

Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound

Preface, Notes and Translation by Marianne McDonald

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INTRODUCTION

Aeschylus

There were three major tragic playwrights in fifth-century Athens: Aeschylus (ca. 525-456 BC), seven of whose plays survive out of approximately eighty; Sophocles (ca. 496-406 BC), with seven plays surviving out of approximately one hundred and twenty; and Euripides (ca. 480-ca. 406 BC), with nineteen out of approximately ninety.

Aeschylus is the father of Greek tragedy. It would appear that before Aeschylus there was just one actor and a chorus in each play, since, according to Aristotle (384-22 BC), he had added a second and Sophocles, a third, creating more possibilities for interchange and conflict.¹ Large issues and the splendor of his choruses characterize Aeschylean drama. He utilizes spectacle to advantage, coupling it with equally spectacular poetic language. His trilogies show divine justice being administered over generations. We know this, not from the trilogies themselves—because his *Oresteia* is the only trilogy of all Greek tragedy that has survived—but from the plots of his extant plays.

Aeschylus lived during the glorious period of the Persian Wars (490-89 BC and 480-79 BC) when the invading Persians were defeated. He fought at Marathon and Salamis, as evidenced by his epitaph, which commemorates him as a soldier and not as a playwright. He did not live to see the end of the inglorious Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC), which came about as a reaction by Sparta and other former allies to the expansion of the Athenian empire.

It is likely that Aeschylus came from a distinguished family. He was invited by Hieron, the ruler of Syracuse, in Sicily, to visit him, and he wrote his *Women of Etna* on the occasion of Hieron's founding of the city of Etna. His plays were esteemed for their inspirational and educational value so much that in Aristophanes' *Frogs* (405 BC), the god Dionysus brings Aeschylus back from the dead so that the Athenians can enjoy good drama once more, and possibly to save the city. Aristophanes (450?-386? BC) also says that whoever sees Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* is anxious to become a warrior

¹ In writing this introduction, I have consulted and in places paraphrased, and in others copied, from my *The Living Art of Greek Tragedy* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003).

(*Frogs*, 1021-22); Aeschylus himself claims that his *Seven Against Thebes* is "full of Ares," the Greek god of war.

The Seven plays that survive are:

Persians, 472 BC;

Seven Against Thebes, 467 BC;

Suppliant Women, not earlier than 466 BC;

Oresteia Trilogy: *Agamemnon*, *Libation Bearers*, and *Eumenides* 458 BC;

Prometheus Bound (though both authorship and date of this play have been disputed).

We are told that Aeschylus won about thirteen victories in the Athenian dramatic festivals (see **Staging** and **Background** below), compared to the twenty-four of Sophocles, and the four that Euripides won during his lifetime and another posthumously. Fragments exist of many of the missing plays.

Aeschylus' plays have many exchanges between one actor and the chorus. As much as half a play can be choral—and his choruses would seem to have been visually striking. For instance, the chorus of Persians appeared in lavish oriental costumes and the *Erinyes*, or Furies in the *Eumenides*, were so hideous in appearance that (an ancient biographer claimed) women miscarried upon seeing them, and little boys fainted from fright. (By the time the biographer wrote his account in the fourth century or later, women were attending the Athenian theatre, whereas before that time it was doubtful that they did.)

Of the three great tragedians whose work we have, Aeschylus gets the prize for poetry. He used bold metaphors and invented some words. He is certainly the most difficult to translate. He often takes an image and carries it through the play, or trilogy, as, for instance, in the *Oresteia* with the related images of net, hunt, blood, fertility, sacrifice, and war—public pursuits, which lead to private disaster. This use of a repeated image in a play, or connected trilogy, is not unlike the Wagnerian *Leitmotiv* in opera. In

Prometheus Bound the main images and themes are fire, knowledge, craft, power, tyranny, slavery, compliance, compromise, drugs, cures, disease, madness, sanity, victimhood, suffering, torture, compassion, brutality, cowardice, bravery, defiance, loyalty, betrayal, pride, honor, crime, excess, immortality and death.

Prometheus Bound: What Happens in the Play

The play opens with a scene of violent torture. Prometheus is nailed to a rock by Power, Force and Hephaestus. The former are as violent as their names, but Hephaestus is sympathetic to Prometheus and detests this job. Prometheus had earlier defended Zeus in his fight against the giants, siding against his own brothers the Titans so that Zeus could win. Prometheus is now being punished for stealing fire from the gods and giving it to man, when Zeus was set on destroying humanity. Fire would give man the means for survival.

The daughters of Oceanus, who are Prometheus' cousins, come in flying chariots to visit him. They sympathize, but keep their distance, and advise him to make peace with Zeus. Oceanus enters mounted on a Hippocamp (front part horse, and rear part sea-serpent). Both enter in a spectacular way, and this is typical of Aeschylus. Oceanus pompously tells Prometheus to do what Zeus wants, and secure his freedom through compromise. Io, another victim of Zeus, enters, and is told her fate by Prometheus who can see the future. She is forced to wander the world in the form of a cow, stung by a gadfly sent by Zeus' wife, Hera, who became aware of Zeus's intentions to make Io the mother of his child. The gadfly is like the eagle that will torture Prometheus. The difference is that Io has no choice, except perhaps to kill herself. Prometheus gives her hope by telling her that her suffering will end when she finally reaches Egypt. There she will be welcomed; she will resume her original shape and bear Zeus's son Epaphus "child of touch" (great-grandfather of Danaus and his daughters). Besides this, another

descendant of hers (Heracles) will eventually free Prometheus from his torment. The hope that Prometheus gives Io is what he earlier gave men out of sympathy for them. Only he knows who will come to overthrow Zeus.

Hermes, Zeus' messenger, comes on the scene to threaten Prometheus with more torture if he will not reveal to Zeus the secret he wants to know. This wins the Chorus over to Prometheus' side, and they choose to assume the risk of sharing his fate at the end. They also opt to be heroic in their loyalty to their friend. Prometheus will not compromise nor reveal his secret, but as he is hurled to the depths, he calls on his mother (Themis, but in this context might be Gaia, Earth, said to be another name for Themis) and the sky, to see what undeserved suffering he has to bear.

Prometheus Bound: Themes, Context and Interpretation

Although *Prometheus Bound* appears with his other plays in the manuscripts, many scholars have questioned whether this play is by Aeschylus. It is possibly by his son. They base their doubts on vocabulary, metrical choices, and general exceptions to the earlier plays. This is the only Aeschylean play that has more lines for the main character (over half) than the chorus. This play may very possibly be the first in which the *mêchanê* or "flying crane," appears. The authorship may be in question, but not, I think the brilliance of the play. It has been the favorite of many: Goethe, Marx, Byron, Shelley, and that romantic of all romantics, Victor Hugo.

Aeschylus shows us god confronting god in his *Prometheus Bound*. Prometheus, the Titan, brought fire to man: this fire represents creativity and imagination, besides the ability to reason and scientific progress. Prometheus taught man to build houses and ships; the arts of religion and of healing: medicine and he taught the art of writing.

Prometheus is the first rebel, and he is accused of loving man too much. Besides stealing fire, myth tells us he told man how to trick Zeus into choosing to have sacrifices

that for the rest of time give Zeus the fat and bones, leaving the meat for man. The story of Prometheus' gifts has a mythical quality, and this may show tragedy at an early stage.

Prometheus attributes all inventions and arts that we associate with civilization to himself:

I'll make a long story short: all the arts and crafts
that Man possesses came from me, Prometheus. (505-506)

Sophocles' *Antigone* (332-362) gives a different story, and says that man invented the arts and crafts himself. This shows us a shift from the earlier Aeschylus and his ideas about the power of the gods. Aeschylus also puts forward an idea of progress, something refuted by Hesiod (ca. 700 BC) in his *Work and Days*, which spoke of a Golden Age, with constant deterioration following. Perhaps in this case Aeschylus was championing a more modern theory.

This is a play that indicts the tyrant, Zeus the king of the gods who abuses Prometheus, the humanitarian. Both Prometheus and Io are his victims, Prometheus for opposing his will (he wanted to destroy man), and Io because he lusted for her. Most people would call them innocent victims, and so this play, and Prometheus' heroism has inspired many oppressed people to fight back. He is the rebel par excellence.

Zeus punishes him for his defiant act, and even worse, for boasting about it. At the end of the play he will be thrown into an abyss and an eagle sent to constantly feed on his liver. He refuses to act subserviently to Zeus, or to reveal the details of a prophecy about the fall of Zeus.

There are many remarks which show psychological acuity: there is reference to a "talking cure," which characterizes talking as relief of pain when Oceanus says:

Don't you know, Prometheus, that words
can heal a mind diseased with passion? (377-78)

Freud's famous therapy was anticipated by Aeschylus.

He is the physician who taught medicine to man, but cannot heal himself. The Chorus says:

... Now your mind wanders and, like a
bad physician, you are sick and in despair; you
cannot find any drug to heal your own disease. (473-75)

The parallels with Christ are obvious, from the suffering of the innocent to the pains of having his body nailed and hanging. Even Prometheus' final words have a curious resemblance to Christ's complaint to his father when he is nailed to the cross, but in this case the complaint is by Prometheus to his mother and the Sky:

O holy mother,
O Sky that guides all light
Over the revolving path of the universe,
Do you see what injustice I suffer? (1091-3)

Both Prometheus and Christ gave their lives for mankind. Prometheus advocates love, whereas Zeus prefers power. Prometheus is filled with love for man, and is willing to suffer for it. Prometheus and Io are also symbols for victims who suffer from slow progressive painful diseases like AIDS, or various cancers.

The fact that Prometheus is silent for so long is also dramatic, and typical of Aeschylus' dramatic technique. In Aristophanes' *Frogs*, Aeschylus is lampooned for his use of an actor who is silent for long periods. Prometheus' silence at the beginning while he is obviously in excruciating pain builds up sympathy for him and antipathy towards the tyrant who ordered this. Significantly, Zeus never appears in the play, but just sends lackeys to carry his messages. It is a pity we do not have the whole trilogy. It is possible that Zeus learned through his own suffering, and that some compromise was effected, so that the final play may have resembled the *Eumenides* in the *Oresteia*. The other plays in the trilogy, which have not survived, were called *The Fire-Bearer* as the first, next *Prometheus Bound* followed by *Prometheus Unbound*, with the satyr play, *Prometheus*,

The Fire-Kindler as the fourth (a satyr play, a burlesque afterpiece) to make a tetralogy. Heracles would kill the eagle and possibly release Prometheus, who then would reveal his secret to Zeus. Reconciliation might follow, although in Aristophanes' *Birds*, Prometheus is only too happy to help his beloved men against Zeus (414 BC).

A static Prometheus is a strong symbol for the rebel who will not give up his cause. His being nailed to a cliff is symbolic of and result of his stubbornness. The other characters come and go; they also change their minds throughout the piece. Not our hero, Prometheus. The chorus is ultimately loyal to him, but at the beginning it urges compromise. They also only seem to adopt their final position, namely sharing Prometheus' punishment, in response to the brutal Hermes, whom they defied.

Background

Dramatic storytelling in Greece began with the Homeric bard who told stories to nobles while they ate and drank, and the *Odyssey* reports that Demodocus sang before the public assembly at the games (8. 266 ff). Aristotle says that the particular form that Greek tragedy took was derived from the singing and dancing of the dithyrambic chorus in honor of Dionysus, the god of theatre and wine. It developed when the chorus leader separated himself from the rest and created the possibility of a dialogue. The first performance of a tragedy is attributed to Thespis, *ca.* 534 BC in Athens.

The Athenians invented theatre as we know it in the sixth century BC. In the fifth-century, there was a population of about 300,000 male citizens, women, children, slaves and foreign residents in Attica (Athens and the area immediately surrounding it). Only the Athenian males were citizens (about 50,000). The theatre of Dionysus seated about 15,000 to 18,000 people, and featured a circular playing area called the *orchêstra*. It may have had an altar in the center.

The main Athenian dramatic festival was the Greater Dionysia, held in honor of Dionysus, in early spring, the 9th-13th days of the month Elaphebolion (March/April), when the seas were calm and Athenian allies could safely make the sea journey and attend. On the first day there was an elaborate show of tribute from the allies, war-orphans paraded, and prominent citizens were given awards. It was not unlike the May Day parade in Russia, when Soviet power was at its height. Going to the theatre was a social, civic, and religious event. One purpose of the festival was to impress foreigners.

Three or four days of the Greater Dionysia were devoted to plays. The performances began at dawn and lasted all day. There are several plays extant whose action begins at dawn, or even in the dark.

A secondary festival was the Lenaia. It took place on the twelfth day of the month Gamelion (January-February), in the dead of winter when storms were common and it was unlikely that foreign visitors could attend. Aristophanes comments on this, saying: here one can speak to the locals without showing off for foreigners. More comedies were performed than tragedies.

During Aeschylus's time at the Greater Dionysia, three playwrights were selected to present three tragedies and a Satyr play that comically dealt with tragic themes. Aeschylus gave us Satyr plays that seemed to be related to the preceding trilogy. Aeschylus preferred the connected trilogy (sometimes tetralogy) that allowed a theme, such as plays about Prometheus, to be developed. Sophocles abandoned the practice of writing connected trilogies and instead preferred to highlight a major character within three separate plays. Euripides probably did not write connected trilogies either, but instead of emphasizing one heroic character, as Sophocles did, he usually created a more socially-directed drama.

A prize was given for the best tragic poet and for the best comic poet. The audience was part of the performance and openly expressed their feelings and reactions, which very likely influenced the judging. The *chorêgos*, who paid for the costuming and

training of the chorus, would obviously be pleased if his playwright won. The jury was selected from the citizens.

All the actors were male and masked, playing both male and female roles. Masks with their stylized features allowed the characters to be better recognized by the audience in the large outdoor spaces in which the tragedies were originally performed. The three actors were later called Protagonist, Deuteragonist, and Tritagonist (first, second, and third actor), and the roles were divided between them, the major roles being taken by the Protagonist. There were also supernumeraries (extras), or nonspeaking parts, such as attendants and children. At first all the actors were non-professional, and the playwright acted too. (However, it is said that Sophocles' weak voice prevented him from acting in his own plays so he probably simply served as a director.) Eventually acting became professional, and prizes were then awarded to actors also.

The chorus probably numbered twelve (as in most plays by Aeschylus) and increased to fifteen (Sophocles). They generally remained present throughout the performance after their first entrance and danced in the *orchêstra* as they sang. The music was provided by the *aulos*, a reed instrument (like the oboe), and sometimes drums. Spoken portions of the drama, mainly in iambic trimeter (a rhythm closest to that of ordinary speech), alternated with the choruses, which were always in lyric meters and usually arranged in *strophês* and *antistrophês* ("turns" and "turnings back," possibly referring to their danced accompaniment). Anapests (~ —) created a strong marching rhythm in the texts that accompanied the initial entrance and final exit of the chorus.

The spoken part of a play could consist of a monologue, or a dialogue between two or three characters or some exchange with a chorus. Sometimes the dialogue took the form of one-line interchanges. At other times an actor sang an impassioned lyric aria. Sometimes there was a formal lament, usually sung by an actor with the chorus.

According to Aristotle, Sophocles introduced scene-painting to suggest a visual background. Dead bodies could be displayed on a device called the *ekkyklêma* which was

rolled out from the center doors of the building depicted on the *skênê* (backdrop, literally "tent"). This device showed stationary tableaux inside the *skênê*. A *mêchanê* ("machine," or mechanical crane) allowed aerial entrances and exits, usually of the gods. It is doubtful that Aeschylus used any of these devices before the *Oresteia* in 458, and the other playwrights used them sparingly. It is likely that the crane was used in *Prometheus Bound*. They were very popular from the fourth century on. The use of side entrances and exits, *parodoi*, could indicate whether a character was local or from a foreign region, or going to or coming from a particular place.

Every citizen could enter the competition to have plays accepted, and every citizen could be an actor. The playwrights competed and the citizens voted on the winner. One did not have to wait for the critics to write their responses. This drama was democracy in action.

Staging of *Prometheus Bound*

The location is somewhere in the Caucasus Mountains, or Scythia. In the drama, Prometheus is a huge figure, who is nailed to a cliff and remains there. We don't know how this was staged in antiquity. The following suggestions apply mainly to modern production. Some of these featured a *papier maché* figure for Prometheus. Others simply a large actor.

Other characters come and go: the daughters in some flying chariot who make up the chorus, and their father Oceanus on something called a Hippocamp (which is more appropriate for Oceanus than the Griffin mentioned by one scholiast). He may have been flown in by means of the mechanical crane. Io is said to be in the form of a cow, and this can be done in various ways, sometimes simply by horns on the actress' (or actor's) head, or on the mask if masks are used. She is all motion, in contrast to Prometheus' stillness. Everyone except Io may have had flying entrances, since they are divine. But such an

entrance for a chorus of fifteen might look ridiculous, if it were even possible, although it has been suggested.

The cataclysmic end could be done many ways, either imagined in the mind, danced by the chorus in some symbolic way, or actually staged as in many productions of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, where the Don is literally plunged into flames at the end. The Greeks probably relied on the imagination. Words are sometimes the most powerful *mise-en-scène*. The two stage entrances probably signify messengers from Zeus on one side and sympathetic visitors on the other.

Textual Transmission

How we come to have less than ten percent of the plays written by the three great ancient Greek tragedians is a complicated story. The plays were selected for a single performance, but it's possible that some were also performed in the *demes* (surrounding countryside) and abroad. The more popular plays were often revived in the fourth century. During these revivals they were vulnerable to adaptation and additions by actors and producers.

When Aeschylus died a state decree was issued allowing his plays to be revived at the tragic festivals in competition with living playwrights. Aristophanes' *Frogs* shows us that Aeschylus was still held in high repute after his death, since he is shown victorious over Euripides.

Around 330 BC, the Athenian politician Lycurgus prescribed that copies of the texts of the plays should be deposited in official archives, and that future performances should conform to these texts. These copies were lent to the Egyptian king, Ptolemy Euergetes I, and deposited in the library at Alexandria, to form the basis of the critical edition made by the Librarian, Aristophanes of Byzantium (ca. 257-180 BC). He also affixed prefaces, or *hypotheses* dealing with the subject of the play and production

details. Many details came from Aristotle's *Didascaliae*, and Callimachus' *Pinakes*. There were other summaries of Euripides' plays that probably dated from the first century BC, besides those, that preceded the plays in the manuscripts. Byzantine *hypotheses* were much longer, probably for use in schools. The composition of scholarly commentaries (*scholia*) on the plays was begun in the Hellenistic period by scholars such as Aristarchus of Samothrace (?217-145 BC, and Didymus (?80-10 AD). Further *scholia* were added in the Byzantine period.

Although the performance tradition is not well documented for this period, it obviously continued. The plays continued to be widely read, and scholars in Alexandria wrote commentaries on them, parts of which still survive. But by the second to third century AD., the number of plays that were being read had diminished. Only the seven plays of Aeschylus and the seven of Sophocles that survive were still commonly read at this time. Of Euripides there were ten such plays, but a further nine of his survive through a lucky accident, preserved in a manuscript that presents them in a quasi-alphabetical order (they evidently formed one part of a collection representing *The Complete Euripides*).

After the Athenian Academy was closed in 529 AD, classical texts disappeared from sight for several centuries and did not reemerge until the revival of learning in the early Byzantine period. Very few manuscripts of the plays survived into this period. Those that did are now lost again, but before they were lost, they were copied and recopied, often by scribes who did not understand what they were copying. The result is that the manuscripts we possess (dating from the 10th century onwards) are usually very corrupt, and one is often unable to recover the playwright's original words. The plays that were most popular in Byzantine times were Aeschylus' *Persians*, *Prometheus Bound* and *Seven against Thebes*; Sophocles' *Ajax*, *Electra* and *Oedipus Tyrannus*; and Euripides' *Hecuba*, *Orestes*, and *Phoenician Women*.

Printed texts of all three playwrights were available from the early sixteenth century in Europe.

***Prometheus Bound* in Later Versions**

The story has proved an inspiration to numbers of poets and playwrights, especially during the Enlightenment and Romantic movement. In modern times it particularly inspires those protesting an oppressive government.

Goethe was attracted by the theme of Prometheus as the Ur-hero for which he wrote a two-act dramatic fragment in verse in 1773. In this, Zeus is described as Prometheus' father, and yet Prometheus is not a god and boasts about his mortality, which he considers immortality since he has no memory of his beginning, nor anticipation of his end. He is offered the rule of earth, but he would still answer to Zeus. He refuses. He was offered bribes, among them that the statues he has created of men and women would be brought to life. Minerva (in Greek, Athena, Zeus's daughter) rebels against her father and helps Prometheus find the source of life on his own. Men will also be rebels. Zeus does not destroy them because he hopes they will end up as his worshippers.

Goethe's play ends with Prometheus teaching men the arts of building and healing, after they struggled over private property (a bit of social commentary Goethe adds). Pandora discovers love (for her companion Mira), which Prometheus calls death, but a temporary death, with a revival of desire. He describes it in terms similar to a theme in Sappho's poetry: you feel a flame, and then you feel faint, and darkness envelops you. Finally you clasp a world though heightened feeling. Both Goethe and Shelley see love as a major creative force, but Goethe links it with death, and in this way prefigures existentialism. Goethe shows no punishment of Prometheus, only his rebellion and glorying in his imperfect creation, man. Both Goethe and Shelley opt for happy endings,

and are not dramatic in a conventional way that endorses lively plot and dialogue; one might even say the same about Aeschylus' *Prometheus*, which is more of a poetic meditation than his other plays.

By 1820, Percy Bysshe Shelley had created a sequel to Aeschylus' play, *Prometheus Bound*; he called it *Prometheus Unbound*, after the lost play by Aeschylus. It is very different from the received myth, and shows Goethe's influence (both feature women finding love with their own sex). In this version Love is the triumphant force in the universe. Prometheus never tells Jupiter (Zeus) the prophecy: if he marries Thetis he will bear a son stronger than he is. Jupiter does marry her, and his son, Demogorgon, drags him off to the abyss. Prometheus is reunited with his wife Asia (a stand-in for Aphrodite); Man renounces evil and we have a new golden age of freedom:

To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory.

Shelley considered this his favorite work; it contains his philosophical dreams. It luxuriates in vivid poetic language that describes the beautiful and the ugly, the unholy and the blessed, the vile and the good. Asia/Aphrodite's shell is described :

See the pale azure fading into silver
Lining it with a soft yet glowing light.
Looks it not like lulled music sleeping there?

Equality among men is praised: "Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man /Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless, /Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king /Over himself." Prometheus is the defiant Titan who wins freedom for man. One feels the drama of his struggle and admires his decision to wait out the years, enduring the worst of tortures so that finally he and man can be free and justice triumph. This is a poetic adventure story well worth staging. Only the tragic end of *Prometheus Bound* is missing. But even Aeschylus' original play had its sequel in the trilogy whose titles were:

Prometheus Bound, and *Prometheus Unbound*, and *Prometheus the Fire Bringer*. The outcome might show an accommodation with Zeus, and therefore a step forward in reconciling might, freedom, and justice.

In 1927 Eva Palmer-Sikelianos revived performances of Greek tragedy at Delphi and began with *Prometheus Bound*. She trained the dancers in the chorus, and they executed Greek dances before the chained figure of Prometheus. She also designed the costumes and had them woven on looms. Her sister-in-law Isadora Duncan contributed to her approach to dance, although she differed with her on the use of the chorus as an inspired ideal of group harmony, over the isolated actor. The contribution of the body was considered as important as the ideas of the mind.

She had her chorus show their profiles to the audience to replicate Greek vases and show their involvement in ritual. People who saw this production (which used masks for the main actors, but not the chorus) commented on the compassion communicated by the emotive expressions of the chorus, which can be corroborated from the film of this production. The actors played on a raised stage above the chorus who danced in the circular space of the ancient theatre. Eva's husband said this was not a return to Greek tragedy, but a resurrection. It was an attempt to convey the original emotions to moderns in the form of an art that used singing, dancing, dialogue, and spectacle. This put into practice much of what Nietzsche tried to articulate in *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*. Aeschylus was the preferred playwright.

Prometheus' hands were spread to suggest a crucifixion: merging the ancient myth with Christian ritual. This was also done by Stravinsky in his *Oedipus Rex* (1928; performed the year following Eva Palmer-Sikelianos' production), and in Lee Breuer's *Gospel at Colonus* (1982), which both used Oedipus instead of Prometheus as the Christ figure.

In 1959 Rudolf Wagner-Régeny composed a Szenisches Oratorium called *Prometheus* in five scenes, which included not only Aeschylus play in a libretto by the composer, but a recitation of Goethe's *Prometheus*. Carl Orff composed a *Prometheus* in 1967, which included ancient Greek. Orff tried to show not only the struggle between the gods, but also man against the gods, and his fate in this trilogy that included *Antigone* and *Oedipus der Tyrann*. These works are starkly rhythmical and use chanting and

declamation. The music enhances the ritualistic quality, and its simplicity is meant to evoke antiquity.

In 1967 Robert Lowell wrote his version of *Prometheus Bound*. He, who was a conscientious objector during World War II, could identify with this hero. Unfortunately, much of Aeschylus' poetry is absent, and the plot is over-explained. As Lowell claimed, "Seldom was there any possibility or temptation to steal a whole phrase. Yet I kept the structure, either roughly rendering or improvising on each speech. Half my lines are not in the original." He is rather in awe of Zeus whom he sees as "the laws of nature, or nature's God...". His Zeus loses that fierce anthropomorphism of the Greek gods which shows them subject to the same passions as man. Not only does he change Zeus, but he shows Io pregnant from Zeus' first visit, rather than from his touch, in Egypt, after years of wandering. Lowell then makes a surrealist ending of Io's death as predicted by Prometheus in some sort of Ur-swamp, chased by flies that continue to plague her. He seems to have a strange view of women's sexuality:

When women are warm enough to make love,
the gods send them flies. The flies rise from your
sticky flesh, are warmed by your heat, and
kept alive by the blood from your thighs
or the milk from your breasts.

Lowell also adds to Prometheus' prediction that the whole universe will be destroyed finally in a conflagration (misuse of atomic power? absorbed by the sun?).

Tom Paulin's *Seize the Fire* (1989) was also based on Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* and expressed the concerns by the Irish in the North about the British occupation.

Paulin also shows Io assaulting patriarchy:

For I'm the cow girl, Io,
who's watched,
watched the whole time
by an audience of men's eyes.
and this,
(*Cupping hands*)
this is the thing pokes out their flies
- the flying prick
that comes humming after me –
oh, how it wants to sting sting sting me!

Paulin transforms Zeus into an imperialist, the capitalist who will use men as tools for his own self-aggrandizement. Prometheus stands for all who oppose such barbaric acts. "Seizing the Fire" is a metaphor for regaining one's country, by the use of arms if necessary. It is a metaphor for gaining freedom not only from the tyranny of occupation, but the tyranny of dogma, and, of course - faithful to Marx - class. Paulin uses familiar Irish images as Prometheus goes on to describe a revolution that will force Zeus to come to him: "Tanks on the lawn, new blackouts, /locked doors and panic - /those empty sinister blocked roads..." and immediately the North of Ireland comes to mind. One is left admiring Prometheus' integrity and one hopes that Ireland remains as steadfast to its ideals.

There also have been films made on this theme: *Prometheus in Chains* (Greece, 1927) by Costas and Demetrios Gaziadis; *Prometheus, Second Person Singular* (Greece, 1975), by Costas Ferris; and *Prometheus*, by Tony Harrison (1998).

Translator's Note

The most common transliterations have been adopted. Words in Greek that express sorrow, surprise and other emotions are simply transliterated. The first letter of lyric lines is capitalized. I have accepted most of the lines that Page, and some other scholars have rejected. Perhaps a director may choose not to use them.

Further Reading²

The main text followed for this was Page, Denys, ed. *Aeschylus: Septem quae supersunt tragoedias*. Oxford: Oxford Classical Texts, 1972.

² Some of this book list, also the following dates, are taken from Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, ed. Marianne McDonald and J. Michael Walton (London: Nick Hern Books 2007).

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Aeschylus: Key Dates

NB All dates are BC; some are necessarily approximate.

- 6th c. Founding of the Festival of the Greater (or City) Dionysia by Pisistratus, tyrant of Athens.
- ca. 534 Tragedies first performed at the Great Dionysia.
- ca. 527 Death of Pisistratus.
- ca. 525 Aeschylus born.
- 510 Expulsion of Hippias, eldest son of Pisistratus, who ruled in Pisistratus' place after his death, but abused his power.
- 508/7 Foundation of Athenian democracy which lasted until 322/1 BC
- ca. 500 Aeschylus' first plays performed. Playing location moves from the *Agora* to the south-west of the Acropolis.
- ca. 496 Birth of Sophocles.
- 490 First Persian War. Athenian victory at the battle of Marathon in which Aeschylus takes part.
- ca. 485 or 480 Birth of Euripides.
- 480 Second Persian War. Athens sacked. The Athenian fleet wins the battle of Salamis. Aeschylus again takes part.
- 472 Production of his first surviving play, *Persians*, which dramatizes the arrival of news of the battle of Salamis in Susa, the Persian capital.
- 468 Sophocles first competes, defeating Aeschylus to win first prize.
- 467 The *Oedipus* tetralogy, of which *Seven against Thebes* alone survives.
- ca. 463 The Danaïd *tetralogy*, from which *Suppliants* survives.
- 461 Council of the Areopagus deprived of its political powers. Ephialtes murdered.
- 458 *The Oresteia*.
- ca. 456 Aeschylus goes to Sicily where he dies.

455

Euripides first competes at the Great Dionysia.

Glossary and Pronunciation Guide

AETHIOP (EE-thee-op) River, “Black” river, possibly the Niger, or the Nile in Egypt.

AMAZONS (AM-ah-zons), warlike women.

ARGOS (ARE-gos) an area of the Peloponnesus (southern Greece).

ARIMASPS (AR-i-masps), one-eyed people who lived in the far north, between the Issedones and the Hyperboreans.

ATLAS (AT-lass), brother of Prometheus. He carries the heavens on his shoulders because he was one of the Titans who opposed Zeus.

CHALYBES (KA-lib-eeze), iron workers who live in Asia Minor near the Pontus.

CANOPUS (Ka-NO-bus), city at Nile’s mouth, in Egypt, near the later Alexandria.

CAUCASUS (KAW-ka-sus), mountain chain that extends from the Black Sea to the Caspian Sea.

CERCHNEA (kerk-NYE-a), lake near Argos.

CILICIAN CAVES (si-LI-sian) caves in Cilicia located in Asia Minor, west of the Euphrates river.

CIMMERIAN (SIM-meer-ian) ISTHMUS or BOSPORUS (BOS-por-us), passage of water that lies between the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea. Bosphorus means “cow’s ford” referring to Io herself passing over it in a cow’s shape.

CISTHENE (sis-THEE-nee), far eastern plains where the Gorgons lived. Proverbial for a far away place.

COLCHIS (KOL-kis), country to the east of the Euxine (Black) Sea.

CRONUS (KRON-us), youngest son of Uranus and Gaia, and among the first gods before the Olympians. He deposed his father, and in turn was deposed by Zeus.

DELPHI (DELL-fee), oracular seat on the side of Mount Parnassus, where the Pythia delivered Apollo’s oracles.

DODONA (doh-DOH-nah), sanctuary of Zeus in Epirus with a grove of talking oaks whose messages were interpreted as oracular pronouncements.

EPAPHUS (ee-PAPH-us), son of Io and Zeus, founder of Memphis in Egypt.

FURIES, (also called Erinyes, ER-in-ee-ez), elemental forces of familial vengeance who later become Eumenides (you-MEN-ih-deeze) ‘kindly ones’ or benevolent goddesses of fertility. They are earth goddesses in contrast to the Olympians, Apollo and Athena.

GAIA (GUY-ah), earth, consort of Uranus, also another name for Themis.

GORGONS, three sisters: Stheno (STHEN-o) “Strength,” Euryale (your-RYE-ah-lee), “Wide-leaper,” and Medusa (me-DOO-sah), “ruler,” who have snakes for hair (Medusa, whose gaze turned people to stone, was the most famous).

GORGONIAN (Gor-GO-nian) PLAINS, where the Gorgon’s dwell.

GRIFFIN (GRIFF-on), huge mythical birds with powerful wings, lions’ bodies and eagle-beaked.

HADES (HAY-deeze), the underworld, and also king of the underworld.

HEPHAESTUS (hef-FES-tus), god of fire, blacksmiths and artisans.

He was conceived by Hera, queen of the gods, with no male help. Athena likewise was Zeus’s child alone, with no mother..

HERA (HAIR-ah) queen of the gods, married to Zeus.

HERACLES (HAIR-ah-cleeze), son of Zeus and Alcmene, Hera forced him into performing labors. He eventually killed the Eagle feasting daily on Prometheus’ liver.

HERMES (HER-meeze), messenger god and half-brother of Apollo.

HESIONE (hes-EYE-oh-nee), Oceanid, wife of Prometheus.

HIPPOCAMP (HIP-po-camp), front horse, rear sea serpent, and sometimes represented with wings. An amphibious form of transportation for sea-deities.

HYBRISTES (hu-BRIS-teeze), river in Asia Minor, whose name means “audacious.”

INACHUS (IN-ah-cus), founder and ruler of Argos, father of Io.

IO (EYE-oh), daughter of Inachus. Zeus pursued her which resulted in her being changed into a white cow and pursued by a gadfly (because of Hera’s jealousy). She wanders over the world until she comes to Egypt where she will regain her human form and give birth to Zeus’s son, Epaphus. Heracles will be his descendent.

IONIAN (IO-nian) Sea, located off the coast of western Greece.

LERNA (LER-nah), lake in the Peloponnese, near Argos. Meadow nearby where Io met with Zeus.

MAEOTIS (may-OH-tis), large lake or body of water (Sea of Azov) between Asia and Europe, north of the Black Sea.

OLYMPUS (oh-LIMP-us) tallest mountain in Greece and home to the gods who were called Olympians.

PELASGUS (pe-LAS-gus), name of early king of Sicyon, and Pelasgian comes to mean Greek, usually referring to the Peloponnesians, who lived in Southern Greece.

PHORCYS (FOR-kis), sea god, father of the Gorgons and the Graeae, old women (Pempredo, “wasp,” Enyo “war,” and Deino “terror”), who share one eye and one tooth.

POSEIDON (pos-EYE-don), god of the ocean.

PROMETHEUS (pro-MEE-the-us), cousin of Zeus. Titan who sided with Zeus in his war against the giants, but who stole fire from the gods and is punished for that theft. Heracles will eventually shoot the eagle that is feeding on his liver.

RHEA (REE-ah), wife of Cronus, mother of Zeus, and his brothers and sisters (Olympians). Rhea Gulf is the Adriatic Sea, north of the Ionian Sea.

SCYTHIA (SITH-ee-a), land northeast of the Black Sea.

TARTARUS (TAR-tar-us), another name for Hades, the underworld, also the section of Hades where the worst offenders were punished.

THEMIS (THEM-is), daughter of Uranus and Gaia (also another name for Themis), mother of Prometheus by Zeus.

THEMISCYRA (them-is-KYE-ra), town where Amazons lived in Cappadocia in Asia Minor, next to the Thermodon river.

THERMODON (THER-mo-don), Cappadocian river that flows into the Black Sea.

THESPROTIS (THES-pro-tis) and MOLOSSIAN (mo-LOS-sian) Plain, areas in Epirus (North-western Greece), near Dodona.

TITANS (TI-tans), children of Uranus and Gaia, large immortals who were the generation of gods before Zeus and the other Olympians.

TETHYS (TETH-is), daughter of Uranus and Gaia and wife of Oceanus.

TYPHON (TIE-fon), hundred-headed giant who opposed Zeus and was buried under Mount Etna.

URANUS (YOUR-ah-nus), pre-Olympian king of the heavens, a sky god who was deposed by his son Cronus.

ZEUS (ZYOOSE), king of the gods.

First Performance Nov.- Dec. 2008 The Theatre Inc., San Diego, director Doug Lay

Cast:

Power: Melissa Hamilton

Force (mute): Vanessa B. Milton

Hephaestus, the smith god: Bianca Chapman

Prometheus, god of fire: Brian Abraham

Oceanus, god of the sea: Rhys Green

Io: Bianca Chapman

Hermes: Rhys Green

Chorus of the daughters of Oceanus (Oceanids): Melissa Hamilton, Vanessa B. Milton, Diana Sparta.

Cast:

Power

Force (mute)

Hephaestus, the smith god

Prometheus, god of fire

Oceanus, god of the sea

Io

Hermes

Chorus of the daughters of Oceanus (Oceanids)

A bleak rough mountain face in the Caucasus.

POWER and FORCE enter leading their prisoner PROMETHEUS.
HEPHAESTUS accompanies them.

POWER

We've come to the ends of the earth,
to Scythia, barren and deserted.
Now, Hephaestus, carry out the orders
of your father Zeus: shackle our criminal
here to this towering cliff, in unbreakable
chains made of adamant. He stole your flower,
the shining fire of creativity,
and gave it to Man. This was his crime:
he must pay the penalty to the gods
and learn to love Zeus's tyranny 10
instead of his absurd devotion to Man.

HEPHAESTUS

Power and Force, you're perfect representatives
for carrying out the orders of Zeus:
nothing is beyond you. I can't bring myself
to chain a relative by force to this icy cliff,
but I have to do this since I know well. It's no
light offense to disobey commands from Zeus.

To Prometheus

Wise son of Themis who advises well,
with both of us unwilling, I must chain you
to this rocky cliff in bronze fetters which 20
no one can release, where you will never hear
the voice of Man, nor see his shape, but the
sun will beat down mercilessly, withering
your fair skin. You will be happy when Night
in her starry robes will hide the sun's bright rays,
but they will return at dawn to melt the frozen dew.
Every day your cares will weigh you down,
for the man to release you is not yet born.

Look what you earned for loving Man too much;
you were a god who defied gods and gave
gifts to Man, far beyond what they deserved. 30

So you are posted to guard this joyless cliff,
upright, sleepless: you can't bend your knees.
You will shed many a useless tear, and cry out
your sorrow, but Zeus has a heart of stone,
like all tyrants who just have come to power.

POWER

Why do you delay, and waste your pity?
Shouldn't you hate this enemy of the gods,
since he gave to men the power that is rightly yours?

HEPHAESTUS

Blood is a strong tie, and so is friendship.

POWER

Yes. But how can you disobey the orders
of your father? Aren't you more afraid of him?

40

HEPHAESTUS

You always like to throw taunts in my face!

POWER

You can moan all you want, but you can't
release him. Don't waste your valuable time.

HEPHAESTUS

I curse my skill. My craft is a heavy burden.

POWER

Don't despise your craft! It's clearly not to blame
for this present problem.

HEPHAESTUS

I wish someone else were chosen to do this.

POWER

We all have to obey orders, except
the god who rules: for no one is free but Zeus.

50

HEPHAESTUS

What we're doing proves it; you're right.

POWER

Hurry and put the chains in place. You don't want
our father to see you wasting time.

HEPHAESTUS

Here are his handcuffs and chains. Are you blind?

POWER

Put them on and use your strength to hammer them into the cliff; make sure he's secure.

HEPHAESTUS

There. I'm at it. He cannot escape without help.

POWER

Drive them in deeper. Make sure everything is tight, He's very clever at wriggling out of trouble.

HEPHAESTUS

That arm's secure; he won't escape those chains.

60

POWER

Secure this one too: he has to learn he's nothing by comparison to Zeus, for all his cleverness.

HEPHAESTUS

He's the only one who can criticize my work.

POWER

Now drive this stake of adamantine right through his chest with all your force.

HEPHAESTUS

Oh, Prometheus, I weep for your sufferings.

POWER

Wingeing again? Pitying Zeus's enemies, are you? You'd better watch out for your own day of suffering.

HEPHAESTUS

You see a sight that calls for tears.

POWER

I see a criminal being punished. Now, attach those iron bands around his waist to the rock.

70

HEPHAESTUS

Enough! I'm doing it! I've had enough of you bossing me!

POWER

You'll never shut me up until you get it done!
I'll even force you. Chain his legs there!

HEPHAESTUS

There. It's done. It was easy.

POWER

Drive the spikes in with all your might.
The one who sees all is a critical judge.

HEPHAESTUS

What you order is as ugly as you are.

POWER

Oh isn't he a dainty little thing! You can't blame me
for an iron will and violent moods. That's what I am!

80

HEPHAESTUS

Let's go then. The net that holds him is secure.

POWER

Now you can be as proud as you like, and
keep on stealing the gods' treasures to give
to your precious men, these creatures of a day.
See what help they can give you now! What a name,
Prometheus, "thinking things out in advance."
Now's your time to figure some way out of this.

Exeunt POWER *and* HEPHAESTUS *and* FORCE.

PROMETHEUS

I call on you bright light of day; swift-winged
breezes; you flowing rivers; unquenchable
laughter of the sea's waves; Earth, mother of all,
and lastly, circle of the sun, that sees all things.

90

See a god's suffering,
Inflicted on me by other gods.
I shall be tortured for centuries.
This is the ugly sentence passed
On me by the lord of the gods.
Pheu! Pheu! I weep for what I suffer now,
And will suffer in years to come.
No savior is yet in sight to end this misery.

100

But why do I say this? I know all things
that are to come; I see endless agony
in store for me. I must try to bear it
as easily as I can, since I know
that no force can stop necessity.
Both speaking and silence are beyond me.
because I gave a gift to men, necessity
yokes me to misery. I hid my stolen prize,
fire, in a hollow fennel stalk: it taught men
all the arts and gave them great resources. 110
that's why I suffer these torments,
nailed with chains under an open sky.

Oh, misery!
What do I hear? What scent hovers on the wind?
I still cannot see what it is. Human?
Divine? Both? Who comes to the edge of the
World to stare at my torment, and for what
Reason? See a chained god who is condemned 120
To misery, enemy of Zeus, and all
The gods who frequent his court,
Just because I loved Man too much.
Pheu! Pheu!
What is this rustling that I hear? Birds?
The light fluttering of wings pipes
Through the air. I am terrified of
Everything that approaches.

Enter CHORUS of the Daughters of OCEANUS.

CHORUS

Don't be afraid! We are friends!
We flew to this place as fast as we could,
After reluctant permission from our father. 130
Swift blowing breezes sped us on our way;
The sound of the pounded iron
Reached us deep in our caves,
And drove away our proper modesty
Which fled in fright; we rushed away
So quickly in our winged chariot,
We left our sandals behind.

PROMETHEUS

Aiai! Aiai!

Children of Tethys, the mother of many,
And Oceanus, whose sleepless stream
Circles the earth,
Look on me, see what chains
Bind me tightly
On the tip of this cliff
Hanging over a deep chasm
Where I am posted to keep dire watch.

140

CHORUS

I see you, Prometheus.
I fear for you. I see
Through a mist of tears
Your wasted body,
Fettered and hanging
On this cliff.
New gods run Olympus now;
Zeus secures his unlawful power
By new laws; he obliterates
What once was mighty.

150

PROMETHEUS

I wish Zeus had thrust me below the earth,
Into the bottomless pit of Tartarus,
Beyond Hades that welcomes the dead.
Although he fasten me brutally
With unyielding chains,
At least no god, or any other might come
To gloat over me; then I would not
Have to endure the scorn of my enemies
As I do now, hanging here, a plaything of winds.

CHORUS

What god is so cruel
As to rejoice at what you suffer?
Who does not sympathize with you except Zeus?
But he nurses his anger in his inflexible mind,
While he oppresses the offspring of Uranus;
He will not end this
Until his heart is satisfied,
Or someone by some clever trick
Overthrows his adamantine rule.

160

PROMETHEUS

There will come a time, although I'm

Tortured, constrained by strong chains,
When this Leader of the Immortals
Will need me to reveal the new plot 170
To deprive him of both rule and honors.
But he will get nothing from me.
No honeyed words or charms,
Nor grim threats will pry out
This secret until he releases me
From this savage bondage
And makes reparation
For all the abuse I've had to suffer.

CHORUS

You're a bold one, and
Are not subdued by your bitter pain,
But you speak a bit too freely. 180
Fear pierces my heart
And I am afraid what will happen to you.
Into what harbor
Will you steer your ship
To end your voyage of pain?
The child of Cronus is stubborn
And his heart knows no sympathy.

PROMETHEUS

I know how cruel Zeus is,
And how he holds justice fast in his fist,
But one day his thoughts will soften,
When he is broken by my secret.
When his blind rage calms down, 190
He will rush into my willing arms
To welcome his newfound friend.

CHORUS

Tell me everything: on what charge
has Zeus convicted you? Why does he
dishonor you this way, torturing you bitterly.
Tell us, unless it hurts you to tell the story.

PROMETHEUS

It is painful to speak but also painful
to keep silent; either way I suffer.
When the gods first became angry,
and opposed each other, some demanding 200
Cronus be unseated in favor
of Zeus, and others the opposite,

claiming that Zeus should never rule,
then I gave the best advice to the Titans,
those children of Heaven and Earth,
but they could not be convinced.
They scorned my clever stratagem,
and thought they could easily seize power,
They arrogantly trusted in their own strength.
My mother Themis, or Gaia (she has 210
many names) foretold to me (and not just once)
how the future would turn out, and the victory
would come from strategy, not from force. I explained
this in detail to the Titans but they rejected
my whole plan. From all the choices left, I thought
it was best that I and my mother go
over to Zeus's side: we were willing and
he willingly welcomed us. So because
of my advice, the dark depths of 220
Tartarus hide old Cronus along with
his allies. Zeus owes me for his being
king of the gods, and you see how
he pays me back with evil. This is
a tyrant's disease, not to trust his friends.

But you asked why he tortures me this way,
so I'll answer that clearly for you.
As soon as he sat on his father's throne,
he gave to all the gods special privileges
and divided up their rule, but
poor Man didn't even cross his mind. 230
In fact, he wanted to destroy him
and create some new race. No one objected,
except me. I was the only one to have
the courage to save mortals from
being crushed and sent off to Hades.
That's why I'm twisted in pain,
terrible to suffer, and pitiful to see.
I had pity on Man, but I am not
given pity for myself: I am
pitilessly tortured and this 240
spectacle of my misery indicts Zeus.

CHORUS

Anyone whose heart would not pity you
for your suffering is either made of iron or stone.
I wish I had never seen how you are abused,
but now that I do, my heart shares your pain.

PROMETHEUS

Yes. My friends have pity on me.

CHORUS

Is that really all you did?

PROMETHEUS

I made it so they could not foretell their own deaths.

CHORUS

What drug did you give them to cure this disease?

PROMETHEUS

I gave them blind hope.

250

CHORUS

That's a great gift for mortals.

PROMETHEUS

I also gave them fire.

CHORUS

Now these creatures of a day have splendid fire?

PROMETHEUS

Yes. They will learn many skills from it.

CHORUS

So this was why Zeus condemned you...

PROMETHEUS

He tortures me, and the pain never lets go.

CHORUS

Do you see no end to this?

PROMETHEUS

No. I'm a victim of his whim.

CHORUS

What are your thoughts? Any hope?

Don't you see that you were wrong? I won't go into the details; too painful for you. Let's change the subject. You should find some means of escape.

260

PROMETHEUS

It's easy for someone who walks on the safe side
to give advice to those who fail. I knew
what would happen when I did what I did,
but I did it willingly; I won't deny it.
By helping mortals I know I harmed myself.
What I didn't know was how I would be
punished: left to waste away, chained to an over-
hanging cliff in a desolate, deserted place. 270
I beg you not to cry over my pain, but come down
and listen to what fate has in store for me:
I'll tell you the whole story from start to finish.
Please consent to this, say yes, and show pity to
someone who is struggling. For suffering wanders
from one to another, touching each man in turn.

CHORUS

Your appeal has not fallen on deaf ears,
Prometheus.
My nimble foot will step
Onto this rough ground, 280
Leaving my swift chariot,
And the pure air where birds fly.
I am eager to hear all your story.

Enter OCEANUS on a Hippocamp, a winged horse with sea-serpent tail

OCEANUS

I have reached the end of a long journey
To see you Prometheus,
I steered this swift-winged bird
With no bit at all, simply by my will.
First of all, I sympathize with your suffering;
This is what I should do,
Since I am your relative. 290
Even if we weren't related, there's no one
I respect more than you.
I'm telling you the truth.
I'm not a flatterer, who makes empty claims.
Tell me how I can help you.
You'll never say you had a more loyal friend
Than Oceanus.

PROMETHEUS

So what have we here?
Have you come to gawk at my misery?

How could you leave your Ocean
and the rock-roofed caves you carved out
to visit this land of iron? Did you come
to ogle me and add your pity to my misery?
Enjoy the spectacle: see how this friend of Zeus
who helped him establish his rule,
is twisted in pain as my reward.

300

OCEANUS

I see, Prometheus, and I am prepared to
give you advice, although I know you are wise.
Know yourself, and learn to fit in with the
new ways, for the ruler of the gods is
also new. If you keep on hurling harsh,
sharp words, Zeus may hear, even though he
is far away, throned on high, and then
your present misery will seem like child's play.
Oh you poor creature, calm your anger, and try
to find some way out of your predicament.
Perhaps you've heard all this already,
but what you suffer is just because of
your boastful proud words. Even now,
you have not learned humility from your pain;
and you go on adding insult to injury.
Learn from me, and don't chafe at your bit;
your leader is cruel but he holds absolute power:
he answers to no one. So I'm going now
to see, as far as I am able, whether I can find
some release for you from this suffering.
But you hold your tongue and check your pride.
For all your wisdom, don't you realize yet
that there is a price to pay for speaking too freely?

320

PROMETHEUS

I envy your ability to keep yourself free
from blame, although you dared to share my suffering.
So forget me now, and don't let it bother you.
Whatever you do you will not persuade Zeus.
That's not his nature. Just watch out for yourself.

330

OCEANUS

You're much better at advising others,
rather than yourself. I have proof, not hearsay.
Don't try to stop me from what I'm going to do.
I'm sure, yes, sure, Zeus will grant me what I ask,
that you will be released from your troubles.

PROMETHEUS

I praise you for this, and I'll never stop praising
your eagerness to help. But you really
shouldn't bother. If you do insist
on working on my behalf, it will be
useless to me. Keep quiet, and protect
yourself. Even if I suffer, I would
not want everyone to do so. No, indeed,
since I know what happened to Atlas,
and how he stands carrying on his
shoulders the heavens above,
a weight that constantly wears him down. 340
I also pitied wild Typhon, born of
Mother Earth. That fierce monster of the hundred
heads, who lived in the Cilician caves, finally
was defeated by force. He stood against all the
gods, hissing terror out from his huge jaws,
a tremendous blazing fire shot out of his eyes:
violence dedicated to destroying Zeus's rule.
Zeus hurled his unsleeping missile; lightning
swept down with its breath of flame, and put a
stop to his boastful taunts; for the first time 350
he felt fear. Pierced to the heart, he burnt to ash,
his life strength consumed by the lightning bolt.
Now his weak sprawling body lies next to
the straits of the sea weighed down by
Aetna's roots while Hephaestus sits on the
mountain peak and pounds the glowing metal.
From there one day rivers of fires will burst out
and chew up with wild jaws the level fields
of Sicily, known for its fair fruits. Such rage
Typhon, although burnt by Zeus's thunderbolt, 360
will vomit up in volleys the hot spears of
a fierce firestorm. But you don't need me
to teach you this. Save yourself in any
way you can. I'll stay here in my misery
and drink it to the dregs until the
mind of Zeus chooses to calm its fury. 370

OCEANUS

Don't you know, Prometheus, that words
can heal a mind diseased with passion?

PROMETHEUS

Gradually in time one can soften the heart,

but no one can use force to limit a swelling anger.

380

OCEANUS

What is wrong with my eagerness
to help, when matched by energy? Tell me.

PROMETHEUS

Just wasted effort and thoughtless foolishness.

OCEANUS

Trust my folly then, since it is best
for a man truly wise to be thought a fool.

PROMETHEUS

But I shall be considered the one to blame.

OCEANUS

Your words show me it's time for me to leave.

PROMETHEUS

Yes. Don't let your moaning incite anger against you.

OCEANUS

From him who sits on his almighty throne? He's new, you know.

PROMETHEUS

However new, avoid having his heart turn against you.

390

OCEANUS

Your own circumstance is my teacher.

PROMETHEUS

Fine, go, but remember what I've said.

OCEANUS

I'm as eager to go, as you are to send me off.
The wings of my four-legged bird already
beat the smooth path of sky; he's eager
to curl up his knees in his stall at home.

Exit OCEANUS on his Hippocamp

CHORUS

I mourn your grim fate, Prometheus.

Tears flood from my eyes
To moisten my cheeks with
Their flowing stream. 400
Zeus rules tyrannically.
Making up his rules as he goes,
Scornfully lording
His might over
The older gods.

The whole earth groans and weeps;
Lamented is the splendor of your
Former honor,
Honor that was yours 410
And your brothers'.
All those
Who live in holy Asia
Share your suffering;
They add their tears to the lament

As do those who live in Colchis,
Amazons, fearless in battle,
And the many Scythians
Who live in that far-flung place
Next to the Maeotic Lake.

And the war-seasoned flower of Arabia, 420
Who live in a lofty city
In mountains near the Caucasus—
A fierce army that thunders its war cry
In battles with sharpened spears.

Only one other Titan have I seen,
A god suffering
In relentless constraint,
Atlas, the strongest of all,
Who holds the heavens on his back
And groans. 430

The falling waves shout out their splashing lament;
Black Hades answers by rumbling
Deep under the earth,
Rivers with clear-flowing streams
Moan as they pity your pain.

PROMETHEUS

Do not think I am prideful or scorn you

because I am silent, but my heart is stung
by the thought of how I am abused in this way.
I, no one else, was the one to divide the powers
and privileges among these *nouveau* gods. 440
But I won't go over this tale; you've already
heard it. Listen instead to the tale of
suffering men, how they knew nothing before me,
but I educated them and taught them to think.
I am not saying this as a reproach to men,
but to show how much I helped them.
First of all, they had eyes, but could not see,
they had ears, but could not understand;
they wandered like dreams throughout
their long lives, and created chaos in the world. 450
They did not know how to build houses
either of stone or wood as protection against the sun.
They lived deep within dark caves, and swarmed
the earth like throngs of ants. They could not
recognize the signs of winter, nor spring with its
flowers, nor fruit-laden summer, so they did
everything without any rational plan,
until I taught them to read the risings of stars
and their settings, which up to now they ignored.
I gave them numbers, that knowledge most 460
to be prized, and the art of writing words to help
memory, the mother of all the muses.
I first yoked beasts and made them work so they
could relieve Man's back of his heaviest burdens.
I harnessed horses to the chariot and made
them respond to reins, a delight for the wealthy.
It was me who invented the ship with sails that
wanders the sea, a chariot for sailors.
All this, to my own misery, I dared to invent
and pass on to Man, but for all my cleverness 470
I could devise no escape from my present suffering.

CHORUS

You have suffered what you should never have
suffered. Now your mind wanders and, like a
bad physician, you are sick and in despair; you
cannot find any drug to heal your own disease.

PROMETHEUS

Hear the rest and you will be even more
amazed at the arts and inventions I
devised. The greatest was this: before,

if a man fell sick, there was no remedy—
nothing, no pill, ointment, nor drink—and without 480
drugs they wasted away. I showed them how
to mix healing medicines that could ward off
all diseases. I also gave them skills so that
they could predict the future: I showed them
which dreams were true; how to interpret
strange voices and sayings, and how to
understand chance meetings during travel.
I taught Man to understand the flight of the
taloned bird, what was beneficial, and
what meant harm, their daily lives, loves and hates, 490
and how they mate. Then I taught about the
smoothness of entrails, the right color of gall
so that it please the gods, and how to read
the liver's lovely mottled lobe. I showed Man
thighbones wrapped in fat, and how to burn
the long backbone, and thus I taught Man the
obscure art of prophecy, sacrifice, and
the language of fire, which had not yet been
understood. But so much for that. Who could claim
before me that he discovered the hidden 500
treasures that lay buried under earth: bronze,
iron, silver and gold? No one. That's clear,
unless some fool babbles nonsense. I'll make
a long story short: all the arts and crafts
that Man possesses came from me, Prometheus,
the god you see suffering before you now.

CHORUS

You should not help men beyond what is right,
and think nothing of your own suffering, because
I hope one day that you will be released
from your chains and be the equal of Zeus. 510

PROMETHEUS

Not yet is fate destined to bring that about,
but only after years of my collapsing
under torture will I be released from my chains.
Art is never as strong as Necessity.

CHORUS

Who determines Necessity?

PROMETHEUS

The three fates, and the Furies who never forget.

CHORUS

Is Zeus weaker than they are?

PROMETHEUS

He cannot escape what is destined to happen.

CHORUS

What is destined for him, except eternal rule?

PROMETHEUS

I'm not going to tell you this: don't ask again. 520

CHORUS

It must be important if you conceal it.

PROMETHEUS

Talk about something else; it's not the right time to speak of this. This has to be kept secret, because through it I shall gain release from these humiliating chains and my suffering.

CHORUS

May Zeus, ruler of all things,
Never set his might against my will,
Nor may I delay in the holy sacrifice
Of cattle to honor the gods 530
Slaughtered beside the unquenchable stream
Of Ocean, my father, nor may I sin in word,
But let this wish remain secure and never vanish.

It is sweet to spend a long life
Fostering courageous hopes,
And fattening one's heart in happiness.
But I shudder when I see you 540
Racked by a thousand pains.
You weren't afraid of Zeus,
But you stubbornly loved Man too much, Prometheus.

The gift you gave yielded you nothing in return, my friend;
Tell me, where is there help?
How are these creatures of a day benefiting you now?
Do you see how weak they are, useless,
Like a dream in which
The blind race of Man sleeps forever. 550
Man can never second-guess the master plan of God.

I have learned this from witnessing
Your terrible fate,
Prometheus.
What a different song is this, from the one
That I sang around your bath and bed
To celebrate your marriage to the bride,
My sister Hesione, whom you persuaded
To share your bed as your wife.

560

Enter IO, crazed, wearing ox horns

What land is this? What people? Who do
I see hanging on this cliff
For the hail and rain to beat on his body?
What wrong did you do to merit this terrible punishment?
Tell me, where have I wandered in my misery?
To what land?

A, A, E, E (cries of anguish)

The gadfly stings me, a ghost of Argos,
Born of Earth. Keep far from my sight
That creature I fear,
The herdsman with one hundred eyes—
Those eyes with which he searches for me—
Not even the earth hides that sight,
But even from the underworld he hunts me,
Wretched as I am, driving me starving
Along the sandy shore of the sea.

570

The reed pipe fashioned with wax
Drones on and on a tune that urges sleep.
Io! Io! Popoi! Where does my far wandering
Take me now? Why, O child of Cronus?
What have I done to offend you that you torture me this way?

E! E!

Why do you drive this miserable creature
Mad with fear of the gadfly's sting?
Consume me with flame;
Bury me in the earth, or feed me to sea monsters;
Oh lord, hear my prayer.
My wanderings over land and sea
Have tortured me enough, but I do not know
How to escape my own misery.
Do you hear the voice of this maiden with horns?

580

PROMETHEUS

How could I not hear this young girl, daughter
of Inachus, whom the gadfly drives mad? She
kindled the fire of love in Zeus's heart, and now
Hera's hate forces her to endless wandering. 590

IO

How do you know my father's name?
Tell this wretched one, who you are.
Who is it that in his misery,
Correctly recognizes this miserable maiden? You name the
Heaven-sent disease that wastes me, that goad with a sting—
E! E!
That drives me bounding over endless lands
Tortured by a shameful hunger, 600
A victim of Hera's angry scheme.
Who, of all those suffering, suffers as much as I?
Tell me clearly, what do I have yet to endure?
Is there a cure or drug to treat this disease?
Tell me if you know,
Speak out and tell this to a maiden wandering in misery.

PROMETHEUS

I shall tell you clearly what you want to know,
and I won't use riddling language, but plain speech 610
that is right to use when speaking with friends.
You see Prometheus, who gave fire to Man.

IO

You have given a great gift to mortals,
poor Prometheus. Why are you punished this way?

PROMETHEUS

I have just gone over the long sad tale.

IO

Will you please tell me one thing, at least?

PROMETHEUS

Ask whatever you wish. You can learn it all from me.

IO

Who was it who nailed you to this cliff?

PROMETHEUS

Zeus ordered it, but Hephaestus carried it out.

IO
What did you do wrong to earn this punishment? 620

PROMETHEUS
I've said enough on this subject.

IO
Then tell me where am I headed, and where will I end?
How long will this suffering continue?

PROMETHEUS
You would be better off not knowing.

IO
Please do not hide from me what I have yet to suffer.

PROMETHEUS
It's not that I don't want to tell you this...

IO
Why then do you hesitate to relate everything?

PROMETHEUS
I don't begrudge you, but I don't want to crush your heart.

IO
Do not be concerned about me. I do not ask for that.

PROMETHEUS
If you want me to speak so much, fine. Listen. 630

CHORUS
Not yet. I also want to share in this.
First we want to ask why she suffers this way.
We want her to tell us how this disaster happened.
Then you can reveal what she has yet to suffer.

PROMETHEUS
Io, you should grant them this favor, most of all
because they are sisters of your father.
It is good to tell a tale full of grief
about your sufferings when you are likely
to earn a gift of tears from your listeners.

IO
I can't refuse. I'll tell you clearly what 640

you want to know. Yet I'll be ashamed when I speak
of the storm of misery that the gods sent,
the mutilation of my former beauty,
and from where destruction swooped down on me.

Visions came to me at night and spoke
flattering words: Maiden, fortunate above all,
why do you guard your virginity so long
when you could enjoy the greatest union possible?

Zeus has been struck by passion's dart and
burns for you: he wishes sexual union. Child, 650
do not despise the bed of Zeus, but go now
to the rich meadows of Lerna where
your father's cattle are sheltered, so that
you can satisfy Zeus's love-struck glance.

These were the temptations that visited me night
after night, until I dared to tell my father
about the dreams that so obsessed me in my sleep.

He sent to Dodona and Delphi to 660
learn what he could do or say to satisfy
the will of the gods. Their answers were
dark riddles, unintelligible oracles
and could not be understood. But finally

there came a clear message to my father,
that he must drive me out of the house,
and let me wander at large like a sacred
animal to the ends of the earth; and if
he disobeyed, a lightning bolt would come
from Zeus utterly to destroy his race.

So he obeyed the commands of Apollo 670
and drove me away, thrusting me out
of the house against his will and mine;
Zeus's whip forced him to carry this out.

Both my shape and mind were twisted;
you see my horns; driven by a stinging
gadfly I wildly leapt to the sweet water
of Cerchnea and Lerna's spring. But
that herdsman born of Earth, Argos followed,
continually raging, tracking me with his many eyes.

Death pounced on him suddenly, but I am 680
still driven from land to land by this curse
sent to me from heaven. That's my story.

Please tell me what trials await me. Don't out
of pity sweeten the tale by telling me lies.
I say the worst plague of all afflictions
is a story that turns out to be untrue.

CHORUS

Ea! Ea! No! Stop! *Pheu!*
Never, never, have I heard
Such a strange story,
Suffering hard to imagine, and hard to bear! 690
Outrageous—
A double goad to strike my heart.
Io, Io! What fate, what luck!
I shudder to see Io's sufferings.

PROMETHEUS

It's too soon for you to cry out or be afraid.
Wait until you hear the end of the story.

CHORUS

Continue. Tell me. It benefits the sick
to know clearly in advance the pain still to come.

PROMETHEUS

The story was easy up to now, since you 700
asked to hear her tell all the sufferings
that happened to her up to this point.
Now hear what lies ahead and what she still
must suffer because of Hera. And you,
Child of Inachus, listen to my tale,
so you know the end of your wanderings.
First, from here, go east, towards the rising sun
and over plains that have never known the plow,
until you reach the Scythian nomads, 710
skilled at the far-shooting bow, who live in houses
built on top of wagons that roll right along.
Don't approach them, but stay close to the shore
against which the sea waves crash with a roar.
Go past their land where the Chalybes do
iron work, but be careful, because they are
savage, and don't take kindly to strangers.
Then you will reach the river Hybristes,
true to its name. Don't cross it: it's difficult,
but walk along its bank until you reach the Caucasus, 720
tallest of all mountains, and from whose crest
the river cascades furiously down. You
cross the peak that almost touches the stars
and go south to where you reach the army of
Amazons, who hate all men; they will settle
Themiscyra, on the Thermodon, where

Salmydessus' fierce jaw lies next to the sea,
hostile to sailors, wicked step-mother of ships.
The Amazons will gladly speed you on your way.
Then, at the narrow entrance to the swamp,
you will reach the Cimmerian Isthmus. Take heart, 730
and pass through the Maeotic channel; men
will tell tales of your passing and name the
Bosporus after you. You will be famous!
Next you will leave Europe and come to Asia.
Doesn't it seem to you that the lord of the gods
is excessively cruel in every way? For
this god not only wanted to lure her into sexual
union, but then damned her to wandering.
Poor girl, you have found yourself the suitor
from hell, and the story you have heard was 740
only the beginning of a long tale to come.

IO

Io moi moi, e e!

PROMETHEUS

What? Moaning again? What are you going to do
when you hear all that lies in store for you?

CHORUS

You don't mean to say that there's more suffering to come?

PROMETHEUS

An unimaginable stormy sea of torture!

IO

Why should I continue to live? Why don't
I throw myself from this jagged cliff, so that,
crashing to the ground, I make an end to
all my troubles? It's better to die once, 750
than live an entire life suffering torment.

PROMETHEUS

I can see it would be impossible for
you to bear the agonies that I must
since I cannot die. I see no limit
to my suffering until Zeus himself
is thrown from his tyrannous rule.

IO

Will Zeus one day lose his power?

PROMETHEUS

I think you would be pleased to see it happen.

IO

Of course, since I suffer because of Zeus.

PROMETHEUS

Then take heart from this, it will happen.

760

IO

Who will remove his scepter from him?

PROMETHEUS

He will do it himself, because he is foolish.

IO

How? Please tell me. That is, if it doesn't hurt you.

PROMETHEUS

He will choose a sexual partner who will ruin him.

IO

A god? Or a mortal? If you can tell me, I want to know.

PROMETHEUS

Why do you ask? I can't tell you that.

IO

Will a sexual partner seize his power from him?

PROMETHEUS

Yes. Because her child will be greater than the father.

IO

Can he do anything to avoid this?

PROMETHEUS

No. Unless I am released from these chains.

770

IO

Who could do that except Zeus?

PROMETHEUS

It is going to be one of your descendents.

IO

What is this? A child of mine release you?

PROMETHEUS

The third child born after ten generations.

IO

Now I cannot understand what you are saying.

PROMETHEUS

So don't ask about the full extent of your labors.

IO

Don't promise to give me this, then take it back.

PROMETHEUS

I'll give you a choice of two tales.

IO

What do you mean? Tell me so I can choose.

PROMETHEUS

I can either relate what is yet to come for you,
or tell you the story about who will rescue me.

780

CHORUS

Tell her one of those tales, and me the other.
Be generous, and don't begrudge us this.
To her, tell of the wanderings that are left, and
tell me who will release you. I want to hear this.

PROMETHEUS

Well, since you are so eager, I won't refuse
to give you an account of all that you still want to know.
First for you Io, I'll explain the painful
wandering left—engrave it in your memory.
When you have crossed the stream that separates
the two continents, go to the flaming East,
where the sun walks, then cross the roaring sea
to reach the Gorgonian plains of Cisthene,
where the ancient daughters of Phorcys dwell,
three in the shape of swans, with one eye and one
shared tooth; the sun's rays never shine on them
nor does the moon at night. Near them are the
snake-haired Gorgons, hated by men, whom no man
gazes upon and still draws the breath of life.

790

800

This is what I am warning you to guard against.
Now there's something even more frightening to see.
Beware the sharp-beaked hounds of Zeus that don't bark,
the Griffins, and the one-eyed army of Arimasps
who ride horses and live next to the stream of
Pluto, that flows with gold. Do not go close
to them. Next you will come to a faraway
land filled with dark-skinned people, who live
near the streams of the sun, and the river called
Aethiop. Go up its banks until you reach 810
the waterfall in the Bybline mountains
where the holy Nile jets out its sweet-tasting streams.
This will lead you to the triangular land
called Nilotis, where it is destined to found
your distant colony for you and your children.
If there is some of this you do not understand
or it is unclear, tell me and I shall explain:
for I have more leisure time than I would like.

CHORUS

If you left something out of her terrible
wandering, let me know. But if you have 820
related the entire account, then tell us
what we requested—I'm sure you remember.

PROMETHEUS

She has heard the end of all her journeying.
But so she knows that all I've said is genuine,
I shall go through all the troubles she had to
face to get to this place. I offer that as proof!
I shall leave out most of this dreary account,
but just tell what happened recently.
You will reach the Molossian plain,
and the steep ridge near Dodona, there 830
where Thesprotian Zeus holds his prophetic seat,
the incredible wonder of the speaking oaks,
where you were praised as the famous spouse
of Zeus. Does this please you to remember?
Then, driven by the gadfly's sting, you came to
the shore of the great gulf of Rhea, but from
there you were driven backwards. Be assured
for the rest of time, a recess of the ocean
will be called by all men to come the Ionian
Sea just to commemorate your passage. 840
This is proof of my ability to show
you how I can see the unseen, how I know

the past and can tell you about the future.
 I shall now tell both you and Io all the
 rest, taking up my tale where I left off.
 There is a city, Canopus, which lies at
 the edge of the Nile's mouth with its piles of silt,
 and in that place Zeus will touch you with his
 gentle hand, and restore you to your senses.
 You will give birth to dark Epaphus, "son
 of touch," to commemorate his origin. 850
 He will harvest all the fruit produced by the
 land watered by the stream of the wide Nile.
 After five generations, fifty maidens
 will come back to Argos to flee marriage
 to their cousins, who are mad with lust
 for an unlawful marriage, and follow
 hot on the girls' trail like hawks pursuing doves.
 God will intervene and deprive them of their catch.
 The Pelagian land will shelter these women 860
 after they savagely murder these men
 at night. Each bride will deprive her husband of life,
 dyeing a two-edged sword in his blood.
 I pray that such a lust visit only my enemies.
 One of the maidens will spare her husband out
 of love, and this spell will blunt her purpose. She
 will choose the lesser of two evils and would
 rather be called a coward than a murderess.
 In Argos she will give birth to many kings.
 All the details would take too long to relate, 870
 but from her offspring will be born a brave man,
 famous for his bow, and it will be he who releases
 me finally from my suffering. This is all the
 prophecy as told me by my Titan mother,
 Themis. How this will be done is too long a story,
 and besides it doesn't help you to know that.

IO

Eleleu! Eleleu!
 The pain, the pain, it stings me, and
 Drives me mad, I'm burning up!
 The gadfly's barbed sting never made in a forge, 880
 Bites me deeply.
 My heart pounds in my chest with fear;
 My eyeballs spin in my frenzy.
 Madness whirls me out of my course.
 I can't control my speech;
 My muddy words tossed randomly about,

Beat against the waves of vengeful ruin.

CHORUS

He was wise, wise was he,
Who weighed this problem in his mind
Before he spoke this wise saying:
To marry one's equal is best by far. 890
A man who labors should not marry above his station,
Either those puffed up with wealth,
Or those who boast about their birth.

Never, never,
Lady Luck, will you see
Me taking Zeus as my bedmate.
Nor would I marry a bridegroom that descends from heaven.
I am terrified by this maiden without her mate,
Io, reaping Hera's hate that forces her
Into cruel and endless wandering. 900

I do not fear
Mating with equals,
But I fear the burning desire of a god
Casting his glance on me, one I could not escape.
It's a war that's no war at all; an unfavorable favor;
I don't know what would happen to me,
Or how to escape
Zeus's crafty designs.

PROMETHEUS

Yes, the day will come, no matter how stubborn
he is, for Zeus to fall, since he is planning
to mate in such a way that he will be thrust
into darkness from his tyrant's throne, and so 910
he will bring to pass the curse of his father Cronus,
uttered at the time when he fell from his throne.
How to save himself, only I, from all
the gods, have the means to reveal clearly.
I know exactly what to do and how. He
can sit boldly all he wants, trusting
in the reverberating might of his lightning bolt.
He can shake it all he likes, but it won't help him.
These fire-breathing bolts cannot protect him against
this dishonorable and unbearable fall.
Such an opponent is he creating against 920

himself, and a marvel impossible to defeat. He will discover a flame stronger than lightning, a roar that will deafen thunder, and shatter the trident, Poseidon's spear, scourge of the sea, and land-shaker. In his catastrophic fall, Zeus will learn how great a difference there is between ruling and being a slave.

CHORUS

You're just telling us what you would like to have happen.

PROMETHEUS

Both. I'm telling the future and what I want.

CHORUS

May we expect someone to come and defeat Zeus?

930

PROMETHEUS

What he suffers will surpass even what I have to bear.

CHORUS

Aren't you afraid to make these predictions?

PROMETHEUS

I'm immortal, what can he do to me?

CHORUS

He can make your suffering much worse.

PROMETHEUS

Let him try. I'm prepared for anything.

CHORUS

Wise are those who respect Necessity.

PROMETHEUS

You go on respecting, adoring, and flattering those in power, but I couldn't care less about Zeus. Let him do what he likes, and rule for his brief day; his authority over the gods won't last long. But I see his servant coming here, that messenger boy of the new tyrant. He seems to have some news.

940

Enter HERMES

HERMES

I'm speaking to you, too clever for your own good,
nastier than nasty, who stole fire from the gods,
in misplaced loyalty to creatures of a day.
Our father orders you to tell him about
the marriage you boast will destroy his power.
And you can forget those riddles: lay it out
plain and simple, in detail. Don't make me
come back, Prometheus; you see, Zeus
is not amused and he has a short temper. 950

PROMETHEUS

Well done, great choice of words, and just as crude
as suits a servant of the gods. You're only
a weak child, and you think like one too, when
you imagine nothing can happen to you,
and you're safe in your lofty tower.
I've already seen two tyrants fall from
that height, and I'm about to see a third
collapse in shame. Do you think I fear
you young upstart gods? Not in the least. 960
Soon your riddle will be solved. Everything
I have said, you will soon see come to pass.

HERMES

It was your own stubbornness that landed
you in trouble before, and you're at it again.

PROMETHEUS

I'm better off than you are;
at least I'm not a servant.

HERMES

Of course, better to hang on this rock
than to be Zeus's trusted messenger.

PROMETHEUS

Just like the criminal you are, hurling insults. 970

HERMES

You seem quite content to suffer as you do.

PROMETHEUS

"Content"? I wish my enemies could be
just as "content" as I am. And you too.

HERMES

So now you blame me for your troubles?

PROMETHEUS

I blame all the gods who benefited from
what I did for them, and wrong me in return.

HERMES

What you say shows that you have gone mad.

PROMETHEUS

Is it madness to hate one's enemies?

HERMES

You would be unbearable, if things went well for you.

PROMETHEUS

Omoi!

HERMES

Omoi? That's not in Zeus's vocabulary.

980

PROMETHEUS

Aging time teaches everything.

HERMES

But you have not learned to nourish a sensible mind.

PROMETHEUS

True. Otherwise I wouldn't waste my time talking to a servant.

HERMES

I gather you won't give our father the answer he wants.

PROMETHEUS

Oh, I really should. I owe him so much.

HERMES

You insult me as if I were a child.

PROMETHEUS

Am I wrong? Aren't you even more foolish
than a child to expect an answer from me?
Zeus can do his worst. No torture will force
me to speak, only release from my bonds.
Let him hurl all the blazing thunderbolts he likes,

990

let the white wings of snow embrace me;
may he shake all the world with his earthquakes
and throw all the world into a chaotic tailspin.
He won't get a thing from me, nor bend my will;
I won't identify who will throw him out of power.

HERMES

Well, you'll soon see how this helps you.

PROMETHEUS

Are you trying to tell me, the prophet, about my future?

HERMES

You foolish god. Won't you learn from your pain
and learn how to be sensible at last?

1000

PROMETHEUS

You have as much chance of convincing me
as turning a wave of the sea. Don't think that
fear of what Zeus has in mind will turn me into
a woman, and force me onto my knees,
to lift my hands in prayer to him, and beg him
to release me from my bonds. That's not me.

HERMES

I see I'm getting nowhere. My pleas neither
convince you, nor change your mind. You take the
bit in your mouth like a young colt, chew at it,
and fight against your reins. Your tactic
is less than effectual and if you don't make sense,
your being stubborn has no power at all.

1010

If my words were not able to convince
you, Zeus has other plans; a storm will
whirl you to destruction beyond belief;
its wave of suffering will overwhelm you.
First, Zeus will shatter this cliff with his
thunder and lightning, bury your body inside,
with the rock embracing you. After
a long span of time, you will be returned
to the light of day, so that the winged hound of Zeus,
a huge golden-red eagle, will fiercely shred
your body into bloody rags. He will arrive
every day, an uninvited guest at a feast,
and turn your liver into pieces of black gore.
There will be no end to your agony
until a god take on your suffering in your place,

1020

and of his own free will goes to the sunless
gloomy land of death, in the depths of Hell.
So consider this. It's not idle boasting, 1030
but total truth, all said for your benefit.
The mouth of Zeus is incapable of telling lies,
so it all will soon come to pass. Think about it;
ponder on it well; stubbornness is never
better than accepting a wise suggestion.

CHORUS

I think that Hermes is giving you good advice;
he tells you not to be stubborn, and to follow
the path of wise good judgment. Listen to him.
No wise man compounds his error. He makes amends.

PROMETHEUS

I already knew what this messenger said. 1040
It's no disgrace for an enemy
To be harmed by an enemy.
Let the forked lightning wrap around me;
The sky redden with lightning and thunder away;
Whirl its tempests;
Shake the earth from its roots;
Waves of the sea should reach the stars,
Force them out of their nightly paths;
Whirl my body to heaven!
Blast it down to Tartarus in fierce 1050
Eddies of necessity.
No matter what he does,
He cannot kill me

HERMES

I'm convinced I'm hearing the words
Of one whose mind is deranged.
This is the prayer of a madman.
Will his madness never let up?
You girls,
So sympathetic to him,
Get out of here quickly, 1060
So the thunder and lightning
Do not hurl you out of your senses.

CHORUS

You had better change your story,
If you want to convince me.
What you say is outrageous.

So you want me to be a coward?
I'll suffer what he suffers;
I hate traitors,
There's no disease
That I hate more.

1070

HERMES

Well, just remember what I said,
And don't blame me when
Your own blindness lands you in trouble.
Don't say that Zeus tossed
You into something you didn't deserve.
Blame yourselves.
You've been warned, and
I didn't speak in riddles.
It's your folly's fault that this
Inescapable net of disaster
Will drag you down along with him.

*Lightning flashes, sound of thunder, earthquake rumbles,
s and signs of total destruction.*

PROMETHEUS

Now the time for words ends;
And the action begins. The earth shakes;
Thunder echoes from the depths
And roars past me;
Bright lightning flashes twist around me;
The winds swirl up dust in dizzying eddies;
The blasts battle with each other,
Whipping up counter attacks;
Sea spray reaches the sky.
The storm approaches,
Sent by Zeus to cause me fear.
O holy mother,
O Sky that guides all light
Over the revolving path of the universe,
Do you see what injustice I suffer?

1080

1090

THE END

