

AESCHYLUS'
"PROMETHEUS BOUND"

Written circa 460BCE

Translated by
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Dramatis Personae

Kratos

("Strength" in Greek)

Via

("Violence" in Greek – silent)

Hephaistos

(*God of fire*)

Prometheus

Oceanus

Chorus

(daughters of Oceanus)

Io

Hermes

(Zeus' messenger)

The rough, desolate peak of a mountain.

FX 1: The sound of a strong icy wind and turbulent ocean before the actors enter the stage.

Enter Kratos, and Via dragging behind them in chains, Prometheus. They are accompanied by Hephaistos.

All three are carrying heavy shackles and clamps, mallets and heavy hammers. Some chains are of steel others of bronze.

Kratos is made to look repulsive. (see line 78. The Greek is 'morphe' which could be either the face or the body or both)

They stop, look around and Kratos, feeling satisfied, they all drop their heavy chains to the ground.

FX 1: ease and cut.

Kratos:

Here we are, Hephaistos, at the very limits of the Earth, on these desolate, untrodden Skythian paths.

Now it's your job to do what Father has ordered to be done to this terrible rebel. Use these unbreakable steel chains and shackle him to this high peak. He stole the very blossom of your craft, the blazing flame, the spark of every art and gave it to the mortals. Such is the crime for which we, gods, must receive recompense. As for him, he should learn to accept the rule of Zeus and forget his mortal-loving ways.

Hephaistos:

Kratos and Via, you've done your part of Zeus' command. You need do nothing more. You may go now but I, I have not the strength of heart to tie a god – a relative of ours - upon this wild and icy rock. Still, I must do so. I must harden my resolve and obey because it is a heavy thing to disobey our father's word.

To Prometheus:

You, Prometheus! You, with your high morals! You, son of wise Themis! Whether you and I want to, I must nail you with these bronze chains upon this deserted peak where no mortal's voice nor mortal's vision will reach you. No one can loosen these chains.

Scorched by the sun's fire you'll lose the bloom of your health and you'll be impatient for Night in her bejewelled robe to come and cover that burning light. That is, until the sun will rise again and Dawn spreads her rays; and so, Prometheus, you'll always have to deal with one tyranny or other and there will be no one to ease your pain. These are the wages you've been paid for your sin of loving the mortals.

Because as a god, you didn't think of the rage of the other gods before unjustly offering gifts to mortals; and so, in payment of this you'll be a guard to this repugnant rock: sleepless, standing, unable to bend your knees and you'd be singing many songs of grief and mourning, all to no effect. It's not easy, Prometheus, to turn Zeus' mind about. Every new ruler is harsh.

Kratos: *To Hephaistos*

Well, then, come on! Why stand there, pointlessly feeling pity for the enemy of the gods? He has betrayed you! He has given away the secrets of your craft, your very gift, to the mortals!

Hephaistos:

It's a heavy thing this, to be a friend and a relative.

40

Kratos:

Sure, but is it proper to disobey your father's word? Aren't you more afraid of that?

Hephaistos:

You've always had a heart of steel, Kratos. Always arrogant, always bold, always full of enmity.

Kratos:

Yes I am bold because to pity this fool does him no good. Why do you worry about matters that do you no good?

Hephaistos:

Oh, how dreadful my craft is! I hate it!

Kratos:

Why blame your craft now? Your craft, in fact, has nothing to do with this man's crime.

Hephaistos:

But I still wish someone else had it.

50

Kratos:

Everything is a heavy burden except that of being the ruler of Heaven. No one is free of burdens! No one, except Zeus.

Hephaistos:

I agree. I can't argue with that.

Kratos:

Well, go on, then! Get the shackles tied all about this wretch! Father will think you're being slow, on purpose.

Hephaistos:

They're ready. Here! I have the chains here, in front of you.

Kratos:

Pick them up and tighten them about his hands with all your might. Nail them hard upon the rock.

Hephaistos and Via do so.

Hephaistos:

Finished. Here you are, the job is done – and quickly!

Kratos:

Hit harder! Tighten those chains! Leave no slack anywhere because he's capable of slipping away from unthinkable places.

60

Hephaistos:

I've fastened this arm so tightly it won't move.

Kratos:

Now the other. Tie it tightly. Let him learn that his schemes and plots are no match for Zeus.

Hephaistos:

No one but Prometheus could criticise the quality of my work!

Kratos:

And now drive this gruesome steel wedge straight through his chest.

Hephaistos:

Oh, Prometheus! I feel your agony!

Kratos:

Again you cry for him? Do you also cry for Zeus' enemies? Take care you won't be crying for your own self later!

Hephaistos:

You are seeing something that is unbearable for the eye to see!

70

Kratos:

What I see is that he's getting his just deserts. Now wrap these chains beneath his arms!

Hephaistos:

All right, all right! If I have to do it, I will, so there's no need for yelling!

Kratos:

I'll yell and yell again, if I must! Now kneel down and clamp his legs. Fasten them hard!

Hephaistos:

There! This is done, too! Easy enough work.

Kratos:

Now hammer these nails hard. Make them go right through. Zeus is a tough judge when it comes to this sort of work.

Hephaistos:

Your tongue, Kratos, matches the shape of your body.

80

Kratos:

You can be as soft as you like but don't go blaming me for being hard and arrogant.

Hephaistos:

Come now, enough. His legs are clamped. Let's go!

Exit Hephaistos and Via

Kratos:

There you are Prometheus! Commit all the evil you want now. Steal if you dare what belongs to the gods and give it to the mortals! Ha! Are these mortals going to ease your pain now?

The gods, Prometheus, should have given you another name! Prometheus, ha! Prescient, one who knows what's coming! Yes, you need a Prometheus of your own—he could have helped you escape this fate.

Exit Kratos

Pause

FX 1: Hold for 10"

Prometheus:

Ah! Ah!

FX 1: Hold for 10"

90

Addressing Nature

Oh, sacred Ether and you winds, masters of speed! You, waters of rivers and you, endless laughter of Ocean's waves! Oh, Mother Earth! And you, Sun, who sees all!

Look at me! Look at my suffering, I, a god who must suffer the punishment of gods!

FX 1: Hold for 10"

Look at what outrageous torment I must endure for countless years! Look at these dire shackles this new ruler of the Gods has devised for me!

FX 1: Hold for 10"

100

Ah! Ah!

I groan for my suffering now and for all the suffering to come. When will I see their end?

But what am I saying? I know the future and all that it will bring and I know all my suffering beforehand, so I must endure as best I can what Necessity has sent upon me because she cannot be resisted.

Yet, neither can I speak nor stay silent about this agony that I am forced to suffer.

110

I've hunted down and stolen, inside the hollow of a fennel's stalk, the seed of fire, a gift that has proven itself to be the teacher of every craft and the greatest resource for humans.

Such is the crime I have committed and this is the penalty I am to suffer: nailed and chained on this rock beneath the open sky.

FX2: Menacing sounds of winds and "birds" fluttering. Hold 10"

Ah! Ah!

What sound is this? What invisible scent comes this way? Is it divine or human or both? Who has come to witness my suffering upon this rock at Earth's end and for what purpose?

120

To look at someone in misery? A god in chains? An enemy of Zeus and of all the other gods who frequent his court – and all because I love the mortals?

Ah! Ah!

The sound is getting closer! I hear the rustling of feathers whistling all around me. Whatever it is that is approaching me, frightens me!

Enter the Chorus, daughters of Oceanus, on a winged chariot. They land on a piece of ground, higher than that of Prometheus. (see line 275)

Chorus:

No, don't be at all afraid Prometheus!

Chorus:

We've come upon swift winds as friends after gaining our father's permission.

130

Chorus:

The ghastly sound of steel had reached the depths of our caves and the fear had made us shed our modesty. See here? We are without sandals. We've rushed here on a winged chariot.

Prometheus:

Ah!

Children of Tethys, who is the father of many and of father Oceanus who circles the earth with streams that never sleep!

Look at me! Here I am nailed upon this high crag which I must guard. Who could envy this work?

142

Chorus:

I see, I see, Prometheus and as I do, the vision of my eyes blurs by a dull mist filled with tears.

Chorus:

I see, Prometheus that on this ghastly rock and inside these steel clamps your body will wither.

150

Chorus:

This is because new gods rule the heavens now, Prometheus and Zeus, who is now the harsher ruler has replaced the old laws with new ones and he has trampled upon the old powers.

Prometheus:

If only he had sent me below the Earth, down into Hades who accepts the dead, down into endless Tartaros, tied with steel that cannot be loosened! At least then neither god nor anyone else would mock me for my suffering. Instead, now, like a scarecrow in the wind, a miserable creature, I must entertain my enemies with my suffering.

160

Chorus:

Which of the gods has such a heart of steel that he can laugh at your suffering, Prometheus? Which of the gods cannot sympathise with you –except Zeus? Because it is he who, with eternal anger and with an inflexible mind, holds in servitude the race of Uranus; and he won't stop until either he's had enough or when some other god, somehow seizes from him his unseizable power!

Prometheus:

But even though I'm shackled in the toughest clamps, the day will come when this King of the Immortals will have a great need of me. He will need me to tell him about the new plan of how he will lose his power and his scepter; and then he can forget using sweet words and charm to persuade me, or utter stern threats to frighten me. The only way I will release this information to him will be if he will free me from these crushing fetters and if he will be willing to pay recompense for this outrage.

180

Chorus:

You are both, defiant and brave, Prometheus. Defiant with your tongue and brave against your bitter torture. Still, my own mind is tortured, too, by a heavy fear of your Fate.

Chorus:

I wonder where you will steer your ship to find an end to your sad voyage of pain, Prometheus. Zeus, the son of Kronos, has a relentless mind and a heart that does not bend by pleas.

190

Prometheus:

I know that Zeus is harsh and that Justice is in his hands but I know, too, that one day he will be softer –once he is crushed the way I think he will be and once his anger has subsided. He will be very eager to make friends with me then.

Chorus:

Tell us, Prometheus, about your suffering. Reveal to us what it is that Zeus blames you for that he has delivered upon you such a bitter torment. Tell us, if the telling does not cause you any more pain.

200

Prometheus:

Telling it or keeping it silent, my tale is one of great pain and abject misery.

When the gods began their great war against each other they did so because they wanted Kronos to prevail and to be placed upon the throne. They did not want to see Zeus as their ruler. Right from the start I tried to convince the Titans –the sons of Earth and Uranus- to accept the best outcome and choose Zeus but I was unable to persuade them. They rejected ideas and preferred to rely on their physical strength, thinking that it would give them an easy win.

My mother, Thetis, or Earth -she has many names- has often told me how the future will unfold. She told me that it was not those who'll use brute force who will prevail but those who'll use plans and plots. But when I was telling them all this and explaining it to them they did not accept a bit of it. And so, the only thing I could do was to go and join my mother and work as a volunteer on the side of Zeus. It's because of my advice that the dark caverns of Tartarus now hide ancient Kronos and his allies.

Yet, whilst the Lord of the gods derived such benefits from my work, this is how he repays me.

It is a curse of tyrants to have no faith in friends.

As to why he tortures me like this, let me explain.

As soon as he seated himself upon his father's throne, he began to allocate to each god their various responsibilities and powers. But for the wretched mortals he showed no interest at all; in fact he wanted to destroy the whole human race and replace it with another, a new one.

No one dared to stand up against this, except me. I was the only one who had the courage to do so and I have saved them from being blasted into ashes and hurled into Hades. So that's why I am now forced to bear these intolerable pains, these dreadful burdens and to be such a pitiful sight.

240

And whilst I've shown great sympathy for the mortals, I did not manage to receive the same sympathy for myself. Rather they have admonished me so harshly, that, in the process they have shamed the name of Zeus.

Chorus:

Whoever feels no pity for you, Prometheus, must be made of stone and he must have a heart of steel. I had no need to witness your pain but now that I did, my heart breaks for you.

Prometheus:

Yes, I am a pitiful sight to my friends.

Chorus:

You haven't, by any chance, committed a further offence?

250

Prometheus:

Yes, I've made it so that humans cannot foresee their own death.

Chorus:

What sort of medicine did you use for this?

Prometheus:

I have filled their hearts with blind hopes.

Chorus:

That is a great gift you have given them, Prometheus.

Prometheus:

And even more than that, I have given them the gift of fire.

Chorus:

So those ephemeral creatures now possess the bright-faced fire?

Prometheus:

Yes and with it they will learn many crafts.

Chorus:

So for these reasons, Zeus –

Prometheus:

Tortures me and has no intentions of lessening the pain of this torture.

Chorus:

Has he not allocated an end to these pains?

260

Prometheus:

None, except that is, when Zeus thinks it is the proper time!

Chorus:

But what will make him think that?

Chorus:

What hopes do you have for that? Can you not see that you've made a great mistake? Still, I don't have the heart to talk about this, Prometheus, because it must be so painful for you.

Chorus:

Let us leave this topic then and see if we can find some means of escape for you.

Prometheus:

It's an easy task for someone whose foot is outside the clamps of torture to give advice and warnings to a poor wretch like me. Still, I knew all this. I knew what I was doing. Yes, I knew what I was doing and the mistake I made, I made on purpose. I don't deny it.

I have made this mistake so as to help the mortals and what I have found at the end of it, was unbearable torture! I didn't think I would be punished so severely, to have my body wasting away upon deserted and dire crags, halfway between the heavens and the Earth.

Still, grieve not about my present agony but come down here and listen to what Fate awaits me. Learn them all, all of my tortures, daughters of Oceanus, learn them all, one by one, from beginning to end.

Come, don't deny me anything I ask of you. Have pity on someone who is suffering. Suffering, ladies, wanders equally from one to another.

280

Chorus:

Prometheus your appeal comes to willing ears and so now, with a light foot we will leave our winged throne and the clear ether –the path of the birds- and will come down to the deserted earth so as to hear from beginning to end all of your tribulations.

Enter Oceanus on a four-footed bird. (see ll 395f).

290

Oceanus:

I have made a long journey, Prometheus, to come here, using my own mind and needing no bridle for this swift-winged beast of a bird. Be certain of this, Prometheus: I sympathise with you in your agony not only because I am forced to do so, since we are related but also because there is no one else for whom I have greater respect. You will see yourself that I am not one to utter sweet words, in vain. Come now, tell me what we should do because you'll never be able to say that you have a more faithful friend than me.

300

Prometheus:

Well, now, what's this? You, too, Oceanus, have come to look upon my suffering? How did you manage to pluck up enough courage to leave the stream that bears your name and the caves whose roofs you have built with rock, to come here to this land, this motherland of iron?

Is it true that you have come to witness my calamity and to sympathise with me?

Here, then! Look upon a ghastly vision! Look at me, the friend of Zeus, a friend who helped him get to the throne. Look at how he torments me!

310

Oceanus:

Yes, Prometheus, I can see. And though I know you are wise, I want to give you some good advice. Know, yourself, Prometheus, and change your ways according to the new times. There is a new lord over the gods now!

319

But you must know this too, Prometheus! You must know that if you want to hurl such harsh and cutting words about, no matter how far Zeus has his throne, he can still hear you and what you are suffering now, he can make look like a joyful little game later. But you, poor wretch, leave your anger behind now and try to free yourself from this agony. Perhaps you might think this advice is some worn-out old saying but, unfortunately, you have earned your plight, Prometheus because of your arrogant tongue. And you are never humble, nor are you softened by your pain but you are after more pain to add to that which you must endure already!

Listen to me, Prometheus: stop kicking at thorns! You see how harsh and irresponsible the new lord is. But now, I am leaving and I shall see if there is some way by which I can save you from your pain.

330

You, in the meantime, stay quiet and don't overindulge your tongue! Or is it that you, you, Prometheus, with all your wisdom, don't know that the uncontrolled tongue brings its own destruction?

Prometheus:

I envy you that you haven't been blamed for daring to help me in all my struggles but now, it is over. Forget about it! No matter what you do Zeus will stay unmoved. He is not easy to persuade. Just be

careful, Oceanus! Be careful that you don't suffer some awful consequence yourself if you take this path.

Oceanus:

It is a most obvious thing to me, Prometheus that you are better at making others wise more so than yourself!

340

I know this for a fact and try not to stop me taking this path because I am proud to say that Zeus will deliver me this favour and free you from your suffering.

Prometheus:

I certainly owe you a favour and I shall never forget your enthusiasm. However don't trouble yourself on my account because it will be in vain.

No, better stay away from these things because even though I am suffering greatly I would never wish it that others also suffer with me.

350

No, absolutely not! Because I am already anxious about my brother Atlas.

He stands somewhere towards the West, holding the pillar of Heaven and Earth on his shoulders, a weight not easy to bear. I was saddened, too when I saw Typho, the Earth-born, who lives in the Sicilian caves. He is the one-hundred headed gruesome monster whose power was curbed violently. He had dared to stand up against all the gods spitting out terror through his dire jaws and flashing from his eyes, most terrifyingly, gorgon-like flames, as if he wanted to hurl Zeus himself off his throne.

360

But Zeus' sleepless bolt came down upon Typho. It is a flame that breathes lightning and swoops down upon you. Instead of Zeus, it was Typho who was hurled, from his brave ambition. The bolt struck Typho at his heart and at his strength and he was burned to ashes. Now, he is a helpless, motionless mass and he is lying pressed down, near the narrows of the sea beneath the roots of Aetna.

And there, seated on the highest peaks, Hephaistos forges the molten ore from which one day will burst forth floods of fire devouring with savage jaws the level, fertile fields of Sicily.

Typho will boil over with such rage and with weapons of fire-breathing storm, even though he had been reduced to ashes by Zeus' thunderbolt.

But you are not new at this and don't need me to instruct you. Save yourself as best you know how and I shall bear this Fate until the anger in Zeus' heart subsides.

380

Oceanus:

But Prometheus, don't you know that the best medicine for a raging anger is words?

Prometheus:

Yes, I do, Oceanus. But a wound must be soothed at the right time and not when it is raging.

Oceanus:

And when someone dares to show his eagerness to help? What harm do you see there, Prometheus?

Tell me so that I may know.

Prometheus:

I see it as a wasted effort, Oceanus and a simple-minded goodwill.

Oceanus:

Well then, let me be simple-minded, Prometheus. It seems that it is profitable to look foolish when one is wise.

Prometheus:

I don't think so, because looking foolish when one is wise will be seen to be my fault.

Oceanus:

Your words, Prometheus your words are telling me to go back home!

390

Prometheus:

Yes, do so, Oceanus, so that by your sympathy you don't gain enmity.

Oceanus:

You mean the enmity of the new ruler?

Prometheus:

Yes. Beware of him because his heart changes to anger very suddenly.

Oceanus:

I can see this from your own fate, Prometheus.

Prometheus:

Go! Leave now and keep your thoughts to yourself!

Oceanus:

Your words find me ready to leave and this four-footed beast of a bird is flapping its wings across the broad ether, anxious to bend its knees for a rest, back in its stables.

Exit Oceanus.

400

Chorus:

I sigh deeply for your miserable fate, Prometheus, and from my eyes rushes forth a stream of tears that covers my face. Zeus rules by his own harsh and unholy laws and displays to the old gods a most arrogant spirit.

Chorus:

Laments are heard from one end of the Earth to the other.

410

Chorus:

The cries are heard of the magnificent days of old, of yours and of your kin and of all mortals too. All those who live in holy Asia sympathise with you for your most dire pains.

Chorus:

And those who live in Colchis –the women, most fearless in war and the hordes of Scythians who live in the farthest extremities of the Earth, neighbouring the lake Maeotis. Their cries are heard also.

420

Chorus:

And the warlike flower of Arabia, those who hold the fortress built on the high crags near the Caucasus, a warrior host whose clamour and sharp spears strike terror in their enemy's heart.

428

Chorus:

I have only ever known one other Titan god who knew such unbearable pain of steel cuffs and chains: Atlas, the strongest of all the Titans. Oh what pain he endures! He holds the pole of Heaven upon his groaning back.

Chorus:

And the sea cries in sympathy...

Chorus:

...and the deep sighs...

Chorus:

...and the black horror of Hades murmurs...

Chorus:

...and the sacred streams of the pure flowing rivers lament in pity for his agony.

Prometheus:

You mustn't think me proud or stubborn if I'm silent. Painful thoughts eat at my heart as I see myself in this hideous predicament. But then who else but I have given to these new gods their rights? Still, I won't speak of these things because what I would say would not be news to you.

Now listen to what I did for the mortals to save them from their many miseries.

In the beginning they were without a working mind so I gave them sense and reason. I am not saying this to disparage mankind but to show that the gifts I have given them were due to my love for them. Firstly, in those days their eyes were of no use and the same was true of their ears which, though they could hear sounds, they made no sense of them. For their whole lives mortals lived as if in a dream, confused about everything and making sense of nothing. They didn't know if a building was made of brick or wood nor knew anything about houses that were warmed by the sun but they lived beneath the ground in sunless caves, as do the ants.

They knew nothing of the signs of Winter or of Spring, full of blossoms, or of Summer, full of fruit and upon which they could depend for their survival but they just wandered about and acted aimlessly, until I came about. I explained to them the risings and settings of stars, a difficult art to explain.

459

And yes, I invented for them numbers, too, the most important science; and the stringing up of letters, the art of Memory, the mother of the Muses. I have also brought the wild beasts into the sway of men, placing them under the yoke, the collar and the saddle so they can carry the heavy burdens of men.

I have harnessed horses to the chariots and made them obey men's reins as a show of wealth and luxury.

And it was I and no one else who had discovered the seafarer's flax-winged craft that now roam about all the seas.

470

I, the poor wretch, have all the wisdom to have made all these discoveries for mankind yet I don't have enough wisdom to devise something with which I can rid myself of my own suffering.

Chorus:

What you are made to suffer is indeed terrible. You have lost your mind, Prometheus and it is wandering.

Chorus:

You are like a doctor who has fallen ill himself and, in your distress, you cannot find the drug that will cure your own ailment.

Prometheus:

And that's not all the crafts and arts I have invented for the race of mortals.

Now listen to the rest of them.

Firstly, and most importantly, I have shown them how to mix soothing remedies with which they can stay clear of any malady because, before that, if they fell ill they could do nothing about it.

There was no medicinal food or ointment or any other mixture, so they just wasted away till they died.

Then I showed them how to read the future and which of their dreams would come true. I have explained to them the meanings of incomprehensible voices and the meanings of cross roads. Then I distinguished clearly for them those of the birds with hooked talons that are sinister from those whose nature is auspicious; how they lived, their mutual loves, hatreds and how they pair with one another.

I showed them the entrails of these birds and pointed out the smoothness of their entrails and what colour the gall must be to please the gods. I have pointed out to them the speckled beauty of the liver-lobe and showed them how to burn the limbs wrapped in fat and their long back bone. I showed the mortals the ways and art of this difficult cult.

Then I cleared their vision so that they could see signs emerging out of flames, an art of which, until then, they knew nothing.

So much about these arts and as for the gains mankind received from below the Earth, brass, iron, silver and gold who could say that he had discovered them before me? No one, and he who claims to have done so, merely babbles on idly. To sum up, let me tell you this, that every art and craft possessed by the mortals comes from me, me, Prometheus!

508

Chorus:

Well then, Prometheus, since you have helped the mortals so much, don't now abandon yourself to your own misery.

Chorus:

I am very hopeful, Prometheus, that you will be freed from these chains and will have similar power to that of Zeus.

Prometheus:

Fate has not declared that my tortuous chains will be loosened here and now but after I have suffered infinite pains. Wisdom is far less powerful than Necessity.

Chorus:

Who then is Necessity's pilot?

Prometheus:

The three Fates and the Furies, who never forget.

Chorus:

Is Zeus weaker than them?

Prometheus:

In so far as he cannot escape his own Fate, yes.

Chorus:

Why? What Fate awaits him other than to rule for ever?

520

Prometheus:

This you mustn't learn yet. Don't insist upon it.

Chorus:

It must be some sort of solemn mystery, that's why you're keeping it a secret from us.

Prometheus:

Change the subject now. This really is not the time for discussing it. It is a topic that must be kept a tight secret because only this way will I be able to escape these chains and this outrage.

Chorus: *Praying*

May I never see my will be crushed by the might of Zeus, dispenser of all things!

Chorus:

May I never be slow in offering to the gods sacred sacrifices of slaughtered oxen by the shores of the endless stream of my father, Oceanus.

Chorus:

And may I never utter words that offend the gods. Let this commitment stay fast in my heart.” (*end of prayer*)

532

Chorus:

It is a sweet thing to go through a long life with my hopes and confidence in place and with my spirits high, so, Prometheus, I shudder, when I look at you racked by that endless torture only because you, of your own accord –and without fearing Zeus- love the mortals too much.

540

Chorus:

The mortals have given you no recompense, Prometheus, so what gain is there in your cunning for both, you and for the ephemeral creatures? Could you not foresee this?

Chorus:

Was it just like a weak dream to you, where the blind race of men stay fettered for ever?

Chorus:

Humans shall never trespass the harmonious system of Zeus.

I have learnt this, Prometheus, by watching your own destructive Fate.

And the difference of the song entered my mind, Prometheus!

560

Chorus:

This song and the other one, the one which I sang about your bridal bed and your bridal bath, the song I sang in honour of your marriage to my sister Hesione, that time when you wooed her and won her with gifts.

FX3: The sound of a single fly. Hold under Io's first speech.

Enter Io, running and behaving as if in a frenzy. She is pursued by a gadfly

She has horns on her forehead.

Io:

What land is this? Ah! What people live here? Who is this I see, shackled on those high rocks? All exposed to the tempest? Ah!

What is the crime you have committed for which you must pay such an awful, deadly penalty?

Tell me to what part of the Earth have I wandered in my misery?

Ah! Ah!

Again the gadfly stings me! Misery! Look there! Look! I see the ghost of Argus the Earth-born!

There! Oh, there the myriad, frightening eyes of the herdsman! Oh, Earth! Earth, keep him away!

Stop him from hounding me with his vile stare.

570

Earth cannot hide him even in death but he passes on from one shade to another, to drive me, poor wretch, famished along the shores of the sea.

FX4: Cut sound of fly. Enter soft sound of pan pipes.

And the clear strains of the shepherd's wax-fastened pipes send me to sleep.

CUT FX4

But ah! Ah! Where will this endless hounding take me?

Ah! Ah!

Zeus, son of Cronos, what sin have I committed that you have shackled me with these pains?

580

Ah! Ah!

Zeus! What transgression is it that you have found I did, that you are wearing me out with frenzy by this terror of this ever-pursuing gadfly?

Send fire and burn me, or bury me, Zeus, deep below the Earth. Give me to the monsters of the deep Ocean to be devoured. Grant me these wishes, Zeus, my Lord!

I have been punished enough with all this wandering. Zeus, how can I escape from this pain?

Zeus! Do you hear the voice of the horned virgin?

590

Prometheus:

How can I not hear Io, daughter of Inachus, frenzied by the gadfly? The one who set Zeus' heart ablaze with love and who now, because of Hera's hatred she is forced to wander endlessly.

Io:

How do you know who my father is? Tell me who you are –one poor wretch to another. How do you know who I am and who my tormentor is, who tortures me with stings that ever hound me?

600

Ah! Ah!

I am driven on and on, violently by these tortures of pain and starvation, I, the victim of Hera's angry will. Who is there, as ill-fated as I am? Who endures such punishment as mine?

Tell me, what more is there for me to suffer? What is my cure? Come reveal to me this cure, if you know it! Tell it to this wretched ever-roaming virgin!

610

Prometheus:

I shall tell you in plain speech and simple words what you wish to know, just as one speaks to a friend. I am Prometheus, he who has given the gift of fire to the mortals!

Io:

Oh, Prometheus! You have indeed proven yourself the common benefactor of the race of men.

Wretched Prometheus, why are you made to suffer like this?

Prometheus:

I have only just finished lamenting my own torture.

Io:

Will you not then tell me about...

Prometheus:

Tell me what it is you want to know and I will tell you everything.

Io:

Tell me who it was who has clamped your feet like so, in this ravine?

Prometheus:

It was Zeus' will and Hephaistos' hand.

620

Io:

What sins did you commit to deserve such punishment?

Prometheus:

No, that is all I wish to tell you.

Io:

No. Reveal then, also when my wretched wanderings will cease. What length of time is set for my release?

Prometheus:

It is better for you to remain ignorant of this.

Io:

Please do not hide from me the future of my suffering.

Prometheus:

I do not do so because I begrudge you this favour.

Io:

Why then are you so reluctant to tell me my Fate?

Prometheus:

Not because of any ill will on my part but because I am afraid of crushing your spirit.

Io:

Don't be more concerned about me than I am.

630

Prometheus:

I'll tell you then, since you are so determined. Listen!

Chorus:

No, not yet Prometheus! Share with us the pleasure of the tale. Let us first ask Io to tell the story of her punishment and let her tell the events that have brought about her dire torment. After that you can tell her what she must endure in the future.

Prometheus:

It is up to you, Io, if you want to grant them this favour. You may do so, particularly since they are your father's sisters. To weep and to lament over one's misfortunes when one is certain to gain a tear or two from the listener is indeed, worth while.

640

Io:

I don't know how I could refuse you. I shall use plain language to tell you everything you want to

know.

I still agonise when I need to speak of the torrent of calamities that Heaven has sent upon me and of the dreadful change my poor, wretched body has suffered, as well as from where it came.

In my own rooms, visions of the night would visit me trying to entice me with seductive words like, “O blessed virgin, why stay a virgin for so long when you can gain a match of the highest order? Zeus is aflame by your charms and by the arrows of love and longs for your union with him.

650

No, my child, do not spurn Zeus’ bed but go to Lerna’s fertile meadows, to the deep pastures and to your father’s flocks and where the oxen graze so that Zeus’ eye might find respite from its longing.” Such dreams tormented me night after night until, finally, I gained enough courage to tell my father how I was haunted by them.

660

My father then sent many messengers to both oracles at Pytho and Dodona to find out what deed or word of his would please the gods. They returned with a report of oracles, strangely worded, dark and oddly delivered. Finally an unambiguous answer arrived for my father. It told him in no uncertain words –and commanded him- to send me away from my home and country to wander at large Earth’s furthest territories. It also told him that if he neglected to do so, Zeus would send a thunderbolt with a fiery face and destroy his whole race.

670

My father, overcome by Apollo’s oracles, expelled me and excluded me from his house against his will and mine because he was forced by this fierce bridle that Zeus had placed on him.

Immediately my form and my mind were distorted and, as you see, I now have horns and, being constantly stung by a sharp-fanged gadfly, I rush with frenzied steps to the sweet streams of Kerchneia and the fountain of Lerna. As well, Earth-born herdsman, Argus, who is most fierce, keeps pursuing me and with his many eyes, following my every footprint.

680

But he, Argus, suddenly and unexpectedly died, whereas I, I am still tormented by the gadfly which chases me about from land to land and I am still stung by this divine scourge.

Now you have heard what has already happened to me. If you are able to tell me what pains await me still, tell them. Don’t feel pity for me and try to soothe me with false tales. Lying is a most foul illness.

Chorus:

Ah! Ah!

Keep her away from us!

Chorus:

Ah! Ah!

I have never thought that such strange things would reach my ears!

Such dreadful, unbearable sufferings to look upon, to endure!

690

Chorus:

Outrages, terrors with two-pronged goads! Such things chill my soul!

Chorus:

Ah! Ah!

Fate! I shudder as I look upon Io’s plight!

Prometheus:

Still, your tears came too soon and I see you are full of fear, daughters of Oceanus! Hold on until you have heard the rest of her story!

Chorus:

Go on, Prometheus. Tell us everything.

Chorus:

It is of some comfort to the ill to know what pains await them.

700

Prometheus:

You’ve got your first wish easily because you wanted to hear about her ordeal from her own lips. Now listen to what further suffering this maiden must endure from Hera, Zeus’ wife. And you, now, Io, daughter of Inachus, listen well to these words and learn the end of your wanderings.

710

From here, you will first go Eastwards and pass through the unploughed meadows, until you come to the Scythians, a nomadic race that lives high above the ground in houses of wattled roofs which are built on carts with mighty wheels. They own powerful bows so don’t go near them but, instead, walk close by the roaring, rocky shore and pass right through that country.

After that, to your left there will be the country of the iron workers who are called Chalybes. Beware of them, too because they are savage people and hate strangers. Then you will come across the river Hybristes –sinful by name and sinful by practice!

720

Don't try crossing it because it is far too hard to cross. Wait until you come all the way to Caucasus itself, the highest of all the mountains. There, from its brow, the river floods forth in a mighty fury. Once you pass through its starry neighbours, you must begin to take on a Southerly direction which will bring you to the Amazons, women, who hate all men. These will one day come to live at Themiscyra, around Thermodon as far as Salmedyssia's rugged jaw –enemy to the sailors, stepmother to the ships. The Amazons will be glad to guide you on your way.

730

After this, you will reach the Cimmerian Isthmus, near its narrow upper portal. You must gather your courage and leave this place and pass through the channel of Maeotis, a place about which mankind will talk for ever, mentioning always your passing and calling it after you, Bosphorous, "The Path of the Cow."

Then you will leave Europe and come to the Asian Continent.

To the Chorus

Do you not think the Lord of the gods is equally harsh in all his ways? In his desire for a union with a mortal virgin he has made her suffer all these terrible wanderings.

To Io

740

Io, you have found a bitter match for your wedding, poor wretch, because, all these things you have just heard –and you must know this well- are barely the beginning of your troubles.

Io:

Ah! Ah!

Prometheus:

What? Again you cry and groan? I wonder what you will do when you will find out what sufferings you still have to endure?

Chorus:

What? Are there still more to tell her?

Prometheus:

Yes, Io, there is still a torrential sea of disastrous distress you must go through!

Io:

Ah, what good is life for me then?

Why don't I run and hurl myself right now from this rugged cliff and be smashed to pieces? There I shall find relief from all my pain!

Far better to die once than to suffer this torture all of my life.

751

Prometheus:

You'd hardly be able to bear my own agonies then, Io and, I am not fated to die! Dying would indeed be an escape from suffering but now there's no limit to it, not until Zeus has been deposed.

Io:

What? Will Zeus be thrown from his throne one day?

Prometheus:

I am sure you would be happy to see this, Io!

Io:

How could I not? He is the sole cause of my suffering.

760

Prometheus:

Then be certain of it, Io. It will happen!

Io:

By whom will he be made to surrender the scepter of his rule?

Prometheus:

By himself and his own, idiotic will.

Io:

How will it happen? Tell me, if there is no harm in doing so.

Prometheus:

He will enter into a marriage which will be his undoing.

Io:

With a god or a mortal? Tell me if it is proper to do so.

Prometheus:

Why ask with whom? I can't reveal that!

Io:

And will it be his wife who will dethrone him?

Prometheus:

Yes, because she will give birth to a son mightier than his father.

Io:

And can he not escape his doom?

770

Prometheus:

No, not unless I was freed from these shackles.

Io:

So who would free you against Zeus' will, Prometheus?

Prometheus:

Someone of your own lineage.

Io:

What was that? Did you say that a child of mine will release you from your misery?

Prometheus:

Exactly. One from your thirteenth generation.

Io:

This prophecy of yours. I find it hard to understand.

Prometheus:

So then, don't ask to find out also about the rest of your sufferings.

Io:

No, you can't withdraw a favour once you have promised it, Prometheus!

Prometheus:

I have two tales. I will tell you one of them.

Io:

Two of them! Tell them to me and let me choose!

780

Prometheus:

I offer you one of these two tales: Either to tell you about the suffering you must still endure or one about who will be my deliverer.

Chorus:

Don't deny us the tale, Prometheus!

Chorus:

Grant one of these favours for her and for us the other.

Chorus:

Yes, tell her of her further wanderings and tell us, because we are desperate to know, who it is who will deliver you from these chains.

Prometheus:

Well, since you insist, I will not refuse. I shall tell you everything.

First, I will reveal to you, Io, the tortuous wanderings you are yet to do. Engrave them carefully in the tablets of your memory.

After you have crossed the stream that separates one continent from the other, you will turn towards the flaming East where the sun walks.

790

Then, crossing the surging sea you will come to the Gorgonean meadows of Kisthene where the three ancient daughters of Phorcys live. They are shaped like swans and, between them, they have one eye and one tooth. Neither the sun, during the day, nor the moon, during the night, sees them. Near them are their three winged sisters.

800

These are the snake-haired Gorgons who hate mankind so much that the mortal who looks at them dies. I tell you this and warn you of it most strongly. Be very careful of them!

And now listen to yet another, more fearsome spectacle.

Stay clear of the Gryphons. These are Zeus' sharp-beaked hounds and they do not bark. Stay clear also of the one-eyed Arimasian people who are mounted on horses and who live around the floods of Pluto's stream, a stream of gold. After that you will come to a far-off country of swarthy people who live near the waters of the sun, near the river Aethiop.

810

Go along its banks until you reach the cataract. There, from the Bybline mountains, Nile sends forth his sacred and sweet stream. He will show you the way to the land of Nilotis, the land of three angles, where at last, it is declared for you and your children, Io, to found your far-off colony. Now if any of this is unclear to you or hard for you to understand, tell me and I shall explain it for you more clearly. I have more time at my disposal than I want.

818

Chorus:

If there is anything still left to tell or anything passed over of her dreadful wanderings that you must tell us, do so, Prometheus.

But if you have told us her full tale then grant us in turn our own favour, and I am sure you remember what that is.

Prometheus:

She has now heard the end of her wanderings but so as to prove to her that my tale was not one of idle words I shall tell her all she has suffered before her arrival here. This should serve as proof of the accuracy of what I have said so far but I will leave out most of the smaller details and come straight to the point of her journey's end.

830

Well then, first you have reached the Molossian meadows and the sheer wall that surrounds Dodona. There, at that place, is the prophetic seat of Thesprotian Zeus and the incredible marvel, the talking oak trees, by which you were addressed in plain and clear words as the destined bride of Zeus that you were. Didn't that give you pleasure? From there you rushed –stung by the gadfly- along the paths by the shore, to the great gulf of Rhea, where you were thrown into a backward journey.

840

That sea will be called for all future, "Ionian" (rest assured of this) as a memorial of your wanderings across all of mankind.

The rest of the tale concerns both, you, Io and you, daughters of Oceanus, beginning from where I broke off.

At the very edge of the mouth and the silt-bar of the Nile, there is a city called Canobus. It is there where Zeus finally gives you back your sanity and he does this by merely touching you and soothing you with a soft hand.

850

Thus, you will give birth to a dark-skinned child, Epaphus, "Touched," a name to suit the means of his conceptions. Epaphus will harvest the fruit of all the lands watered by the wide-flowing Nile but, by the fifth generation, from him a group of fifty daughters will, unwillingly, return to Argos trying to escape the incestuous union with their cousins. These young men, passion-stricken, pursue the daughters as closely as falcons hunt doves but Zeus will not grant them the joy of marriage.

860

The city, Argos shall receive the brides and give them a home where, during the night, they shall slay their husbands, a deed of dire daring accomplished by a woman's hand, for each bride shall rob her respective husband of his life by dying a sharp, twin-edged sword in the blood of his throat. How I wish Love would visit my enemies in the same manner!

But one of the brides shall not have the requisite resolve and she shall not slay the partner of her bed. She shall be called a coward and not a murderess.

It is she who, in the city of Argos, will give birth to a royal race.

870

Now, to tell you this story in detail would take a long time but, in any case, of her race, will be born a mighty warrior renowned in archery, who will set me free from these torments. This is the oracle Themis, my aged Titan mother, told me but to explain the how and the when of all of this needs a long story and, in any case, to know it would not help you at all.

Io:

Ah! Ah!

Again, I am stung! Again that spasm of frenzy burns my brain with a flameless fire! My heart shudders and throbs violently against my breast and my eyes roll wildly round and round. I am carried out of my course by a raging blast of madness and I have no control of my tongue. My troubled words dash idly against waves of dark calamity.

Exit Io

Chorus:

It was a wise man, indeed who had weighed this thought in his mind and gave it words: to marry in one's rank is by far the best.

890

Chorus:

The man who labours with his hands should never seek to marry either, a woman puffed up by wealth or one who carries pride in her birth.

Chorus:

O, venerable Fates! May you never see me sharing Zeus' bed and may I never be joined in marriage with a god.

Chorus:

I shudder when I see the virgin Io, bereft of a man's love and tormented by her unbearable wanderings, sent to her by Hera.

900

Chorus:

There is no fear nor danger in marriage when it is between equals. May the love of the mightier gods never cast on me their inescapable glance for that would be indeed a war that is impossible to fight. This is pure misery and I don't know what my Fate would be. Who can tell what Zeus has in his mind?

Prometheus:

The day will most definitely come when Zeus, for all his stubbornness will be humbled by the very marriage he pursues.

910

It is a marriage that shall hurl him from his throne and from his power and into utter disaster! And that will be the fulfillment of the curse of Cronos, his father. It was a curse that he had cast at him as he, himself was falling from his ancient throne. It was no other god but I who had saved Zeus from his father's curse. Only I know of it and only I know how to deliver him from it.

So let him sit there, self assured and confident in the ever-echoing thunders of his heavenly fire-breathing bolts! None of these will help him from falling in shameful, in unbearable destruction!

920

Such an enemy against himself is he now preparing –a portent that shall baffle all resistance –that this enemy will invent a flame more potent than lightning and a clamour, louder than the thunder. It will make that earth-convulsing scourge, Poseidon's ocean trident, shiver with fear.

And when Zeus has stumbled upon this disaster he shall learn how great is the difference between being a ruler and being a slave.

Chorus:

This is your own wishful thinking, Prometheus!

Prometheus:

Yes, and my prophesy!.

930

Chorus:

Should we expect to see someone who will overthrow Zeus?

Prometheus:

Yes, and Zeus will suffer even greater pains than those I am suffering now.

Chorus:

How can you not be afraid of uttering such words?

Prometheus:

Why should I be afraid if I cannot be killed?

Chorus:

But Zeus might make you suffer an even greater ordeal.

Prometheus:

Let him do it for all I care! I am prepared for everything.

Chorus:

Wise are those, Prometheus, who fear the inescapable.

Prometheus:

Worship, adore and fawn upon whoever is your ruler. As for Zeus, I care even less than nothing. Let him do whatever he likes. Let him do it during the little time he has left.

940

His time for ruling the gods is nearly over.

Ah! Well look there!

I can see his little runner, Hermes, coming over. Here's our tyrant's lackey! Obviously he's here to deliver us a message from him.

Enter Hermes.

Hermes:

You!

You bitter, twisted craftsman of evil! I am speaking to you! You have sinned against the gods by stealing the fire and giving it to the mortals. The Father bids you tell him what is this marriage you keep talking about, that will hurl him from his throne and from his power. And don't explain yourself in riddles and subtle subterfuge but tell it clearly, one point after another, exactly as the situation stands.

950

Zeus is angered by baffling replies so don't make me come back here again, Prometheus.

Prometheus:

Ah, Hermes!

The typical little underling of the gods! And a puffed up speech full of arrogance to match. You are all young gods and so is your power and though you think that the place you inhabit is heights unreachable by grief, remember I have already seen two great powers thrown down from these heights. The third, the current ruler, too, I shall see thrown down and ruined even more shamefully and even more speedily than the other two.

960

Do you think I am so afraid as to cower before these upstart gods? Far from it! No, not at all! Off you go now! Rush back to where you came from because your questions will bear no fruit here.

Hermes:

You have entered into this harbour of calamity, Prometheus by the same pride and arrogance that you also did once before.

Prometheus:

I would not change my calamity with your servitude under any circumstances. Not ever! Not I!

Hermes:

Obviously, serving this rock is better than being the trusted messenger of Father Zeus!

970

Prometheus:

The insolent can only offer insults.

Hermes:

It is obvious, Prometheus, that you revel in this plight of yours!

Prometheus:

I revel in this? How I wish my enemies would be reveling like this – and you! You, I count among them!

Hermes:

What? Are you blaming me for your punishment?

Prometheus:

To put it in simple words, I hate all the gods whom I helped yet turned against me so unjustly.

Hermes:

Your simple words tell me you have become totally insane.

Prometheus:

Only if by "insanity" you mean that I loathe my enemies.

Hermes:

Ha! Imagine you out of these chains!

You'd be unbearable!

Prometheus: *groaning*

Out of these chains! Ah!

980

Hermes:

Ah? Did you say, "ah?"

Zeus does not know this word!

Prometheus:

Yes, Hermes, but ever-ageing Time teaches everyone everything!

Hermes:

Sure, but you, at least, have not yet learnt wisdom or circumspection.

Prometheus:

Obviously, otherwise why would I be talking to a little slave like you?

Hermes:

Obviously then, you will give none of the answers the Father demands.

Prometheus:

Yes, in fact, there is much that I owe him.

Hermes:

You're treating me like a child.

Prometheus:

And are you not a child and even less intelligent than a child, if you're expecting to get an answer from me? There is no torture or device which Zeus can use to make me utter what he wants to hear until these tormenting chains are undone.

990

So, let Zeus fling his scorching lightning from the Heavens! Let the whole Earth convulse with white-winged snow storms and subterranean thunder! Nothing will force me to reveal whose hand it is that Fate will use to hurl him from his throne.

Hermes:

And do you think this idea will do you any good?

Prometheus:

This idea was foreseen and determined a long time ago.

1000

Hermes:

Try, fool! At least, try!

Try to see some wisdom in the face of your present suffering!

Prometheus:

You're pestering me in vain, Hermes! As if you are trying to persuade a wave to move in the opposite direction. Never think that I would be so petrified by Zeus as to become a woman and, aping a woman's ways, I would go, with hands upturned, to beg my hateful enemy to release me from these clamps. Anything but!

1009

Hermes:

It seems all my words do go in vain. They neither comfort you nor soften you.

You take the bit between your teeth like a newly harnessed colt and you kick and struggle against the reins. But this is just a small device that is getting you angry because stubbornness alone is of no help at all to a fool.

Yet if my words won't make you change your mind, imagine what you will do when a torrent and a towering wave of misfortune crashes upon you, Prometheus, one which you won't be able to escape. First, Father Zeus will smash that jagged cliff with his thunder and lightning rod and this will entomb you, still shackled to that rock's embrace.

1020

Then, after a very long time underground, you will be returned back into the light.

Then, Zeus' winged hound, the ravenous eagle will be coming uninvited all day long to tear off pieces of your liver to feed his savage appetite until your liver turns black. And don't expect an end to this agony until some god appears to take upon himself your suffering and volunteers to descend into the dark realm of Death in the depths of Tartarus.

1030

So think carefully! This is no idle threat but the utter truth, coming from Zeus' mouth and he never lies but brings everything to fruition.

Think of this very carefully and reflect upon it. Don't let your stubborn pride take the better of your judgement.

Chorus:

At least to us, Prometheus, Hermes' words strike at the mark. He bids you to put away your stubbornness and seek out wisdom. Be advised, Prometheus because it is shameful for the wise to persist in doing the wrong thing.

1040

Prometheus:

All that this minion has proclaimed so vociferously is no news to me.

Know this: suffering ill from an enemy is no dishonour, so let the lightning's forked spear be hurled upon my head! Let the heavens be convulsed by the thunder and by the charge of savage winds! Let the hurricane shake the Earth by its roots! Let the waves of the deep mingle with the savage surge of the paths of all the stars in Heaven and let him lift me on high and hurl me down into the depths of black Tartarus!

Let him hurl me upon the pitiless floods of stern Necessity.

No matter what he does to me, I will not be killed!

1051

Hermes:

These are indeed the thoughts and utterances one hears from the insane! This is not a prayer but an exhibition of frenzy, a frenzy he does not want to control.

But you, daughters of Oceanus, you, who sympathise with him in his suffering, back away quickly from this spot in case the harsh crash of thunder stuns your senses.

Chorus:

This manner of speech and this advice does not persuade me because all that you have uttered just now is of no use to me.

Chorus:

I cannot do the things you tell me.

Chorus:

How can you tell me to do something so shameful?

Chorus:

I am happy to suffer any Fate with Prometheus.

Chorus:

I have learnt to hate traitors and there is no infamy I hate more than betrayal.

1071

Hermes:

In that case, remember my warning well and when you are caught by your disaster, don't blame the Fates or say that Zeus has delivered it unexpectedly. Blame, instead, yourselves because you are well aware what is coming to you: you will be entangled by your own madness in the inescapable net of Calamity.

Exit Hermes

Pause 15"

Begin FX: 5 (see below Prometheus' speech) and roll under Prometheus' speech until his last words, when they are brought to a climax

Prometheus:

And now the word has turned into deed!

Ah! The Earth rocks!

The roaring thunder echoes from the depths of the Ocean!

The fiery lightning rods clamour all over the sky and whirlwinds throw about the swirling dust.

Blasts of all the winds are leaping.

Gust against gust, a war of ruthless gusts! The sky is mingled with the ocean and all of this terror charging towards me, is, no doubt from Zeus.

O holy Mother!

O holy Ether who sends light to the world!

See how I am wronged!

FX: Sound, light should follow the above, at the end of which the stage is left sans dramatis personae.

**END OF AESCHYLUS'
"PROMETHEUS BOUND"**