

THE COMPLETE GREEK TRAGEDIES

Edited by David Grene and Richmond Lattimore

AESCHYLUS • II

THE SUPPLIANT MAIDENS

Translated by S. G. Benardete

THE PERSIANS

Translated by S. G. Benardete

SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

Translated by David Grene

PROMETHEUS BOUND

Translated by David Grene

Second Edition

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Chorus

Alas, alas.
O high-vaunting, ruin to the race
fatal Furies, who have destroyed
the race of Oedipus so utterly—
What will happen me? What shall I do?
What shall I plan?
How shall I be so heartless,
not to mourn for you,
not to give escort to your funeral?
But I fear the dreadful authority
of the people: I am turned from my purpose.

1060

(To the body of Eteocles)

Many mourners you shall win:

(To the body of Polyneices)

But this poor wretch unwept
save for his sister's single dirge
shall go his road. Who would yield
so much obedience as this?

(The Chorus divides in two.)

First Half-Chorus

Let the state do or not
what it will to the mourners of Polyneices.
We will go and bury him;
we will go as his escort.

1070

This grief is common to the race
but now one way and now another
the city approves the path of justice.

Second Half-Chorus

But we will go with the other, as the city
and Justice jointly approve.
For after the Blessed Ones and the strength of Zeus
he is the one who saved the city
from utter destruction, from being overwhelmed
by the wave of foreign invaders.

PROMETHEUS BOUND

Translated by David Grene

INTRODUCTION TO PROMETHEUS BOUND

IN THE eighteenth century the critics knew what they thought about the *Prometheus* of Aeschylus and knew why they thought it. It was a bad play because the structure was episodic, the characters extravagant and improbable, the diction uncouth and wild. Their handbook of criticism was the *Poetics* of Aristotle, either directly or indirectly drawn upon. And it is plain that the Aeschylean play does not measure up to Aristotelian standards. Since the eighteenth-century critics believed there was only one canon for drama, rooted in the principles of Aristotle, they quite reasonably judged the *Prometheus* a bad play. During the nineteenth century, with the Romantic revival and the breakdown of the so-called "classical" rules of the drama, the *Prometheus* was acclaimed by the critics as a great work of art. But they so acclaimed it entirely in terms of its theme or its poetry and in the same breath spoke of the greatness of Sophocles' *Oedipus*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and Goethe's *Faust*. There was no effort to discover what in the nature of Aeschylus' dramatic method set him so apart from Sophocles that the eighteenth-century critics had refused to recognize his merit. Nor did they sift the striking differences which exist between the *Prometheus* and any of the Shakespearean tragedies or *Faust*. They contented themselves with vague and not entirely satisfied references to the *Prometheus* as a study-drama rather than a play for the theater.

Of the three dramatists, Aeschylus perhaps appears for a modern reader the most provocative and the most enigmatic. There is so much in the *Oresteia*, for instance, and particularly in the *Agamemnon*, which appeals directly to our sense of the theater and dramatic poetry. And yet the conclusion with its stress on an obscure theological point and its very local emphasis on the court of the Atreopagus baffles our awakened interest. But in no play of Aeschylus is a

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reader today so aware at the same time of the directness and universality of the theme and also of the purely Greek, and indeed purely fifth-century, implications of it as in the *Prometheus*. The remarks that follow constitute only one more attempt among many to assist readers who are not classical scholars to a more complete understanding of a very great and very puzzling play.

For Aeschylus the myth is the illustration of a great permanent truth that he finds at the heart of man's activity. His dramatic imagination seizes on such truths as are most frequently a compromise between two opposites, and consequently the myths he uses most are those which tell of conflict on a cosmic scale and conflict ultimately laid by some concessions on the part of both combatants. To make myth universally significant, both characters and plot must correspond symbolically with characters and plot on one or more levels in addition to the myth in which they are imbedded.

In the *Prometheus*, the probability is not in the action or the conditions the dramatist has stated for us before the play commences. It consists in setting forth a very simple story, one which comes from a common stock of mythological stories known to almost all, and fusing this with a number of other patterns known to almost all. Everybody in Greece knew the legend of the Titan who stole fire from heaven to give it to man. But everybody in Greece also knew the story of Peisistratus, the tyrant of Athens, or Lygdamis, the tyrant of Naxos, or Polycrates, the tyrant of Samos. They knew the kind of outrage citizens had suffered at their hands, the innovations in established custom and ritual and in the conventional governmental attitudes of mercy, the "unwritten laws." Thus when the Prometheus-Zeus conflict is represented also as the rebel versus tyrant conflict, it has been invested with a new probability. And men everywhere have felt, some obscurely and some clearly, an opposition between the animal and the spirit in man, between violence and persuasion, between might and intellect. So when the Zeus-Lygdamis versus Prometheus-rebel struggle is represented as another facet of the conflict between the two most powerful factors in human life—brute force and mind—the story has been invested with a new

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probability drawn from the community of man's experience. And men everywhere have known the torture of subjugation to a stronger force than themselves, have known the helplessness of persuasion against force, and yet have believed in the ultimate triumph of persuasion. And so, when the suffering Prometheus cries out in his helplessness and his knowledge, and doubts yet feels certain of the outcome, the story has been invested with a new probability drawn from the community of man's experience. The original story of Zeus and Prometheus is like a stone thrown into a quiet pool, where the ripples spread in wider and wider circles.

Methods like the Aeschylean, developed to varying degrees of complexity, are familiar in other forms of literature. The degree of complexity is determined by the number of levels of meaning involved. For instance, in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, there is only one meaning in the tale apart from the highly dramatic story of Christian's journey, and that is the progress of the Christian soul toward the Eternal City. But, in the *Prometheus*, Aeschylus has made his story significant on a number of different levels, though each level involves the conflict of two opposing principles. For Prometheus is, politically, the symbol of the rebel against the tyrant who has overthrown the traditional rule of Justice and Law. He is the symbol of Knowledge against Force. He is symbolically the champion of man, raising him through the gift of intelligence, against the would-be destroyer of man. Finally, there is a level at which Prometheus is symbolically Man as opposed to God.

We are never told in this play why Zeus wished to destroy man. There is no indication what sort of animal he wished to put in his place; but, insofar as Prometheus in disobedience to Zeus enlightened man by the gift of intelligence, it may be assumed that Zeus's creation would have had no such dangerous potentialities of development. This first attempt to destroy mankind is almost certainly the flood of Deucalion, of which we hear elsewhere, and there is a tradition to the effect that Prometheus counseled Deucalion to the building of the ark which preserved him and his family. The second

action in Prometheus' rescue of man from the enmity of the world in which he found himself is even more significant. "I stopped mortals from foreseeing doom," says Prometheus.

Chorus: What cure did you provide them with against that sickness?

Prometheus: I placed in them blind hopes.

Chorus: That was a great gift you gave to men.

As the rest of his gifts to man are all concerned with enlightenment, and, indeed, as fire itself becomes a symbol of that enlightenment, this gift of "blind hopes" seems at first strange. Yet it is quite consistent. There is a passage in the *Gorgias* which is illuminating here. We are told that in the days of Kronos and when Zeus was *newly king*, men were informed as to the day of their death and were judged alive, with all their clothes on and their possessions about them, by live judges. This was a practice which brought much injustice, says Plato, and Zeus ultimately ordered it otherwise. Plato is using the myth for the illustration of his own theme, and we must not be surprised that his picture of the development of man when this was the state of things does not accord with that of Aeschylus. But the dating in the case of Plato shows either that he and Aeschylus were drawing on the same myth or else that Plato is borrowing from Aeschylus: "In the days of Kronos and when Zeus was *newly king*." What, then, is the meaning of the blind hopes which were the compensation for man's loss of knowledge of his death and yet left him able to use his reason to build houses and yoke horses and invent cures for sickness?

Prometheus is wise in the wisdom of his mother Themis, or Earth, and consequently wise in the knowledge of destiny. This is not reason. It is absolute knowledge. The knowledge of the day of a man's death partakes of that quality, for it is in the province of destiny. Thus man at the beginning had an infinitely small particle of the *same kind of knowledge* which Prometheus enjoyed in large measure. Just as animals today seem to have a curious intuition of the coming of their death and crawl away into hiding to face it, so primitive man had this knowledge. And Prometheus caused them

to cease to foreknow the day of their death. For the gift of reason, the supreme ally in their struggle against nature, made them fight on against death in "blind hope," even when the day of their death had come. It is worth noticing here that, of the two accounts of man's origins in the world—the one that of a golden age of material and moral perfection and the other of miserable ignorance and helplessness—Aeschylus has preferred the scientific tradition. But he has chosen to incorporate in his account a grain of the truth of the former. The very small particle of absolute knowledge which man possessed was a spark of the divine. The fire itself, Prometheus' greatest and most celebrated gift to man, is a symbol of practical, not speculative, reason. And nowhere does Aeschylus assert that such speculative reason in its full will ever be in man's possession.

There is a sense in which Prometheus in this play appeals directly to the human sympathies of his audience because though a Titan and a God his helplessness before Zeus places him on the same level with mortals. It is the story of the man-god who must suffer for his kindness to man by having his state equated with theirs. In the case of Prometheus the good achieved for man is achieved before the suffering—which comes in the nature of a punishment. The cry of Prometheus—

I knew when I transgressed nor will deny it.
In helping man I brought my troubles on me;
but yet I did not think that with such tortures
I should be wasted on these airy cliffs—

is the cry of one who is man enough to be weak under pain. Prometheus, though possessed of a knowledge of destiny and therefore of victory in the end, is for the present at the mercy of a brutal and ignorant opponent. So, too, is the mortal Io. So are all the mortals over whom Death holds power against which they fight with "blind hopes." Finally, Prometheus' deliverance by Heracles, who is part god and part man, once again binds his fate to the creature whom he has helped to survive in the teeth of the opposition of the supreme god.

PROMETHEUS BOUND

CHARACTERS

Might

Violence (muta persona)

Hephaestus

Prometheus

Oceanos

Io

Hermes

Chorus of daughters of Oceanos

SCENE: *A bare and desolate crag in the Caucasus. Enter Might and Violence, demons, servants of Zeus, and Hephaestus, the smith.*

Might

This is the world's limit that we have come to; this is the Scythian country, an untrodden desolation. Hephaestus, it is you that must heed the commands the Father laid upon you to nail this malefactor to the high craggy rocks in fetters unbreakable of adamantine chain. For it was your flower, the brightness of fire that devises all, that he stole and gave to mortal men; this is the sin for which he must pay the Gods the penalty—that he may learn to endure and like the sovereignty of Zeus and quit his man-loving disposition. 10

Hephaestus

Might and Violence, in you the command of Zeus has its perfect fulfilment: in you there is nothing to stand in its way. But, for myself, I have not the heart to bind violently a God who is my kin here on this wintry cliff. Yet there is constraint upon me to have the heart for just that, for it is a dangerous thing to treat the Father's words lightly.

High-contriving Son of Themis of Straight Counsel: this is not of your will nor of mine; yet I shall nail you in bonds of indissoluble bronze on this crag far from men. Here you shall hear no voice of mortal; here you shall see no form of mortal. You shall be grilled by the sun's bright fire and change the fair bloom of your skin. You shall be glad when Night comes with her mantle of stars and hides the sun's light; but the sun shall scatter the hoarfrost again at dawn. Always the grievous burden of your torture 20

will be there to wear you down; for he that shall cause it to cease has yet to be born.

Such is the reward you reap of your man-loving disposition. For you, a God, feared not the anger of the Gods, but gave honors to mortals beyond what was just. Wherefore you shall mount guard on this unlovely rock, upright, sleepless, not bending the knee. Many a groan and many a lamentation you shall utter, but they shall not serve you. For the mind of Zeus is hard to soften with prayer and every ruler is harsh whose rule is new. 30

Might

Come, why are you holding back? Why are you plying in vain? Why is it that you do not hate a God whom the Gods hate most of all? Why do you not hate him, since it was your honor that he betrayed to men?

Hephaestus

Our kinship has strange power; that, and our life together.

Might

Yes. But to turn a deaf ear to the Father's words—how can that be? Do you not fear that more? 40

Hephaestus

You are always pitiless, always full of ruthlessness.

Might

There is no good singing dirges over him. Do not labor uselessly at what helps not at all.

Hephaestus

O handicraft of mine—that I deeply hate!

Might

Why do you hate it? To speak simply, your craft is in no way the author of his present troubles.

Hephaestus

Yet would another had had this craft allotted to him.

Might

There is nothing without discomfort except the overlordship of the Gods. For only Zeus is free.

Hephaestus

I know. I have no answer to this.

Might

Hurry now. Throw the chain around him that the Father may not look upon your tarrying.

Hephaestus

There are the fetters, there: you can see them.

Might

Put them on his hands: strong, now with the hammer: strike. Nail him to the rock.

Hephaestus

It is being done now. I am not idling at my work.

Might

Hammer it more; put in the wedge; leave it loose nowhere. He's a cunning fellow at finding a way even out of hopeless difficulties.

Hephaestus

Look now, his arm is fixed immovably!

Might

Nail the other safe, that he may learn, for all his cleverness, that he is duller witted than Zeus.

Hephaestus

No one, save Prometheus, can justly blame me.

Might

Drive the obstinate jaw of the adamantine wedge right through his breast: drive it hard.

Hephaestus

Alas, Prometheus, I groan for your sufferings.

Might

Are you pitying again? Are you groaning for the enemies of Zeus? Have a care, lest some day you may be pitying yourself.

Hephaestus

You see a sight that hurts the eye.

Might

I see this rascal getting his deserts. Throw the girth around his sides. 70

Hephaestus

I am forced to do this; do not keep urging me.

Might

Yes, I will urge you, and hound you on as well. Get below now, and hoop his legs in strongly.

Hephaestus

There now, the task is done. It has not taken long.

Might

Hammer the piercing fetters with all your power, for the Overseer of our work is severe.

Hephaestus

Your looks and the refrain of your tongue are alike.

Might

You can be softhearted. But do not blame my stubbornness and harshness of temper. 80

Hephaestus

Let us go. He has the harness on his limbs.

Might (to Prometheus)

Now, play the insolent; now, plunder the Gods' privileges and give them to creatures of a day. What drop of your sufferings can mortals spare you? The Gods named you wrongly when they called you Forethought; you yourself need Forethought to extricate yourself from this contrivance.

(*Prometheus is left alone on the rock.*)

Prometheus

Bright light, swift-winged winds, springs of the rivers, numberless

laughter of the sea's waves, earth, mother of all, and the all-seeing circle of the sun: I call upon you to see what I, a God, suffer at the hands of Gods— 90

see with what kind of torture worn down I shall wrestle ten thousand years of time—

such is the spiteful bond that the Prince has devised against me, the new Prince of the Blessed Ones. Oh woe is me!

I groan for the present sorrow,

I groan for the sorrow to come, I groan questioning when there shall come a time when He shall ordain a limit to my sufferings.

What am I saying? I have known all before,

all that shall be, and clearly known; to me, nothing that hurts shall come with a new face.

So must I bear, as lightly as I can,

the destiny that fate has given me;

for I know well against necessity,

against its strength, no one can fight and win.

I cannot speak about my fortune, cannot hold my tongue either. It was mortal man

to whom I gave great privileges and

for that was yoked in this unyielding harness.

I hunted out the secret spring of fire

that filled the narthex stem, which when revealed became the teacher of each craft to men, a great resource. This is the sin committed

for which I stand accountant, and I pay

nailed in my chains under the open sky.

Ah! Ah!

What sound, what sightless smell approaches me,

God sent, or mortal, or mingled?
Has it come to earth's end
to look on my sufferings,
or what does it wish?

120

You see me a wretched God in chains,
the enemy of Zeus, hated of all
the Gods that enter Zeus's palace hall,
because of my excessive love for Man.

What is that? The rustle
of birds' wings near? The air whispers
with the gentle strokes of wings.

Everything that comes toward me is occasion for fear.

*(The Chorus, composed of the daughters of Oceanos, enters,
the members wearing some formalized representation of
wings, so that their general appearance is birdlike.)*

Chorus

Fear not: this is a company of friends
that comes to your mountain with swift
rivalry of wings.

130

Hardly have we persuaded our Father's
mind, and the quick-bearing winds
sped us hither. The sound
of stroke of bronze rang through our cavern
in its depths and it shook from us
shamefaced modesty; unsandaled
we have hastened on our chariot of wings.

Prometheus

Alas, children of reeking Tethys and of him
who encircles all the world with stream unsleeping,
Father Ocean,

140

look, see with what chains
I am nailed on the craggy heights
of this gully to keep a watch
that none would envy me.

« 144 »

Chorus

I see, Prometheus: and a mist of fear and tears
besets my eyes as I see your form
wasting away on these cliffs
in adamantine bonds of bitter shame.

For new are the steersmen that rule Olympus:
and new are the customs by which Zeus rules,
customs that have no law to them,
but what was great before he brings to nothingness.

150

Prometheus

Would that he had hurled me
underneath the earth and underneath
the House of Hades, host to the dead—
yes, down to limitless Tartarus,
yes, though he bound me cruelly
in chains unbreakable,
so neither God nor any other being
might have found joy in gloating over me.
Now as I hang, the plaything of the winds,
my enemies can laugh at what I suffer.

Chorus

Who of the Gods is so hard of heart
that he finds joy in this?
Who is that that does not feel
sorrow answering your pain—
save only Zeus? For he malignantly,
always cherishing a mind
that bends not, has subdued the breed
of Ouranos, nor shall he cease
until he satisfies his heart,
or someone take the rule from him—that hard-to-capture rule—
by some device of subtlety.

160

Prometheus

Yes, there shall come a day for me
when he shall need me, me that now am tortured

« 145 »

in bonds and fetters—he shall need me then,
this president of the Blessed—
to show the new plot whereby he may be spoiled
of his throne and his power.
Then not with honeyed tongues
of persuasion shall he enchant me;
he shall not cow me with his threats
to tell him what I know,
until he free me from my cruel chains
and pay me recompense for what I suffer.

170

Chorus

You are stout of heart, unyielding
to the bitterness of pain.
You are free of tongue, too free.
It is my mind that piercing fear has fluttered;
your misfortunes frighten me.
Where and when is it fated
to see you reach the term, to see you reach
the harbor free of trouble at the last?
A disposition none can win, a heart
that no persuasions soften—these are his,
the Son of Kronos.

180

Prometheus

I know that he is savage: and his justice
a thing he keeps by his own standard: still
that will of his shall melt to softness yet
when he is broken in the way I know,
and though his temper now is oaken hard
it shall be softened: hastily he'll come
to meet my haste, to join in amity
and union with me—one day he shall come.

190

Chorus

Reveal it all to us; tell us the story,
on what charges Zeus has laid hold on you

« 146 »

and tortures you so cruelly, with dishonor.
Instruct us if the telling will not harm you.

Prometheus

To speak of this is bitterness. To keep silent
bitter no less; and every way is misery.
When first the Gods began their angry quarrel,
and God matched God in rising faction, some
eager to drive old Kronos from his throne
that Zeus might rule—the fools!—others again
earnest that Zeus might never be their king—
I then with the best counsel tried to win
the Titans, sons of Ouranos and Earth,
but failed. They would have none of crafty schemes
and in their savage arrogance of spirit
thought they would lord it easily by force.
But she that was my mother, Themis, Earth—
she is but one although her names are many—
had prophesied to me how it should be,
even how the fates decreed it: and she said
that "not by strength nor overmastering force
the fates allowed the conquerors to conquer
but by guile only": This is what I told them,
but they would not vouchsafe a glance at me.
Then with those things before me it seemed best
to take my mother and join Zeus's side:
he was as willing as we were:
thanks to my plans the dark receptacle
of Tartarus conceals the ancient Kronos,
him and his allies. These were the services
I rendered to this tyrant and these pains
the payment he has given me in requital.
This is a sickness rooted and inherent
in the nature of a tyranny:
that he that holds it does not trust his friends.

200

210

220

« 147 »

But you have asked on what particular charge he now tortures me: this I will tell you. As soon as he ascended to the throne

230

that was his father's, straightway he assigned to the several Gods their several privileges and portioned out the power, but to the unhappy breed of mankind he gave no heed, intending to blot the race out and create a new.

Against these plans none stood save I: I dared. I rescued men from shattering destruction that would have carried them to Hades' house; and therefore I am tortured on this rock, a bitterness to suffer, and a pain to pitiful eyes. I gave to mortal man a precedence over myself in pity: I can win no pity: pitiless is he that thus chastises me, a spectacle bringing dishonor on the name of Zeus.

240

Chorus

Of iron mind he must be, must be made of stone who does not sympathize, Prometheus, with your sufferings. Myself, I would not have chosen to look on them; now that I do, my heart is full of pain.

Prometheus

Yes, to my friends the sight is pitiable.

Chorus

Did you perhaps go further than you have told us?

Prometheus

Yes, I stopped mortals from foreseeing doom.

250

Chorus

What cure did you discover for that sickness?

Prometheus

I sowed in them blind hopes.

Chorus

That was a great help that you gave to men.

« 148 »

Prometheus

Besides, I myself gave them fire.

Chorus

Do now creatures of a day own bright-faced fire?

Prometheus

Yes and from it they shall learn many crafts.

Chorus

So it was on such charges as this that Zeus—

Prometheus

Tortures me, gives me no respite from my pains.

Chorus

Is there no term prescribed for your suffering?

Prometheus

None save when it seems good to Zeus himself.

260

Chorus

How shall it seem good? What hope is there? Do you not see that you were wrong? How you have been wrong, it is not a pleasure for me to say, and pain for you. Let us let all this be; seek some deliverance out of your trial.

Prometheus

It is an easy thing for one whose foot is on the outside of calamity

to give advice and to rebuke the sufferer.

I have known all that you have said: I knew, I knew when I transgressed nor will deny it. In helping man I brought my troubles on me;

but yet I did not think that with such tortures I should be wasted on these airy cliffs, this lonely mountain top, with no one near.

270

But do not sorrow for my present suffering; alight on earth and hear what is to come that you may know the whole complete: I beg you

« 149 »

alight and join your sorrow with mine: misfortune
wandering the same track lights now upon one
and now upon another.

Chorus

Willing our ears,
that hear you cry to them, Prometheus.
Now with light foot I leave the rushing car
and sky, the holy path of birds, and light
upon this jutting rock: I long
to hear your story to the end.

280

(Enter Oceanos, riding on a hippocamp, or sea monster.)

Oceanos

I come
on a long journey, speeding past the boundaries,
to visit you, Prometheus: with the mind
alone, no bridle needed, I direct
my swift-winged bird; my heart is sore
for your misfortunes; you know that. I think
that it is kinship makes me feel them so.
Besides, apart from kinship, there is no one
I hold in higher estimation: that
you soon shall know and know beside that in me
there is no mere word-kindness: tell me
how I can help you, and you will never say
that you have any friend more loyal to you
than Oceanos.

290

Prometheus

What do I see? Have you, too, come to gape
in wonder at this great display, my torture?
How did you have the courage to come here
to this land, this Iron Mother, leaving the stream
called after you and the rock-roofed, self-established
caverns? Was it to feast your eyes upon
the spectacle of my suffering and join
in pity for my pain? Now look and see

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« 150 »

the sight, this friend of Zeus, that helped set up
his tyranny, and see what agonies
twist me, by his instructions!

Oceanos

Yes, I see,
Prometheus, and I want, indeed I do,
to advise you for the best, for all your cleverness.
Know yourself and reform your ways to new ways,
for new is he that rules among the Gods.
But if you throw about such angry words,
words that are whetted swords, soon Zeus will hear you,
even though his seat in glory is far removed,
and then your present multitude of pains
will seem like child's play. My poor friend, give up
this angry mood of yours and look for means
of getting yourself free of trouble. Maybe
what I say seems to you both old and commonplace;
but this is what you pay, Prometheus, for
that tongue of yours which talked so high and haughty:
you are not yet humble, still you do not yield
to your misfortunes, and you wish, indeed,
to add some more to them; now, if you follow
me as a schoolmaster you will not kick
against the pricks, seeing that he, the King,
that rules alone, is harsh and sends accounts
to no one's audit for the deeds he does.
Now I will go and try if I can free you:
do you be quiet, do not talk so much.
Since your mind is so subtle, don't you know
that a vain tongue is subject to correction?

320

330

Prometheus

I envy you, that you stand clear of blame,
yet shared and dared in everything with me!
Now let me be, and have no care for me.
Do what you will, Him you will not persuade;

« 151 »

He is not easily won over: look,
take care lest coming here to me should hurt you.

Oceanos

You are by nature better at advising
others than yourself. I take my cue
from deeds, not words. Do not withhold me now
when I am eager to go to Zeus. I'm sure,
I'm sure that he will grant this favor to me,
to free you from your chains.

340

Prometheus

I thank you and will never cease; for loyalty
is not what you are wanting in. Don't trouble,
for you will trouble to no purpose, and no help
to me—if it so be you want to trouble.
No, rest yourself, keep away from this thing;
because I am unlucky! I would not,
for that, have everyone unlucky too.

350

No, for my heart is sore already when
I think about my brothers' fortunes—Atlas,
who stands to westward of the world, supporting
the pillar of earth and heaven on his shoulders,
a load that suits no shoulders; and the earthborn
dweller in caves Cilician, whom I saw
and pitied, hundred-headed, dreadful monster,
fierce Typho, conquered and brought low by force.
Once against all the Gods he stood, opposing,
hissing out terror from his grim jaws; his eyes
flashed gorgon glaring lightning as he thought
to sack the sovereign tyranny of Zeus;
but upon him came the unsleeping bolt
of Zeus, the lightning-breathing flame, down rushing,
which cast him from his high aspiring boast.
Struck to the heart, his strength was blasted dead
and burnt to ashes; now a sprawling mass
useless he lies, hard by the narrow seaway

360

« 152 »

pressed down beneath the roots of Aetna: high
above him on the mountain peak the smith
Hephaestus works at the anvil. Yet one day
there shall burst out rivers of fire, devouring
with savage jaws the fertile, level plains
of Sicily of the fair fruits; such boiling wrath
with weapons of fire-breathing surf, a fiery
unapproachable torrent, shall Typho vomit,
though Zeus's lightning left him but a cinder.
But all of this you know: you do not need me
to be your schoolmaster: reassure yourself
as you know how: this cup I shall drain myself
till the high mind of Zeus shall cease from anger.

370

Oceanos

Do you not know, Prometheus,
that words are doctors for a diseased temper?

380

Prometheus

Yes, if in season due one soothes the heart,
not violently reduces the swelling temper.

Oceanos

In loyalty to you and courage to show it
what penalty do you see for me? Now tell me.

Prometheus

Only futile effort and a silly good nature.

Oceanos

Suffer me to be sick of this complaint,
for it is best for wise ones to seem foolish.

Prometheus

The fault will seem to be mine if you do this.

Oceanos

It is clear your words would send me home again.

Prometheus

Yes, for lamenting now will lead to enmity.

390

« 153 »

Oceanos

With him that now sits on the throne of power?

Prometheus

His is a heart take heed you never vex.

Oceanos

Your own misfortune, Prometheus, is my teacher.

Prometheus

Off with you, then! Begone! Keep your present mind.

Oceanos

These words of yours reach one who is ready to go.

For my four-footed bird already paws
the level track of heaven with his wings
and gladly will he bend his knee
in his home stable.

Chorus

STROPHE

I cry aloud, Prometheus, and lament your bitter fate.
My tender eyes are trickling tears:
their fountains wet my cheek.

This is a tyrant's deed; this is unlovely,
a thing done by a tyrant's private laws,
and with this thing Zeus shows his haughtiness
of temper toward the Gods that were of old.

ANTISTROPHE

Now all the earth has cried aloud, lamenting:
now all that was magnificent of old
laments your fall, laments your brethren's fall—
as many as in holy Asia hold
their stablished habitation, all lament
in sympathy for your most grievous woes.

STROPHE

Dwellers in the land of Colchis,
maidens fearless in the fight,

and the host of Scythia, living
round the lake Maeotis, living
on the edges of the world.

ANTISTROPHE

And Arabia's flower of warriors
and the craggy fortress keepers
near Caucasian mountains, fighters
terrible, crying for battle,
brandishing sharp pointed spears.

STROPHE

One God and one God only I have seen
before this day, in torture and in bonds
unbreakable: he was a Titan,
Atlas, whose strength and might
ever exceeded; now he bends his back
and groans beneath the load of earth and heaven.

ANTISTROPHE

The wave cries out as it breaks into surf,
the depth cries out, lamenting you; the dark
Hades, the hollow underneath the world,
sullenly groans below; the springs
of sacred flowing rivers all lament
the pain and pity of your suffering.

Prometheus

Do not think from pride and stubbornness I am silent.
In self awareness my heart is eaten away
to see myself insulted as I am.
Yet to these new gods who but I assigned
their privileges of honor in full completion?
Of all that I say nothing, for I would speak
to you who know it. But man's tribulation,
that I would have you hear—how I found them mindless
and gave them minds, made them masters of their wits.
I will tell you this not as reproaching man,

but to set forth the goodwill of my gifts.
First they had eyes but had no eyes to see,
and ears but heard not. Like shapes within a dream
they dragged through their long lives and muddled all,
haphazardly. They knew not how to build

430

brick houses to face the sun, nor work in wood.
They lived beneath the earth like swarming ants
in sunless caves. They had no certain mark
of winter nor of flowery spring nor summer,
with its crops, but did all this without intelligence
until it was I that showed them—yes, it was I—
stars' risings and their settings hard to judge.

And numbering as well, preeminent
of subtle devices, and letter combinations
that hold all in memory, the Muses' mother skilled in craft,
I found for them. I was the first to yoke

460

beasts to be slave to the traces, and with their bodies
to be man's substitute in the hardest work. I harnessed
to the carriage horses obedient to the rein,
the crowning glory of the rich man's luxury.
And carriages that wander on the sea,
the ships sail-winged, who else but I invented?
Such, to my sorrow, were the devices which
I found for men, but have no clever means
to rid myself of the afflictions now oppressing me.

470

Chorus

You have suffered terribly. Bewildered in your mind
you are astray, and like a bad doctor who
has fallen sick, you have lost heart not finding
by what drugs your own disease is curable.

Prometheus

If you hear the rest, you will marvel even more
at what crafts and what resources I contrived.
Greatest was this: when one of mankind was sick,

there was no defense for him—neither healing food
nor drink nor unguent; for lack of drugs they wasted,
until I showed them blendings of mild simples
with which they drive away all kinds of sickness.
The many ways of prophesying I charted;

480

I was the one who first judged what out of dreams
came truly real; and for mankind I gave meaning
to ominous sounds, hard of interpretation,
and to the significance of road encounters.
The flights of hook-taloned birds I analyzed,
which of them were in nature prosperous
and lucky, and what manner of life each led,
their hates and loves, companionships with each other;
what smoothness of the entrails and what color
the gall should have if it were to please the Gods,
and also the dappled beauty of the lobe.

490

It was I bound the thighbones wrapped in fat,
and the long shank; it was I that set mortals on
the murky road of prophecy. Flaming signs
I made visible which till then were only dim.
So much for these things. Then beneath the earth
those hidden blessings for man, bronze, iron, silver
and gold—who can claim to have discovered before me?
No one, I am sure, who wants to speak to the purpose.
In one short sentence understand it all:
every art of mankind comes from Prometheus.

500

Chorus

Do not help mortals beyond due occasion
while careless of your own misfortune.
For I am strong in hope that once released
from these chains you will be no less strong than Zeus.

510

Prometheus

These things the Fate that brings all to fulfillment
has not yet determined that they be accomplished.

I must first be twisted by ten thousand pangs
and agonies before I escape my bondage.
Craft is far weaker than necessity.

Chorus

Who then is the steersman of necessity?

Prometheus

The three-formed Fates and the remembering Furies.

Chorus

And is Zeus, then, weaker than these?

Prometheus

Yes,
for he too cannot escape what is fated.

Chorus

But what is fated for Zeus save rule eternal?

Prometheus

You cannot know that yet; do not entreat me.

Chorus

This must be a solemn secret that you veil.

Prometheus

Think of some other story; this is not seasonable
to utter; it must be wholly hidden.

For only by so keeping it can I
escape these shameful bonds and agonies.

Chorus

STROPHE

May Zeus never, Zeus that all
the universe controls, oppose
his power against my mind:
may I never dallying
be slow to give my worship at
the sacrificial feasts
when the bulls are killed beside
quenchless Father Ocean:

« 158 »

530

may I never sin in word:
may these precepts still abide
in my mind nor melt away.

ANTISTROPHE

It is a sweet thing to draw out
a long, long life in cheerful hopes,
and feed the spirit in the bright
benignity of happiness:

but I shiver when I see you
wasted with ten thousand pains,
all because you did not tremble
at the name of Zeus: your mind
was yours, not his, and at its bidding
you regarded mortal men
too high, Prometheus.

STROPHE

Kindness that cannot be requited, tell me,
where is the help in that, my friend? What succor
in creatures of a day? You did not see
the feebleness that draws its breath in gasps,
a dreamlike feebleness by which the race
of man is held in bondage, a blind prisoner.
So the plans of men shall never
pass the ordered law of Zeus.

ANTISTROPHE

This I have learned while I looked on your pains,
deadly pains, Prometheus.
A dirge for you came to my lips, so different
from the other song I sang to crown your marriage
in honor of your couching and your bath,
upon the day you won her with your gifts
to share your bed—of your own race she was,
Hesione—and so you brought her home.

(Enter Io, a girl wearing horns like an ox.)

« 159 »

540

540

550

Io

What land is this? what race of men? Who is it
I see here tortured in this rocky bondage?
What is the sin he's paying for? Oh tell me
to what part of the world my wanderings have brought me.

O, O, O,

there it is again, there again—it stings me,
the gadfly, the ghost of earth-born Argos:

keep it away, keep it away, earth!

I'm frightened when I see the shape of Argos,
Argos the herdsman with ten thousand eyes.

He stalks me with his crafty eyes: he died,

but the earth didn't hide him; still he comes

even from the depths of the Underworld to hunt me:

he drives me starving by the sands of the sea.

The reed-woven pipe drones on in a hum
and drones and drones its sleep-giving strain:

O, O, O,

Where are you bringing me, my far-wandering wanderings?

Son of Kronos, what fault, what fault

did you find in me that you should yoke me

to a harness of misery like this,

that you should torture me so to madness

driven in fear of the gadfly?

Burn me with fire: hide me in earth: cast me away
to monsters of the deep for food: but do not

grudge me the granting of this prayer, King.

Enough have my much wandering wanderings

exercised me: I cannot find

a way to escape my troubles.

Do you hear the voice of the cow-horned maid?

Prometheus

Surely I hear the voice of the gadfly-haunted
daughter of Inachus who fired with love

the heart of Zeus and now through Hera's hate
is violently driven in courses overlong.

Io

How is it you speak my father's name?

Tell me, who are you? Who are you? Oh

who are you that so exactly accosts me by name?

You have spoken of the disease that the Gods have sent to me

which wastes me away, pricking with goads,

so that I am moving always

tortured and hungry, wild bounding,

quick sped I come,

a victim of jealous plots.

Some have been wretched

before me, but who of these

suffered as I do?

But declare to me clearly

what I have still to suffer: what would avail

against my sickness, what drug would cure it:

Tell me, if you know:

tell me, declare it to the unlucky, wandering maid.

Prometheus

I will tell you clearly all that you would know,

weaving no riddles, but in simple story

as it is just to open lips to friends.

You see Prometheus that gave fire to men.

Io

You that have shown yourself a common blessing

to all men, sad Prometheus, why are you punished?

Prometheus

I have but now ceased complaining of my sufferings.

Io

Will you grant me this favor?

Prometheus

Say what it is
you ask for. You will learn all from me.

Io

Tell me who nailed you to this cliff.

Prometheus

The plan

was Zeus's, but it was Hephaestus' hand.

Io

What was the offense for which this is punishment?

620

Prometheus

Enough that I have told you clearly just so far.

Io

Besides this, tell me the limit of my own wanderings.

Prometheus

It were better not to know than to know this.

Io

Do not hide from me what it is fated I should suffer.

What shall its term be for this unhappy girl?

Prometheus

It is not I grudge you this gift that you ask.

Io

Then why not tell me everything at once.

Prometheus

No grudging, but I dread to break your spirit.

Io

Do not care for me more than I would have you.

Prometheus

Since you are bent on it, I must speak; Now hear me, you.

630

Chorus

Not yet. Give to me, too, a share of pleasure.

Let us first question her about her sickness.

« 162 »

let herself tell us her disastrous chances.

Then let her be told by you what she must still suffer.

Prometheus

Io, it is your task to gratify

these spirits who are, moreover, your father's sisters.

To sorrow and make wail for your ill fortune,

when you will win a tear from those who listen,

is well worthwhile.

Io

I know not how I should distrust you: clearly

640

you shall hear all you want to know from me.

Yet even as I speak I groan in bitterness

for that storm sent by God on me, that ruin

of my beauty; I must sorrow when I think

who sent all this upon me. There were always

night visions that kept haunting me and coming

into my maiden chamber and exhorting

with winning words, "O maiden greatly blessed,

why are you still a maiden, you who might

make marriage with the greatest? Zeus is stricken

with lust for you; he is afire to try

the bed of love with you: do not disdain him.

Go, child, to Lerna's meadow, deep in grass,

to where your father's flocks and cattle stand,

that Zeus's eye may cease from longing for you."

With such dreams I was cruelly beset

night after night until I took the courage

to tell my father of my nightly terror.

He sent to Pytho many an embassy

and to Dodona seeking to discover

what deed or word of his might please the God,

but those he sent came back with riddling oracles

dark and beyond the power of understanding.

At last the word came clear to Inachus

charging him plainly that he cast me out

650

660

« 163 »

of home and country, drive me out footloose
to wander to the limits of the world;
if he should not obey, the oracle said,

the fire-faced thunderbolt would come from Zeus
and blot out his whole race. These were the oracles
of Loxias, and Inachus obeyed them.

He drove me out and shut his doors against me
with tears on both our parts, but Zeus's bit
compelled him to do this against his will.

Immediately my form and mind were changed
and all distorted; horned, as you see,
pricked on by the sharp biting gadfly, leaping
in frenzied jumps I ran beside the river

Kerchneia, good to drink, and Lerna's spring.
The earth-born herdsman Argos followed me
whose anger knew no limits, and he spied
after my tracks with all his hundred eyes.

Then an unlooked-for doom, descending suddenly,
took him from life: I, driven by the gadfly,
that god-sent scourge, was driven always onward
from one land to another: that is my story.
If you can tell me what remains for me,
tell me, and do not out of pity cozen
with kindly lies: there is no sickness worse
for me than words that to be kind must lie.

Chorus

Hold! Keep away! Alas!

never did I think that such strange
words would come to my ears:
never did I think such intolerable
sufferings, an offense to the eye,
shameful and frightening, so

would chill my soul with a double-edged point.
Alas, Alas, for your fate!
I shudder when I look on Io's fortune.

Prometheus
You groan too soon, you are full of fear too soon.
Wait till you hear what still remains.

Chorus

Speak, tell us to the end. For the sick it is sweet to know
what pain is still to come and to know it clearly.

Prometheus

The first request you made of me you gained
lightly: from her you wished to hear the story
of what she suffered. Now hear what remains,
what sufferings this maid must yet endure
from Hera. Do you listen, child of Inachus,
hear and lay up my words within your heart
that you may know the limits of your journey.
First turn to the sun's rising and walk on
over the fields no plough has broken: then
you will come to the wandering Scythians,
who live in wicker houses built above
their well-wheeled wagons; they are an armed people,
armed with the bow that strikes from far away:
do not draw near them; rather let your feet
touch the surf line of the sea where the waves moan,
and cross their country: on your left there live
the Chalybes who work with iron: these
you must beware of; for they are not gentle,
nor people whom a stranger dare approach.
Then you will come to Insolence, a river
that well deserves its name: but cross it not—
It is no stream that you can easily ford—
until you come to Caucasus itself,
the highest mountains, where the river's strength
gushes from its very temples. Cross these peaks,
the neighbors of the stars, and take the road
southward until you reach the Amazons,
the race of women who hate men, who one day

shall live around Thermodon in Themiscyra
where Salmydessos, rocky jaw of the sea,
stands sailor-hating, stepmother of ships.
The Amazons will set you on your way
and gladly: you will reach Cimmeria,
the isthmus, at the narrow gates of the lake.
Leave this with a good heart and cross the channel,
the channel of Maeotis: and hereafter
for all time men shall talk about your crossing,
and they shall call the place for you Cow's-ford.*
Leave Europe's mainland then, and go to Asia.

730

(To the Chorus)

Do you now think this tyrant of the Gods
is hard in all things without difference?
He was a God and sought to lie in love
with this girl who was mortal, and on her
he brought this curse of wandering: bitter indeed
you found your marriage with this suitor, maid.
Yet you must think of all that I have told you
as still only in prelude.

740

Io

O, O!

Prometheus

Again you cry out, again you lament? What then
will you do when you learn your other sufferings?

Chorus

Is there still suffering that you have to tell her?

Prometheus

A wintry sea of agony and ruin.

* Cow's-ford: Bosphorus

10 What is the good of life to me? Why should I not
quickly dash myself down from this blind precipice
to strike the ground and win a quittance
of all my pains? Better at once to die
than suffer torment all the rest of my days.

750

Prometheus

You would find it hard to bear these trials of mine,
since for me death is not decreed at all.
Death would indeed be a riddance of my suffering,
but, as it is, there is no limit set
for pain, save when Zeus falls from his seat of power.

Io

Is there a time when Zeus shall fall?

Prometheus

You would be glad, I think, to see that end.

Io

How should I not, who suffer so cruelly from him?

Prometheus

Know surely, then, that this will come to pass.

760

Io

Who will despoil him of his sovereign power?

Prometheus

His own light-witted counsels will undo him.

Io

How? Tell me, if there is no harm in telling.

Prometheus

He will make a marriage which one day he will rue.

Io

With god or mortal? Tell me if it may be told.

Prometheus

Why tell what marriage? That may not be spoken.

Io
Will it be by his wife that he shall lose his throne?

Prometheus
Yes. She shall bear a son greater than his father.

Io
Can he not turn aside this doom of his?

Prometheus
No, save only by my release from bondage.

770

Io
But who will free you against Zeus's will?

Prometheus
That must be one of your own descendants.

Io
What! Will a child of mine free you one day?

Prometheus
Yes, in the generation tenth and third.

Io
No longer can I grasp your prophecy.

Prometheus
Then do not seek to know your own troubles further.

Io
Do not offer me the gift and then withhold it.

Prometheus
I will offer you the choice of the two stories.

Io
Which are they? Tell me, give me the choice.

Prometheus
Yes, I will give it you: either to tell you,
clearly, the rest of your troubles or my deliverer.

780

Chorus
Give *her* the one of the two and me the other,
a kindly favor. Do not deny the tale.

« 168 »

Tell her what still remains of her wanderings,
and me the deliverer. That is what I want.

Prometheus

Since you have so much eagerness, I will not
refuse to tell you all that you have asked me.
First to you, *Io*, I shall tell the tale

of your sad wanderings, rich in groans—inscribe
the story in the tablets of your mind.

When you shall cross the channel that divides
Europe from Asia, turn to the rising sun,

to the burnt plains, sun-scorched; cross by the edge
of the foaming sea till you come to Gorgona,
to the flat stretches of Kisthene's country.

There live the ancient maids, children of Phorcys:
these swan-formed hags, with but one common eye,
single-toothed monsters, such as nowhere else

the sun's rays look on nor the moon by night.
Near are their winged sisters, the three Gorgons,

with snakes to bind their hair up, mortal-hating:
no mortal that but looks on them shall live:

these are the sentry guards I tell you of.
Hear, too, of yet another gruesome sight,

the sharp-toothed hounds of Zeus, that have no bark,
the vultures—they take heed of—and the host

of one-eyed Arimaspians, horse-riding,
that live around the spring which flows with gold,

the spring of Pluto's river: go not near them.
A land far off, a nation of black men,

these you shall come to, men who live hard by
the fountain of the sun where is the river

Aethiops—travel by his banks along
to a waterfall where from the Bibline hills

Nile pours his holy waters, pure to drink.
This river shall be your guide to the triangular

land of the Nile and there, by Fate's decree,
there, *Io*, you shall find your distant home,

810

800

790

« 169 »

a colony for you and your descendants.
If anything of this is still obscure
or difficult ask me again and learn
clearly: I have more leisure than I wish.

Chorus

If there is anything further or left over
you have to tell her of her deadly traveling,
tell her. If that is all, grant us again
the favor that we asked for earlier.
You remember?

820

Prometheus

The limit of her wanderings complete
she now has heard: but so that she may know
that she has not been listening to no purpose
I shall recount what she endured before
she came to us here: this I give as pledge,
a witness to the good faith of my words.

The great part of the story I omit

and come to the very boundary of your travels.
When you had come to the Molossian plains
around the sheer back of Dodona where

830

is the oracular seat of Zeus Thesprotian,
the talking oaks, a wonder past belief,
by them full clearly, in no riddling terms,
you were hailed glorious wife of Zeus that shall be:
does anything of this wake pleasant memories?

Then, goaded by the gadfly, on you hastened
to the great gulf of Rhea by the track
at the side of the sea: but in returning course
you were storm-driven back: in time to come
that inlet of the sea shall bear your name
and shall be called Ionian, a memorial

840

to all men of your journeying: these are proofs
for you, of how far my mind sees something farther
than what is visible: for what is left,

« 170 »

to you and you this I shall say in common,
taking up again the track of my old tale.

There is a city, furthest in the world,
Canobos, near the mouth and issuing point
of the Nile: there Zeus shall make you sound of mind
touching you with a hand that brings no fear,
and through that touch alone shall come your healing.
You shall bear Epaphos, dark of skin, his name
recalling Zeus's touch and his begetting.

850

This Epaphos shall reap the fruit of all
the land that is watered by the broad flowing Nile.

From him five generations, and again
to Argos they shall come, against their will,
in number fifty, women, flying from
a marriage with their kinsfolk: but these kinsfolk,
their hearts with lust aflutter like the hawks
barely outdistanced by the doves, will come
hunting a marriage that the law forbids:

860

the God shall grudge the men these women's bodies,
and the Pelasgian earth shall welcome them
in death: for death shall claim them in a fight
where women strike in the dark, a murderous vigil.
Each wife shall rob her husband of his life,
dipping in blood her two-edged sword: even so
may Love come, too, upon my enemies.

But one among these girls shall love beguile
from killing her bedfellow, blunting her purpose:
and she shall make her choice—to bear the name
of coward and not murderer: this girl
she shall in Argos bear a race of kings.
To tell this clearly needs a longer story,
but from her seed shall spring one brave and famous
for archery, and he shall set me free.

Such was the prophecy which ancient Themis,
my Titan mother, opened up to me;
but how and by what means it shall come true

« 171 »

would take too long to tell, and if you heard
the knowledge would not profit you.

10

Eieieu, eieieu.

It creeps on me again, the twitching spasm,
the mind-destroying madness, burning me up,
and the gadfly's sting goads me on—
steel point by no fire tempered—

880

and my heart in its fear knocks on my breast.
There's a dazing whirl in my eyes as I run
out of my course by the madness driven,
the crazy frenzy; my tongue ungoverned
babbles, the words in a muddy flow strike
on the waves of the mischief I hate, strike wild
without aim or sense.

Chorus

STROPHE

A wise man indeed he was
that first in judgment weighed this word
and gave it tongue: the best by far
it is to marry in one's rank and station:
let no one working with her hands aspire
to marriage with those lifted high in pride
because of wealth, or of ancestral glory.

890

ANTISTROPHE

Never, never may you see me,
Fates majestic, drawing nigh
the bed of Zeus, to share it with the King,
nor ever may I know a heavenly wooer:
I dread such things beholding
Io's sad virginity
ravaged, ruined; bitter wandering
hers because of Hera's wrath.

900

EPODE

When a match has equal partners
then I fear not: may the eye
inescapable of the mighty
Gods not look on me.

That is a fight that none can fight: a fruitful
source of fruitlessness: I would not
know what I could do: I cannot
see the hope when Zeus is angry
of escaping him.

Prometheus

Yet shall this Zeus, for all his pride of heart,
be humble yet: such is the match he plans,
a marriage that shall drive him from his power
and from his throne, out of the sight of all.

910

So shall at last the final consummation
be brought about of Father Kronos' curse
which he, driven from his ancient throne, invoked
against the son deposing him: no one
of all the Gods save I alone can tell
a way to escape this mischief: I alone
know it and how. So let him confidently
sit on his throne and trust his heavenly thunder
and brandish in his hand his fiery bolt.
Nothing shall all of this avail against
a fall intolerable, a dishonored end.

920

So strong a wrestler Zeus is now equipping
against himself, a monster hard to fight.
This enemy shall find a plan to best
the thunderbolt, a thunderclap to best
the thunderclap of Zeus: and he shall shiver
Poseidon's trident, curse of sea and land.
So, in his crashing fall shall Zeus discover
how different are rule and slavery.

Chorus

You voice your wishes for the God's destruction.

Prometheus

They are my wishes, yet shall come to pass.

Chorus

Must we expect someone to conquer Zeus?

Prometheus

Yes, he shall suffer worse than I do now.

Chorus

Have you no fear of uttering such words?

Prometheus

Why should I fear, since death is not my fate?

Chorus

But he might give you pain still worse than this.

Prometheus

Then let him do so; all this I expect.

Chorus

Wise are the worshippers of Adrasteia.

Prometheus

Worship him, pray; flatter whatever king
is king today; but I care less than nothing
for Zeus. Let him do what he likes,
let him be king for his short time: he shall not
be king for long.

940

Look, here is Zeus's footman,

this fetch-and-carry messenger of him,
the New King. Certainly he has come here
with news for us.

Hermes

You, subtle-spirit, you
bitterly overbitter, you that sinned
against the immortals, giving honor to
the creatures of a day, you thief of fire:

« 174 »

950

the Father has commanded you to say
what marriage of his is this you brag about
that shall drive him from power—and declare it
in clear terms and no riddles. You, Prometheus,
do not cause me a double journey; these

(*Pointing to the chains.*)

will prove to you that Zeus is not softhearted.

Prometheus

Your speech is pompous sounding, full of pride,
as fits the lackey of the Gods. You are young
and young your rule and you think that the tower
in which you live is free from sorrow: from it
have I not seen two tyrants thrown? the third,
who now is king, I shall yet live to see him
fall, of all three most suddenly, most dishonored.
Do you think I will crouch before your Gods,
—so new—and tremble? I am far from that.
Hasten away, back on the road you came.
You shall learn nothing that you ask of me.

960

Hermes

Just such the obstinacy that brought you here,
to this self-willed calamitous anchorage.

Prometheus

Be sure of this: when I set my misfortune
against your slavery, I would not change.

Hermes

It is better, I suppose, to be a slave
to this rock, than Zeus's trusted messenger.

Prometheus

Thus must the insolent show their insolence!

Hermes

I think you find your present lot too soft.

« 175 »

Prometheus
Too soft? I would my enemies had it then,
and you are one of those I count as such.

Hermes
Oh, you would blame me too for your calamity?

Prometheus
In a single word, I am the enemy
of all the Gods that gave me ill for good.

Hermes
Your words declare you mad, and mad indeed.

Prometheus
Yes, if it's madness to detest my foes.

Hermes
No one could bear you in success.

Prometheus
Alas!

Hermes
Alas! Zeus does not know that word.

Prometheus
Time in its aging course teaches all things.

Hermes
But you have not yet learned a wise discretion.

Prometheus
True: or I would not speak so to a servant.

Hermes
It seems you will not grant the Father's wish.

Prometheus
I should be glad, indeed, to requite his kindness!

Hermes
You mock me like a child!

Prometheus
And are you not
a child, and sillier than a child, to think
that I should tell you anything? There is not
a torture or an engine wherewithal
Zeus can induce me to declare these things,
till he has loosed me from these cruel shackles.

So let him hurl his smoky lightning flame,
and throw in turmoil all things in the world
with white-winged snowflakes and deep bellowing
thunder beneath the earth: me he shall not
bend by all this to tell him who is fated
to drive him from his tyranny.

Hermes
Think, here and now, if this seems to your interest.

Prometheus
I have already thought—and laid my plans.

Hermes
Bring your proud heart to know a true discretion—
O foolish spirit—in the face of ruin.

Prometheus
You vex me by these senseless adjurations,
senseless as if you were to advise the waves.
Let it not cross your mind that I will turn
womanish-minded from my fixed decision
or that I shall entreat the one I hate
so greatly, with a woman's upturned hands,
to loose me from my chains: I am far from that.

Hermes
I have said too much already—so I think—
and said it to no purpose: you are not softened:
your purpose is not dented by my prayers.

You are a colt new broken, with the bit
clenched in its teeth, fighting against the reins,
and bolting. You are far too strong and confident
in your weak cleverness. For obstinacy
standing alone is the weakest of all things
in one whose mind is not possessed by wisdom.
Think what a storm, a triple wave of ruin
will rise against you, if you will not hear me,
and no escape for you. First this rough crag
with thunder and the lightning bolt the Father
shall cleave asunder, and shall hide your body
wrapped in a rocky clasp within its depth;
a tedious length of time you must fulfil
before you see the light again, returning.
Then Zeus's winged hound, the eagle red,
shall tear great shreds of flesh from you, a feaster
coming unbidden, every day: your liver
bloodied to blackness will be his repast.
And of this pain do not expect an end
until some God shall show himself successor
to take your tortures for himself and willing
go down to lightless Hades and the shadows
of Tartarus' depths. Bear this in mind
and so determine. This is no feigned boast
but spoken with too much truth. The mouth of Zeus
does not know how to lie, but every word
brings to fulfilment. Look, you, and reflect
and never think that obstinacy is better
than prudent counsel.

1010

1020

1030

Chorus

Hermes seems to us
to speak not altogether out of season.
He bids you leave your obstinacy and seek
a wise good counsel. Hearken to him. Shame
it were for one so wise to fall in error.

« 178 »

Prometheus
Before he told it me I knew this message:
but there is no disgrace in suffering
at an enemy's hand, when you hate mutually.
So let the curling tendril of the fire
from the lightning bolt be sent against me: let
the air be stirred with thunderclaps, the winds
in savage blasts convulsing all the world.
Let earth to her foundations shake, yes to her root,
before the quivering storm: let it confuse
the paths of heavenly stars and the sea's waves
in a wild surging torrent: this my body
let Him raise up on high and dash it down
into black Tartarus with rigorous
compulsive eddies: death he cannot give me.

1040

1050

Hermes
These are a madman's words, a madman's plan:
is there a missing note in this mad harmony?
is there a slack chord in his madness? You,
you, who are so sympathetic with his troubles,
away with you from here, quickly away!
lest you should find your wits stunned by the thunder
and its hard defending roar.

1060

Chorus

Say something else
different from this: give me some other counsel
that I will listen to: this word of yours
for all its instancy is not for us.
How dare you bid us practice baseness? We
will bear along with him what we must bear.
I have learned to hate all traitors: there is no
disease I spit on more than treachery.

1070

Hermes

Remember then my warning before the act:
when you are trapped by ruin don't blame fortune:

« 179 »

don't say that Zeus has brought you to calamity
that you could not foresee: do not do this:
but blame yourselves: now you know what you're doing:
and with this knowledge neither suddenly
nor secretly your own want of good sense
has tangled you in the net of ruin, past
all hope of rescue.

Prometheus

1080

Now it is words no longer: now in very truth
the earth is staggered: in its depths the thunder
bellows resoundingly, the fiery tendrils
of the lightning flash light up, and whirling clouds
carry the dust along: all the winds' blasts
dance in a fury one against the other
in violent confusion: earth and sea
are one, confused together: such is the storm
that comes against me manifestly from Zeus
to work its terrors. O Holy mother mine,
O Sky that circling brings the light to all,
you see me, how I suffer, how unjustly.

1090