

**WHERE IS IO RUSHING TO?  
WHY AND FOR WHAT? ON THE FUNCTION OF  
οἶστρος IN *PROMETHEUS BOUND*\***

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*Abstract.* The article analyses the semantic field, the etymology and the function of οἶστρος in depth, including the psychic condition it causes, manifested by a sudden mind alteration, the abrupt urge to travel, jerking movements and rushing aimlessly about. Although οἶστρος does not act on its own, but instead as an executor, it nevertheless determines Io's state in her adventure. Its touch is perceived to be a god's punishment, but in fact, οἶστρος appears to be a tool enabling the fulfilment of a god's intent. Through the intervention of οἶστρος Io becomes an unconscious seeker in quest of a place to "meet" Zeus. Being attuned to a god's intent, understanding the impulse behind the action, and constantly moving forward are steps proposed by the tragedian towards restoring balance in one's inner world when a person is permanently anxious, restless, and totally obsessed with seeking something. The psychic condition caused by οἶστρος is compared to the psychic epidemic, dromomania, that occurred in France at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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The tragedy *Prometheus Bound*, traditionally attributed to Aeschylus, raises a number of questions for researchers: the date of the play,<sup>1</sup> its authorship,<sup>2</sup> the notions of tyranny<sup>3</sup> and of humanism,<sup>4</sup> fate and free will,<sup>5</sup> the theme of progress in the ancient Greek world<sup>6</sup> and the understanding of space in the tragedy,<sup>7</sup> to name but a few. However, my aim is not to review the history of studies devoted to the tragedy or to discuss scholarly opinions regarding any of these questions. Instead, I have examined the phenomenon of “madness” as presented by the author in this work.

I analyze the linguistic expressions of this key phenomenon found in the tragedy, as well as the semantic field, etymology and function of οἷστρος, which is one of the central lexical formatives used in the play to refer to madness.<sup>8</sup> I also study the psychological condition suffered by Io, and the causes and ultimate reasons for this psychological phenomenon. *Prometheus Bound* is the only surviving Greek tragedy of all ancient texts that offers significant possibilities to study the psychic condition caused by οἷστρος, as the tragedy comprehensively reveals its essence and function. In *Prometheus Bound* οἷστρος afflicts Io, daughter of the Argive King Inachus, driving her into madness and compelling her to wander across the Eurasian continent.

The story of Io is narrated in Episode 3 of *Prometheus Bound*. The princess, turned into a heifer, enters the scene and shares her anguish with

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<sup>1</sup> Griffith 1983, 31-35; West 2007, 394-396.

<sup>2</sup> The authorship of *Prometheus Bound* remains widely debated among scholars. His authorship of the tragedy was first questioned by Wilhelm Schmid (1929). Likewise, Mark Griffith (2007, 8-19) and Martin L. West (2007, 392-396; 1990, 51-72) argue against attributing the play to Aeschylus. On the other hand, the hypothesis of Aeschylus' authorship is supported by Hugh Lloyd-Jones (2003). As the question still remains disputable, the generic terms – “the author” and “the tragedian” are, for the most part, used in the paper to refer to the writer of *Prometheus Bound*.

<sup>3</sup> Golden 1962, 20-26; White 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Lloyd-Jones 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Lloyd-Jones <sup>2</sup>1983, 79-103; Rader 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Dodds 2001, 26-45.

<sup>7</sup> Finkelberg 1998; Gottesman 2013, 239-263; Bakola 2019.

<sup>8</sup> οἷστρος – one of the Greek lexical formatives referring to madness.

Prometheus, who is bound to a rock in Scythia. Because of Zeus' love for Io, Hera sent Argus Panoptes to watch the heifer ceaselessly, and then sent a gadfly to torment her with its stings. According to Io, myriad-eyed Argus, who would not allow her to hide, was soon killed; Io was set free from the giant – but not from the gadfly. The gadfly haunted and stung her endlessly, never allowing her to remain in the same place. Driven to madness, Io moved non-stop unless the gadfly gave her a brief rest. Thus tortured and exhausted by the persistent insect, Io roamed many a land. However, Prometheus prophesied that many more days of wandering were still ahead. Io finally settled beside the Nile to give birth to her offspring.

According to the tragedy, Io was afflicted by a sickness, referred to as νόσος (“disease,” “sickness,” 597, 632, 643).<sup>9</sup> Io called it “a divine disease” (θεόστυτον νόσον, 597), and compared it to “a storm sent by the gods” (θεόστυτον χειμῶνα, 643), while the Chorus merely calls it a “sickness” (νόσον, 632).

What kind of a sickness was it and how was it manifested? Analysis of the text reveals that Inachus' daughter Io suffered from a “roaming” (πλάνη, πλανάω, 565, 572, 575, 622, 784, 788, 820) sickness. Io refers to her own extraordinary adventure as “wandering” (πλάνη, πλανάω, 565, 572, 575, 622), “devious wanderings” (τηλέπλανγκτοι πλάναι, 577), and as “roaming far” (πολύπλανοι πλάναι, 585). She describes herself as “roaming wildly around” (φοιταλέος, 598) and as a “maiden wandering in misery” (δυσπλάνω παρθένω, 608). Prometheus also calls her strange adventure “wandering” (πλάνην, 788) and “a journey” (πορείας, 823). He says that Io's “exceedingly long race... wears [her] out, harasses [her]” (ὑπερμήκεις δρόμους... γυμνάζεται, 592). Her movement from one land to another was likewise perceived as “wandering” by the Chorus (πλάνην, 784; πλάνης, 820).

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<sup>9</sup> Chiara Thumiger, who studies mental health and mental disorder in antiquity, Greek and Roman physicians' ideas about the relationship between body and soul and the history of ancient medicine, points out that in *Prometheus Bound* Io's suffering is the manifestation of the statement of pathology. See Thumiger 2013, 62; 2017, 18-19.

Io's wandering was triggered by a gadfly, which in the tragedy is referred to with two lexical formatives: μύωψ<sup>10</sup> (675) and οἴστρος (567, 879). Although both formatives (μύωψ, οἴστρος) denote a gadfly, only οἴστρος has the connotation of madness.

In the tragedy, Io says she is "driven/stung by a gadfly" (οἴστρογήλατος, 581; οἴστροπλήξ, 681). Prometheus too refers to her as "stung by a gadfly" (οἴστροήσασσα, 836) and "driven round and round by a gadfly" (οἴστροδινήτος, 589). Io's altered state of consciousness is directly related to οἴστρος. I believe the use of μύωψ to refer to the gadfly in line 675 led to the meanings of οἴστρος: "gadfly" and "stimulating."

Greek literature makes no mention of a personified Oistros, a god or a daemon of madness. As a young male deity, οἴστρος is only featured in a 4<sup>th</sup>-century B.C. vase painting. However, there is an inscription ΟΙΣ[Τ]ΡΟΣ made with uppercase letters beneath a young man's figure depicted on a volute crater from South Italy (*Medea's Adventures in Corinth*). Bearing torches in both hands, the young man is driving Helios' chariot and staring at the scene of the filicide.<sup>11</sup> Evidently, οἴστρος was later personified as a young man.

In *Prometheus Bound* οἴστρος is an insect.

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<sup>10</sup> The primary meanings of μύωψ are "gadfly," "spur," "goad," while its secondary meanings are "stimulating" and "incentive." In *Prometheus Bound* (675) and *The Suppliants* (307), μύωψ denotes "a gadfly," "a horse-fly," "Tabanus." The word has the same meaning in Plato's *Apology* (30e) and Aristotle's *History of Animals* (528b31, 552a29, etc.). μύωψ means "a spur" and "a goad" in Xenophon (*Eq.* 8.5), Theophrastus (*Char.* 21.8), Polybius (11.18.4) as well as in Cercidas (fr. 8.2), Callimachus (fr. 46), and Apollonius of Rhodes (*Argon.* 3.277). In its secondary meaning, i.e., in the sense of "stimulant," "incentive," μύωψ is used by Lucian (*Cal.* 14), ps.-Lucian (*Am.* 2), and *Achilles Tatius* (7.4). In ps.-Plutarch (*Fluv.* 22.5) μύωψ refers to "a plan" (growing in the Achelous), while Oppian (*Cyn. Schol.* 3.254) uses μύωψ in the sense of "a little finger."

<sup>11</sup> The red-figured volute crater is to be attributed to the so-called Underworld Painter. The vessel was discovered in Canosa, South Italy and dated to ca. 330-310 B.C. The young man depicted at the lower part of the crater, whose name ΟΙΣ[Τ]ΡΟΣ is inscribed beneath his figure, is a witness to the filicide committed by Medea. See Trendall 1989, 115-118.

The semantic field of οἰστρος is broad, and the word has primary as well as secondary connotations. Its primary literal meanings are “a gadfly,” “an insect that infests tunny-fish,” “a small insectivorous bird” and also “a throw of dice,” while its connotations are “a sting,” anything that drives “mad,” “madness, frenzy,” “any vehement desire, insane passion,” “the smart of pain, the agony” and “zeal.”<sup>12</sup> Although these meanings may seem to have nothing in common, a contextual analysis reveals underlying associative bonds between them, as well as their connection with the meanings of the word οἰστρος as used in the tragedy.

In the *Odyssey*, οἰστρος denotes “an insect that infests cattle” (22.300). This insect is likely the *Tabanus bovinus*. In *Prometheus Bound*, οἰστρος is an insect that bites the heifer Io, so that she is compelled to move from one place to another (673-679, 703-704).

A gadfly is a hematophagous ectoparasite<sup>13</sup> of domestic animals of the order of Diptera, with piercing and sucking mouthparts that allow it to feed on the host’s blood, causing acute pain.<sup>14</sup> In Aristotle’s *History of Animals*, οἰστρος refers to a small insectivorous bird (*Sylvia trochilus*) and an aquatic parasite that attacks tuna (probably *Brachiella thynni*).<sup>15</sup> The insect-eating bird catches and swallows insects suddenly with a swift movement. The bite of the water parasite is so painful that it makes tuna jump out of the water (*Arist. Hist. an.* 557a 27, 592b 22, 602a28.3).<sup>16</sup>

The connotative meanings of οἰστρος can mainly be found in tragedies (*Aesch. Supp.* 541; *PV* 567; *Soph. Trach.* 1254; *Ant.* 1002; *Eur. HF* 862; *IT* 1456; *Hipp.* 1300; *Or.* 791; *IA* 548; *Bacch.* 665), though the term also occurs in Herodotus (2.93.1) and Epicurus (fr. 483) in the sense of a “vehement desire.” In a 6<sup>th</sup>-century A.D. papyrus, οἰστρος means “zeal” (*PMasp.* 3.13). The connotations of οἰστρος – “a sting,” “anything that maddens,” “any vehement desire, insane passion,” “the smart of pain, agony,”

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<sup>12</sup> LSJ 1996.

<sup>13</sup> Ectoparasite – a parasite that lives in the skin of a host, whether a plant or an animal. See Hopla, Durden, and Keirans 1994.

<sup>14</sup> Walker 1994, 78-84.

<sup>15</sup> Tuna – a fish.

<sup>16</sup> Graham and Dickson 2004.

“madness, frenzy” – are related to the function of the gadfly in the story of Io, and are the most widespread uses of the word in the Greek tragedy.

An insect – the gadfly – is the primary meaning of οἰστρος. All insects (the gadfly, *Tabanus bovinus*, *Brachiella thynni*) or birds referred to as οἰστρος attack their prey suddenly. An insectivorous bird eats its prey, while an insect causes pain and convulsive movements in animals, which are involuntary spasmodic movements. Therefore, the movements of an individual bitten by οἰστρος are perceived by outsiders as bizarre and inadequate. Evidently, the Greeks saw these movements as madness, and οἰστρος gradually acquired the meaning of madness (Aesch. *Supp.* 541; *PV* 567; *Soph. Trach.* 1254; *Ant.* 1002; *Eur. HF* 862; *IT* 1456; *Hipp.* 1300; *Or.* 791; *IA* 548; *Bacch.* 665; 483 *EGF Davies*).

Later, in the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D., the same lexical formative was used in a positive sense, as a strong emotion or a vigorous effort for someone else’s benefit, or “zeal” (*PMasp.* 3.13). As for the meaning of “a throw of dice” found in *Eubulus* (57.5), it associatively describes the sudden and swift movement of tossing dice.

The main axis that unites the different meanings of οἰστρος – from “an insect” to “a throw of dice” – is rooted in the etymology of the word. According to Beekes, οἰστρος could be related to οἶμα, which means “rage of a lion and an eagle, of a snake”; “attack” and “fit of anger.” οἶμα \*οἶμα must have been derived from and be related to Avestan *aēšma* (“anger”), which, evidently, is the source of an Indo-Iranian verb “quick movement, “urge forward.” According to Beekes, \*οἶμα is a noun denoting an agent that urges someone else to move forward.<sup>17</sup> The primary meanings of οἰστρος – “gadfly,” “sting” – must have derived from this word.<sup>18</sup>

οἰστρος stings (χρῶ, 566, 597, 675, 880) *Io* (κέντρον, 598; ἄρδις, 879) and compels her, driven into madness, to roam pointlessly and ceaselessly far away. She loses control over her actions and is subdued by the effect of οἰστρος’s sting. *Io* does not know when the gadfly will sting her again and is afraid of it (581, 881). The fear of being stung leaves her dis-

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<sup>17</sup> Beekes 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Dianosashvili 2020, 51-53.

traught (παρακόπον, 582). The gadfly's touch is sudden (566, 577-580) and agonizing. The sting is sharp, and the bite is painful (ὀξύτομος, 674). Io violently convulses (σφάκελος, 879) with pain and is struck with madness (έμμανεῖ, 675; φρενοπληγεῖς μανιαί, 878-879). Her mind is confused (φρένες διάστροφοί ἦσαν, 673). She rolls her eyeballs wildly around and around (τροχοδινεῖται δ' ὄμμαθ' ἐλίγδην, 882); fury (λύσσα, 883) changes her direction with the "blast of madness" (πνεύματι μάργω, 884), and her speech is distorted as she loses control over it (γλώσσης ἀκρατής, 884-885).

Then Io "leaps (599, 675,) and rushes furiously she knows not where" (σκιρτημάτων ... λαβρόσυτος ἦλθον, 599-600), leaving one land after another behind her (561, 565, 572, 599, 681-682). Presumably, this very movement caused by οἶστρος is the reason that the verb γυμνάζω ("exercise," "practise," "train," 586, 592) is repeatedly used in the tragedy to refer to Io's actions. Her movements involve great physical exertion and stress. She is alone in her travels, and only talks to those she comes across on her way, like Prometheus. At the same time, she is famished (573, 599). Whenever the gadfly leaves her alone, she stops, tortured and exhausted. Then, when she recovers from the fit, she is ashamed (αἰσχύνομαι, 642) of her fate.

Researchers offer different explanations for Io's condition. According to Demetrios Kouretas, the transformation of a princess into a heifer and her incessant migration is the manifestation of a boanthropic psychosis.<sup>19</sup> Phylis B. Katz believes that Io is in a hysterical state while wandering. The tragedian's portrayal of her state precisely corresponds to physicians' description of female hysteria.<sup>20</sup>

According to George Devereux, Io's condition is a natural outcome of her dream. The scholar analyses the dream through the lens of psychoanalysis and interprets Io's state as the awakening of a latent Oedipus Complex – her unconscious desire for her father, conscious

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<sup>19</sup> Kouretas 1951, 45. Boanthropic psychosis is a rare psychic disorder, in which a person identifies himself/herself with a bovine. Such self-identification may start as a dream but gradually develops into an obsession and then into a mania. See Stevenson and Brown 2007, 195.

<sup>20</sup> Katz 1999.

suppression of the desire, and the conflict between the two. Devereux argues that Io's adventure is the manifestation of her inner conflict.<sup>21</sup>

Ariadne Konstantinou sees Io's adventure – her wandering from Argos to Egypt – as a woman's preparation for marriage.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, Silvia Montiglio associates Io's wandering and her state during the process with a state of a woman anticipating marriage.<sup>23</sup> In her opinion, the tragedian aims to offer a dramatic portrayal of what may happen if a girl refuses to get married and change her status – become a woman and a wife. This may not only cause her to wander but to wander in madness.<sup>24</sup>

According to Montiglio, the image of a wandering girl invites parallels with a wandering womb.<sup>25</sup> A wandering womb suggests anxiety associated with the refusal of a young female to mature, whether biologically or socially.

The scholar believes that Io's condition is a symptom of the wandering womb caused by her refusal to get married, as her time of virginity is up and she is mature enough to become a wife and a mother. It is through wandering that Io is driven to do what she does not wish to.<sup>26</sup> Io's initiation ends with her pregnancy, which cures her.

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<sup>21</sup> Devereux 1976, 25-52.

<sup>22</sup> According to Konstantinou (2018, 91-98), the way from Argos to Egypt Io is compelled to undertake is a figurative representation of virgin approaching marriage. In ancient Greece, a woman was supposed to move to her future husband's household. Her husband would replace her father and she would acquire a new "lord." Naturally, the process would be accompanied by anxiety. According to Vernant (2006, 157-196), marriage, most likely, was the only occasion in a woman's life when she was mobile, as she had to leave her parents' home for her husband's.

<sup>23</sup> Montiglio 2005, 17-23.

<sup>24</sup> Montiglio 2005, 18.

<sup>25</sup> Montiglio 2005, 19. According to Hippocrates, the wandering womb, accompanied by mind-wandering and fever, is associated with a young girl's fear of growing out of childhood into womanhood (Littré 1853, 466-471). Unless she accepts herself as a woman or internalizes her new social role of a wife, her reproductive organ will start "wandering," i.e., will be relocated.

<sup>26</sup> Montiglio compares Io's wandering with the Proetides' rambling in the state of madness and believes that their story too can be explained by the theory of the wandering womb.

Montiglio draws on the Hippocratic theory that pregnancy may cure the wandering womb.<sup>27</sup>

Ruth Padel focuses on the relationship between οἶστρος and Hera in ancient Greek mythology and literature.<sup>28</sup> The scholar mentions the festival of Hera, the Heraea, which consisted of foot-races for maidens to

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According to one of the versions, Hera inflicted madness on Proetus' daughters because they slighted her wooden image. As a result, the girls would ramble all over Argos in the state of madness (ps.-Apollod. 2.26). According to Hesiod (fr. 131 Merkelbach-West) and Servius (*Ecl.* 6.48), the wandering Proetides perceived themselves as cows. This erroneous self-perception (*errorem*) was imposed upon them by Hera (Serv. *Ecl.* 6.48). According to Bacchylides (11.47-52) too, the reason for the Proetides' madness was their disrespect for Hera. They bragged their father was wealthier than the wife of mighty Zeus and thus defied the idea of leaving their father's home and getting married. Driven mad by Hera, the maidens wandered from Tyrins to Lusoi for thirteen months, until Proetus appealed to Artemis to free them from Hera's punishment. See Burkert 1983, 168-169; Dowden 1989, 73-74.

Dowden sees a genetic connection between the myths about the Proetides and Io. According to him, in both cases, transformation into a cow and boanthropy was associated with the Argive Heraion, a prenuptial ritual performed by maidens on their maturity. They were to spend some time in a precinct of Hera in seclusion, away from people, where they were supposed to perceive themselves as a cow, the sacred animal of Hera, and recall Hera's male counterparts, the Bulls of Halai, or the Oxen of Sparta. Presumably, barefooted and with their hair cut short, the maidens would paint themselves white and/or wear white clothing. In this state, their behaviour was unusual, marginal, deviant, and mad. See Dowden 1989, 134. Montiglio (2005, 17) also sees the wandering of Proetus' daughters as part of a coming-of-age ritual for girls.

<sup>27</sup> Littré 1853, 468-470; Montiglio 2005, 20-21. Plato too sees pregnancy as a remedy against the wandering womb. In *Timaeus*, he writes that a womb starts wandering when it remains without fruit for a long time: "... and in women again, owing to the same causes, whenever the matrix or womb, as it is called, which is an indwelling creature desirous of child-bearing, remains without fruit long beyond the due season, it is vexed and takes it ill; and by straying all ways through the body and blocking up the passages of the breath and preventing respiration it casts the body into the uttermost distress, and causes, moreover, all kinds of maladies; until the desire and love of the two sexes unite them..." (Pl. *Ti.* 91c, trans. Lamb 1925).

<sup>28</sup> Padel 1992, 121; 1995, 15.

mark their transition from girlhood into womanhood.<sup>29</sup> According to Padel, οἰστρός is directly related to Hera and her sacred animal, the cow, to sexuality and to the performance of the ritual. Padel sees this relationship in *Prometheus Bound* as well: Io, turned into a cow by Hera, is stung and haunted by οἰστρός, which embodies Zeus' frustrated desire for Io, and Hera's jealousy. In her opinion, οἰστρός is the personification of the distress intrinsic to Io's position in the erotic triangle (Zeus, Hera, and Io).<sup>30</sup> As Padel writes, "Zeus' lust, Hera's hostility, Io's madness, the *oi-stros*: all cease together when Zeus impregnates Io, 'touching her only', with his hand."<sup>31</sup>

Although differing, the above-cited opinions are by no means mutually exclusive or contradictory. The scholars focus on diverse aspects (Io's metamorphosis into a heifer, the cause of her wandering, a maiden's preparation for marriage, her rejection of marriage, the relationship between οἰστρός and Hera, the love triangle of Zeus, Hera, and Io). They interpret Io's adventure from different angles and at different levels.

If we interpret Io's wandering with regard to marriage, it is important to note that Inachus' daughter does not reject marriage (655-657). She merely does not know what to do when a mysterious voice calls her "to go forth to Lerna's meadow land of pastures deep"<sup>32</sup> to satiate Zeus' passion (647-649). Furthermore, we should bear in mind that Io's adventure

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<sup>29</sup> The Heraea, a festival in honour of Hera, was celebrated four times a year at Olympia. The only competition held during the festival was the footrace of maidens. The length of the racecourse was 5/6 of a stadion or approximately 160m (Paus. 5.16.2-4). See Serwint 1993, 403-422; Dillon 2002, 131. There are different opinions regarding the importance of the competition: Serwint (1993, 418-422) believes the game of the maidens was a pre-nuptial ritual. Contrary to Serwint, Dillon (2000) argues that the event could not be related to marriage as the competitors were divided into three age groups, the third one being the elderly; Dillon argues that the footrace at the Heraea could have been a puberty rite. It should be noted, however, that in Serwint's opinion (1993, 418), the game was associated with mythological weddings.

<sup>30</sup> Padel 1992, 120-122.

<sup>31</sup> Padel 1992, 121.

<sup>32</sup> Trans. Smyth 1926.

is not about marriage preparation as such, but about preparing for the union with Zeus at a predefined site – the bank of the Nile. In fact, what matter is the place of the union and the person one is to unite with.

As regards other viewpoints, the following factors drew my attention: wandering is not a key or typical symptom of mental conditions described by the scholars and nor can long-distance purposeless walking be conclusively associated with the Heraea.<sup>33</sup>

As a result, the following questions crop up: why did the tragedian choose this very action – wandering – to portray Io in an altered state of consciousness after she is stung by a gadfly? Given that boanthropic psychosis, hysteria, the Oedipus Complex, a maiden's preparation for marriage or Hera's role in Io's adventure could have been presented otherwise, how else should we interpret Io's roaming? What else may Io's roaming signify?

Io's incessant wandering from country to country evokes an extraordinary psychic epidemic that broke out in France at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which gripped the whole country instantly, and spread to Italy and Germany. Dozens of people left their homes unexpectedly. Like the princess Io, they travelled somewhere far away, even crossing borders, without realizing where they were going, while being in an altered state of consciousness. They not only moved to a different town or country but even to other continents – in the same way that Io found herself in Egypt at the end of her adventure.

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<sup>33</sup> Incessant and spontaneous movement until full exhaustion is not among the symptoms of boanthropic psychosis; neither is it characteristic of the Oedipus Complex or a love triangle. Wandering is not a defining symptom of hysteria. Also, maidens competing at the Heraea were in a conscious state and those were short-distance races. Io's condition was caused by Hera's wrath. The daughter of Inachus is a maiden, and her actions performed in this extraordinary state resemble running. While these circumstances may remind us of the Heraea and the race of maidens, we should bear in mind that as Io moves on, she covers long distances in an altered state of consciousness and her actions are never called "running" in the tragedy. Instead, the princess wanders (πλάνη, πλανάω, 565, 572, 575, 622, 784, 788, 820), leaps and rushes furiously (σκιρτημάτων ... λαβρόστος ἦλθον, 599-600).

Psychiatrists called this condition dromomania (δρόμος – “run”; μανία – “mania”) and described it as a psychic condition manifested as “an uncontrollable urge to change location, to wander pointlessly.”<sup>34</sup> Dromomania involved mood swings – sudden and unmotivated changes in humour, fits of extreme sadness with the compulsion to leave. As if stung by οἶστρος, persons suffering from dromomania left their family, friends, and work without warning anyone, and went without knowing where, to whom and for how long they would go.

The fit could occur unexpectedly, even during a meal. Individuals afflicted with dromomania would stop eating, put on their clothes and leave the place where they were, driven by a strong desire to get away. Like Io, they were hungry as they moved incessantly, but sometimes lost their appetite and were sleepless. Dromomaniacs always walked alone, as Io did, without seeking company or encountering anyone. Each new crisis compelled them to move further. Some would return home, while others would find a new place, like Io.

The urge to stop also came suddenly – as in the case of Io, whom οἶστρος would leave alone from time to time. Having recovered their composure and a normal state of mind, people with dromomania were unable to account for their actions; they felt travel “burnout” and were ashamed of themselves.<sup>35</sup> Io too was ashamed of this extraordinary adventure (642). Finally, individuals afflicted with dromomania would either get arrested or be confined to psychiatric hospitals.

The attacks of οἶστρος were similar to dromomania, causing sudden anxiety, restlessness and an altered state of consciousness or madness. All of a sudden, Io was compelled to run far away, without any reason.<sup>36</sup> The extraordinary epidemic in Europe lasted for 23 years, from

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<sup>34</sup> Tissié 1887; Beaune 1983, 184-185, 195-196, 205-207; Portnoy 1987; ten Have 2000.

<sup>35</sup> ten Have 2000. Describing cases of dromomania, a Canadian philosopher Ian Hacking calls such individuals “mad travellers” and qualifies their condition as a symptom of a temporary mental disorder. See Hacking 1998, 7-80.

<sup>36</sup> “Oh! Oh! Alas! Once again convulsive pain and frenzy, striking my brain, inflame me. I am stung by the gadfly’s barb, unforged by fire. My heart knocks at my ribs in terror; my eyeballs roll wildly round and round. I am carried out of my course by a

1886 to 1909, and disappeared as suddenly as it erupted.<sup>37</sup> Today it is qualified as a historical psychiatric diagnosis, while today a similar condition is called "dissociative fugue." Dissociative fugue was included in DSM-IV and ICD-10,<sup>38</sup> but not found in DSM-V.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, we refer here to the above-mentioned condition as dromomania.

The first confirmed case qualified by psychiatrists as dromomania was that of Jean-Albert Dadas, who was found in 1881 in a neighbouring city, with no recollection of having travelled. After he left on his trip, he would often wake up on a street bench, in a police department

fierce blast of madness; I've lost all mastery over my tongue, and a stream of turbid words beats recklessly against the billows of dark destruction" (Aesch. *PV* 877-886, trans. Smyth 1926) – that was how Io describes the onset of the condition.

<sup>37</sup> At a conference held in Nantes in 1909, psychiatrists declared that dromomania could not be qualified as a disease in its own right but as a symptom of psychopathy, epilepsy, and schizophrenia. They stopped recording it as a diagnosis. Furthermore, political confrontations in Europe compelled their leaders to close international borders, thus crossing a border was no longer as easy as in the previous century, when "mad travellers" could freely move from one country to another. See Hacking 1998, 75, 99.

<sup>38</sup> Gelder, Harrison and Cowen 2006, 229. DSM-IV – the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition*; ICD-10 – *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, Tenth Revision*.

<sup>39</sup> Harrison, Cowen, Burns and Fazel 2018, 654. DSM-V – the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition*.

Modern Western psychiatric community is very cautious about giving a medical qualification to a psychic condition, norm, pathology/disorder or drawing lines between similar medical conditions. Psychiatrists take into consideration the experience that has accumulated since the origins of psychiatric practices and observations until present. DSM is a subject to continuous review and update based on statistical evidence and research findings for preventing mistakes made previously. Therefore, the list of mental diseases and their names are periodically reviewed and modified. On controversies over DSM in psychiatry, see Hughes 2013.

Io's condition depicted in *Prometheus Bound* resembles 19<sup>th</sup>-century descriptions of extraordinary cases which psychiatrists then called dromomania, I too will use the term to refer to a condition when an individual has a strong unconscious impulse to wander far away pointlessly and endlessly.

or on a train bound for a strange city. He would even work at odd jobs to be able to return to France. When Dadas occasionally came to his senses, he could not recall how he had arrived in the new place. In this state of mind, he crossed several international borders to find himself in Berlin, Vienna, Prague, Poznan, and Moscow. Finally, he ended up in a psychiatric hospital in Bordeaux, where his bizarre psychiatric condition was described by the neuropsychiatrist Philippe Auguste Tissié, who called it dromomania.<sup>40</sup>

The study of this phenomenon of madness in *Prometheus Bound* led me to the assumption that the story of Io as narrated in the tragedy could be the first surviving text to describe dromomania. I believe the tragedy could provide information to help understand the mechanism and find a treatment for the syndrome (φάρμακον νόσου, 606), which disappeared even before scientists could study it properly.<sup>41</sup>

Julian C. Hughes believes that things repeat themselves in the universe and we face the same intellectual problems today as our ancestors did in antiquity. Ancient authors' awareness of mental disorders is so profound and complete, that if we mean to succeed in psychiatry today, we would better look backwards to antiquity.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Tissié investigated Dadas' case and defended a dissertation on dromomania in 1887. See Tissié 1887; Hacking 1998, 19-31; Toohey 2007, 151-152.

<sup>41</sup> Scientists suggest various causes of dromomania. According to Tissié, Dadas' case was genetically determined (the patient's father suffered from hypochondria and syphilis) and could also be related to a brain injury received at the age of eight. See Tissié 1887 and Hacking 1998, 21. However, no similar medical history was found among the numerous individuals in Europe who were also afflicted with wanderlust. Therefore, childhood trauma as a possible cause of dromomania cannot be generalized. Hacking argues that the spread of dromomania at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is to be explained by a romantic allure, an ecological niche, and the qualification of the condition as a disease, which relieved people of the responsibility for their own deeds and contributed to their aimless and infinite roaming for long distances. See Hacking 1998, 27-31 and Toohey 2007, 151-152. Nevertheless, the question still remains open: what is the cause of dromomania?

<sup>42</sup> Hughes 2013, 41-42, 58. Hughes discusses in depth the concept of creating DSM, dwells on modern psychiatrists' attitude to mental disorders, on the important role played by ethics and values in the conceptualisation of mental sufferings, singles

According to psychiatrists, the diagnosis has fallen into disuse. However, some people still tend to leave their homes whether driven by a conscious or unconscious desire, roam pointlessly, and are possessed by wanderlust, an irresistible impulse to travel. The analysis of the condition as described in *Prometheus Bound* may provide answers to some remaining questions.<sup>43</sup>

Rusudan Tsanova associates the wandering of Io, stung by οἶστρος, with one of the mytho-ritual models of acquiring power, and refers to ecstatic city foundation rituals practiced by shamans of early times.<sup>44</sup> A shaman was to find a power site – an area that was deemed special, not by its location but by the way it appealed to one’s “inner senses.” It was believed that such sites enabled one to communicate easily with the

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out the Methodist school from the medical schools of antiquity and compares modern and ancient approaches to psychiatric nosology. Hughes argues that while DSM could have hardly appeared innovative to ancient physicians, the latter’s findings are of great value for modern psychiatrists. See Hughes 2013, 41-58. Hughes agrees with Ludwig Wittgenstein stating: “it is not absurd ... to believe that the age of science and technology is the beginning of the end for humanity; the idea of great progress is a delusion, along with the idea that the truth will ultimately be known ... mankind, in seeking it [scientific knowledge], is falling into a trap” (Wittgenstein 1980, 56). According to Hughes (2013, 41-42, 57-58), if Ancient Greeks and Romans had DSM, we would have a clear understanding of mental disorders. When discussing this question, Hughes mainly refers to ancient medical texts/treatises. However, Greek tragedies are no less informative as regards mental disorders. See Knox 1957; Collinge 1962; Biggs 1966; Jouanna 1987; Ryzman 1992; Gill 1996; Guardasole 2000; Worman 2000; Craik 2001; Kosak 2004; Jouanna 2012a; 2012b; Dianosashvili 2020. I believe the Io episode in *Prometheus Bound* can be helpful in understanding the phenomenon of dromomania. On the development of psychological thought in antiquity and the role of medical anthropology in the history of medicine in antiquity, see Thumiger 2017, 1-66; on the development of psychiatry as a discipline and the history of physicians’/psychiatrists’ attitude to individuals with mental problems or generally to madness, see Foucault 2006.

<sup>43</sup> Drabkin was one of the first to point out the importance of retrospective diagnosis: “[the study of ancient psychopathology] could significantly deepen our understanding not only of ancient civilization but of our own.” See Drabkin 1955, 223.

<sup>44</sup> Tsanova 2005, 253, 264-265.

universe, to feel secure and happy. It was possible to accumulate power by merely staying in these places. Therefore, people would set up their dwellings on power sites and later even create city-states.<sup>45</sup>

By performing a ritual, the shaman sought to open the chakra of a seeker, activate the nexus in the human body that is the source of a person's energy. Opening this chakra was believed to help a person find the power site. Shamans associated chakras with animals, birds, or insects, believing that the creatures would protect the person's nexus. Remarkably, the energy of a seeker was sometimes thought to be contained in a chakra protected by the bull.<sup>46</sup>

According to Tsanava, the esoteric vision of shamans is materialized in Greek myths. In the myth of Io, the bull chakra is replaced by a biological cow – βούς that heads for sacred places. Evidently, she feels the power sites. Where she lies down, cities are founded (e.g., Aia, Iopolis, later called Antioch).<sup>47</sup>

Is it possible to call Io a seeker in *Prometheus Bound*? What is her motivation to wander in the tragedy? What is it that keeps her moving on?

The tragedy implies conscious as well as subconscious motivations shaping her behaviour. Consciously, Inachus' daughter desperately wishes to be free from her sufferings (561-588) – the shadow of Argus' death (568-569), the gadfly's stings (567, 675, 879-880), her distraught state of mind after the gadfly's bites (581-582), madness (675), and wanderings (585-587). While she needs to know where (ποιῖ, 576-577) she is going to rest, she is not acting of her own will. Her wanderings neither start nor proceed or stop through her own free will. She is not the author of her story. Although Io feels an unbearable pain and roams "the world" (the Eurasian continent) on foot, she is nevertheless to be considered as a passive character.

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<sup>45</sup> Harner 1990, 95-113; Castaneda 2003, 17-20; Tsanava 2005, 264-265; 2015, 150-151.

<sup>46</sup> Harner 1990, 57-69; Dixon 2000, 82-100; Tsanava 2015, 147-148.

<sup>47</sup> Tsanava 2005, 245-252, 264-265. According to Dowden, in the Argive Heraion, maidens would resemble "mad" Syberian Shamans as they called males during a ritual in honour of Hera, which they would perform to celebrate their transition from childhood to adulthood. See Dowden 1989, 134.

Io's story starts with the revelation of Zeus' desire in her dreams. When sleeping, she always hears a voice asking her why she still keeps her maidenhood, despite the honour of having a glorious wedding, when Zeus himself has a desire for her. Let her appear before him in Lerna's meadow to quench his wild lust (645-654). Exhausted by the nightly visions, the princess tells her father about her dreams.

I believe this is where the tragic conflict starts: her inability to comprehend a god's intent lies at the root of the conflict.<sup>48</sup> Io was chosen by Zeus. However, she does not aspire to join him and is unable to understand her dreams or act on them. Instead, she seeks support from her father.

Not knowing how to seek the god's favour, Inachus immediately sends his messengers to Pytho and Dodona to find out what the oracles say. Finally, one of the oracles utters that he shall oust his daughter from the palace, or Zeus' lightning will destroy his entire race. Inachus follows the oracle's words (658-672).

He banned his daughter from his palace. Ousted from her home by her own father, Io faces the reality to which Zeus or Hera<sup>49</sup> has doomed her. Her sufferings start at this point: she loses her home – the king's palace (670) as well as her physical identity – her form is destroyed (διαφθορὰν μορφῆς, 643-644) and she acquires a different body. Io turns into a cow, her body and mind are distorted (μορφή καὶ φρένες διάστροφοί, 673); her integrity is destroyed. Her physical identity and inner self are no longer aligned – transformed into a heifer, she roams from one land to another.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Scholars unanimously agree that conflict development and resolution in *Prometheus Bound* is identical to that of Aeschylus' other tragedies and that a conflict started upon a god's will ends in divine reconciliation. Concerning the development of the tragic conflict in Aeschylus' works, see Schadewaldt 1991, 170; Lesky 1972, 164; Gordeziani 2019, 153.

<sup>49</sup> According to the tragedy, Io knows that the torturous roaming inflicted upon her is Hera's vengeance (601). However, she blames Zeus for her sufferings (578-588, 759) and does not wish him well (759).

<sup>50</sup> After Io loses home and her human form, her freedom is also restricted. She is haunted by myriad-eyed Argus, who watched her permanently and did not leave her even for a moment (678-679). Argus controlled Io's every action, however she was soon set free from him. The story of Argus is narrated in a few lines (668-669,

Io's trajectory towards a place on earth where she can rest is unconscious. Since her actions are not intentional and purposeful, her state resembles dromomania – an unmotivated, aimless movement over a long distance. To this extent, οἴστρος, compared to “a whip of god” (μάστιγι θεία, 682), plays a key role in Io's adventure, causing her to move long distances continuously. As she roams from one land to another, the gadfly only gives her enough time to rest so that she can catch her breath, evidently, to prevent her from straying off the path and then bites her again, so that she can reach the place where Zeus' will is to be fulfilled. Thus, Io's wandering can only be described as an unconscious quest, an unconscious journey towards the place where she will meet Zeus.

Her preparation for meeting Zeus is likewise unconscious. Never in her roaming does Io appeal to Zeus. She is eager to have her sufferings come to an end, but not to meet Zeus (747-751, 578-588). She is worried about having lost her bodily self (643-644, 673-674) and wants to find a place to rest. “Where is my far-roaming wandering course taking me?” (576-577) – is her only question.

Prometheus provides an answer to her question. Although Io learns about the trajectory of her roaming, which Prometheus describes in detail (700-740, 823-876), as well as about the story of her inevitable meeting with Zeus, and the awareness of her future adds to her pointless wandering and furious rush, Io's constant moving ahead nevertheless continues to be determined by οἴστρος (877-886) and not by her own conscious decision. After she hears the prophecy, she is again bitten by the gadfly, which drives her into an altered state of consciousness, and she is once more compelled to follow a direction leading to Zeus.<sup>51</sup>

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677-678), and he is already dead when Io appears in the play (668-669). The tragedian does not even mention Hermes, who kills Argus (Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.5-9; Hyg. *Fab.* 145; Ov. *Met.* 1.583; Val. Flacc. *Argon.* 4.345). Instead, Aeschylus tells the spectators/readers the story of the gadfly – *oistros*.

<sup>51</sup> Thumiger identifies key factors that shape human mental life: the human mind, the body and the world around it, self-representation, social expectations, politics, and the irreducible individual experience. According to Thumiger, the human mind has a biological basis and can be healthy or unhealthy. The human mind and mental life are much broader than the brain and its functioning. Mental life is not

According to Prometheus, Io's wanderings come to an end in Egypt, on the banks of the Nile after Zeus touches her with his hand. Io is thus brought to her senses and she conceives.<sup>52</sup> She is freed from the haunting gadfly and not only finds peace but re-acquires her own female form, gives birth to Epaphus, finds a new dwelling and lays the foundation of a new culture. Io's offspring starts a new royal race of Argos (813-815, 848-852).<sup>53</sup>

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merely a consequence of the brain's performance but is formed through the interaction of the human mind with the body and the world around it. The body is not a container necessary for the mind, but the body and the mind co-exist on equal terms and are both involved in determining mental life. The human mind develops and advances through self-representation, amid social expectations and political processes, through an interaction with the world and is shaped by the irreducible individual experience. See Thumiger 2017, 24-29.

What can be said about Io from this perspective, given that her state in the tragedy is qualified as "disease," "sickness" (597, 632, 643)? Io's mind and body are integrated and mutually coordinated. They do not confront each other but cooperate. As regards her relationship with the outer world, the lack of congruence is obvious. Io's mental life is presented as a powerful immanent process within herself. She does not respond to external factors.

Io passes many a land on her way from Argos to the Nile. She comes across a lot of different people. Prometheus gives her advice on how to behave in different places – each country has its own laws and its specific nature (707-735, 790-815, 846-852). However, neither the social environment nor political processes have any impact on her mental state. Io's self-representation before Prometheus (645-682) and awareness of her future likewise are not effective. Though she gains experience through wandering, her mental condition nevertheless remains unchanged until her encounter with Zeus in Egypt. The only external factor to which she responds is the gadfly – *oistros*. The gadfly does not appear on the stage and nor is it described by any character of the play. It is through Io's words (567, 879; also Prometheus calls Io "stung by the gadfly" – οἰστροῦσασα, 836) and "frenzied by the gadfly" (οἰστροδινῆτος, 589), that the audience/reader learns what happens to her when it stings her.

<sup>52</sup> Davison and Katz interpret a god's touch as a way of impregnation in Greek myths and refer to Io's story from *Prometheus Bound*. See Davison 1991, 54; Katz 1999, 133.

<sup>53</sup> What kind of universe does Aeschylus portray in the tragedy? Is it predetermined or does it allow for freedom of choice? So far, there is no unanimous an-

According to the tragedy, Io's state was brought on by Hera as a punishment – for Io “fires the heart of Zeus with passion” (590-591). Because of her husband's desire for Io, Hera was vengeful (ἐπικότος, 601) towards her, even if Io had never yet been with Zeus. It was Hera who sent myriad-eyed Argus and οἴστρος to haunt her. However, Hera's actions only contribute to the eventual meeting of Zeus and Io.

According to Montiglio, Hera and Zeus unintentionally collaborate, which adds a touch of irony to the tragedy. Instead of confronting each other, they both compel her to do what she resists – to marry Zeus.<sup>54</sup> Likewise, Inachus and οἴστρος are inadvertently fulfilling the will of Zeus. Inachus' banning of her daughter from the palace gave Hera a chance to take revenge.<sup>55</sup> Likewise, although the gadfly acts directly upon Hera's

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swer to the questions. Researchers look into the nature of Zeus to find out the answers. “Hugh Lloyd-Jones has suggested that the way *PV* frames this theological crux could justifiably give the impression of a ‘monotheistic’ perspective” (Rader 2013, 176; see also Lloyd-Jones 1983, 79-103). Contrary to this opinion, Richard Rader referring to Terry Eagleton argues that the cosmos presented in the tragedy “is open and undetermined... The future is not yet written – not for Zeus, for Prometheus, Oceanus or the chorus... (Eagleton 2003, 109) The gods have choices and thus have a hand in the creation and sustainability of the universe ... Zeus is neither Superego nor pawn but rather more like an artist for whom ‘existence is gift, not fate, play rather than necessity’ (Eagleton 2008, 19). He is subject to no deterministic force of necessity because the future can change at any moment depending on the relationships he cultivates with others” (Rader 2013, 176-177). I share Rader's opinion. His research clearly shows that Zeus as well as other gods, even Prometheus bound to a rock, can create their own stories and “manage” their destiny. However, the same is not true about Io: she is the only mortal in the play.

<sup>54</sup> Montiglio 2005, 23. According to Provenza, Zeus should only be thankful to Hera, as it is with her support that he impregnates Io on the banks of the Nile. See Provenza 2020, 213.

<sup>55</sup> Devereux's analysis of Io's story was inspired by psychoanalysis. See Devereux 1976, 25-52. Psychoanalysts too would most probably interpret Io's dream as the representation of the Oedipus Complex. However, Devereux's opinion that the character of Zeus as portrayed by Aeschylus implicates Inachus is not attested in any ancient source (Zeus has a desire for Io (Aesch. *Supp.* 295; Nonnus, *Dion.* 20.35; 32. 65; Suda, s. v. “Isis”); Io is in love with Zeus (Prop. 2.33A); Io gives birth to Epa-

instructions, it appears to be one of the key facilitators of Io and Zeus' meeting, a key element leading to this outcome. After Zeus' will is fulfilled, the gadfly disappears from Io's life.

Thus, οἰστρος plays an important role in Io's story. Although it does not act on its own free will, but merely as an executor, a tool of vengeance in the hands of Hera, it nevertheless determines Io's psychic condition in her adventure which is manifested by a sudden alteration of the mind, a sudden urge to travel, jerking movements (convulsions, leaps), and urgency. It has ambivalent features. Its touch is torturous but eventually beneficial. It is perceived to be a god's punishment but in fact, it appears to be a tool enabling the fulfilment of a god's will. It finally drives Io towards Zeus. It is also because of οἰστρος that Inachus' daughter becomes a seeker – although unconsciously.

Being attuned to a god's intent, understanding the motivation of one's actions and constantly moving forward are the steps proposed by Aeschylus in *Prometheus Bound* towards gaining or restoring balance in one's inner world – when a person is permanently anxious, restless, and totally involved in seeking something. When questions crop up in the mind of a perpetual traveler, does it mean their roaming can ever finish? And where does it end? According to the tragedian, a person who embarks on such a path is helped by gods to carry out that intent.

This might have also been an unconscious motivation of the “mad travel” phenomenon emerging at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – to find a new place determined by god's will where travellers could settle and fulfil themselves.

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phus by Zeus in Egypt (Aesch. *Supp.* 171-172, 312; ps.-Hyg. *Fab.* 155; Nonnus *Dion.* 284). According to Devereux, Io's sufferings start with the breaking of a taboo (Io's passion for her father). See Devereux 1976, 38, 47, 50. Differing from this, I believe Io's adventure was initiated by the fear of breaking a taboo (i.e., Io's possible union with Zeus, a deity) that gripped Inachus after he learned about Io's dream and the oracle's counsel (Aesch. *PV* 655-671). Inachus is afraid that Io's possible meeting with Zeus would cause her daughter to cross the threshold established by the gods concerning the rights of humans and that it would destroy his race.

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