

Creation Two: Prometheus

After the great war between the gods and the Titans was over, the victorious gods had thrown all the grey Titans down to Tartarus. Only two had been spared, the two that had not fought against them: Prometheus, whose name means 'forethought', and Epimetheus, whose name means 'afterthought'.

One day, Prometheus left his green valley. He crossed a grassy plain and he came to a cave in the side of a mountain. He entered. There was a pool of water. He dipped his hand into it and drank. And then he heard a voice: 'Prometheus.'

He peered into the darkness. He saw there were three figures crouching in the shadows, three ancient crones, their skin as white as apple flesh, creased and folded like old leather. The first was spinning a thread. The third was holding a pair of sharp shears in her hands.

'Who are you?'

It was the middle sister who answered. 'Prometheus, we are the three Fates. All that will happen in the future is clear to us.'

Prometheus looked them up and down. 'Sisters, if you truly are the Fates, then I have a question for you.'

'Ask us and we will tell you the truth.'

'The new gods and goddesses have divided up the universe. There is a god of the sky, a god of the sea, a god of the underworld, a god of light, a goddess of the moon, a goddess of love, a goddess of wisdom, and yet the world belongs to nobody. Tell me sisters, whose children will inherit the earth?'

The three Fates smiled gap-toothed grins and chuckled. 'Your children, Prometheus. Yours!'

'But I have no children. I don't even have a wife. Tell me more.' But the three Fates were silent. It was as though they had turned to stone.

As Prometheus lowered his head and made his way out of the cave, he remembered how, in the early days of the world, he had buried three stone jars filled with the flesh of his mother, the earth, and the blood of his father, the sky. He journeyed to the place he had buried them. He dug into the soil with his grey hands and soon his fingers curled around cold stone. He lifted the jars and cradled them in his arms. He carried them to his green valley at the foot of Mount Hymettus. He showed them to his brother, Epimetheus.

'What's inside the jars?'

Prometheus smiled tenderly. 'My children,' he said. He took them to the edge of a stream, at the foot of a valley. He lifted the lid from one of the jars. He scooped out a handful of the blood-soaked earth. He lifted a handful of clay from the water's edge and he kneaded them together. He had no plan but it was as though his fingers had a mind of their own. He was making a head, shoulders, arms, a body, legs. He was making something not unlike himself, not unlike the gods, and the thing was becoming warm. It was wriggling with a life of its own. It was suddenly veined with blood, then cloudy with skin. It opened its mouth and gasped for breath. It opened its eyes and looked at him.

With infinite tenderness, Prometheus set it on the ground. It ran away from him and crouched among the bushes. Prometheus made another one and another. He made male ones and female ones. They all ran from him and huddled together. All day he worked, until there was just one handful of earth left in the third jar. He mixed it with clay. He shaped it and set it on the ground.

It ran away from him and then let out a sharp, piercing cry. It fell to the ground, it shuddered and was still. Prometheus went across and lifted it. It was cold in his hand, as cold as clay. He dug a hole and buried it. In the cave of the ancient sisters, the third crone was opening her shears. The first had been spinning threads on her spindle; each thread was a human life. The second had been measuring the length of the threads. The third had just tried her shears for the very first time. She nodded. They were sharp. She smiled at her sisters. 'Everything is ready now.'