

PROMETHEUS BOUND

by Aeschylus

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Characters in the Play

Kratos
Bia
Hephaestus
Prometheus
Chorus of the Oceanides
Oceanus
Io
Hermes

Mountainous country, and in the middle of a deep gorge a Rock, towards which KRATOS and BIA carry the gigantic form OF PROMETHEUS. HEPHAESTUS follows dejectedly with hammer, nails, chains, etc.

KRATOS

Now have we journeyed to a spot of earth
Remote—the Scythian wild, a waste untrod.
And now, Hephaestus, thou must execute
The task our father laid on thee, and fetter
This malefactor to the jagged rocks
In adamantine bonds infrangible;
For thine own blossom of all forging fire
He stole and gave to mortals; trespass grave
For which the Gods have called him to account,
That he may learn to bear Zeus' tyranny
And cease to play the lover of mankind.

HEPHAESTUS

Kratos and Bia, for ye twain the hest
Of Zeus is done with; nothing lets you further.
But forcibly to bind a brother God,
In chains, in this deep chasm raked by all storms
I have not courage; yet needs must I pluck
Courage from manifest necessity,
For woe worth him that slights the Father's word.
O high-souled son of them is sage in counsel,
With heavy heart I must make thy heart heavy,
In bonds of brass not easy to be loosed,
Nailing thee to this crag where no wight dwells,
Nor sound of human voice nor shape of man
Shall visit thee; but the sun-blaze shall roast
Thy flesh; thy hue, flower-fair, shall suffer change;
Welcome will Night be when with spangled robe
She hides the light of day; welcome the sun
Returning to disperse the frosts of dawn.
And every hour shall bring its weight of woe
To wear thy heart away; for yet unborn

PROMETHEUS BOUND

Is he who shall release Chee from thy pain.
This is thy wage for loving humankind.
For, being a God, thou dared'st the Gods' ill will,
Preferring, to exceeding honour, Man.
Wherefore thy long watch shall be comfortless,
Stretched on this rock, never to close an eye
Or bend a knee; and vainly shalt thou lift,
With groanings deep and lamentable cries,
Thy voice; for Zeus is hard to be entreated,
As new-born power is ever pitiless.

KRATOS

Enough! Why palter? Why wast idle pity?
Is not the God Gods loathe hateful to thee?
Traitor to man of thy prerogative?

HEPHAESTUS

Kindred and fellowship are dreaded names.

KRATOS

Questionless; but to slight the Father's word—
How sayest thou? Is not this fraught with more dread?

HEPHAESTUS

Thy heart was ever hard and overbold.

KRATOS

But wailing will not ease him! Waste no pains
Where thy endeavour nothing profiteth.

HEPHAESTUS

Oh execrable work! I handicraft!

KRATOS

Why curse thy trade? For what thou hast to do,
Troth, smithcraft is in no wise answerable.

HEPHAESTUS

Would that it were another's craft, not mine!

KRATOS

Why, all things are a burden save to rule
Over the Gods; for none is free but Zeus.

HEPHAESTUS

To that I answer not, knowing it true.

KRATOS

Why, then, make haste to cast the chains about him,
Lest glancing down on thee the Father's eye
Behold a laggard and a loiterer.

HEPHAESTUS

Here are the iron bracelets for his arms.

KRATOS

Fasten them round his arms with all thy strength!
Strike with thy hammer! Nail him to the rocks!

HEPHAESTUS

'Tis done! and would that it were done less well!

KRATOS

Harder—I say—strike harder—screw all tight
And be not in the least particular
Remiss, for unto one of his resource

PROMETHEUS BOUND

Bars are but instruments of liberty.

HEPHAESTUS

This forearm's fast: a shackle hard to shift.

KRATOS

Now buckle this! and handsomely! Let him learn
Sharp though he be, he's a dull blade to Zeus.

HEPHAESTUS

None can find fault with this: –save him it tortures.

KRATOS

Now take thine iron spike and drive it in,
Until it gnaw clean through the rebel's breast.

HEPHAESTUS

Woe's me, Prometheus, for thy weight of woe!

KRATOS

Still shirking? still a–groaning for the foes
Of Zeus? Anon thou'lt wail thine own mishap.

HEPHAESTUS

Thou seest what eyes scarce bear to look upon!

KRATOS

I see this fellow getting his deserts!
But strap him with a gelt about his ribs.

HEPHAESTUS

I do what I must do: for thee–less words!

KRATOS

"Words," quotha? Aye, and shout 'em if need be.
Come down and cast a ring–bolt round his legs.

HEPHAESTUS

The thing is featly done; and 'twas quick work.

KRATOS

Now with a sound rap knock the bolt–pins home!
For heavy–handed is thy task–master.

HEPHAESTUS

So villainous a form vile tongue befits.

KRATOS

Be thou the heart of wax, but chide not me
That I am gruffish, stubborn and stiff–willed.

HEPHAESTUS

Oh, come away! The tackle holds him fast.

KRATOS

Now, where thou hang'st insult Plunder the Gods
For creatures of a day! To thee what gift
Will mortals tender to requite thy pains?
The destinies were out miscalling the
Designer: a designer thou wilt need
From trap so well contrived to twist thee free.
Exeunt.

PROMETHEUS.

O divine air Breezes on swift bird–wings,
Ye river fountains, and of ocean–waves
The multitudinous laughter Mother Earth!
And thou all–seeing circle of the sun,

PROMETHEUS BOUND

Behold what I, a God, from Gods endure!
Look down upon my shame,
The cruel wrong that racks my frame,
The grinding anguish that shall waste my strength,
Till time's ten thousand years have measured out their length!
He hath devised these chains,
The new throned potentate who reigns,
Chief of the chieftains of the Blest. Ah me!
The woe which is and that which yet shall be
I wail; and question make of these wide skies
When shall the star of my deliverance rise.
And yet—and yet—exactly I foresee
All that shall come to pass; no sharp surprise
Of pain shall overtake me; what's determined
Bear, as I can, I must, knowing the might
Of strong Necessity is unconquerable.
But touching my fate silence and speech alike
Are unsupportable. For boons bestowed
On mortal men I am straitened in these bonds.
I sought the fount of fire in hollow reed
Hid privily, a measureless resource
For man, and mighty teacher of all arts.
This is the crime that I must expiate
Hung here in chains, nailed 'neath the open sky. Ha! Ha!
What echo, what odour floats by with no sound?
God—wafted or mortal or mingled its strain?
Comes there one to this world's end, this mountain—girt ground,
To have sight of my torment? Or of what is he fain?
A God ye behold in bondage and pain,
The foe of Zeus and one at feud with all
The deities that find
Submissive entry to the tyrant's hall;
His fault, too great a love of humankind.
Ah me! Ah me! what wafture nigh at hand,
As of great birds of prey, is this I hear?
The bright air fanned
Whistles and shrills with rapid beat of wings.
There cometh nought but to my spirit brings
Horror and fear.
The DAUGHTERS OF OCEANUS draw near in
mid—air in their winged chariot.

CHORUS

Put thou all fear away!
In kindness cometh this array
On wings of speed to mountain lone,
Our sire's consent not lightly won.
But a fresh breeze our convoy brought,
For loud the din of iron raught
Even to our sea—cave's cold recess,
And scared away the meek—eyed bashfulness.
I tarried not to tic my sandal shoe

PROMETHEUS BOUND

But haste, post haste, through air my winged chariot flew.

PROMETHEUS

Ah me! Ah me!

Fair progeny

That many-childed Tethys brought to birth,

Fathered of Ocean old

Whose sleepless stream is rolled

Round the vast shores of earth

Look on me! Look upon these chains

Wherein I hang fast held

On rocks high-pinnacled,

My dungeon and my tower of dole,

Where o'er the abyss my soul,

Sad warder, her unwearied watch sustains!

CHORUS

Prometheus, I am gazing on thee now!

With the cold breath of fear upon my brow,

Not without mist of dimming tears,

While to my sight thy giant stature rears

Its bulk forpined upon these savage rocks

In shameful bonds the linked adamant locks.

For now new steersmen take the helm

Olympian; now with little thought

Of right, on strange, new laws Zeus stablisheth his realm,

Bringing the mighty ones of old to naught.

PROMETHEUS

Oh that he had conveyed me

'Neath earth, 'neath hell that swalloweth up the dead;

In Tartarus, illimitably vast

With adamantine fetters bound me fast—

There his fierce anger on me visited,

Where never mocking laughter could upbraid me

Of God or aught beside!

But now a wretch enskied,

A far-seen vane,

All they that hate me triumph in my pain.

CHORUS

Who of the Gods is there so pitiless

That he can triumph in thy sore distress?

Who doth not inly groan

With every pang of thine save Zeus alone?

But he is ever wroth, not to be bent

From his resolved intent

The sons of heaven to subjugate;

Nor shall he cease until his heart be satiate,

Or one a way devise

To hurl him from the throne where he doth monarchize.

PROMETHEUS

Yea, of a surety—though he do me wrong,

Loading my limbs with fetters strong—

The president

PROMETHEUS BOUND

Of heaven's high parliament
Shall need me yet to show
What new conspiracy with privy blow
Attempts his sceptre and his kingly seat.
Neither shall words with all persuasion sweet,
Not though his tongue drop honey, cheat
Nor charm my knowledge from me; nor duress
Of menace dire, fear of more grievous pains,
Unseal my lips, till he have loosed these chains,
And granted for these injuries redress.

CHORUS

High is the heart of thee,
Thy will no whit by bitter woes unstrung,
And all too free
The licence of thy bold, unshackled tongue.
But fear hath roused my soul with piercing cry!
And for thy fate my heart misgives me! I
Tremble to know when through the breakers' roar
Thy keel shall touch again the friendly shore;
For not by prayer to Zeus is access won;
An unpersuadable heart hath Cronos' son.

PROMETHEUS

I know the heart of Zeus is hard, that he hath tied
Justice to his side;
But he shall be full gentle thus assuaged;
And, the implacable wrath wherewith he raged
Smoothed quite away, nor he nor I
Be loth to seal a bond of peace and amity.

CHORUS

All that thou hast to tell I pray unfold,
That we may hear at large upon what count
Zeus took thee and with bitter wrong affronts:
Instruct us, if the telling hurt thee not.

PROMETHEUS

These things are sorrowful for me to speak,
Yet silence too is sorrow: all ways woe!
When first the Blessed Ones were filled with wrath
And there arose division in their midst,
These instant to hurl Cronos from his throne
That Zeus might be their king, and these, adverse,
Contending that he ne'er should rule the Gods,
Then I, wise counsel urging to persuade
The Titans, sons of Ouranos and Chthon,
Prevailed not: but, all indirect essays
Despising, they by the strong hand, effortless,
Yet by main force—supposed that they might seize
Supremacy. But me my mother Themis
And Gaia, one form called by many names,
Not once alone with voice oracular
Had prophesied how power should be disposed—
That not by strength neither by violence

PROMETHEUS BOUND

The mighty should be mastered, but by guile.
Which things by me set forth at large, they scorned,
Nor graced my motion with the least regard.
Then, of all ways that offered, I judged best,
Taking my mother with me, to support,
No backward friend, the not less cordial Zeus.
And by my politic counsel Tartarus,
The bottomless and black, old Cronos hides
With his confederates. So helped by me,
The tyrant of the Gods, such service rendered
With ignominious chastisement requites.
But 'tis a common malady of power
Tyrannical never to trust a friend.
And now, what ye inquired, for what arraigned
He shamefully entreats me, ye shall know.
When first upon his high, paternal throne
He took his seat, forthwith to divers Gods
Divers good gifts he gave, and parcelled out
His empire, but of miserable men
Recked not at all; rather it was his wish
To wipe out man and rear another race:
And these designs none contravened but me.
I risked the bold attempt, and saved mankind
From stark destruction and the road to hell.
Therefore with this sore penance am I bowed,
Grievous to suffer, pitiful to see.
But, for compassion shown to man, such fate
I no wise earned; rather in wrath's despite
Am I to be reformed, and made a show
Of infamy to Zeus.

CHORUS

He hath a heart
Of iron, hewn out of unfeeling rock
Is he, Prometheus, whom thy sufferings
Rouse not to wrath. Would I had ne'er beheld them,
For verily the sight hath wrung my heart.

PROMETHEUS

Yea, to my friends a woeful sight am I.

CHORUS

Hast not more boldly in aught else transgressed?

PROMETHEUS

I took from man expectancy of death.

CHORUS

What medicine found'st thou for this malady?

PROMETHEUS

I planted blind hope in the heart of him.

CHORUS

A mighty boon thou gavest there to man.

PROMETHEUS

Moreover, I conferred the gift of fire.

CHORUS

PROMETHEUS BOUND

And have frail mortals now the flame—bright fire?

PROMETHEUS

Yea, and shall master many arts thereby.

CHORUS

And Zeus with such misfeasance charging thee—

PROMETHEUS

Torments me with extremity of woe.

CHORUS

And is no end in prospect of thy pains?

PROMETHEUS

None; save when he shall choose to make an end.

CHORUS

How should he choose? What hope is thine? Dost thou

Not see that thou hast erred? But how thou erredst

Small pleasure were to me to tell; to the

Exceeding sorrow. Let it go then: rather

Seek thou for some deliverance from thy woes.

PROMETHEUS

He who stands free with an untrammelled foot

Is quick to counsel and exhort a friend

In trouble. But all these things I know well.

Of my free will, my own free will, I erred,

And freely do I here acknowledge it.

Freeing mankind myself have durance found.

Natheless, I looked not for sentence so dread,

High on this precipice to droop and pine,

Having no neighbour but the desolate crags.

And now lament no more the ills I suffer,

But come to earth and an attentive ear

Lend to the things that shall befall hereafter.

Harken, oh harken, suffer as I suffer!

Who knows, who knows, but on some scatheless head,

Another's yet for the like woes reserved,

The wandering doom will presently alight?

CHORUS

Prometheus, we have heard thy call:

Not on deaf cars these awful accents fall.

Lo! lightly leaving at thy words

My flying car

And holy air, the pathway of great birds,

I long to tread this land of peak and scar,

And certify myself by tidings sure

Of all thou hast endured and must endure.

While the winged chariot of the OCEANIDES comes

to ground their father OCEANUS enters, riding on a monster.

OCEANUS

Now have I traversed the unending plain

And unto thee, Prometheus, am I come,

Guiding this winged monster with no rein,

Nor any bit, but mind's firm masterdom.

And know that for thy grief my heart is sore;

PROMETHEUS BOUND

The bond of kind, methinks, constraineth me;
Nor is there any I would honour more,
Apart from kinship, than I reverence thee.
And thou shalt learn that I speak verity:
Mine is no smooth, false tongue; for do but show
How I can serve thee, grieved and outraged thus,
Thou ne'er shalt say thou hast, come weal, come woe,
A friend more faithful than Oceanus.

PROMETHEUS

How now? Who greets me? What! Art thou too come
To gaze upon my woes? How could'st thou leave
The stream that bears thy name, thine antres arched
With native rock, to visit earth that breeds
The massy iron in her womb? Com'st thou
To be spectator of my evil lot
And fellow sympathizer with my woes?
Behold, a thing indeed to gaze upon
The friend of Zeus, co-stablisher of his rule,
See, by this sentence with what pains I am bowed I

OCEANUS

Prometheus, all too plainly I behold:
And for the best would counsel thee: albeit
Thy brain is subtle. Learn to know thy heart,
And, as the times, so let thy manners change,
For by the law of change a new God rules.
But, if these bitter, savage, sharp-set words
Thou ventest, it may be, though he sit throned
Far off and high above thee, Zeus will hear;
And then thy present multitude of ills
Will seem the mild correction of a babe.
Rather, O thou much chastened one, refrain
Thine anger, and from suffering seek release.
Stale, peradventure, seem these words of mine:
Nevertheless, of a too haughty tongue
Such punishment, Prometheus, is the wage.
But thou, not yet brought low by suffering,
To what thou hast of ill would'st add far worse.
Therefore, while thou hast me for schoolmaster,
Thou shalt not kick against the pricks; the more
That an arch-despot who no audit dreads
Rules by his own rough will. And now I leave thee,
To strive with what success I may command
For thy deliv'rance. Keep a quiet mind
And use not over-vehemence of speech—
Knowest thou not, being exceeding wise,
A wanton, idle tongue brings chastisement?

PROMETHEUS

I marvel that thou art not in my case,
Seeing with me thou did'st adventure all.
And now, I do entreat thee, spare thyself.
Thou wilt not move him: he's not easy moved

PROMETHEUS BOUND

Take heed lest thou find trouble by the way.

OCEANUS

Thou art a better counsellor to others
Than to thyself: I judge by deeds not words.
Pluck me not back when I would fain set forth.
My oath upon it, Zeus will grant my prayer
And free thee from these pangs.

PROMETHEUS

I tender thee
For this my thanks and ever-during praise.
Certes, no backward friend art thou; and yet
Trouble not thyself; for at the best thy labour
Will nothing serve me, if thou mean'st to serve.
Being thyself untrammelled stand fast.
For, not to mitigate my own mischance,
Would I see others hap on evil days.
The thought be far from me. I feel the weight
Of Atlas' woes, my brother in the west
Shouldering the pillar that props heaven and earth,
No wieldy fardel for his arms to fold.
The giant dweller in Cilician dens
I saw and pitied—a terrific shape,
A hundred-headed monster—when he fell,
Resistless Typhon who withstood the Gods,
With fearsome hiss of beak—mouth horrible,
While lightning from his eyes with Gorgon—glare
Flashed for the ravage of the realm of Zeus.
But on him came the bolt that never sleeps,
Down—crashing thunder, with emitted fire,
Which shattered him and all his towering hopes
Dashed into ruin; smitten through the breast,
His strength as smoking cinder, lightning—charred.
And now a heap, a helpless, sprawling hulk,
He lies stretched out beside the narrow seas,
Pounded and crushed deep under Etna's roots.
But on the mountain-top Hephaestus sits
Forging the molten iron, whence shall burst
Rivers of fire, with red and ravaging jaws
To waste fair-fruited, smooth, Sicilian fields.
Such bilious up-boiling of his ire
Shall Typho vent, with slingstone—showers red-hot,
And unapproachable surge of fiery spray,
Although combusted by the bolt of Zeus.
But thou art not unlearned, nor needest me
To be thy teacher: save thyself the way
Thou knowest and I will fortify my heart
Until the wrathfulness of Zeus abate.

OCEANUS

Nay then, Prometheus, art thou ignorant
Words are physicians to a wrath-sick soul?

PROMETHEUS

PROMETHEUS BOUND

Yes, if with skill one soften the ripe core,
Not by rough measures make it obdurate.

OCEANUS

Seest thou in warm affection detriment
Or aught untoward in adventuring?

PROMETHEUS

A load of toil and a light mind withal.

OCEANUS

Then give me leave to call that sickness mine.
Wise men accounted fools attain their ends.

PROMETHEUS

But how if I am galled by thine offence?

OCEANUS

There very palpably thou thrustest home.

PROMETHEUS

Beware lest thou through pity come to broils.

OCEANUS

With one established in Omnipotence?

PROMETHEUS

Of him take heed lest thou find heaviness.

OCEANUS

I am schooled by thy calamity, Prometheus!

PROMETHEUS

Pack then! And, prithee, do not change thy mind!

OCEANUS

Thou criest "On" to one in haste to go.
For look, my dragon with impatient wings
Flaps at the broad, smooth road of level air.
Fain would he kneel him down in his own stall.
Exit OCEANUS.

CHORUS (after alighting)

I mourn for thee, Prometheus,
minished and brought low,
Watering my virgin cheeks with these sad drops, that flow
From sorrow's rainy fount, to fill soft-lidded eyes
With pure libations for thy fortune's obsequies.
An evil portion that none coveteth hath Zeus
Prepared for thee; by self-made laws established for his use
Disposing all, the elder Gods he purposeth to show
How strong is that right arm wherewith he smites a foe.
There hath gone up a cry from earth, a groaning for the fall
Of things of old renown and shapes majestic,
And for thy passing an exceeding bitter groan;
For thee and for thy brother Gods whose honour was thine own:
These things all they who dwell in Asia's holy seat,
Time's minions, mourn and with their groans thy groans repeat.
Yea, and they mourn who dwell beside the Colchian shore,
The hero maids unwedded that delight in war,
And Scythia's swarming myriads who their dwelling make
Around the borders of the world, the salt Maeotian lake.
Mourns Ares' stock, that flowers in desert Araby,

PROMETHEUS BOUND

And the strong city mourns, the hill–fort planted high,
Near neighbour to huge Caucasus, dread mountaineers
That love the clash of arms, the counter of sharp spears.
Beforetime of all Gods one have I seen in pain,
One only Titan bound with adamantine chain,
Atlas in strength supreme, who groaning stoops, downbent
Under the burthen of the earth and heaven's broad firmament.
Bellows the main of waters, surge with foam–seethed surge
Clashing tumultuous; for thee the deep seas chant their dirge;
And Hell's dark under–world a hollow moaning fills;
Thee mourn the sacred streams with all their fountain–rills.

PROMETHEUS

Think not that I for pride and stubbornness
Am silent: rather is my heart the prey
Of gnawing thoughts, both for the past, and now
Seeing myself by vengeance buffeted.
For to these younger Gods their precedence
Who severally determined if not I?
No more of that: I should but weary you
With things ye know; but listen to the tale
Of human sufferings, and how at first
Senseless as beasts I gave men sense, possessed them
Of mind. I speak not in contempt of man;
I do but tell of good gifts I conferred.
In the beginning, seeing they saw amiss,
And hearing heard not, but, like phantoms huddled
In dreams, the perplexed story of their days
Confounded; knowing neither timber–work
Nor brick–built dwellings basking in the light,
But dug for themselves holes, wherein like ants,
That hardly may contend against a breath,
They dwelt in burrows of their unsunned caves.
Neither of winter's cold had they fixed sign,
Nor of the spring when she comes decked with flowers,
Nor yet of summer's heat with melting fruits
Sure token: but utterly without knowledge
Moiled, until I the rising of the stars
Showed them, and when they set, though much obscure.
Moreover, number, the most excellent
Of all inventions, I for them devised,
And gave them writing that retaineth all,
The serviceable mother of the Muse.
I was the first that yoked unmanaged beasts,
To serve as slaves with collar and with pack,
And take upon themselves, to man's relief,
The heaviest labour of his hands: and
Tamed to the rein and drove in wheeled cars
The horse, of sumptuous pride the ornament.
And those sea–wanderers with the wings of cloth,
The shipman's waggons, none but I contrived.
These manifold inventions for mankind

PROMETHEUS BOUND

I perfected, who, out upon't, have none—
No, not one shift—to rid me of this shame.

CHORUS

Thy sufferings have been shameful, and thy mind
Strays at a loss: like to a bad physician
Fallen sick, thou'rt out of heart: nor cans't prescribe
For thine own case the draught to make thee sound.

PROMETHEUS

But hear the sequel and the more admire
What arts, what aids I cleverly evolved.
The chiefest that, if any man fell sick,
There was no help for him, comestible,
Lotion or potion; but for lack of drugs
They dwindled quite away; until I taught them
To compound draughts and mixtures sanative,
Wherewith they now are armed against disease.
I staked the winding path of divination
And was the first distinguisher of dreams,
The true from false; and voices ominous
Of meaning dark interpreted; and tokens
Seen when men take the road; and augury
By flight of all the greater crook-clawed birds
With nice discrimination I defined;
These by their nature fair and favourable,
Those, flattered with fair name. And of each sort
The habits I described; their mutual feuds
And friendships and the assemblages they hold.
And of the plumpness of the inward parts
What colour is acceptable to the Gods,
The well-streaked liver-lobe and gall-bladder.
Also by roasting limbs well wrapped in fat
And the long chine, I led men on the road
Of dark and riddling knowledge; and I purged
The glancing eye of fire, dim before,
And made its meaning plain. These are my works.
Then, things beneath the earth, aids hid from man,
Brass, iron, silver, gold, who dares to say
He was before me in discovering?
None, I wot well, unless he loves to babble.
And in a single word to sum the whole—
All manner of arts men from Prometheus learned.

CHORUS

Shoot not beyond the mark in succouring man
While thou thyself art comfortless: for
Am of good hope that from these bonds escaped
Thou shalt one day be mightier than Zeus.

PROMETHEUS

Fate, that brinks all things to an end, not thus
Apportioneth my lot: ten thousand pangs
Must bow, ten thousand miseries afflict me
Ere from these bonds I freedom find, for Art

PROMETHEUS BOUND

Is by much weaker than Necessity.

CHORUS

Who is the pilot of Necessity?

PROMETHEUS

The Fates triform, and the unforgetting Furies.

CHORUS

So then Zeus is of lesser might than these?

PROMETHEUS

Surely he shall not shun the lot apportioned.

CHORUS

What lot for Zeus save world–without–end reign?

PROMETHEUS

Tax me no further with importunate questions.

CHORUS

O deep the mystery thou shroudest there

PROMETHEUS

Of aught but this freely thou may'st discourse;
But touching this I charge thee speak no word;
Nay, veil it utterly: for strictly kept
The secret from these bonds shall set me free.

CHORUS

May Zeus who all things swayeth
Ne'er wreak the might none stayeth
On wayward will of mine;
May I stint not nor waver
With offerings of sweet savour
And feasts of slaughtered kine;
The holy to the holy,
With frequent feet and lowly
At altar, fane and shrine,
Over the Ocean marches,
The deep that no drought parches,
Draw near to the divine.
My tongue the Gods estrange not;
My firm set purpose change not,
As wax melts in fire–shine.
Sweet is the life that lengthens,
While joyous hope still strengthens,
And glad, bright thoughts sustain;
But shuddering I behold thee,
The sorrows that enfold thee
And all thine endless pain.
For Zeus thou hast despised;
Thy fearless heart misprized
All that his vengeance can,
Thy wayward will obeying,
Excess of honour paying,
Prometheus, unto man.
And, oh, beloved, for this graceless grace
What thanks? What prowess for thy bold essay
Shall champion thee from men of mortal race,

PROMETHEUS BOUND

The petty insects of a passing day?
Saw'st not how puny is the strength they spend?
With few, faint steps walking as dreams and blind,
Nor can the utmost of their lore transcend
The harmony of the Eternal Mind.
These things I learned seeing thy glory dimmed,
Prometheus. Ah, not thus on me was shed
The rapture of sweet music, when I hymned
The marriage—song round bath and bridal bed
At thine espousals, and of thy blood—kin,
A bride thou chosest, wooing her to thee
With all good gifts that may a Goddess win,
Thy father's child, divine Hesione.
Enter IO, crazed and horned.

IO

What land is this? What people here abide?
And who is he,
The prisoner of this windswept mountain—side?
Speak, speak to me;
Tell me, poor caitiff, how did'st thou transgress,
Thus buffeted?
Whither am I, half—dead with weariness,
For—wandered?
Ha! Ha!
Again the prick, the stab of gadfly—sting!
O earth, earth, hide,
The hollow shape—Argus—that evil thing—
The hundred—eyed—
Earth—born—herdsman! I see him yet; he stalks
With stealthy pace
And crafty watch not all my poor wit baulks!
From the deep place
Of earth that hath his bones he breaketh bound,
And from the pale
Of Death, the Underworld, a hell—sent hound
On the blood—trail,
Fasting and faint he drives me on before,
With spectral hand,
Along the windings of the wasteful shore,
The salt sea—sand!
List! List! the pipe! how drowsily it shrills!
A cricket—cry!
See! See! the wax—webbed reeds! Oh, to these ills
Ye Gods on high,
Ye blessed Gods, what bourne? O wandering feet
When will ye rest?
O Cronian child, wherein by aught unmeet
Have I transgressed
To be yoke—fellow with Calamity?
My mind unstrung,
A crack—brained lack—wit, frantic mad am I,

PROMETHEUS BOUND

By gad-fly stung,
Thy scourge, that tarres me on with buzzing wing!
Plunge me in fire,
Hide me in earth, to deep-sea monsters fling,
But my desire—
Kneeling I pray—grudge not to grant, O King!
Too long a race
Stripped for the course have I run to and fro;
And still I chase
The vanishing goal, the end of all my woe;
Enough have I mourned!
Hear'st thou the lowing of the maid cow-horned?

PROMETHEUS

How should I hear thee not? Thou art the child
Of Inachus, dazed with the dizzying fly.
The heart of Zeus thou hast made hot with love
And Hera's curse even as a runner stripped
Pursues thee ever on thine endless round.

IO

How dost thou know my father's name? Impart
To one like thee
A poor, distressful creature, who thou art.
Sorrow with me,
Sorrowful one! Tell me, whose voice proclaims
Things true and sad,
Naming by all their old, unhappy names,
What drove me mad—
Sick! Sick! ye Gods, with suffering ye have sent,
That clings and clings;
Wasting my lamp of life till it be spent!
Crazed with your stings!
Famished I come with trampling and with leaping,
Torment and shame,
To Hera's cruel wrath, her craft unsleeping,
Captive and tame
Of all wights woe-begone and fortune-crossed,
Oh, in the storm
Of the world's sorrow is there one so lost?
Speak, godlike form,
And be in this dark world my oracle I
Can'st thou not sift
The things to come? Hast thou no art to tell
What subtle shift,
Or sound of charming song shall make me well?
Hide naught of ill
But—if indeed thou knowest—prophecy—
In words that thrill
Clear-toned through air—what such a wretch as
Must yet abide—
The lost, lost maid that roams earth's kingdoms wide?

PROMETHEUS

PROMETHEUS BOUND

What thou wouldst learn I will make clear to thee,
Not weaving subtleties, but simple sooth
Unfolding as the mouth should speak to friends.
I am Prometheus, giver of fire to mortals.

IO

Oh universal succour of mankind,
Sorrowful Prometheus, why art thou punished thus?

PROMETHEUS

I have but now ceased mourning for my griefs.

IO Wilt thou not grant me then so small a boon?

PROMETHEUS

What is it thou dost ask? Thou shalt know all.

IO

Declare to me who chained thee in this gorge.

PROMETHEUS

The hest of Zeus, but 'twas Hephaestus' hand.

IO

But what transgression dost thou expiate?

PROMETHEUS

Let this suffice thee: thou shalt know no more.

IO

Nay, but the end of my long wandering
When shall it be? This too thou must declare.

PROMETHEUS

That it is better for thee not to know.

IO

Oh hide not from me what I have to suffer!

PROMETHEUS

Poor child! Poor child! I do not grudge the gift.

IO

Why then, art thou so slow to tell me all?

PROMETHEUS

It is not from unkindness; but I fear
'Twill break thy heart.

IO

Take thou no thought for me
Where thinking thwarteth heart's desire!

PROMETHEUS

So keen

To know thy sorrows! List I and thou shalt learn.

CHORUS

Not till thou hast indulged a wish of mine.
First let us hear the story of her grief
And she herself shall tell the woeful tale.
After, thy wisdom shall impart to her
The conflict yet to come.

PROMETHEUS

So be it, then.

And, Io, thus much courtesy thou owest
These maidens being thine own father's kin.
For with a moving story of our woes

PROMETHEUS BOUND

To win a tear from weeping auditors
In nought demeans the teller.

IO

I know not
How fitly to refuse; and at your wish
All ye desire to know I will in plain,
Round terms set forth. And yet the telling of it
Harrows my soul; this winter's tale of wrong,
Of angry Gods and brute deformity,
And how and why on me these horrors swooped.
Always there were dreams visiting by night
The woman's chambers where I slept; and they
With flattering words admonished and cajoled me,
Saying, "O lucky one, so long a maid?
And what a match for thee if thou would'st wed
Why, pretty, here is Zeus as hot as hot—
Love—sick—to have thee! Such a bolt as thou
Hast shot clean through his heart And he won't rest
Till Cypris help him win thee! Lift not then,
My daughter, a proud foot to spurn the bed
Of Zeus: but get thee gone to meadow deep
By Lerna's marsh, where are thy father's flocks
And cattle—folds, that on the eye of Zeus
May fall the balm that shall assuage desire."
Such dreams oppressed me, troubling all my nights,
Woe's me! till I plucked courage up to tell
My father of these fears that walked in darkness.
And many times to Pytho and Dodona
He sent his sacred missioners, to inquire
How, or by deed or word, he might conform
To the high will and pleasure of the Gods.
And they returned with slippery oracles,
Nought plain, but all to baffle and perplex—
And then at last to Inachus there raught
A saying that flashed clear; the drift, that
Must be put out from home and country, forced
To be a wanderer at the ends of the earth,
A thing devote and dedicate; and if
I would not, there should fall a thunderbolt
From Zeus, with blinding flash, and utterly
Destroy my race. So spake the oracle
Of Loxias. In sorrow he obeyed,
And from beneath his roof drove forth his child
Grieving as he grieved, and from house and home
Bolted and barred me out. But the high hand
Of Zeus bear hardly on the rein of fate.
And, instantly—even in a moment—mind
And body suffered strange distortion. Horned
Even as ye see me now, and with sharp bite
Of gadfly pricked, with high—flung skip, stark—mad,
I bounded, galloping headlong on, until

PROMETHEUS BOUND

I came to the sweet and of the stream
Kerchneian, hard by Lerna's spring. And thither
Argus, the giant herdsman, fierce and fell
As a strong wine unmixed, with hateful cast
Of all his cunning eyes upon the trail,
Gave chase and tracked me down. And there he perished
By violent and sudden doom surprised.
But I with darting sting—the scorpion whip
Of angry Gods—am lashed from land to land.
Thou hast my story, and, if thou can'st tell
What I have still to suffer, speak; but do not,
Moved by compassion, with a lying tale
Warm my cold heart; no sickness of the soul
Is half so shameful as composed falsehoods.

CHORUS

Off! lost one! off! Horror, I cry!
Horror and misery
Was this the traveller's tale I craved to hear?
Oh, that mine eyes should see
A sight so ill to look upon! Ah me!
Sorrow, defilement, haunting fear,
Fan my blood cold,
Stabbed with a two-edged sting!
O Fate, Fate, Fate, tremblingly I behold
The plight of Io, thine apportioning!

PROMETHEUS

Thou dost lament too soon, and art as one
All fear. Refrain thyself till thou hast heard
What's yet to be.

CHORUS

Speak and be our instructor:
There is a kind of balm to the sick soul
In certain knowledge of the grief to come.

PROMETHEUS

Your former wish I lightly granted ye:
And ye have heard, even as ye desired,
From this maid's lips the story of her sorrow.
Now hear the sequel, the ensuing woes
The damsel must endure from Hera's hate.
And thou, O seed of Inachaeon loins,
Weigh well my words, that thou may'st understand
Thy journey's end. First towards the rising sun
Turn hence, and traverse fields that ne'er felt plough
Until thou reach the country of the Scyths,
A race of wanderers handling the long-bow
That shoots afar, and having their habitations
Under the open sky in wattled cotes
That move on wheels. Go not thou nigh to them,
But ever within sound of the breaking waver,
Pass through their land. And on the left of the
The Chalybes, workers in iron, dwell.

PROMETHEUS BOUND

Beware of them, for they are savages,
Who suffer not a stranger to come near.
And thou shalt reach the river Hybristes,
Well named. Cross not, for it is ill to cross,
Until thou come even unto Caucasus,
Highest of mountains, where the foaming river
Blows all its volume from the summit ridge
That o'ertops all. And that star-neighbour'd ridge
Thy feet must climb; and, following the road
That runneth south, thou presently shall reach
The Amazonian hosts that loathe the male,
And shall one day remove from thence and found
Themiscyra hard by Thermodon's stream,
Where on the craggy Salmadessian coast
Waves gnash their teeth, the maw of mariners
And step-mother of ships. And they shall lead the
Upon thy way, and with a right good will.
Then shalt thou come to the Cimmerian Isthmus,
Even at the pass and portals of the sea,
And leaving it behind thee, stout of heart,
Cross o'er the channel of Maeotis' lake.
For ever famous among men shall be
The story of thy crossing, and the strait
Be called by a new name, the Bosphorus,
In memory of thee. Then having left
Europa's soil behind thee thou shalt come
To the main land of Asia. What think ye?
Is not the only ruler of the Gods
A complete tyrant, violent to all,
Respecting none? First, being himself a God,
He burneth to enjoy a mortal maid,
And then torments her with these wanderings.
A sorry suitor for thy love, poor girl,
A bitter wooing. Yet having heard so much
Thou art not even in the overture
And prelude of the song.

IO

Alas! Oh! Oh!

PROMETHEUS

Thou dost cryout, fetching again deep groans:
What wilt thou do when thou hast heard in full
The evils yet to come?

CHORUS

And wilt thou tell
The maiden something further: some fresh sorrow?

PROMETHEUS

A stormy sea of wrong and ruining.

IO

What does it profit me to live! Oh, why
Do I not throw myself from this rough crag
And in one leap rid me of all my pain?

PROMETHEUS BOUND

Better to die at once than live, and all
My days be evil.

PROMETHEUS

Thou would'st find it hard
To bear what I must bear: for unto me
It is not given to die,—a dear release
From pain; but now of suffering there is
No end in sight till Zeus shall fall.

IO

And shall
Zeus fall? His power be taken from him?
No matter when if true—

PROMETHEUS

'Twould make thee happy
Methinks, if thou could'st see calamity
Whelm him.

IO

How should it not when all my woes
Are of his sending? learn how
These things shall be.
The tyrant's rod?
And fond imaginings.

IO

But how? Oh, speak,
If the declaring draw no evil down I

PROMETHEUS

A marriage he shall make shall vex him sore.

IO

A marriage? Whether of gods or mortals?
Speak!

If this be utterable!

PROMETHEUS

Why dost thou ask
What I may not declare?

IO

And shall he quit
The throne of all the worlds, by a new spouse
Supplanted?

PROMETHEUS

She will bear to him a child,
And he shall be in might more excellent
Than his progenitor.

IO

And he will find
No way to parry this strong stroke of fate?

PROMETHEUS

None save my own self—when these bonds are loosed.

IO

And who shall loose them if Zeus wills not?
Of thine own seed.
How say'st thou? Shall a child

PROMETHEUS BOUND

Of mine release thee?

PROMETHEUS

Son of thine, but son

The thirteenth generation shall beget.

IO

A prophecy oracularly dark.

PROMETHEUS

Then seek not thou to know thine own fate.

IO

Nay,

Tender me not a boon to snatch it from me.

PROMETHEUS

Of two gifts thou hast asked one shall be thine.

IO

What gifts? Pronounce and leave to me the choice.

PROMETHEUS

Nay, thou are free to choose. Say, therefore, whether

I shall declare to thee thy future woes

Or him who shall be my deliverer.

CHORUS

Nay, but let both be granted! Unto her

That which she chooseth, unto me my choice,

That I, too, may have honour from thy lips.

First unto her declare her wanderings,

And unto me him who shall set thee free;

'Tis that I long to know.

PROMETHEUS

I will resist

No further, but to your importunacy

All things which ye-desire to learn reveal.

And, Io, first to thee I will declare

Thy far-driven wanderings; write thou my words

In the retentive tablets of thy heart.

When thou hast crossed the flood that flows between

And is the boundary of two continents,

Turn to the sun's uprising, where he treads

Printing with fiery steps the eastern sky,

And from the roaring of the Pontic surge

Do thou pass on, until before thee lies

The Gorgonean plain, Kisthene called,

Where dwell the gray-haired three, the Phorcides,

Old, mumbling maids, swan-shaped, having one eye

Betwixt the three, and but a single tooth.

On them the sun with his brightbeams ne'er glanceth

Nor moon that lamps the night. Not far from them

The sisters three, the Gorgons, have their haunt;

Winged forms, with snaky locks, hateful to man,

Whom nothing mortal looking on can live.

Thus much that thou may'st have a care of these.

Now of another portent thou shalt hear.

Beware the dogs of Zeus that ne'er give tongue,

PROMETHEUS BOUND

The sharp-beaked gryphons, and the one-eyed horde
Of Arimaspians, riding upon horses,
Who dwell around the river rolling gold,
The ferry and the frith of Pluto's port.
Go not thou nigh them. After thou shalt come
To a far land, a dark-skinned race, that dwell
Beside the fountains of the sun, whence flows
The river Ethiops: follow its banks
Until thou comest to the steep-down slope
Where from the Bibline mountains Nilus old
Pours the sweet waters of his holy stream.
And thou, the river guiding thee, shalt come
To the three-sided, wedge-shaped land of Nile,
Where for thyself, Io, and for thy children
Long sojourn is appointed. If in aught
My story seems to stammer and to er
From indirectness, ask and ask again
Till all be manifest. I do not lack
For leisure, having more than well contents me

CHORUS

If there be aught that she must suffer yet,
Or aught omitted in the narrative
Of her long wanderings, I pray thee speak.
But if thou hast told all, then grant the boon
We asked and doubtless thou wilt call to mind.

PROMETHEUS

Nay, she has heard the last of her long journey.
But, as some warrant for her patient hearing
I will relate her former sufferings
Ere she came hither. Much I will omit
That had detained us else with long discourse
And touch at once her journey's thus far goal.
When thou wast come to the Molossian plain
That lies about the high top of Dodona,
Where is an oracle and shrine of Zeus
Thesprotian, and-portent past belief—
The talking oaks, the same from whom the word
Flashed clear and nothing questionably hailed the
The destined spouse—ah! do I touch old wounds?—
Of Zeus, honoured above thy sex; stung thence
In torment, where the road runs by the sea,
Thou cam'st to the broad gulf of Rhea, whence
Beat back by a strong wind, thou didst retrace
Most painfully thy course; and it shall be
That times to come in memory of thy passage
Shall call that inlet the Ionian Sea.
Thus much for thee in witness that my mind
Beholdeth more than that which leaps to light.
Now for the things to come; what I shall say
Concerns ye both alike. Return we then
And follow our old track. There is a city

PROMETHEUS BOUND

Yclept Canobus, built at the land's end,
Even at the mouth and mounded silt of Nile,
And there shall Zeus restore to thee thy mind
With touch benign and laying on of hands.
And from that touch thou shalt conceive and bear
Swarth Epaphus, touch-born; and he shall reap
As much of earth as Nilus watereth
With his broad-flowing river. In descent
The fifth from him there shall come back to Argos,
Thine ancient home, but driven by hard hap,
Two score and ten maids, daughters of one house,
Fleeing pollution of unlawful marriage
With their next kin, who winged with wild desire,
As hawks that follow hard on cushat-doves,
Shall harry prey which they should not pursue
And hunt forbidden brides. But God shall be
Exceeding jealous for their chastity;
And old Pelasgia, for the mortal thrust
Of woman's hands and midnight murder done
Upon their new-wed lords, shall shelter them;
For every wife shall strike her husband down
Dipping a two-edged broadsword in his blood.
Oh, that mine enemies might wed such wives!
But of the fifty, one alone desire
Shall tame, as with the stroke of charming-wand,
So that she shall not lift her hands to slay
The partner of her bed; yea, melting love
Shall blunt her sharp-set will, and she shall choose
Rather to be called weak and womanly
Than the dark stain of blood; and she shall be
Mother of kings in Argos. 'Tis a tale
Were't told in full, would occupy us long.
For, of her sowing, there shall spring to fame
The lion's whelp, the archer bold, whose bow
Shall set me free. This is the oracle
Themis, my ancient Mother, Titan-born,
Disclosed to me; but how and in what wise
Were long to tell, nor would it profit thee.

IO

Again they come, again
The fury and the pain!
The gangrened wound! The ache of pulses dinned
With raging throes
It beats upon my brain—the burning wind
That madness blows!
It pricks—the barb, the hook not forged with heat,
The gadfly dart!
Against my ribs with thud of trampling feet
Hammers my heart!
And like a bowling wheel mine eyeballs spin,
And I am flung

PROMETHEUS BOUND

By fierce winds from my course, nor can rein in
My frantic tongue
That raves I know not what!—a random tide
Of words—a froth
Of muddied waters buffeting the wide,
High-crested, hateful wave of ruin and God's wrath!
Exit raving.

CHORUS

I hold him wise who first in his own mind
This canon fixed and taught it to mankind:
True marriage is the union that mates
Equal with equal; not where wealth emasculates,
Or mighty lineage is magnified,
Should he who earns his bread look for a bride.
Therefore, grave mistresses of fate, I pray
That I may never live to see the day
When Zeus takes me for his bedfellow; or
Draw near in love to husband from on high.
For I am full of fear when I behold
Io, the maid no human love may fold,
And her virginity disconsolate,
Homeless and husbandless by Hera's hate.
For me, when love is level, fear is far.
May none of all the Gods that greater are
Eve me with his unshunnable regard;
Fir in that warfare victory is hard,
And of that plenty cometh emptiness.
What should befall me then I dare not guess;
Nor whither I should flee that I might shun
The craft and subtlety of Cronos' Son.

PROMETHEUS

I tell thee that the self-willed pride of Zeus
Shall surely be abased; that even now
He plots a marriage that shall hurl him forth
Far out of sight of his imperial throne
And kingly dignity. Then, in that hour,
Shall be fulfilled, nor in one tittle fail,
The curse wherewith his father Cronos cursed him,
What time he fell from his majestic place
Established from of old. And such a stroke
None of the Gods save me could turn aside.
I know these things shall be and on what wise.
Therefore let him secure him in his seat,
And put his trust in airy noise, and swing
His bright, two-handed, blazing thunderbolt,
For these shall nothing stead him, nor avert
Fall insupportable and glory humbled.
A wrestler of such might he maketh ready
For his own ruin; yea, a wonder, strong
In strength unmatchable; and he shall find
Fire that shall set at naught the burning bolt

PROMETHEUS BOUND

And blasts more dreadful that o'er-crow the thunder.
The pestilence that scourgeth the deep seas
And shaketh solid earth, the three-pronged mace,
Poseidon's spear, a mightier shall scatter;
And when he stumbleth striking there his foot,
Fallen on evil days, the tyrant's pride
Shall measure all the miserable length
That parts rule absolute from servitude.

CHORUS

Methinks the wish is father to the thought
And whets thy railing tongue.

PROMETHEUS

Not so: the wish And the accomplishment go hand in hand.

CHORUS

Then must we look for one who shall supplant
And reign instead of Zeus?
Far, far more grievous shall bow down his neck.

CHORUS

Hast thou no fear venting such blasphemy?

PROMETHEUS

What should I fear who have no part nor lot
In doom of dying?

CHORUS

But he might afflict the
With agony more dreadful, pain beyond
These pains.

PROMETHEUS

Why let him if he will
All evils I foreknow.

CHORUS

Ah, they are wise
Who do obeisance, prostrate in the dust,
To the implacable, eternal Will.

PROMETHEUS

Go thou and worship; fold thy hands in prayer,
And be the dog that licks the foot of power!
Nothing care I for Zeus; yea, less than naught!
Let him do what he will, and sway the world
His little hour; he has not long to lord it
Among the Gods.

Oh here here runner comes
The upstart tyrant's lacquey! He'll bring news,
A message, never doubt it, from his master.
Enter HERMES.

HERMES. You, the sophisticated rogue, the heart of gall,
The renegade of heaven, to short-lived men
Purveyor of prerogatives and titles,
Fire-thief! Dost hear me? I've a word for thee.
Thou'rt to declare—this is the Father's pleasure
These marriage-feasts of thine, whereof thy tongue
Rattles a-pace, and by the which his greatness

PROMETHEUS BOUND

Shall take a fall. And look you rede no riddles,
But tell the truth, in each particular
Exact. I am not to sweat for thee, Prometheus,
Upon a double journey. And thou seest
Zeus by thy dark defiance is not moved.

PROMETHEUS

A very solemn piece of insolence
Spoken like an underling of the Gods! Ye are young!
Ye are young! New come to power And ye suppose
Your towered citadel Calamity
Can never enter! Ah, and have not
Seen from those pinnacles a two-fold fall
Of tyrants? And the third, who his brief "now"
Of lordship arrogates, I shall see yet
By lapse most swift' most ignominious,
Sink to perdition. And dost thou suppose
I crouch and cower in reverence and awe
To Gods of yesterday? I fail of that
So much, the total all of space and time
Bulks in between. Take thyself hence and count
Thy toiling steps back by the way thou camest,
In nothing wiser for thy questionings.

HERMES

This is that former stubbornness of thine
That brought thee hither to foul anchorage.

PROMETHEUS

Mistake me not; I would not, if I might,
Change my misfortunes for thy vassalage.

HERMES

Oh! better be the vassal of this rock
Than born the trusty messenger of Zeus

PROMETHEUS

I answer insolence, as it deserves,
With insolence. How else should it be answered?

HERMES

Surely; and, being in trouble, it is plain
You revel in your plight.

PROMETHEUS

Revel, forsooth!
I would my enemies might hold such revels
And thou amongst the first.

HERMES

Dost thou blame me
For thy misfortunes?

PROMETHEUS

I hate all the Gods,
Because, having received good at my hands,
They have rewarded me with evil.
Proves thee stark mad!

HERMES

This proves thee stark mad!

PROMETHEUS BOUND

PROMETHEUS

Mad as you please, if hating
Your enemies is madness

HERMES

Were all well
With thee, thou'dst be insufferable!

PROMETHEUS

Alas!

HERMES

Alas, that Zeus knows not that word, Alas!

PROMETHEUS

But ageing Time teacheth all knowledge.

HERMES

Time
Hath not yet taught thy rash, imperious will
Over wild impulse to win mastery.

PROMETHEUS

Nay: had Time taught me that, I had not stooped
To bandy words with such a slave as thou.

HERMES

This, then, is all thine answer: thou'lt not
One syllable of what our Father asks.

PROMETHEUS

Oh, that I were a debtor to his kindness!
I would requite him to the uttermost!

HERMES

A cutting speech! You take me for a boy
Whom you may taunt and tease.

PROMETHEUS

Why art thou not
A boy—a very booby—to suppose
Thou wilt get aught from me? There is no wrong
However shameful, nor no shift of malice
Whereby Zeus shall persuade me to unlock
My lips until these shackles be cast loose.
Therefore let lightning leap with smoke and flame,
And all that is be beat and tossed together,
With whirl of feathery snowflakes and loud crack
Of subterranean thunder; none of these
Shall bend my will or force me to disclose
By whom 'tis fated he shall fall from power.

HERMES

What good can come of this? Think yet again!

PROMETHEUS

I long ago have thought and long ago
Determined.

HERMES

Patience! patience! thou rash fool
Have so much patience as to school thy mind
To a right judgment in thy present troubles.

PROMETHEUS

PROMETHEUS BOUND

Lo, I am rockfast, and thy words are wave
That weary me in vain. Let not the thought
Enter thy mind, that I in awe of Zeus
Shall change my nature for a girl's, or beg
The Loathed beyond all loathing—with my hands
Spread out in woman's fashion—to cast loose
These bonds; from that I am utterly removed.

HERMES

I have talked much, yet further not my purpose;
For thou art in no whit melted or moved
By my prolonged entreaties: like a colt
New to the harness thou dost back and Plunge.
Snap at thy bit and fight against the rein.
And yet thy confidence is in a straw;
For stubbornness, if one be in the wrong,
Is in itself weaker than naught at all.
See now, if thou wilt not obey my words,
What storm, what triple-crested wave of woe
Unshunnable shall come upon thee. First,
This rocky chasm shall the Father split
With earthquake thunder and his burning bolt,
And he shall hide thy form, and thou shalt hang
Bolt upright, dangled in the rock's rude arms.
Nor till thou hast completed thy long term
Shalt thou come back into the light; and then
The hound of Zeus, the tawny eagle,
Shall violently fall upon thy flesh
And rend it as 'twere rags; and every day
And all day long shall thine unbidden guest
Sit at thy table, feasting on thy liver
Till he hath gnawn it black. Look for no term
To such an agony till there stand forth
Among the Gods one who shall take upon him
Thy sufferings and consent to enter hell
Far from the light of Sun, yea, the deep pit
And mirk of Tartarus, for thee. Be advised;
This is not stuffed speech framed to frighten the
But woeful truth. For Zeus knows not to lie

CHORUS

To our mind
The words of Hermes fail not of the mark.
For he enjoins thee to let self-will go
And follow after prudent counsels. Him
Harken; for error in the wise is shame.

PROMETHEUS

These are stale tidings I foreknew;
Therefore, since suffering is the due
A foe must pay his foes,
Let curled lightnings clasp and clash
And close upon my limbs: loud crash
The thunder, and fierce throes

PROMETHEUS BOUND

Of savage winds convulse calm air:
The embowelled blast earth's roots uptear
And toss beyond its bars,
The rough surge, till the roaring deep
In one devouring deluge sweep
The pathway of the stars
Finally, let him fling my form
Down whirling gulfs, the central storm
Of being; let me lie
Plunged in the black Tartarean gloom;
Yet–yet–his sentence shall not doom
This deathless self to die!

HERMES

These are the workings of a brain
More than a little touched; the vein
Of voluble ecstasy!
Surely he wandereth from the way,
His reason lost, who thus can pray
A mouthing mad man he!
Therefore, O ye who court his fate,
Rash mourners–ere it be too late
And ye indeed are sad
For vengeance spurring hither fast–
Hence! lest the bellowing thunderblast
Like him should strike you mad I

CHORUS

Words which might work persuasion speak
If thou must counsel me; nor seek
Thus, like a stream in spate,
To uproot mine honour. Dost thou dare
Urge me to baseness! I will bear
With him all blows of fate;
For false forsakers I despise;
At treachery my gorge doth rise:
I spew it forth with hate!

HERMES

Only–with ruin on your track–
Rail not at fortune; but look back
And these my words recall;
Neither blame Zeus that he hath sent
Sorrow no warning word forewent!
Ye labour for your fall
With your own hands I Not by surprise
Nor yet by stealth, but with clear eyes,
Knowing the thing ye do,
Ye walk into the yawning net
That for the feet of is set
And Ruin spreads for you.
Exit.

PROMETHEUS

The time is past for words; earth quakes

PROMETHEUS BOUND

Sensibly: hark! pent thunder rakes
The depths, with bellowing din
Of echoes rolling ever nigher:
Lightnings shake out their locks of fire;
The dust cones dance and spin;
The skipping winds, as if possessed
By faction—north, south, east and west,
Puff at each other; sea
And sky are shook together: Lo
The swing and fury of the blow
Wherewith Zeus smiteth me
Sweepeth apace, and, visibly,
To strike my heart with fear. See, see,
Earth, awful Mother! Air,
That shedd'st from the revolving sky
On all the light they see thee by,
What bitter wrongs I bear!
The scene closes with earthquake and thunder,
in the midst of which PROMETHEUS and the DAUGHTERS OF OCEANUS
sink into the abyss.
THE END