

## SECRETS

Secrets are concealed messages we trade with each other when we want to assure privacy to what we communicate. Secrets often either support or fortify intimacy—they target a single ear—and often create bonds, the closeness of which the secret receiver is the sole custodian. Keeping a secret is a great, and often under practiced, art, for often the very sacredness of a secret depends on the keen import of the message for an interested community.

Secret holding can be burdensome. In the *Prometheus Bound* of the Greek dramatist Aeschylus, the humanist god Prometheus, is nailed to a rock in the Caucasus, while a vulture pecks his liver, waiting until the god will give in and reveal the ultimate secret, the name of the deity who will eventually supplant the tyrannical Zeus. The power to retain his secret derives from Prometheus' knowledge of the goods he has brought to mankind—writing, math, the spirit of science—which are a permanent strengthening of the fragile mortals whom this god has been sent to defend.

The fact is, as most mortals will testify, keeping a secret is difficult. Mary revealed her secret to Elizabeth, but only because her now motherly radiance made her secret transparent. The difficulty of secret-concealing radiates through human experience. Your sister has been appointed Provost of a major University, but for administrative reasons has been sworn to silence. When you meet her downtown you see that she is bursting to tell you something... but will not. As you separate from your brief encounter you reflect on that visible quality of 'but will not,' in which lies so much human power of endurance.