

PROMETHEUS BOUND

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Prometheus Bound

At the J. Paul Getty Museum, Getty Villa
Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, September 5–28, 2013

I have been asked to say something about my translation. That is difficult to do. To the extent that it succeeds, a translation speaks for itself. But perhaps I can say something about my intentions in translating *Prometheus Bound*, and about the experience of wrestling with the difficulties it presented.

I aspired from the outset to a fidelity, thought for thought and image for image, as complete as was possible without sacrificing imagination and vigor in my use of English. At the same time, wherever the original form could not be gracefully adopted, as was the case with the choral Odes, I needed to invent metric patterns of my own. There was also another challenge that could not be met by any technical means or aesthetic cunning. It was a sound, or perhaps more precisely a tone—the noble, passionate resonance of a great tragic poem, speaking and sometimes chanting through superhuman personae, mortal and divine, in a register that would not be reduced to the cadences of realistic speech. And yet these same characters express emotions that are nothing if not human: pride, pity, fear, love, and that essentially democratic passion, hatred of arbitrary authority.

Holding such competing tensions in balance is a normal and always satisfying part of a literary translator's job. When one has the good fortune of engaging with a sublime work, there are less usual rewards. Gradually my own mind became the stage on which the revolt of Prometheus, the agony of Io, and the pity of the daughters of Okeanos were played out with ringing voices, and that in turn gave me an awed sense of participation in what must have been, at the time of the play's first performance, a sacred event.

— Joel Agee

