

Arachne the Spinner

retold by Geraldine McCaughrean

Once, when all cloths and clothes were woven by hand, there was a weaver called Arachne more skillful than all the rest. Her tapestries were so lovely that people paid a fortune to buy them. Tailors and weavers came from miles around just to watch Arachne at work on her loom. Her shuttle flew to and fro, and her fingers plucked the strands as if she were making music rather than cloth.

"The gods certainly gave you an amazing talent," said her friends.

"Gods? Bodkins! There's nothing the gods could reach me about weaving. I can weave better than any god or goddess."

Her friends turned rather pale. "Better not let the goddess Athene hear you say that."

"Don't care who hears it. I'm the best there is," said Arachne.

An old lady sitting behind her examined the yarns Arachne had spun that morning, feeling their delightful texture between finger and thumb. "So if there were a competition between you and the goddess Athene, you think you would win?" she said.

"She wouldn't stand a chance," said Arachne. "Not against me."

All of a sudden the old lady's gray hair began to float like smoke about her head and turned to golden light. A swish of wind blew her old coat into shreds and revealed a robe of dazzling white. She grew taller and taller until she stood head and shoulders above the crowd. There was no mistaking the beautiful gray-eyed goddess, Athene.

"Let it be so!" declared Athene. "A contest between you and me."

Arachne's friends fell on their faces in awe. But Arachne simply threaded another shuttle. And although her face was rather pale and her hands did tremble a little, she smiled and said, "A contest then. To see who is the best weaver in the world."

To and fro went the shuttles, faster than birds building a nest.

Athene wove a picture of Mount Olympus. All the gods were there: heroic, handsome, generous, clever, and kind. She wove all the creatures of creation onto her loom. And when she wove a kitten, the crowd sighed, "Aaaah!" When she wove a horse, they wanted to reach out and stroke it.

Along her sat Arachne, also weaving a picture of the gods.

But it was a comical picture. It showed all the silly things the gods had ever done: dressing up, squabbling, lazing about, and bragging. In fact she made them look just foolish as ordinary folk.

But oh! When she pictured a butterfly sitting on a blade of grass, it looked as if it would fly away at any moment. When she wove a lion, the crowd shrieked and ran away in

fright. Her sea shimmering and her corn waved, and her finished tapestry was more beautiful than nature itself.

Athene laid down her shuttle and came to look at Arachne's weaving. The crowd held its breath.

"You *are* the better weaver," said the goddess. "Your skill is matchless. Even I don't have your magic."

Arachne preened herself and grinned with smug satisfaction. "Didn't I tell you as much?"

"But your pride is even greater than your skill," said Athene. "And your irreverence is past all forgiving." She pointed at Arachne's tapestry. "Make fun of the gods will you? Well, for that I'll make such an example of you that no one will ever make the same mistake again!"

She took the shuttle out of Arachne's hands and pushed it into her mouth. Then, just as Athene had changed from an old woman into her true shape, she transformed Arachne.

Arachne's arms struck into her sides, and left her only her long, clever fingers straining and scrabbling. Her body shrank down to a black blob no bigger than ink blot: an end of thread still curled out of its mouth. Athene used the thread to hang Arachne up on a tree and left her dangling there.

"Weave your tapestries forever!" said the goddess. "And however wonderful they are, people will only shudder at the sight of them and pull them to shreds."

It all came true. For Arachne had been turned into the first spider, doomed forever to spin webs in the corners of rooms, in bushes, and in dark, upswept places. And though cobwebs are as lovely a piece of weaving as you'll ever see, just look how people hurry to sweep them away.

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PROMETHEUS

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Illustration by Willy Pogany, from
*The Golden Fleece and the Heroes
Who Lived before Achilles, 1921,*
by Padraic Colum (1881–1972)

*The dark-winged hound of Zeus will come, the
savage eagle,
An uninvited banqueter, and all day long
Will rip your flesh in rags, and feast upon your
liver,
Gnawing it black.*

Hermes, "Prometheus Bound", by Aeschylus

● QUICK INTRODUCTION ●

When Zeus, the king of the Olympian gods, was young and trying to establish his rule, he was challenged by a group of ferocious Titans, who tried to keep him from gaining power. A long and terrible war ensued, with all the Olympian gods

joined against the Titans, who were led by Zeus' father Cronus and mighty Atlas.

After ten years of fighting, and with the help of the Cyclopes and the Hecatoncheires (The Hundred-Handed-Ones), Zeus and his fellow Olympians defeated the enemy. Only a few Titans, particularly Prometheus and his brother Epimetheus, fought on the side of Zeus, against their fellow Titans.

You see, Prometheus was very wise - wiser even than most of the gods - and foresaw the winner of the battle between the Olympians and the Titans. He persuaded his impulsive brother Epimetheus to also fight on the side of Zeus against gigantic Atlas and his army. Once Zeus emerged victorious he granted the brothers some just rewards.

Zeus permitted Prometheus and Epimetheus to populate the earth with creatures and humans. Epimetheus (he wasn't too bright and his name means "**Afterthought**") foolishly gave all the good qualities to the creatures: Strength and speed, the ability to fly, to stay warm in all conditions, to possess a keen sense of smell, superb cunning and instinct, to live underwater...

Sadly, when it came time for Man to be endowed with qualities, there were very few left. The scatterbrain Epimetheus had given away all the goods to the creatures so that there was no quality to make Man a match for the beasts. Desperate and sorry, he begged his brother for help. Prometheus (he was wise and his name means "**Forethought**") took over the task of creation and considered ways to make humans superior.

● WISE PROMETHEUS ●

When the goddess of wisdom Athena was born out of the head of Zeus, Prometheus (or some say Hephaestus) assisted in the "delivery". Wise Athena then taught Prometheus mathematics, navigation, astronomy, architecture, medicine and many other arts. That's how Prometheus got to be so smart. Along with his ability to foresee the future, that made him a formidable Titan.

Prometheus had created humans in the likeness of gods, using the clay and water of Panopeus, and Athena had breathed a living soul into them. To compensate for the lack of great qualities, which had foolishly all been given to the creatures by Epimetheus, the wise Titan made Man stand upright like the gods, to be noble and conscious, and to hold his head high, looking up at the heavens.

As yet there were no mortal women on the earth. That came later, as we will see.

Prometheus passed onto Man the useful arts taught him by Athena and looked with joy upon his creation:

**"Hear the sum of the whole matter in the compass of one brief word--
every art possessed by man comes from Prometheus."
from *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus**

He felt bad, however, because when Man sacrificed to the gods, the best portions of the animal were offered to the Olympians, leaving little for the people. So Prometheus tricked Zeus into choosing one pile of offerings, cleverly disguised to look delicious, but instead hiding fat and bones.

Zeus fell for the trick and impulsively chose the wrong pile, and from then on humans got to keep the good and tasty parts of the animal offerings, giving to Zeus the useless portions. This made the King of the Olympians real mad, so he punished Prometheus, who was laughing at him. Zeus took fire away from Man - "Let them eat their meat raw!" he shouted. "Let's see how your Men keep warm in the winter!"

Talk about a bad sport! Zeus knew that he would seem ungrateful if he directly hurt Prometheus, since the Titan had really helped him become King of Olympus, so he did the next best thing - Swearing revenge, he punished humans by taking away their fire.

Well, you know that didn't sit well with Prometheus. Daily he looked down with sadness upon his creation, watching them shiver in the cold and try to eat their food raw. Slowly they began to die and Prometheus could no longer sit by idly.

● FIRE RETURNED ●

Prometheus arranged a meeting with Athena and beseeched her for help. The wise and gracious Athena kindly revealed to Prometheus a hidden backstairs entrance to Olympus and he gained entrance to the Palace of the gods, one of few to do so.

Upon arriving he lit a torch from the fiery chariot of the sun god, as Helios passed by. Breaking off a fragment of glowing charcoal, he hid the fire inside the hollow of a giant fennel-stalk. Blowing out his torch in case he was spotted by Zeus, Prometheus then worked his way down the side of Mount Olympus.

And what a perilous journey it was! The rebel Prometheus, who had taken such a personal risk for Man, now was faced with getting the fire back down to earth. The winds howled as he strode down the mountain, threatening to blow out the coal, or huff it out of his hand. With each step he took, the Titan fully expected to be seen by Zeus and to be struck dead with one of his killer thunderbolts.



Illustration by Willy Pogany, from
*The Golden Fleece and the Heroes
Who Lived before Achilles, 1921,*
by Padraic Colum (1881–1972)

But Prometheus made it to earth and proudly gave the fire to the humans, who were overjoyed, needless to say. Soon Zeus smelled the tantalizing scent of cooked meat drifting up to Olympus from earth and when he looked down he was outraged! There were the humans he had supposedly punished, happily cooking their food and keeping warm around their fires. Zeus was furious!

"Then men were able to hammer iron into tools, and cut down forests with axes, and sow grain where the forests had been. Then were they able to make houses that the storms could not overthrow, and they were able to warm themselves at hearth fires. They had rest from their labor at times. They built cities; they became beings who no longer had heads and backs bent but were able to raise their faces even to the gods."

by Padraic Colum, from "The Golden Fleece and the Heroes who Lived Before Achilles"



(It must be noted that, along with all the advantages that fire bestowed upon humanity, it also brought many ills. Out of the flaming forge emerged cruel weapons of war, along with all the attendant miseries that follow the disruption of a simple way of life.)

●REVENGE OF ZEUS ●

That was twice that Prometheus had made the King of the Olympians look bad and this time Zeus was not holding back any punches. Forgetting all that Prometheus had done for him in the war against the Titans, Zeus had our hero arrested. He summoned from the Underworld the three ferocious Giants, his thugs Gyes, Cottus, and Briareus, and had them take Prometheus to the highest peak of Mount Caucasus.

On a huge rock the Giants bound the Titan with unbreakable adamantine chains, according to the ancient poet Hesiod from his book "Theogony" (Birth of the Gods):

*To a high-piercing, headlong rock
In adamantine chains that none can break.*

This is what the brutes told Prometheus, again from Hesiod's "Theogony":

*Forever shall the intolerable present grind you down
And he who will release you is not born
Such fruit you reap for your man-loving ways.
A god yourself, you did not dread God's anger,
But gave to mortals honor not their due.
And therefore you must guard this joyless rock --
No rest, no sleep, no moment's respite.*

Groans shall your speech be, lamentation your only words.

Some say that Zeus's henchmen, Force and Power, were the ones who escorted Prometheus to the peak, and that the smith god, Hephaestus, was the one who applied the chains, albeit reluctantly. Here is Hephaestus, in *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus:

*Evermore the burden of your present ill shall wear you out;
for your deliverer is not yet born.*

*Such is the prize you have gained for your championship of man.
For, god though you are, you did not fear the wrath of the gods,
but you bestowed honors upon mortal creatures beyond their due.*

*Therefore on this joyless rock you must stand sentinel, erect,
sleepless, your knee unbent. And many a groan and unavailing
lament you shall utter; for the heart of Zeus is hard,
and everyone is harsh whose power is new.*

As if that wasn't bad enough, each day an enormous eagle (some say a vulture), sent by Zeus, would arrive and eat at Prometheus' liver, feasting on the helpless Titan. To make matters worse, the liver would grow back overnight and the whole ordeal would be repeated the following day. Talk about cruel and unusual punishment!



**"O you bright sky of heaven, you swift-winged breezes,
you river-waters, and infinite laughter of the waves of ocean,
O universal mother Earth, and you, all-seeing orb of the sun, to you I call!
See what I, a god, endure from the gods."**

from *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus

For thirty years (some say one thousand, or even thirty thousand years) Prometheus endured this excruciating pain and torment. Being a god he couldn't die, hence his ordeal could not be eased. At one point Zeus offered him a chance to free himself by revealing information that Prometheus knew. Since our hero had the power of Foresight, he knew the name of the one who would overthrow Zeus, just like Zeus had done to Cronus. The King of the Olympians promised Prometheus that he would set him free if only the Titan revealed the identity of his potential usurper.

Nothing doing. Stubborn Prometheus informed the Messenger god Hermes, who had delivered Zeus' offer, to tell his boss to go fly a kite. He couldn't be bribed.

*"Go and persuade the sea wave not to break.
You will persuade me no more easily."*

Talk about a rebel! Prometheus was the kind of guy you'd want on your side in a brawl! He was tough and his morals were uncompromising. Even though his body was bound, his spirit was free and the Titan refused to buckle to Zeus' threats, torture and tyranny. Here's what he told Hermes:

*"There is no force which can compel my speech.
So let Zeus hurl his blazing bolts,
And with the white wings of the snow,
With thunder and with earthquake,
Confound the reeling world.
None of this will bend my will."
Hesiod, "Theogony"*



The Torture of Prometheus, Gustave Moreau, 1868

●PROMETHEUS UNBOUND ●

Zeus felt bad. He wasn't a mean-spirited god, after all, and deep down he admired Prometheus for sticking to his ideals. So he offered a slim glimmer of hope to our hero: Zeus told the Titan that he could go free if two conditions were met:

- 1) An Immortal would have to give up his life for Prometheus
- 2) A mortal would have to slay the liver-eating eagle

Small consolation, thought Prometheus...What Immortal would ever give up his life for a Titan, he mused, and besides, there was no mortal brave and strong enough to kill the evil beast that feasted on his liver. Unrepentant for his actions, and fully aware that he had done the right thing in stealing fire from Olympus and giving it to Man, Prometheus was resigned to eternal life on the rocks, so to

speak.



Prometheus Bound
By Christian Schussele, 1824-1879

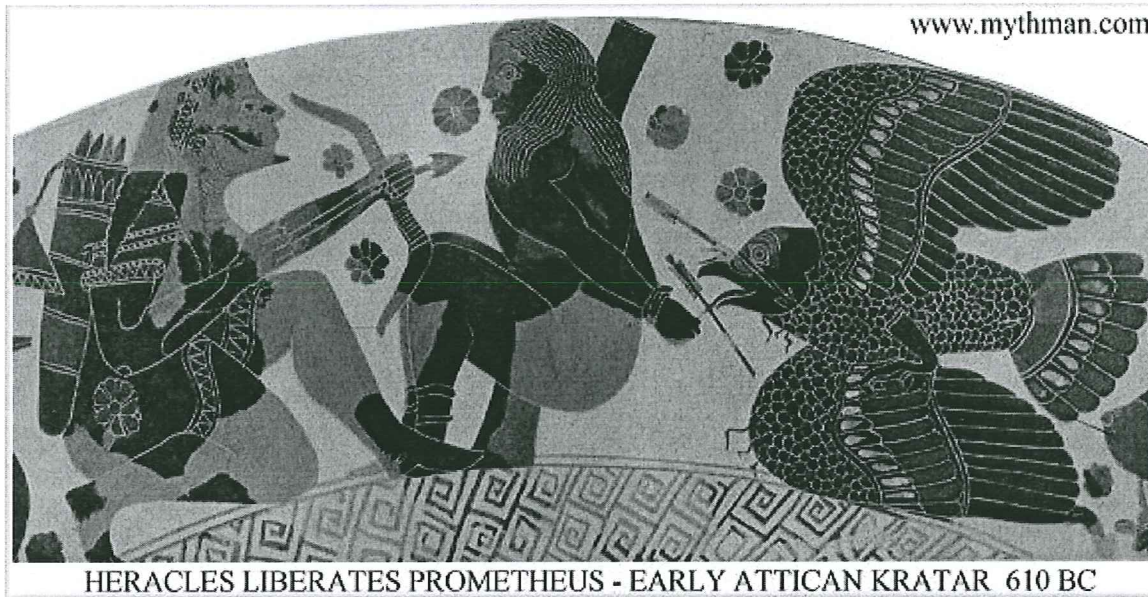
But wait! Our story has a happy ending. You see, the Centaur (half man, half horse) named Chiron, a wise and Immortal mentor of many Greek heroes, had been accidentally shot and wounded by one of Heracles' (Hercules) poisoned arrows. The arrows were deadly, having been dipped in the blood of the dying Hydra. But being an Immortal, the gentle Centaur could not die, but lived in horrid pain from the lethal poison.

Hearing of the plight of courageous Prometheus, Chiron volunteered to die in his stead so that his unbearable pain would cease, at the same time conferring his immortality upon the chained Titan. It was a mutually beneficial move and fulfilled the first part of Zeus' terms. Now, where could be found a mortal hero brave enough to challenge the ferocious eagle?

Have no fear, Heracles is here! Passing by Mount Caucasus one day the world's greatest hero, mighty Heracles, saw Prometheus bound to the rock, with the frightful eagle merrily munching on his liver. This would not do! Heracles was famous for always taking the side of the just, the powerless and the overwhelmed.

Armed with his bow and arrows, gifts from the gods, mighty Heracles took aim

and let fly a missile at the beast. Bingo! One shot was all it took and the Titan's tormentor became buzzard feed itself, killed instantly by the poisoned arrow...



Heracles Arrives Unexpectedly to Liberate Prometheus - Athens Archaeological Museum

Prometheus was now free to go! By this time Zeus had realized his folly in imposing such a stern sentence upon the brave Titan, so he invited Prometheus to come and live on Mount Olympus. All was forgiven and our hero rejoined his rightful place at the home of the gods.

Zeus did make Prometheus wear a ring, in which a piece of the Caucasus rock was set, as a symbol of his painful connection with the mountain. This represented the first ring to have a setting, and ever since humans have worn rings in honor of the Titan, in gratitude for all the agony he had endured on their behalf.

"No hard feelings. By the way, Prometheus, any chance of you telling me the name of the one who will overthrow me?" asked Zeus.

"Forget it, Big Guy!" replied our hero, a rebel to the end...

But just to show that he harbored no grudge, Prometheus eventually did tell Zeus and Poseidon, who were both pursuing a sea nymph named Thetis, to avoid the girl at all costs. Prometheus informed the Olympian gods that the son of Thetis would grow up to become mightier than his father. A thankful Zeus promptly ordered Thetis to marry a mortal named Peleus and their offspring was the great hero of the Trojan War, Achilles, who indeed achieved a fame far surpassing that of his father.

Before his divine punishment Prometheus married Hesione, and is said to have conceived Oceanus with her. He is also considered to have been the father of Deucalion and in some cases is described as the brother of the Titans Atlas and Menoetius, as well as the foolish Epimetheus.

The name of brave Prometheus has endured throughout the ages as the world's first rebel and the champion of humanity. He fought against divine authority for his ideals and ultimately paid a heavy price for his Foresight.

Aren't you glad he did, though?

●EPILOGUE ●

After Zeus imposed the horrible punishment upon Prometheus he then followed that up with a similar infliction upon Man, whom the Titan had created. Zeus ordered Hephaestus to craft a gorgeous female out of clay. She was to be called Pandora (All-Gifted) and she would be the world's first mortal woman.

Meant as a bride for foolish Epimetheus, Pandora would unleash countless evils upon humanity. Poor Pandora had everything, you see. But she also was cursed by the gods with Curiosity, and that proved to be her undoing.

Why don't you see for yourself?

PANDORA PAGE



painting by John William Waterhouse

Name _____

Title:
Author:
Setting:
• Time:
• Place:
• Mood:
Characterization:
• Protagonist (Static/Dynamic) (Round/Flat)
• Antagonist (Static/Dynamic) (Round/Flat)
Other Main Characters:
• (Static/Dynamic) (Round/Flat)
• (Static/Dynamic) (Round/Flat)
• (Static/Dynamic) (Round/Flat)
Point of View:
• First/Third Limited/Third Omniscient
• Narrator (if first person POV):

Conflict(s):
• Person vs: Person/Society/Self/Nature
• External/Internal
• Those involved:
• Description of conflict:
• Person vs: Person/Society/Self/Nature
• External/Internal
• Those involved:
• Description of conflict:
Plot:
Exposition:
Rising Action:
Climax:
Falling Action:
Resolution:
Theme:

<p>Diction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Formal/Colloquial) • Examples of diction including character: 	<p>Literary Devices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreshadowing: • Suspense: • Flashback: • Imagery:
<p>Similes and Metaphors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of similes: • Examples of metaphors: 	<p>Symbolism:</p>
<p>Irony:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Situational: • Dramatic: • Verbal: 	<p>Other:</p>

STORY MAP

Title: _____

Climax:

Resolution,
Ending
Events,
and
Changes

8. _____

7. _____

6. _____

5. _____

4. _____

3. _____

2. _____

1. _____

Main Conflict:

Theme, Message, Moral,
or Lesson

Characters

Place
and
Time