movement (278).

⁵ Sienkewicz analyses this characteristic fully and argues that it is the major motivating force in the chorus.

⁶ The Oceanids would provide a contrasting characterization to the more assertive Titans, the children of Earth and Sky, in the *Prometheus Unbound*. C. J. Herington has suggested that a series of different natural elements runs through the trilogy as a kind of subplot (*Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound* [New York and London 1975] trans. J. Scully and C. J. Herington, Appendix 101–2).

speech of defiance a discontinuity sufficient to interrupt the direction of the play or else to indicate an innate weakness in the chorus' resolve. A sampling of critical comment shows a high degree of frustration with these lines as well as a wide variety of proposed solutions. Bethe found the whole ending of the play false and reconstructed the proper ending with the chorus fleeing the harsh words of Prometheus at 937ff. rather than joining him;⁷ this staging is repeated in Robert Lowell's recent version of the play where the chorus become a series of tempters to the unyielding Titan.⁸ Wilamowitz surrenders to the power of the last scene in controlling the perceptions of the audience:

Im Grunde ist es anstössiger, dass die schüchternen Okeaniden, die den Prometheus wieder und wieder zur Nachgiebigkeit gemahnt haben, plötzlich sich mit seiner Sache identifizieren und freiwillig sein Los teilen, da es sie Verrat dünkt, von seiner Seite zu weichen. Auch hier gebot der theatralische Zwang, und die starke sinnliche Wirkung der Schlusszene lässt alle Überlegungen des Verstandes schweigen.⁹

Most recently, Mark Griffith has attempted to mitigate the harshness of the chorus' words by suggesting a kind of non-event:

it is better to assume (in accordance with the Chorus' cautious disposition, as manifested up to this point . . .) that their readiness to suffer with P. is never put into action, not really put to the test at all: the earthquake and whirlwind sweep him away before they can move to join or abandon him.¹⁰

But these are desperate remedies for a text which may not be so problematic. The initial characterization outlined above is agreed upon by all critics; if the chorus' last words are genuine, fully intended by the poet, and sincerely spoken, then there has been some change in their attitude, though not necessarily in their character. The events of the play will have worked their effect on this chorus, just as they have affected the attitudes of Oceanus, Io, and Prometheus. The question then becomes whether this change in attitude is sudden and unanticipated or has been building throughout the play and is perceptible in earlier scenes. If such passages can be identified, there will be seen to be a tighter logic to the development of the chorus than has been realized.¹¹ I will argue that the Oceanids throughout the play respond

⁷ E. Bethe, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Theaters in Alterthum* (Leipzig 1896) 175–78.

⁸ R. Lowell, *Prometheus Bound* (New York 1969).

⁹ U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Aischylos Interpretationen* (Berlin 1914) 126–27.

¹⁰ Griffith, *APB* on 1067.

¹¹ Such logic has been sought recently by Conacher 73: "Thus the Chorus put loyalty, however dangerous, above the safer conventional wisdom which they preached a moment earlier" and Ewans 8: "the chorus's heroic commitment to Prometheus at this moment seems the deeply appropriate culmination of the bond of *philia* which has increasingly joined them to him as the play unfolds." Sienkewicz's article focuses on many of the same passages as I do and arrives at similar conclusions on the presentation of the chorus as a consistent character. He stresses the growth of pity in the chorus as the major force motivating their final resistance. The present study will examine closely the words of the second and third stasima in order to show an earlier shift in the chorus' attitude towards defiance of Zeus' commands.

in conformity with their character to the events which unroll before them, but they undergo a striking shift in their perspective between the second and third stasima.¹² This re-evaluation is so fundamental that their statements prior to line 525 lead to and inform the second stasimon while those following line 907 are derived from the new understanding reached in the third stasimon.¹³

In the episode before the second stasimon (436–525) the Oceanids are the sole hearers of Prometheus' tale of his benefits to man, which are summed up in the boastful claim that "all arts come to men from Prometheus" (506). Their double reaction of caution and sympathy arises from their basic character: "don't help men too much" and "I hope to see you freed and no less powerful than Zeus" (507–10).¹⁴ Prometheus immediately corrects them by saying that fate has not designed things so simply and then hints at the possibility that Zeus will fall. Though they are eager to press him, Prometheus stops them because this is the secret which he must preserve. When he urges them to find some other theme, they begin their song.

In the first stanza they express the hope that the Zeus "who allots all things will never set his power against my intentions" (526–28). This prayer, coming immediately after Prometheus' hint that Zeus will be deposed, is built on the natural assumption that Zeus will be the eternal ruler of the universe.¹⁵ The Oceanids wish to serve Zeus and the other gods eagerly and

¹² I am here assigning to the chorus the same degree of change as Ewans who defines one of the major components of the play as the defiant spirit gained by the chorus: "Commentators have been less shocked than they should be by the ending, where these young women are elevated to heroic defiance of Zeus in a hatred of Zeus which proves the depth of their loyalty to Prometheus" (p. 7).

¹³ See Scott, *Musical Design* 173–74, who argues that the presence of a formally symmetrical ode dividing the action of the play is characteristic of Aeschylean style. The problem in associating *PV* 526–60 with this design is that the *Io* Scene seems much more a divider than the second stasimon in terms of plot and themes. Perhaps the playwright has conceived of the whole scene from 526–907 as pivotal and used the symmetrical second stasimon to introduce the whole conversion scene; this would be parallel in form to the extended scene at *Ag.* 975–1330 after a similarly shaped ode at 975–1034. See also Scott, "The Confused Chorus (*Agamemnon* 975–1034)," *Phoenix* 23 (1969) 336–64 and *Musical Design* 58–68.

¹⁴ This line is the first direct statement of allegiance to the cause of Prometheus; if it is taken literally, it is simply an astounding statement from a chorus which has been previously portrayed as timid. But more likely the members of the chorus are attempting to say something which is not to be understood so strictly; rather they seek to console their hearer (cf. 148–51, 163–67, 402–5).

¹⁵ Thomson on 542–80 and Conacher 55 note that the second stasimon offers a rejection of Prometheus' strong statements in the previous dialogue. Most commentators, however, do not feel that the chorus is consciously departing from Prometheus at this point, since they either fail to note a connection with the preceding scene or else they stress the chorus' being as a more or less independent agent; see Griffith *APB* on 526–60 who sees this chorus, as others, as "concerned, but to some extent detached, observers . . . contrasted with the extreme attitudes and sufferings of the protagonist, as they draw conventional but inadequate morals, and express their own little anxieties and preferences."

continually by the perpetual stream of their father Ocean. Optatives extend their wish into indefinite future time, and they emphasize by repetition that they want this resolve to remain fixed, never disappearing (535).¹⁶ Yet by the end of the play not only will they have allied themselves with Prometheus, the potential overthrower of Zeus, but they will also desert their home, ignore the commands of Hermes, and reject the rule of Zeus. So much for their pledges of perpetual piety.

There is, however, a sustained unconscious irony even in this strophe. The Oceanids want to be swift in their service at the banquets of the gods; yet the only example of swift service has been Hephaestus, who works rapidly from his fear of punishment (52–53). Aeschylus also knew that the only divinely-sponsored banquet mentioned in this play will be that of the eagle (1021–25). In addition, Zeus has indeed allotted (cf. *panta nemôn*, 526) everything—including pains to Prometheus. The “power” of Zeus which the chorus mentions is highly limited if the previous words of Prometheus are correct.¹⁷

The second stanza (536–43) begins with an assertion of choral optimism. Their criterion is sweetness, their outlook is far-sighted, and their attitude is one of confident hope in continuing growth within an atmosphere of good cheer. Of course, opposed to all of this is Prometheus: he causes them to shiver. Instead of growing, he is being worn away; instead of good cheer and festivities, he has toils and pains. He does not respect Zeus—worse yet, he worships men and that in excess.¹⁸

¹⁶ There is a small dispute over the referent of *tode* in line 535. Most commentators, including the Medicean scholiast, feel that the chorus is referring to their wish to serve Zeus expressed in 526–34; but Wecklein and Griffith *APB* interpret it as referring to the gnomic statement in 536–39. *Tode* is used by the chorus of this play to refer to the immediately preceding statement at 247, 249, and 252; with these passages as support I will use *tode* as a word referring to the content of the previous stanza.

¹⁷ There are many other ironies throughout this stasimon which reveal the gap between the chorus' ideal and the reality of Zeus's rule: 1. The chorus do not want Zeus to set his power against (*antipalon*, 528) them; they are using a metaphor more aptly applied to the adversary which Zeus is likely to beget at 920–21. Here they renounce all types of opposition to Zeus's will, but they have no conception of the ultimate contest which may be fought between Zeus and his rival. It may be significant that Aeschylus uses the word “*palaistês*” for Apollo's mating with Cassandra at *Ag.* 1206—a truer picture of what marriage with Olympians involves than the happy ceremonies celebrated by the chorus at 555–60. 2. The chorus tremble seeing Prometheus (*phrissô*, 540), but this is the discomfort of naïve souls before their first vision of suffering in contrast to Prometheus' more profound fear of the unknown (127 and 1090) or the debilitating, convulsive fear of Io (580 and 881). 3. They charge Prometheus with worshipping men (*sebei*, 543); Prometheus gives them two equivalents for this word applied directly to Zeus as their god (*proseuchou* and *thôptie*, 937) stressing the dependence and flattering adoration demanded by Zeus. 4. The chorus wish to lead a long life (537) in happiness; the only others mentioned as leading a long life are undeveloped men who find life befuddling under Zeus' rule without Prometheus at 449. 5. The chorus asks: “*tis ephameriôn arêxis*” (547). Presumably the genitive is subjective, but the Io scene suggests that the chorus might better use an objective genitive: “what possible help can there be for mortals?” Cf. the words of Prometheus at 267.

¹⁸ In the words of the chorus Prometheus is guilty of a major inversion. He “worships”

In the third stanza (545–52) they seek to educate Prometheus by asking him how his favor can rightly be called a favor when he performed it for defenseless, perishable, feeble, dream-like, shackled mankind.¹⁹ The plans of such creatures will never escape the “harmony” desired by Zeus.

In the final stanza (552–60) they lament the change from the song which they sang to accompany the marriage of Prometheus to their sister Hesione. They stress their previous delight in the details of the wedding scene: the bridal bed and the wedding bath, the gifts offered to their sister by Prometheus, the persuasion which he used, the sense of family which they all felt as their own sister was wed. Now they are estranged from this brother-in-law and the good cheer of the happy day has vanished. With their recollection of the joyous wedding day and its celebratory songs, they finish this ode, which they acknowledge is a very different kind of song.

In the second stasimon the chorus withdraw from Prometheus²⁰—his words,²¹ his actions, and his being. They postulate a world in which Zeus rules now and forever, where there is only willing service of the gods at sacred banquets, where men seek rules which remain eternally valid, and where Ocean’s stream will never cease to flow. This they call their *gnomé*, their settled view of the world (527).²² Prometheus accepts none of their assumptions; indeed, his words threaten the overthrow of their credo.²³ In addition,

(*sebein*, 543) men, thus showing the kind of regard for men which one would normally reserve for gods; see the scholiast on Soph. *Ajax* 666 and B. M. W. Knox, “The *Ajax* of Sophocles,” *HSCP* 65 (1961) 16 and n. 85. In addition, there is the constant problem of degree with the passionately involved and impetuous Prometheus; *agan* and *lian* are used often to describe his actions: 123, 180, 318, 327, and 1031.

¹⁹ In insisting on the weakness of men the chorus is expressing a traditional belief which goes back to *Iliad* 6.147–49 and underlies such statements as Hesiod, *W & D* 90–105; Simonides, 520 and 521 among others in Page, *PMG*; Pindar, *Pyth.* 8.95–97; Herodotus 1.32. For other citations see Thomson on lines 564–68.

²⁰ Precisely the interpretation of Paley (see above, note 4) on 536: “may my duty and my inclination ever coincide; may the one never clash with the other, so that I may be tempted to disobey like Prometheus”: although he sees a continuation of the “goodness and humility” of the chorus even through the third stasimon (see also his note on line 914).

²¹ The conflict between the two parties is clear in the chorus’ desire to avoid sinning in their words vs. their complaints with Prometheus’ words; see 180, 311–14, 318–19, 932.

²² Unterberger 83–87 states that here the future is being represented as the present. This is possible, but here the chorus is expressing their wish or hope as to what the future will be. When they shift their thoughts in the next stasimon, this change can be explained as the reasonable response of a character rather than the poet’s creation of a song which is based on little regard for consistency of motivation or characterization. As a parallel, the old men in *Ag.* express a similar trust in the Hymn to Zeus (*Ag.* 160–83), but their belief is not supported by the events in their play, even though this vision will be realized by the end of the trilogy.

²³ Prometheus’s opposition is immediately clear in the contrasting *gnomai* 527 vs. 543. But individual *gnomé* occurs elsewhere in praiseworthy contexts in this long scene from 526–907. Hypermetra curbs her *gnome* in making an individual choice (867) as does the wise being at 887 who first formulated the theory about the unpleasantness of marrying outside of one’s rank. The

he refuses to acknowledge that men are weak since he has just explained to them in his long discourse the immense potential within men for their own development, and he has apparently renounced the marriage bed of their sister, choosing instead permanent imprisonment on his rock. They can only conclude that they have learned a lesson from him (553–54): there is a better world available for those who can accept the rule of Zeus.

Tragic choruses were never born to be happy for long; here the contradicting evidence in the form of Io enters just as they are finishing their last note. She is the sole representative of mankind in this play. From her mask, her costume, and her frantic movements, it is clear that she is a woman whose life has been distorted and malformed. She was a young, marriageable maiden who has been turned into a cow. She has been tormented and driven mad, she does not know where she is or where she is going, and she has no power over her fate, over her route, over her comings and goings—not even over her speech. All of this has come to her through Zeus, who sought—in his own words—to “marry” her (648). In the course of this courtship Zeus sent a dream which promised a happy future but destroyed her. Oracles then shattered her family, deprived her of her home, and revealed Zeus’ threats to use force if there was no compliance with his whim (663–72).

In the second stasimon the Oceanids prayed that they might never see the power of Zeus arrayed against them; rather they wanted to be swift in his service. Now Io appears, the example of the person who has lived the subservient life which they have just celebrated. Though unwilling, she was sent to be married to Zeus in compliance with his wishes, and this marriage, her acceptance of Zeus’ will, has been the ruination of her life. As she bitterly tells the story, she was sent away from home as a specially devoted animal, an image continued when she speaks of compulsion by the bridle of Zeus (666 and 672) and realized when she is changed into a cow. The reaction of the chorus is swift and direct (687–95). They wish that they had never heard these words, had never seen this sight. Again they shudder—but now looking at Io as their example (695, cf. 540). While Prometheus is a powerful god whose opposition to Zeus might be seen as another one of those divine feuds between the Olympians and various Titans, Io is an innocent whose very being shows the effects of the rule of Zeus on mankind.²⁴

After hearing the tale of her long and terrible future wanderings, Io is driven off stage by both external and internal forces. The gadfly stings her, but in addition the vision of her future life, which she has just heard, has shat-

word *gnomē* seems consciously repeated for emphasis in roughly the same position in both the second and third stasima (527 and 887–88).

²⁴ Their meter is a combination of iambic and dochmiac, thus similar to the meter of Io’s astrophic monody at 566–73. This recall of a previous meter may indicate that they are not only stunned by her appearance and tale but are beginning to see her situation in somewhat the same terms as she does.

tered her mind—exactly as Prometheus had predicted (628). In her astrophic exit stanza she feels convulsions and madness run through her body, her heart kicks against her mind, her eyes spin, and she loses control of her speech as her words rush out unrestrained (877–86). She has been deprived of power over her life and is now driven further on her course as an unwilling victim. She cannot even choose to end her own scene, but is goaded off stage by the gadfly. The chorus in their terror at the physical disfigurement and shocking derangement of Io are able to see the clear results of the rule of Zeus.

Consequently when they sing the third stasimon (887–907), an ode which is closely joined to the second stasimon in framing the Io scene by opening in the same dactylo-epitrite meter,²⁵ it is only to be expected that they are going to reflect this shattering experience.²⁶ They do not directly condemn Zeus; rather they praise the first formulator of the principle that one should not marry outside of one's rank or station.²⁷ Yet Io's tale has revealed that Zeus is infatuated with his power, which is greater than the power of any other member of the cosmos with the sole exception of the child to be born from that special woman. The chorus' statement reflects a veering from their previous desire to be swift in their service of Zeus, the god who they hope will never set his power in opposition to them. Here the Oceanids are saying that Zeus' power is, in fact, by nature opposed to them, and they no longer will seek only to serve his will.²⁸

In addition, they praise the wisdom of that being who first formulated this awareness as a principle which should offer some protection to men. In the previous ode they called humans defenseless, weak, feeble, dreamlike, blind, and shackled. Now they are willing to admit that in comparison with the gods the race may be weak, but it has one great strength: humans can

²⁵ Dactylo-epitrite is a relatively rare meter in Aeschylean plays. Even A. M. Dale, "Metrical Analysis of Tragic Choruses. Fasc. I Dactylo-Epitrite," *BICS* Suppl. 21.1 (1971) 2–13 finds only two passages with some lines of this meter prior to the ones in the *PV*; Griffith, *Authenticity* 40–42 finds none. J.-F. Boittin, "Figures du mythe et de la tragédie: Io dans le *Prométhée Enchaîné*," in *Écriture et théorie poétiques* (Paris 1976) 40–56 provides a sensitive discussion of the contribution of the chorus in the *PV* with special reference to the framing function of the second and third stasima. See also Sienkewicz 69–70.

²⁶ Most commentators on this passage would limit the concern of the chorus to comments on the immediate scene; e.g., Griffith *APB* on 887–906: "their concern is quite narrowly restricted to the immediate context . . . , and there is no attempt to explore the further implications of Zeus' behavior, to question the propriety of his conduct, or to look for an underlying meaning that might justify these events . . . The Chorus continue merely to *react* to what they see and hear."

²⁷ This is cited as proverbial wisdom which can be traced to the *Odyssey* 17.218 or the *Hymn to Aphrodite* 239–46. One source is Pittacus, Callimachus, *Ep.* 1 cited by Diogenes Laertius 1.79–80 and the scholiast at *PV* 887. See the list of similar statements collected by Thomson in his comment on 913.

²⁸ The basic idea for my analysis of the third stasimon is presented by Conacher 65: "the implicit criticism of Zeus in the present ode prepares us for the Chorus' bold decision (1063ff.) at the final climactic moment."

observe the world and think and talk. An observer who saw the overwhelming resources of the Olympians formulated the law: no marriage with such gods for "poorer" beings. To the extent that all men understand this law, the gods will be less able to deceive weaker beings and men will at least be unwilling participants on each occasion. They will be no happier nor will their lot change, but they will be able to recognize the nature of their predicament and instruct other men about it; the Olympians will have to use force to gain their ends and may thus be deprived of the joy of having willingly compliant slaves. In a sense, Prometheus provides this type of clear perspective for Io and the chorus when he tells her the full extent of her travels; he does not thereby lessen her suffering, and he possibly makes her outlook even more bleak because she comes to know the full extent of her toils, but by encapsulating the whole story in this way, he convinces the chorus that there is something very wrong in such a universe. His telling of the full tale contributes to the defiant resistance of the chorus at the end of the play; similarly the seeds for this defiance show early growth when the chorus praises as wise the formulator of the basic rule—lesser beings must be segregated from the Olympians.²⁹

In the antistrophe (894–900) the Oceanids apply this rule to themselves in a statement which suggests that they no longer wish to be in attendance at the holy banquets of the gods. Their example is Io; her suffering causes them fear. In her alliance with Zeus they can see only lovelessness and destruction, all of which arise from Hera's jealousy of her husband's newest victim. Io is innocent while the gods remain devoted to their ego-centered passions, uncaring for mankind, unmoved by issues of justice, and ultimately spiteful; they are powerful and confident, and thereby an unescapable reality for humans.

In the epode (901–907) the chorus praises equality of partners in marriage.³⁰ Without such parity there will be constant war and dilemma. In addition, the members of the chorus have no place to escape; that placid refuge by the unending streams of Ocean and the perpetual service at the god's holy feast appear mere figments of their fantasizing. Now they openly admit that there is no place to flee the lust of Zeus; they are small beings in a world dominated by far larger powers, they are subject to whimsical and unpredictable attacks, and they cannot escape any of these conditions.³¹

²⁹ The strength of the chorus' resolve here is stressed by the corresponding phrases at the beginning of the strophe and antistrophe: *ê sophos ê sophos* = *mêpote mêpote*. An even tighter example of strengthening sentiment through close corresponson is found in the final hymn of the slave women at *Ch.* 935ff. = 946ff. There are three other examples of anadiplosis used to give emphasis in the lyrics of the *PV*: 577, 688, and 694; see Griffith, *Authenticity* 194–95.

³⁰ At least this much is clear in this confused stanza. Page solves the text problems neatly, if not permanently; see T. C. W. Stinton, "Notes on Greek Tragedy, I," *JHS* 96 (1976) 123–24.

³¹ See the comment of Long on line 41: "The emotion tyrants inspire is fear, not love (11). Even Prometheus, who is usually bold (29, 542, 932, 960, 1003), fears briefly at 124–27 and 1090, near the beginning and end of his being on stage, as Io fears at 580 and 881. The Oceanids are afraid for both Prometheus and Io: 144, 181–82, 696."

This change in attitude between the second and third stasima is pivotal in the development of the chorus' thought. From here on the Oceanids continue to advise the wisest course or the least painful action, but they will never again retreat to the simple devotion which glowed in the first stanza of the second stasimon. After they see Io they realize that Zeus' power is great but corrupting, that his rule is tarnished by the plaintive cries of his subjects, and that the proper attitude toward Zeus and the other Olympians is fear and aversion.³²

But in the third stasimon this change is not stated so bluntly, nor would brusque, confrontational declarations arise naturally from these Oceanids. They came on stage as shy spirits who were startled and curious at the sound of the metal shackles being pounded into the rock and who had to persuade their father to let them out of their cave into the larger world. On their first entrance they did not even set foot on the earth, but are presented as flying above it. Only later, when they alighted on the ground, did they begin to confront the situation in the world in a more general way.³³ Throughout the play they remain sympathetic and emotional in their responses to Prometheus' situation rather than rational or coolly objective. No one should expect such characters to express strong attitudes or take stands; they tend to feel their way carefully watching for others' responses and trying to reinforce their tentative beliefs in each new situation. They would rather seek peace and compromise than triumph—and are thus the least likely supporters of a god with the stubborn willfulness of Prometheus. Therefore, even slight signs of diverging from their previous worshipful attitude toward Zeus are significant for a careful listener.

Unfortunately there have not been many careful listeners. Most critics are still puzzled about the source of the chorus' rejection of Hermes' demands at the end of the play when it makes the stunning choice to stay with Prometheus. But the scene with Io has been crucial in the formation and strengthening of the nymphs' resolve. Even though they have few lines between the third stasimon and the end of the play, they remain timid and sympathetic maidens. Even when Prometheus—in support of their turn away from the perpetual service of Olympians—predicts the humbling of Zeus, they characteristically retreat to their careful and limited statements at 928ff. Yet in these lines they never deny that they have seen the uglier side of the reign of Zeus in the person of Io; they only question the wisdom of Prometheus in asking for more pain, and they advise prudence. The same is true of their words at 1036–39, where they counsel practicality and the avoidance of mistakes without ever saying that Prometheus is wrong or unjust. Critics have seen these two sets of

³² For discussion of a similar learning process in this play, where one character learns by confronting the fates of others, see D. Konstan, "The Ocean Episode in the *Prometheus Bound*," *History of Religions* 17 (1977) 61–72.

³³ Well discussed by Inoue.

speeches as repetitions of the same sentiments with which the chorus arrived on stage³⁴—and therefore they are necessarily confused at this sudden resistance. But in the words of the chorus, there is no retreat from their new attitude, which counsels resistance, even though the phrasing remains characteristically diplomatic and tactful.

Yet for some reason which has not yet been made clear the Oceanids lose this reserve in their final defiant speech. Something in the speeches of Prometheus and Hermes between their words of cautious advice at 1036–39 and their final speech forces them to state their beliefs openly and bluntly. In fact, as the meter of the last scene changes from iambic trimeter to anapaests, all three characters begin to speak more frankly about their choices. Prometheus hurls his magnificent challenge at Zeus inviting him to destroy the universe—if finally he must. Hermes dismisses the spirit of his challenge as insane bravado but confirms that the destruction of the world is at hand. In both speeches there are elements which the chorus has heard before, to its sorrow. Io has instructed the Oceanids on the personal cost of living under the reign of Zeus in her final anapaests at 877–86; now with the return of the anapaestic meter, the chorus can recognize several familiar motifs. The symptoms which were so painfully evident in Io foreshadowed the cataclysm which now will engulf Prometheus as storm and earthquake throw the elements into tumult. The raging wind of her madness appears again in the clashes and convulsions of the swirling winds (883–84 and 1044–46, cf. 1084–87). The uncontrollable sounds which come from her mouth (885–86) are repeated in the bellowings from the earth and the thunder which threatens to stupify the minds of the chorus and are the only effective voice of Zeus at the end of the play (1061–62, cf. 1082f.). The destruction which is clear in the body of Io is threatened now for Prometheus (1050–52). She reels in madness which enflames her mind; Hermes calls Prometheus mad and Zeus will hurl curls of flame at him (878–79, 1054 and 1043–44). Io feels herself driven from her proper course by the wind; Prometheus foretells the wind which will shake the earth from its foundations (883–84 and 1046–47, cf. 1081 and 1085–87). Io's words strike against waves of destructive madness; Prometheus views literal waves rising to mingle with the stars in the ultimate dissolution of the universe (885–86 and 1048–50, cf. 1080–93, esp. 1088).³⁵ As the chorus hears Prometheus and Hermes project the same destruction which was wrought on the life of Io onto the universe, they speak their strong words of defiance. The government of

³⁴ E.g., Griffith *APB* on 937: "P. has lost his temper with the Chorus, for the only time in the play . . . in disgust at the conventional piety and caution of 936" and Long on 1036: "Last speech of the Chorus before their conversion, of which there is no indication."

³⁵ C. M. Dawson, "Notes on the Final Scene of *Prometheus Vincit*," *CP* 51 (1946) 237–39 identifies many echoes of the language of the Io scene. More recently Unterberger 88–113 discusses in detail the similarities between Prometheus and Io which are developed throughout this scene, and Griffith *APB* notes the parallels in his notes to 582 and 1085–86.

Zeus appears to them marked by unacceptable perversion, violence, and cruelty whether it dominates an individual or the whole world.

The chorus is a character in the *Prometheus Bound*.³⁶ It is continually called upon to shift its responses, its judgments, its evaluations, and its perspective. In the course of witnessing the major characters as they come and go, the Oceanids participate in one scene with a character who significantly alters the balance of their belief even though they only acknowledge this effect in terms typical to their timid characterization. Yet while the characterization remains constant, the shift in their attitude, which results in their surprisingly powerful words of defiance, is so complete that it must be termed a conversion. Their experience of the perverted form of Io forces this new belief into action when the most uncommitted characters in the play find the price of neutrality to be their own destruction.³⁷

³⁶ This is the broader issue being discussed in this paper. Kranz, esp. 207–28, presents the strongest statement of the multiple functions served by a chorus and the consequent varied relationships of the choral odes to the scene around them; he concludes with the statement that the chorus is “alles andere eher als ein ‘Charakter’.” He accepts the first stasimon as the work of Aeschylus but identifies the second and third as forgeries inserted into the drama somewhere between 440–430. Such were the presuppositions of R. Hölzle, *Zum Aufbau der lyrischen Parteien des Aischylos* (diss. Freiburg 1934) who perceived choral odes as a series of cult songs, but he also found that these songs became increasingly more accommodated to a dramatic design throughout the career of Aeschylus. J. Rode, *Untersuchungen zur Form des Aischyleischen Chorliedes* (diss. Tübingen 1965) and “Das Chorlied” in *Die Bauformen der griechischen Tragödie*, ed. W. Jens (Munich 1971) 85–115 sketches the increasing integration of song and scene in Aeschylus’ plays, but identifies the songs in the *PV* as a series of proto-embolima breaking into the play as comment on individual elements in a scene. See also the discussion on the diverse functions of the tragic chorus by T. G. Rosenmeyer, *The Art of Aeschylus* (Berkeley 1982) 145–87, esp. 164–80.

³⁷ I want to express my appreciation to C. J. Herington, M. Griffith, and the anonymous referees for this journal for their thoughtful criticism of this paper during its preparation.