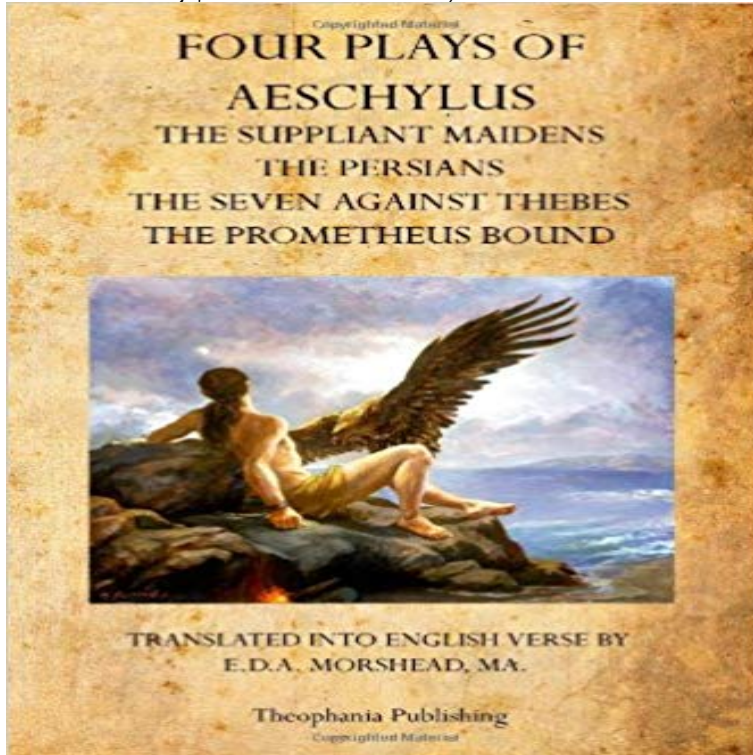


Four Plays of Aeschylus: The Suppliant Maidens, The Persians, The Seven Against Thebes, The Prometheus Bound



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The Suppliants pays tribute to the democratic undercurrents running through Athens in advance of the establishment of a democratic government in 461. In the play, the Danaids, the fifty daughters of Danaus, founder of Argos, flee a forced marriage to their cousins in Egypt. They turn to King Pelasgus of Argos for protection, but Pelasgus refuses until the people of Argos weigh in on the decision, a distinctly democratic move on the part of the king. The people decide that the Danaids deserve protection, and they are allowed within the walls of Argos despite Egyptian protests.

The Persians is based on experiences in Aeschylus's own life, specifically the Battle of Salamis. It is unique among surviving Greek tragedies in that it describes a recent historical event. The Persians focuses on the popular Greek theme of hubris by blaming Persia's loss on the pride of its king. It opens with the arrival of a messenger in Susa, the Persian capital, bearing news of the catastrophic Persian defeat at Salamis to Atossa, the mother of the Persian King Xerxes. Atossa then travels to the tomb of Darius, her husband, where his ghost appears to explain the cause of the defeat. It is, he says, the result of Xerxes' hubris in building a bridge across the Hellespont, an action which angered the gods. Xerxes appears at the end of the play, not realizing the cause of his defeat, and the play closes to lamentations by Xerxes and the chorus. Seven against Thebes has the contrasting theme of the interference of the gods in human affairs. It also marks the first known appearance in Aeschylus's work of a theme which would continue through his

plays, that of the polis (the city) being a key development of human civilization. The play tells the story of Eteocles and Polynices, the sons of the shamed King of Thebes, Oedipus. The sons agree to alternate in the throne of the city, but after the first year Eteocles refuses to step down, and Polynices wages war to claim his crown. The brothers kill each other in single combat, and the original ending of the play consisted of lamentations for the dead brothers. Prometheus Bound, is attributed to Aeschylus by ancient authorities. The play consists mostly of static dialogue, as throughout the play the Titan Prometheus is bound to a rock as punishment from the Olympian Zeus for providing fire to humans. The god Hephaestus, the Titan Oceanus, and the chorus of Oceanids all express sympathy for Prometheus plight. Prometheus meets Io, a fellow victim of Zeus cruelty; and prophesies her future travels, revealing that one of her descendants will free Prometheus. The play closes with Zeus sending Prometheus into the abyss because Prometheus refuses to divulge the secret of a potential marriage that could be Zeus downfall.

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