

AESCHYLUS

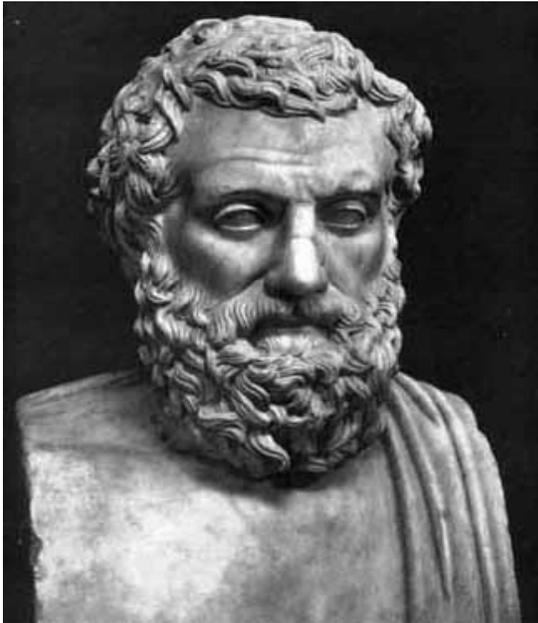
Greek Poet

(525 BC - 456 BC)

HIS LIFE, WORKS AND LEGACY

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Who was Aeschylus?



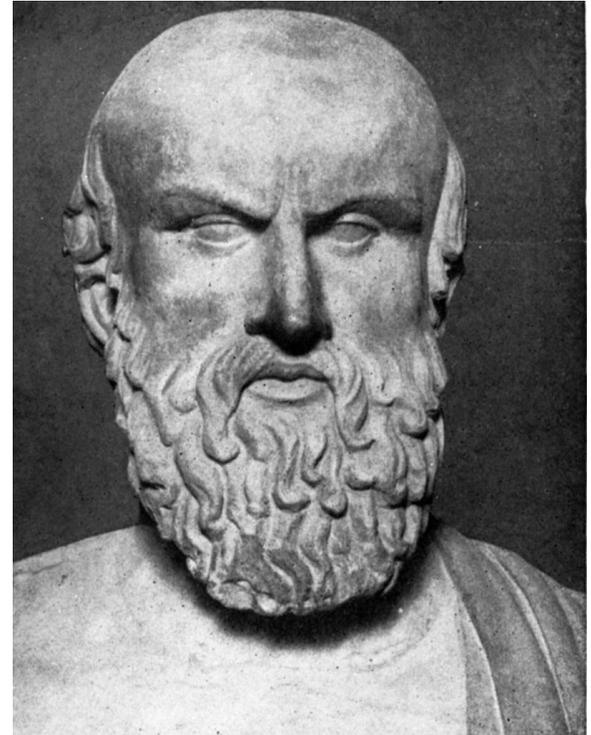
Aeschylus (525/524 – c. 456/455 BC) was an ancient Greek tragedian. He is often described as the father of tragedy. According to Aristotle, he expanded the number of characters in theatre allowing conflict among them; characters previously had interacted only with the chorus.

About his early life

Aeschylus was born about the year 525 BC in a small town called Eleusis, which is about 27 kilometers northwest of Athens. His family was rich, and his father, Euphorion, was a member of the Eupatridae, the ancient nobility of Attica. Pausanias wrote that Aeschylus worked in a vineyard until god Dionysus visited him in his sleep. The god ordered him to write the first tragedies. His first play was performed in 499 BC, when he was only 26 years old.

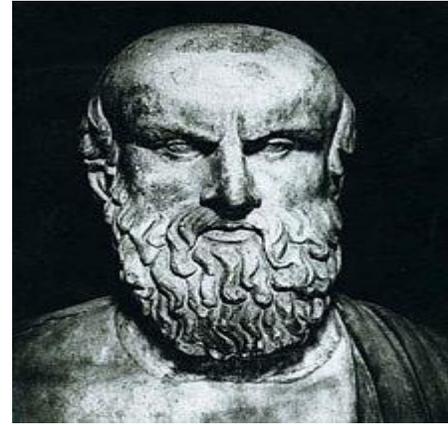
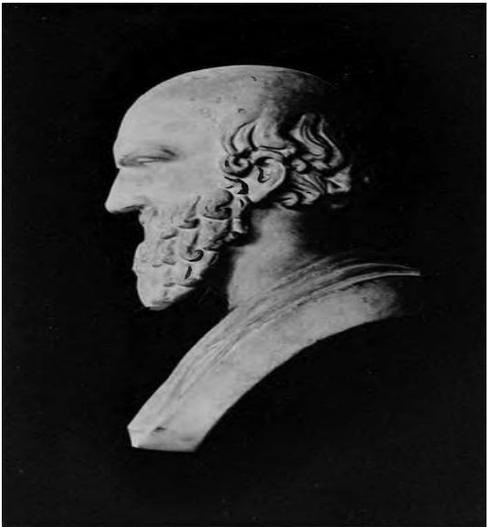
The Eleusinian Mysteries

Aeschylus was one of many Greeks who joined the Eleusinian Mysteries. This was the religious cult of Demeter, and based in his home town of Eleusis. Members of the group learned mystical and secret knowledge. Members were sworn under the penalty of death not to say anything about the Mysteries to anyone.

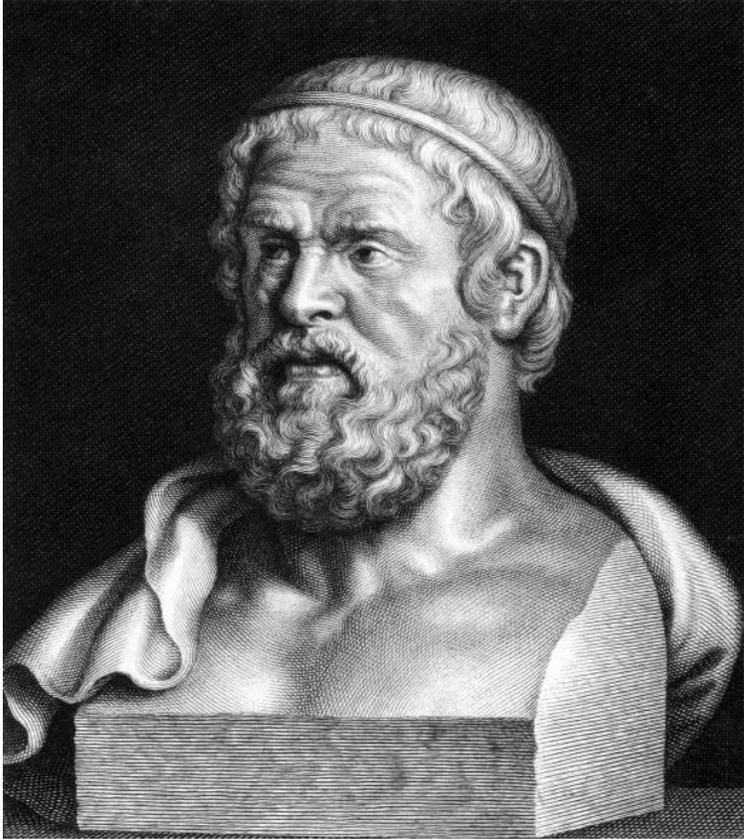


Later Life

Aeschylus travelled to Sicily once or twice in the 470s BC, a major Greek city on the eastern side of the island; and during one of these trips he produced *The Women of Aetna* (in honor of the city founded by Hieron) and restaged his *Persians*.



The Persian Wars



The naval battle of Salamis holds a prominent place in *“The Persians”*, his oldest surviving play, which was performed in 472 BC with Pericles serving as *choregos* and won first prize at the *Dionysia*. In fact, by 473 BC, Aeschylus was winning first prize in nearly every competition at the *Dionysia*.

When and how did he die?

In 458 BC, he returned to Sicily for the last time, visiting the city of Gela where he died in 456 or 455 BC. Valerius Maximus wrote that he was killed outside the city by a tortoise dropped by an eagle which had mistaken his bald head for a rock suitable for shattering the shell of the reptile. Pliny, in his *Naturalis Historiæ*, adds that Aeschylus had been staying outdoors to avoid a prophecy that he would be killed by a falling object. But this story may be legendary and due to a misunderstanding of the iconography on Aeschylus's tomb. **Aeschylus's work was so respected by the Athenians that after his death, his were the only tragedies allowed to be restaged in subsequent competitions.** His two sons and his nephew also became playwrights.

The inscription on his gravestone

The inscription on Aeschylus's gravestone makes no mention of his theatrical renown, commemorating only his military achievements.

Beneath this stone lies “Aeschylus, son of Euphorion, the Athenian, who perished in the wheat-bearing land of Gela; of his noble prowess the grove of Marathon can speak, and the long-haired Persian knows it well”.

According to Castoriadis, the inscription on his grave signifies the primary importance of "belonging to the City" (polis), of the solidarity that existed within the collective body of citizen-soldiers.



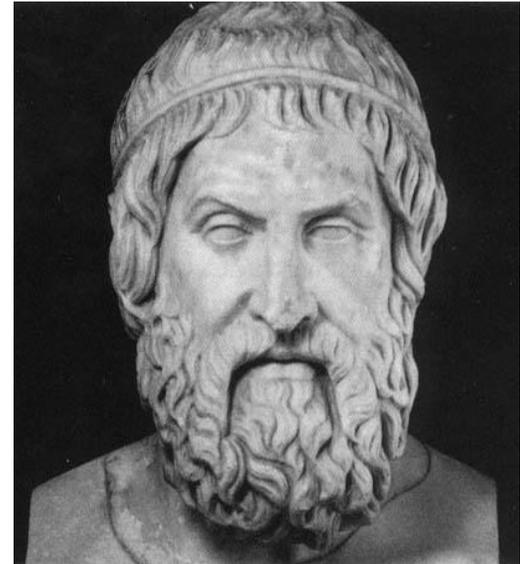
His survived plays

All of the surviving plays won first prize at the City Dionysia. One book, the Alexandrian *Life of Aeschylus*, said that he won the first prize at the City Dionysia 13 times. Sophocles' won 18 times out of his 120 plays, and Euripides only had five wins out of about 90 plays.

- i. The Persians (Persai)* (472 BC)
- ii. Seven Against Thebes (Hepta epi Thebas)* (467 BC)
- iii. The Suppliants (Hiketides)* (463 BC)
- iv. Oresteia* a series of three plays (458 BC)
 - *Agamemnon*
 - *The Libation Bearers (Choephoroi)*
 - *The Eumenides*

His influence and legacy

At the time that Aeschylus first began writing, the theatre had only just begun to evolve in Greece, usually involving just a single actor and a Chorus. **Aeschylus added the innovation of a second actor, allowing for greater dramatic variety, and gave the Chorus a less important role.** He is also sometimes credited with introducing scene-decoration (although this distinction is sometimes ascribed to Sophocles) and more elaborate and dramatic costuming. In general, though, he continued to write within the very strict bounds of Greek drama: **his plays were written in verse, no violence could be performed on stage, and the works had a strong moral and religious emphasis.**



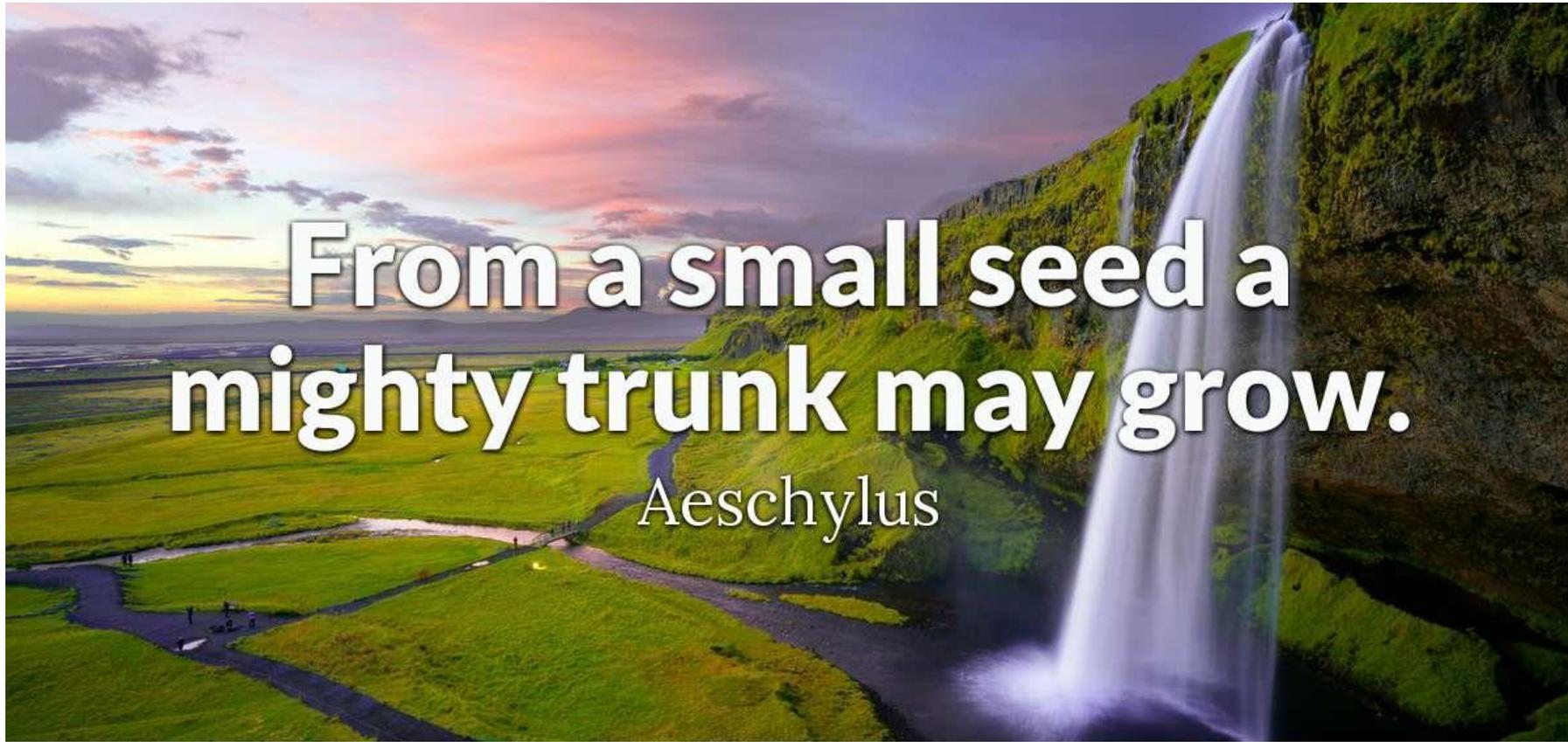
Aeschylus' quotes



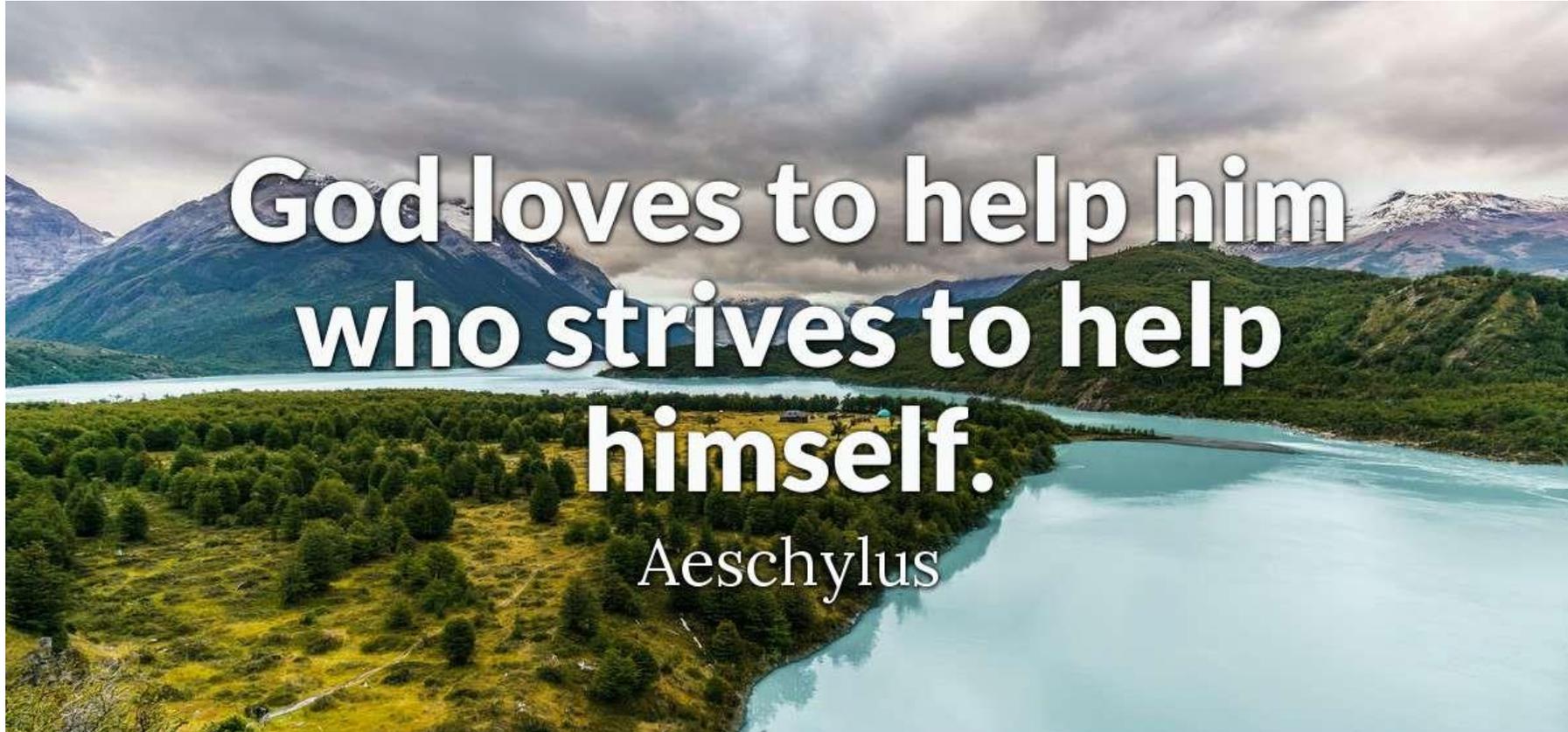
**There is no pain so great as
the memory of joy in present
grief.**

Aeschylus

Aeschylus' quotes



Aeschylus' quotes



Aeschylus

Aeschylus' quotes



**It is best for the wise man
not to seem wise.**

Aeschylus

Sources

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