



ALCMENA

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THE PROMETHEUS TETRALOGY PART II

For Juliet. Of course!

PROMETHEIA

The Prometheus Tetralogy

Part II

ALCMENA

a tragedy

The work of Mark Griffiths (*The Authenticity of Prometheus Bound* CUP 1977) has made it impossible to look on *Prometheus Desmotes* as a work by Aeschylus. What the rest of the tetralogy consisted of, or if there was one, must also be in doubt. Possibly he did write *Prometheus Luomenos* – Cicero thought so – and equally possibly a Prometheus Desmotes – just not the one we have today! There was another play, possibly in the same tetralogy, mentioned in the list of titles of Aeschylus' plays: *Prometheus Pyrphoros*. Not enough is known of this play to decide whether it could have been the first in the trilogy or the third, or even the fourth – the satyr-play. A similar title, *Prometheus Pyrkaios* is generally accepted to have been the satyr-play in another tetralogy altogether.

My belief is that *Luomenos* was the third play of a tetralogy – about Prometheus' liberation, and his reconciliation with Zeus. What then was the second? With no evidence whatsoever, I have guessed at *Alcmena* (Aeschylus wrote one – although Griffiths even throws doubt on the reliability of the list). As I imagine it, the play deals with the backstory of Heracles – son of Zeus – who will free Prometheus from the bonds imposed by Zeus, and allows us to see what Ge/Gaia thought of her son (Ge and Heracles are both named as characters who appear in *Luomenos*).

Winnington-Ingram's guess at *Aitnaiai* – Women of Etna – would have been tempting also, but a Sicilian production of the tetralogy is discredited if Aeschylus didn't write Desmotes – but scholars seem to want a dilogy (Desmotes and Luomenos) – or a trilogy where they are 1st and second or second and third. Few have had the effrontery to suggest first and third!

Characters

ALCMENA, an Argive princess, in exile in Thebes

CHORUS of young women from the leading families of Thebes

A herald

GE aka THEMIS, EARTH, Mother of all

EPIMETHEUS, her son, brother of Prometheus.

TEIRESIAS, a seer

ATHENA daughter of Zeus, grand-daughter of Ge, goddess of divine wisdom.

Scene

Thebes, in front of the house of Amphitryon.

ALCMENA

Some young girls are dancing and singing. They are the CHORUS, daughters of Theban grandees.

CHORUS *[music, anapaests]*

We are daughters of Thebes, city ancient and proud,

Birthplace of gods, birthplace of heroes and kings.

But our founder was not a god but a man,

No Greek, no native sprung from the soil,

But he came from afar, he crossed the sea,

To arrive in the plain by Asopus's banks,

With its soil, deep, rich and ready to plough.

His name was Cadmus, Cadmus who ruled

The distant land of Phoenicia, home to

Sailors and traders and wealthy merchants.

Cadmus had a sister, lovely Europa.

Both of them children of Tyrian Agenor,

Descended from Io, once beloved

Of Zeus. And Zeus set his sights once again

On a mortal girl, this time on Europa.

I am a human, a girl, it is not my place,

For me to criticise Zeus. But I know

That when Zeus is in love with a mortal girl,

It's the girl who suffers, as Io did.

Poor Io, tormented by Hera's spite ...

ALCMENA is heard distantly within

Io, my family's founder!

CHORUS *after a brief pause*

... Was transformed to a cow. Europa
Was taken by Zeus in the form of a bull.
(How many men fancy themselves as bulls?)
He took her to Crete, and seduced her.
Cadmus, distraught, didn't know where to look
For his sister. He took a ship, and he came
To Delphi, where they said to forget her.
And then the story begins to be strange:
"Follow a cow until it sinks to the earth:
There you must build your city, that one day
Men will call Thebes." But the cow collapses
By a spring, which a serpent's protecting:
It kills anyone who approaches to drink.
Cadmus throws a stone which kills it dead.
"Sow its teeth in the ground, and they'll grow into men,
Men who'll become great Theban warriors!"
So he took this advice, but the men who sprang up
Started killing each other, till there were five.
And from them we are all descended they say!

ALCMENA *within*
Where is my husband? I'm so alone!

CHORUS
But Cadmus was loved by the gods, and they gave
Him a wife. Gods and goddesses all came
Flocking to Thebes to attend his wedding!
These are the tales; who knows if they're true?
I'm taught to believe that Thebes was the place
Where gods and mortals met with each other,
Once long ago when the world was young.

ALCMENA *within*
I'm miserable! I want to die!

CHORUS *[iambics now]*

A poor girl seems to be in real pain!

Who are you? Please come out. We're friends

Women should share each other's troubles.

We all know what it's like be alone.

ALCMENA *emerging*

My name's Alcmena; Argos was my home;

Elektryon, my father, was its king,

And I his only daughter, the princess.

Thanks for your sympathy. I weep because

I am a stranger here, a refugee

In Thebes. I have no friends. Amphytryon

My husband, — though I have not been allowed

As yet to call him that — Amphytryon

Is far away, in danger of his life.

I worry I may not see him again.

CHORUS

I do remember you! We're cousins! Io's

An ancestor we share — though quite

A distant one! It was so nice

You came to Thebes, you and Amphytryon.

ALCMENA *weeping*

I'm grateful for your hospitality,

Thank you so much.. I need friends, desperately

CHORUS

We **are** your friends, we're here to comfort you.

Please share your sorrow, tell us why

You are unhappy, why the floods of tears?

ALCMENA

Alas! You can't know why I weep so much.

Nine brothers I had once; now eight are dead,

Killed by the Teleboans, thieves who stole
My father's cows, his pride and joy.
Amphitryon retrieved the cows, and then
Elektryon mustered an army, to
Avenge himself on those who'd killed his sons.
He gave Amphitryon his royal power,
To act as king for while he was away,
And promised him that I should be his bride,
His wife, but only if he could resist
My charms and never sleep with me
Till he returned successfully from war.
It was a bitter blow, but through the love
We both agreed, reluctantly, that we
Would be obedient to my father's wish.

CHORUS

Truly a hard condition he imposed!
To test your love, or out of cruelty?
Your father, though, destroyed his enemies,
Surely, returned in triumph home?

ALCMENA

Alas, alas, that's not the way it was.
My father never even went to war!
Before his army ever left the town,
My husband accidentally deprived
My father of his life. It was a vicious trick of fate.
An accident, no way could he be blamed.
But still Amphitryon was driven out, as if
A murderer, and banished from his home

CHORUS

So now I see why you came here to Thebes,
Already married, but not married yet.

How hard a role for a young girl to play!
Then are you still a virgin? Can I ask?
Has Amphytrion kept the promise he
Gave your father before his tragic death?

ALCMENA

Amphytrion is a fine and loyal man.
He will not break the contract that he made.
He will not sleep with me until he has
Destroyed my father's enemies.
There's only one thing now keeps me alive,
That he will by this find redemption for
The tragic part he played in father's death,
And come back safe to make me his at last.

CHORUS

Pray you won't have to wait much more. Surely,
Alcmena, you deserve some happiness
For all you've suffered, left alone so long.
Brooding on how your brothers and your father
Met their sad ends must make you live in fear,
That news might yet come of your husband's death.

ALCMENA

Not knowing if he is alive or dead,
That makes my suffering far worse. If I
Knew he was dead, and won't be coming back
At least I'd have some certainty, and could
Perhaps adjust to widowhood. For that
Is after all the lot of many wives.
A woman's life without a man is hard –
But as a widow I could put on black
And share my grief with other suffering souls.

CHORUS

First Stasimon

Strophe 1

I am a woman and I know
Little or nothing of the secret world of men.
Men go to war. They leave their wives
Their children too, and off they march!
Shields shining in the sunlight, swords
Cleaned and polished for their feast of blood,
The horses and the chariots, the laden mules.

Antistrophe 1

A mob of prostitutes and slaves
Completes the hopeful column which deserts the town.
The generals proud and confident,
Their breastplates boasting predatory beasts -
Dragons or eagles, rampant lions;
Common soldiers cracking soldiers' jokes
Singing rude songs, believing they're the best.

Strophe 2

What follows next I do not know.
It's left to my imagination to sketch out
A picture of what happens when
Our army meets the army it must fight.
Do they just draw their swords and rush
To slice and hack like butchers dressing meat,
Carving each other, or like priests with sacrificial bulls?
A sword is just a double-bladed knife.

Antistrophe 2

I hear the noise of steel on steel,
A horseshoe hammered on an anvil hurts my ears,
That bell-like sound, but amplified
As if a thousand blacksmiths all at once
Were striking sparks from glowing iron,
Sword striking sword, sword hitting armour-plate,
Sword cracking shield, shield butting highly-polished shield,
And on and on: slash, bash, clash, crash – then death..

Strophe 3

Would there be trumpets, too, I ask?
I think there would be, yes.
And then, no harmony with those metallic notes,
The human voices struggling to be heard
Above the din of bronze and iron;
The shouts of those whose weapons thrust and stab
The cries and screams of those who're stabbed and bleed,
The groans of the desperate who know they've lost the fight,
And what no one can hear above the noise, the laboured breaths
Of dying men, as gasping lungs surrender life at last.

Antistrophe 3

When one side has killed more of them -
How many more I ask? -
Then victory is claimed. The losers are allowed
To pick their corpses up and take them home -
A husband and a father left,
A hero is returned to them, his ashes in a jar.
The part we women play in this charade:
We bid farewell and we weep. We wait and weep.
And when our masters finally return, if they return,

We weep again, in private, for the folly of it all.

A herald enters.

HERALD

Which is the house of lord Amphitryon?

I have important news to give his wife.

CHORUS

That's it just there. His wife Alcmena's here

With us, dreading that one may come to bring

The news she has been fearing for so long.

ALCMENA

I am Alcmena. Please don't hesitate

To give your message, though it end my life.

If you will tell me my husband is dead,

Please speak. I'm ready to receive the blow.

HERALD

My lady, I'm not here to cause you grief!

Amphitryon has won the war. He's won!

It was a long and difficult campaign,

But with the help of dedicated friends,

Allies who sympathised with his just cause,

He's made your brothers' killers pay the price.

He's on his way home - now! He will be here,

He hopes, maybe this very night, or else

Tomorrow, long before the sun has set.

ALCMENA

How quickly grief can change to joy! From deep

Despair, you've brought me happiness!

You cannot know how much! My father made

Me swear I would not lie with him until

His enemies were truly crushed. They are!

I'm overjoyed, yet at the same time filled
With fear! Nervous, excited, both at once.
Now I must go indoors to make sure all
Is ready for my wedding night. Tonight!

HERALD

How glad I am to bring you such good news.
Good luck, my lady, go with you and may
The gods deliver all that you desire. *Exit*

ALCMENA *pausing in the doorway*

So much to organise before he comes!
The servants will have little time to rest:
There's water to be fetched so I can take
The bath to purify myself. Torches
Must be prepared to light my husband home
To my bedroom – a place he's never been!-
The maids must comb and brush my hair the way
Tradition says they should. The bed itself
Must be prepared, and I must not forget
The wedding clothes, the perfume that we'll need.
I'm so excited I can hardly bear
To wait the few more hours until he holds
Me in his arms. One night won't be enough!
She goes back inside

CHORUS

Second stasimon

Strophe 1

Love, who can say what it is?
To me it seems a mystery, beyond experience.
Perhaps I am too young to understand.
Love it seems had driven Alcmena

To a deep cavern of most profound despair.
Or can I say the lack of Love
Love's absence gnawed away her soul?

Antistrophe 1

Love drives two souls together.
Though I am young, this is what I think Love is:
A longing to unite, to be as one.
Completeness, when two souls are tightly bound;
A desire to melt, to flow into each other;
From what I've learned, from storybooks,
That's what we humans mean by Love.

Strophe 2

But if the one you love has gone,
Taken by death, or not by your side
Where is the Love?
Then surely there is only pain, not Love at all.
We say someone can die of Love:
That is not true!
One dies because Love is not there. It's gone.

Antistrophe 2

Poets and wise men get it wrong.
Love can be only thrilling ecstasy.
When Love has gone
The lack of love is pain, is agony - a pain no less
Malignant than the many pains
We mortals bear.
Don't slander love - Love must be only joy.!

An elderly lady is seen approaching during the last speech. She is GE, Mother Earth, or GAIA, known too as THEMIS, the mother of Prometheus and the other Titans. She has taken human form, because she has a special interest in what is about to occur in Thebes.

GE

My children, pardon me for eavesdropping!

As an old woman I confess that I

Find pleasure in the chatter of the young!

CHORUS *crowding round her*

Old lady, welcome, come and join with us!

Like young girls everywhere, we talk of love!

— You are a grandmother, that's obvious,

You must have in your time gone through

Every experience that women do

—If it is not impertinent to ask,

What is it truly to feel love? Can it

Really bring happiness, or only grief?

—Tell us, the pains of childbirth, are they

As agonising as the rumours say?

—What if the man you wed is violent?

—And when you've suffered to give birth,

What if your children turn on you, and love

Turns to mistrust and hatefulness?

GE

So many answers you young girls require!

My dears, love is a thing you need not fear:

To most it brings nothing but good, though I

Myself have suffered far more pain from it

Than you as mortal girls will ever know.

CHORUS

You call us mortals, does that mean you are

Perhaps a goddess? Tell us who you are!

GE

You were not fooled by my disguise! Oh dear!

You are young women of intelligence.

My name is Ge, or Gaia. "Mother Earth".

The gods are my children or grandchildren -

And some great-grandchildren of mine.

You find me here because my grandson, Zeus,

I know, has planned to do a shameful deed.

Right here. In Thebes. Tonight. Oh dear!

He is a god who acts just as he likes!

He's been a handful since a little boy..

CHORUS

Zeus? Zeus the god we worship? Zeus who rules

The universe of gods and men? The one

Whose strict commands all must obey?

Zeus whose decisions none may criticise,

Or risk destruction from his thunderbolt?

We fear, we tremble hearing Zeus described

As if he were unworthy of respect.

How could the king of gods do wrong? Explain!

If that is not too bold of us! Excuse

Our youth! We long to understand it all!

GE

To start with, there were just the three of us.

Myself, the Earth - and Ouranos or Sky.

And Aphrodite - who was there already

Waiting for us. Primordial Love through whom

All things exist. Love made Ouranos eager

To lie with me - to permeate me with

The moisture from the sky, gentle as rain

Sometimes, a soothing shower – but other times
A violent storm accompanied by gales
And hurricanes. The damp encouraged me
To bring forth from my naked body flowers,
Trees bearing fruit and grassy meadowlands,
Lush prairies, gloomy woods, and forests too.

CHORUS

The world you made sounds like a paradise!
And then came creatures who could move and breathe?

GE

From Love sprang living creatures, yes, who spread
Across the land: all animals and birds,
The reptiles, fish, – and creepie-crawlies too –
Were born from me: some ate the greenery
Sprung from my soil, while others preyed on them –
Lest Love let numbers grow too large and so
Sufficient food might not be there for all.

CHORUS

And were some of your children actual gods?

GE

The first immortals? They were ugly things –
But I still loved them, nursed a mother's hopes.
My favourites were the Cyclopes, giants,
But peaceful ones – craftsmen, and masters of
That secret element called Fire, which they
Discovered hidden in my inner depths.

CHORUS

And was your husband proud to have these sons?

GE

No! Ouranos, despised them, and hid them
From me, and from the light, in Tartaros,

That unlit void below the earth. He forced
Me to give birth to a new race of gods –
The Titans, who could help Ouranos rule
His universe. *Okeanos* patrolled
The seas, and rivers; they stole land from me
But extra water helped life spread and grow.
Hyperion ensured that every day,
The Sun, whose warmth was vital to all life
Arose; *Prometheus* was the crafty one,
Who shared my thoughts, inherited
My foresight, and my creativity.
Lots more! Though I still missed my older sons.
But Ouranos could not control his lust:
I found his violence too much to bear.
The Titans were now grown too strong. Thanks to
Prometheus, and the ruthless plan he made,
Ouranos' rule came to a sudden end.

CHORUS

A violent husband is unbearable.
But how could you get rid of him, a god?

GE

Young Kronos took a sickle and made sure
There'd be no future Titans to ally
With those already born! And Ouranos
Was hurled to Tartaros, but as he fell,
He bellowed forth a chilling prophecy:
That Kronos too would be dethroned one day
By his own son. Kronos took Rhea his
Big sister for his wife – but would not let
The children that she bore survive. Grimly
He swallowed each as they were born, determined

That he would rule alone without an heir
Who might disrupt his rule. Hera, Demeter,
And Hestia, Poseidon, Hades too
Were all in turn devoured by him, not one
Was left to thrive, alas. Prometheus though
Had an idea to save her latest child...

CHORUS

Prometheus' cunning seems to know no bounds!

GE

Yes, he devised this clever trick for Rhea:
Her third son she should make quite sure
Would be delivered in the dark, so he
Could be smuggled away to caring Nymphs
Who'd bring him up: while Rhea presented father
With a large stone, swaddled just like a child.
He swallowed it, and so the infant Zeus
Survived, escaped his siblings' gruesome fate.
As Zeus grew up, he planned to take revenge
Prometheus showed him how to secretly
Drug Kronos' drink and made him vomit up
Not just the stone, the other victims too.
As they matured, and learned what he had done,
The siblings started urging Zeus to lead
Them in a war to end the reign of Kronos
And all his ancient Titan clan. But wars
Are won by cunning, not by force alone.

CHORUS

Prometheus had a part to play, I guess!

GE

Prometheus, cool as ever, stood with Zeus
Against his Titan kin, betraying them,

Handing the victory to Zeus and his
Young cohort of Olympians: Zeus stole
The keys to Tartaros, and freed once more
The Cyclopes, and with their mastery
Of Fire he had them forge a weapon which
No god could face – his lethal thunderbolt.

CHORUS

So, Zeus became the king of all the gods,
Thanks to his invincible thunderbolts.
What happened to the other Titans then?

GE

Kronos's sons were sent to Tartaros,
Or given other brutal punishments:
Their jobs were given to his brother gods
Or goddesses, or else, the children he
Would father with Hera his sister-queen.
Prometheus maintained his place as Zeus'
Most trusted counsellor – though not for long!

CHORUS

Prometheus was the only one to side with Zeus?

GE

My son Okeanos did not join in the war -
For or against. His wife, my daughter, Tethys
Bore him no sons, but many, many daughters.
All were quite happy in their father's realm,
Swimming and diving, taking pleasure in
The ocean's waves, assisting sailors when
They found themselves battered by storms, or else
Becalmed, or stranded thanks to unkind winds.
But one was different. **Metis** was never seen
Surfing, or diving deep beneath the sea.

She was a studious child, and soon stood out
Among the gods for Brains, Intelligence:
For Wisdom of a greater kind than mortals
Ever know: a wisdom not yet found in Zeus!
Metis will tutor Zeus, and given time
He will absorb the wisdom that he lacks.
The male mind's bold decisiveness needs to
Be held in check by female thoughtfulness!
Guided by her, he will in time devise
A force more powerful than any known.

CHORUS

More powerful than the thunderbolt of Zeus?

GE

The thunderbolt will be made obsolete!
But that's the future. Zeus has not as yet
Consumed his fill of wisdom. He is still
New in his role, unruly, unpredictable
As many are if given power too young.
I feel increasingly I lack respect:
It is not easy to control my family.
Zeus these days is a law unto himself!

CHORUS

Males whether gods or men seem to prefer
To bully or ignore their womenfolk!
But where's the human race, our kind, in all
This tangled history of brutal gods?

GE

Alone of creatures you did not emerge
Spontaneously from Mother Earth, but were
Created, by Prometheus, my son.
Why he did this was quite unclear, at first:

You humans seemed a wretched race, that Zeus
Decided he would wipe out and replace.

CHORUS

Why did he not then? What prevented him?

GE

Prometheus started plotting how to save...

CHORUS

His pet creation, poor humanity?

GE

And make mankind a force to reckon with!

CHORUS

So, we became a weapon for Prometheus!

GE

Which he could use to get revenge on Zeus.

CHORUS

How did he weaponise the human race?

GE

He educated you and taught you skills.

CHORUS

A clever plan! What were we like before?

GE

Just rather pitiful and sad. You had

No purpose to your short and brutish lives.

CHORUS

What did Prometheus do to strengthen us?

GE

He stole Fire from the gods, the element

They'd kept exclusively for their own use.

CHORUS

And gave it us. I see why Zeus was cross!

GE

With fire came many other skills; men soon
Resembled gods: they grew things they could eat,
And found out how to cook them, too! They learned
To sail the seas and travel over land.
They learned to write and calculate, make shelters
And clothes, they formed communities, built walls
And soon had cities bound by one man's rule,
Just like the gods who with their varied skills
Obey one single master, Father Zeus.

CHORUS

They sing and dance

I feel like dancing, feel I'd never tire
Just like the leaping flames of golden fire -
Prometheus's gift to man!
The god who had a master plan!
Saw just how much the earth
For humankind would soon be worth
We have it in our grasp to own
This world of ours, mankind alone!
Subdue the animals, conquer the seas
Plough up the fertile soil, cut down the trees,
Dig out the treasure from the ground,
For mortal creatures paradise is found!

CHORUS LEADER

But did Zeus try to thwart Prometheus' plan?

GE

Prometheus' gifts to mortals he could not
Take back: they'd made them far too powerful,
Too strong now to be wiped out easily.

Prometheus' larceny he could punish –
And how! He had him fettered to a rock, alone,
Remote, at the world's furthest edge, exposed
To burning sun, storms, blizzards, icy gales,
A sentence worse than death: he cannot die!
He was too proud and stubborn to ask Zeus
To mitigate his pain; and would not stop
Abusing him, so, he was sent, still bound,
To Tartaros - then Zeus devised a more
Sadistic scheme. He brought him back, but had
An eagle tear his liver out and then
Allow it to regenerate before
The bird returned for its next meal. And this
Is happening still, and has been happening
For tens of thousands of your human years.

CHORUS

How could he bear to suffer all this time?

GE

He is patient, as I have told him this:
That Zeus will fall, just like his father, and
His grandfather, and I know how, and that
Someone someday will free him from his chains.
Informed by me, he knows a secret which
He won't reveal to Zeus unless he's freed.

CHORUS

But how much longer must Prometheus wait?

GE

Prometheus knows he must show fortitude.
He is a god. Time does not mean the same
To one who's been prepared to wait and wait
For many eons for the rescuer

He knows will set him free. But here's a secret
I can share with you all now! I know
And I alone, that rescuer will be
Conceived, quite soon, in Thebes! In fact tonight!
My errant grandson has in mind to bed
An unsuspecting girl right here in Thebes.
I can't prevent the rape, but I am here
To help the wretched victim of his ravishing.

CHORUS

Who is it? Could it be someone we know?

GE

Zeus may not like the way mankind evolved:
But he cannot ignore the lure of womankind!
The transient beauty of a human girl
He can't resist, he has to sleep with her.
It's always lust. Love he's no knowledge of.
He constantly betrays Hera, his wife,
Who is not fooled when he comes down to Earth
Ingeniously disguised as man or beast
And casually makes love to mortal girls.

CHORUS

I met a girl who thinks she slept with Zeus!

GE

Three victims are important to the plan
I have, to see Prometheus freed, and Zeus
Transformed from rapist, tyrant, predator
Into caring protector of the human race.
Three victims linked by family ties, although
Long years apart, they share a common fate.
Io, who fled in terror when approached, but was
Turned to a cow by Hera – to frustrate

Her husband's lust. Imagine her ordeal!
At last, she reached the Nile, where Zeus made love
To her, gently to demonstrate "remorse"
Now forward many generations, look:
Danaë, her descendant, finds herself
Approached by Zeus. She had been shut away
To keep her safe, but Zeus becomes a shower
Of rain and seeps through cracks into her room -
Some say a shower of gold to bribe her guard!
Their son was Perseus, who was ancestor
Of victim three, of this same family,
A newly married girl, who Zeus tonight
Will ravish and implant his seed, a boy
Who as a man will save Prometheus.

CHORUS

Third Stasimon

Strophe 1

To have a son by Zeus
To me that signals lifelong grief,
Perpetual worry and concern.
I'd hate to bear the child of Zeus
Or any other god!
He'll need to spend his life
Rescuing maidens in distress
Slaughtering monsters,
No time to rest or be
An ordinary mortal
With an ordinary mortal's

Antistrophe 1

Loves, desires and needs:
A home, a wife, a plot of land
On which to plant his corn and reap
Enough to live a simple life
Uncomplicated by
The need to always be
A beacon of virility
Showing off battle-skills
His prowess with the bow,
His unrelenting courage;
His life in danger.

Strophe 2

I think now of
Amphitryon, returned from war at last
To make Alcmena his wife
In deed as well as word.
At last they'll settle down
Look forward to
A normal married life.
Their sons will be just ordinary boys
Becoming men with ordinary fates.
A farm, some cattle, sheep,
Perhaps a field that bears
A crop of barley every year, a loving wife
Not poor, not rich but happy
To be neither: a modest wish.

Epode

That's why I pray that I
May I never welcome to my bed

One of the immortal gods.
That's why I pity that young girl,
Somewhere in Thebes, tonight
Who will receive a visit from a god.
A night with an immortal may I fear
Begin a life of wretched misery for her.

But look! Who is this man approaching us?
I pray that it may be Amphytrion.
It's not, I see, now there's a closer view
Whoever he might be, he seems in angry mood!
GE

I recognise Epimetheus, my son, the twin
Of him imprisoned on the lonely rock.

Epimetheus bursts in

EPIMETHEUS

Mother, I heard you praise Prometheus yet again!
No one remembers that I fought for Zeus
Beside my brother. We were both involved
In his campaign to overthrow the Titan race.
We saw the Titans as a threat, who might
Disrupt the new and glistening Earth,
With all her fragile, vulnerable life.
Not that Zeus had a role in that creation, no!
Into this youthful world, the animals
And birds, the fish, the insects, all that live
Upon the earth sprang somehow **from** the earth –
And there's no god, not even Earth herself,
Knows how it came to be, how life began.
Mother, we know, that mystery remains!
Each creature, though – by Nature's scheme –

Found its own niche, its habitat, its home
And a unique defence against the rest.
All life was thus connected – and the death
Of one, it seemed, would give another life.
Thus, no creature would dominate and rule
The roost, but all would share Earth's wonders
In balance and in harmony. And I
It was helped allocate the various skills
And roles for all the world of living things.

CHORUS

Truly the work you did was wonderful!

EPIMETHEUS

Lions were given extra strength, and bees
Had stings to guard the honey all
Desired to taste. All birds had wings to fly
From danger – each was unique too, the wren
Was tiny, while the ostrich huge: its size
Relieved it of the need to fly, instead
It could outrun all creatures on the land.
And then my brother intervened to spoil
This paradise. He selfishly created man
For his own purposes – his own idea –
From elements he took from Earth, from dust
And clay. And dared to make them look just like
The gods! But there was no niche left for them –
I'd allocated habitats to all
Already! Nor was any unique skill
Remaining, that could be assigned to man.
Prometheus' playthings were a sorry race:
Zeus did not see the point of them, where they
Belonged in the rich tapestry of life.

Misfits! They could not soar like eagles, they
Could not be milked or ridden or be used
For any purpose he could ascertain.
He'd have them sent to Tartaros, perhaps
Devise a better race in place of them.
But then my brother, desperate to thwart
The well-considered plans of Zeus, stole Fire
And showed men all that they might do with it,
How armed with Fire they'd overpower the rest
Of Earth's creation, and soon dominate:
Exploit the crops and minerals in the rocks
And make themselves supreme, the master-race.
He claimed he could foresee a glorious time:
When Earth's resources served mankind alone.
When other creatures, unless kept as pets,
Or bred and herded to fulfil man's greed,
Were hunted down and killed for sport, or else
Allowed to quietly go extinct. And when
Mankind had conquered forests, deserts, plains,
The seas – the birds' domain waited to be
Exploited! When small villages became
Vast cities, where some men would rule
And live a life of idle luxury,
Whilst others – the majority – were slaves
Or servants, forced to work to live, or die.
All this Prometheus foresaw for men.

CHORUS

But we appreciate Prometheus' gifts!
We revel in our conquest of the world!
Our farming skills have made the earth our slave,
Our mining's found the hidden wealth below,

We've burned the forests, made the deserts bloom,
We've learned to use the beasts not just for food,
But to transport us anywhere we wish.
Our ships sail speedily from port to port
Bringing us luxuries from every land.
Truly the human race is blessed thanks to
Prometheus and his precious gifts to us!

EPIMETHEUS

So it may seem. Can you ignore the pain?
The poverty of those who do not own
The farms, the hard relentless labour they
Must do each day or starve, the injuries,
The foul diseases and the early death?
Prometheus wanted glory for himself,
By trying to show he was as good as Zeus!
None of the creatures to whom I gave gifts
Assume they have the right to rule the world!
Think these things over. I have had my say!

Exit Epimetheus

GE

Mankind's elite indeed have become gods
In all save their mortality. Most though
Do not reap joy from what Prometheus stole.
Prometheus wrecked the fragile equilibrium
Earth had before he introduced mankind.
He insolently made them look like gods,
And with his theft of fire permitted them
To act like gods. But being mortals still,
They live to gratify their lusts, no more.
And this is why his punishment is harsh.
Not petty larceny,! Not quite the same

As when a thief breaks in and steals a thing:
Prometheus in his arrogance destroyed
The subtle blend of rules that manage Earth.
It's too late to undo the changes that
His theft has brought – and will in future bring.
The skill and ingenuity he gave
To mankind makes them now invulnerable.

CHORUS

You're teaching me how privileged I've been,
The daughter of a wealthy man of Thebes
A city blessed with flocks and fertile soil.
But gifts that only blessed a few of us.
You've shown the harm Prometheus has done.
It's true the ordinary folk live lives
Not much improved from that sad brutish state
That Zeus observed when he began his reign,
And wanted them replaced to start again.
I pity now the slaves who labour in
My father's fields to make him rich and fat!
Then should we recognise that all the gifts
Prometheus bestowed on us were bad?

GE

Not all – even if some were used in ways
Prometheus himself did not foresee!
My son gave mortals, though, a special gift,
That benefits them even more than fire.

CHORUS

Better than fire? How? I don't understand!

GE

He gave them Hope, a gift that helps mankind
Go on though all around seem dark. They won't

Give up though everything brings misery:
In this they're like Prometheus himself,
Who waits with hope for his deliverer.
And I, today, can give you mortals hope:
I prophecy – and I, Themis, the Earth, alone
Do understand the laws that rule our world –
There'll come a time when Zeus is not the same.
He will have changed...

CHORUS

But is that possible?

GE

The goddess, Metis, Titaness, his teacher
Persuades my grandson how his wants must be
Subservient to thought, intelligence;
How Law and Justice rule the universe,
Not tyranny and power, not greed and lust.
Men will not lose their curiosity, their need
To search, explore and question things,
But they will understand what benefits
And what will do them harm. Because they can
Do something thing, does not mean they should.

CHORUS

So shall we lose all progress we have made?

GE

Of course not, dears, that's not the plan at all!
Humans may keep your houses, ships, and roads,
But learn to share the bounty of my Earth
Fairly, and equally and so evolve in time
Your own unique niche that will compensate
You for what Epimetheus could not give.

CHORUS

Thanks, Mother Earth. It has been quite a night!
You've given us a lesson I shall not forget,
The past, the present, future all explained!
Our conversation has held me in thrall -
But surely morning should have come by now?
GE

You've been an eager audience, and I
have found myself revealing much maybe
That I should be reluctant to disclose!
You're right - this night has been too long indeed:
A single night prolonged to feel like three!
And I know why - it is a sign that Zeus
Has been up to his tricks again. A girl
Has had a visit from the king of gods!

CHORUS

Fourth stasimon

Strophe 1

What do we know of Metis?
Mysterious her origins
We do not know her well.
We know the gods because they show themselves -
Or if they are not seen themselves
Their actions tell us they exist
And have the power
To benefit mankind
Or wreak destruction.

Antistrophe 1

Thunder and lightning show us
The nature of almighty Zeus.

Poseidon shakes the Earth
To prove his is the Earthquake's lord. The sun
Rises and sets – the pattern shows
That Helios is at his task..
The clash of iron
Maimed bodies in the dirt
Ares is hard at work.

Strophe 2

But Metis is a mystery
No painter no sculptor has given us
An image to assist us.
Is Metis old, a wizened crone
Or is she young and beautiful?
Is she a wife? Does she have sons
Or daughters? A husband? A lover?

Antistrophe 2

When nothing's known, then myths
Usurp the place of knowledge very soon
So has it been with Metis..
As mankind is in ignorance
Of who she is and what she does
Imagination's been allowed
To flourish, and make up a story:

Strophe 2

“Zeus fell in love with Metis, who,
as passion overpowered them
Found she was pregnant with his child.
A rumor said her son would grow

To be a mightier god than Zeus had been,
More ruthless more cunning, more powerful.

Antistrophe 2

Zeus could not have her killed she was
A Titaness, a goddess!
And here the story turns absurd
He swallowed her, it's said, in hopes
Her disappearance would cause no alarm.
I find this unbelievable: but then there's more.

Some months elapsed and Zeus began
Complaining of ghastly pain, an awful ache
That seemed to set his brain on fire.
The pain grew so intense he ordered Hephaistos
His son, the divine handyman,
To take an axe and split his skull
And so release him from his distress.

Hephaistos stuck a blow, and from
His head a tiny goddess sprang fully armed
With tiny shield and tiny spear.
She grew, just like a butterfly from its cocoon
Into a full-sized goddess, whom
We call Athena, goddess of
Wisdom and all the female arts.

Alcmena comes out of the palace. Ge remains standing in the background.

ALCMENA

This night has been incredible! The best
Night of my life! We said we wouldn't sleep
Together, consummate our love, until

He had avenged my brothers' deaths. My father
Made him promise this, and I agreed.
Last night triumphantly he came back home!
He has defeated all my father's enemies,
And came to claim me as his promised bride.
What glorious tales he told me of the wars,
The bravery, the cunning that he showed!
I'd suffered anguish while he was away,
Imagined he was dead a thousand times,
Hardly dared dream that he'd return to me!
He was more handsome, stronger too, than I
Remembered him to be, and what a night
Of love we shared! I hoped it would not end –
Indeed, it seemed it never would! It was
The best, the most amazing of my life!

ALCMENA *sings*

O it was ecstasy! I wanted more!
Pleasure I never knew before.
I had not grasped what true love means
I was a virgin, though in dreams
As all girls do, I wondered how it would be
To have a man in bed to sleep with me.
One single night with my new man –
Though it seemed more like three nights – can
Erase all memory of loneliness,
And all that worry and uneasiness,
The lonely years I waited, all in vain
The years of longing, misery, and pain –
The furious joy, the things we dared
The wonderful togetherness we shared

Have changed me from a fearful child
Into a woman, confident — and wild!

She dances ecstatically

CHORUS

Alcmena, how we envy you,
I've yet to know what love can do
Your passion makes me wish I could
Know the full joy of womanhood!

But who is this? An old man coming here,
Led by a child, who guides his steps; I know
The seer whose prophecies are always true,
Respected throughout Thebes, Teiresias.

Enter Teiresias, led by a small boy.

TEIRESIAS

Thanks to this child who tells me what my eyes
Cannot discern, I have news to impart.
Amphitryon's wife it is I'm looking for.
Is this Alcmena who I'm speaking to?

ALCMENA *stepping forward*

I am Alcmena. What do you want with me?

TEIRESIAS

Last night my boy as usual guided me
To my seat on the hill where I observe
The flight and cries of birds who bring to me
Prophetic messages that I Teiresias
Alone can understand. As the sun set
I saw a flight of crows, and in their beaks
They carried ears of corn that they had robbed,
All this my young lad told me of, of course,

An eagle swooped and scattered those black crows
He struck them down, first one and then the next
He killed them all, and then it seemed he turned
And headed home as if to celebrate.

ALCMENA

Eagles and crows? What's that to do with me?

TEIRESIAS

Such observations help me see the future
So I may do some good to those in Thebes
Who usually reward me for my pains!
The Teleboans are the slaughtered crows,
Your brothers are the ears of corn they stole,
The eagle is the bird of Zeus; this shows
That Zeus is working with Amphitryon:
The eagle perches still upon his mast.
Amphitryon is coming home today!
His victory is won! He'll soon be here.
My boy tells me his ship moments ago
Came into port. Quite soon he'll come ashore.
How happy you will be to see once more
Your husband, now his duty has been done.

ALCMENA *Trembling with shock and rage, after a pause, she speaks quietly, at first.*

Though I am new to Thebes, a refugee,
Teiresias, I know well who you are!
You are a prophet, the blind man who sees,
Who always tells the truth to Thebes, they say.
Well I do not believe your eagles, crows,
Know anything. My husband is already here.
He came last night and told me details of
His splendid victory, and how my father
Now has been avenged, his wish fulfilled.

No longer is Amphitryon husband
In name alone. We had postponed our bliss:
We lay together from sunset till dawn
Rejoicing in the wondrous gifts of love!
Be off, Tiresias, your prophecies
Are wicked lies. I won't hear any more! *She collapses, weeping uncontrollably*

TEIRESIAS

As many Thebans have learned to their cost
And many more, I say, have yet to learn,
I do not lie. My words are never false!
I go. Boy, take me home. But you will learn
Today, that what I've told you is the truth.

Exit Teiresias.

CHORUS, *as Alcmena lies squirming on the ground*

We weep with you, Alcmena, so distraught,
Poor thing! Her dreams have turned to dust,
She is all tears. She's inconsolable. *Ge moves to comfort Alcmena*

GE *tenderly*

My poor Alcmena, he is right. Noble
Amphitryon is disembarking now.
Your husband was last night on board his ship.
I fear you've been deceived. Your visitor
Was not Amphitryon, but Zeus. You are
Simply the latest in the long parade
Of women mortal and immortal whom
He's bedded in disguise. A swan he was
When he charmed Leda, and seduced her, he
Becomes an ant, a pigeon, cuckoo – anything
To worm himself into a mortal woman's bed.

ALCMENA

Dear Earth, you know the truth of everything.

My trembling heart refused to trust Teiresias,
Though I could feel inside that he was right.
Does it console me that my visitor was Zeus?
To have betrayed my husband must be wrong!
How easily I was deceived. No one
Can hope to outwit Zeus. And now
I feel so stupid and so angry still.
How can I now receive Amphytryon?
How can a man compete with mighty Zeus?
It will be hard to seem as full of love
Tonight as last night, he won't understand!
GE

A woman sometimes has to make a show
To reassure her husband all is well!
But what's important, dear Alcmene, is this:
You are already pregnant with a son
Of Zeus, but do not tell Amphytryon.
Neither the boy, to whom you'll give the name
Of Herakles, nor his brother— who'll be
Your husband's child —must know the truth.
Amphytryon must believe both sons are his.
Right from his birth your elder son will be
A target: that's because through jealousy
Hera will try and try again to have him killed.
A night of love with Zeus brings two-fold pain
You've been deceived, and Hera then will vent
Her jealous rage on you relentlessly.

ALCMENA

You frighten me. What will she do to him?

GE

Before he's born, she cheats him of his rights:

Prolongs your labour so the eldest born
That day will be his cousin who thereby
Will claim the throne of Argos for himself,
And rob your son of his inheritance.
And then when he is still a tiny babe
She'll have snakes hidden in his cradle, but
He'll deal with them! He shows amazing strength.
Which year on year increases mightily.
As he grows up, matures, becomes a man,
His courage, too, will be unparalleled.
Of all his generation he'll be best,
At wrestling, archery, all manly skills.
He wins a wife, and fathers several sons.
Then tragedy, again through Hera, strikes.

ALCMENA

She manages at last to get him killed?
O that would be too much for me to bear!
GE

Far worse, I fear. She makes him go insane.
In his mad state he kills the sons he loved,
Then throws himself upon the mercy of
The gods. His punishment: to be a slave
To Eurystheus, his cousin, who's usurped
His rightful place, through Hera's trick, as king
Of Argos, and perform what dangerous
Labours the tyrant should require of him.
The cruel Eurystheus has in mind to choose
Such tasks he hopes will prove impossible,
So Heracles will die performing them.

ALCMENA

Intolerable pain and worry you

Forecast for me. How can my son survive?

CHORUS

What are the tasks her son will carry out?

Please tell us all the details that you know!

To know his pain will help Alcmena, too.

Forewarned, the poor girl will be spared

Not knowing, but imagining the worst.

GE

I feel I've told you quite enough, but if

Alcmena is willing to hear the rest

I'll gladly tell what is in store for him,

ALCMENA

I've suffered agonies from what's been told

So far. I don't wish to torment myself

With further horrors. Please just tell me this:

Is there a purpose to his suffering?

Just how much pain will Zeus allow his son

To undergo? Can't he prevent the endless

Spite that Hera will devise to hurt our son?

GE

To understand you have heard from me

The reasons Zeus has sent a son of his

To suffer so much agony. You must

Believe me when I say Almighty Zeus,

Once all his many Labours are complete,

Intends a glorious future for your son.

ALCMENA

In that case I should like to be informed

Of all he'll go through. Pain that ends in joy

Is worth the suffering and can be borne,

As women bear the pains of giving birth.

If it is true my son will be a hero,
Achieving feats beyond a normal man,
Please tell me, so it may be easier
To face a mother's worry for her child.

CHORUS

Your courage is an inspiration to
Young girls like us, unmarried, who are yet
To know the pain and stress of motherhood.

GE

My Titan children, though overthrown by Zeus
Left vicious offspring, who endanger life.
The first that he'll be forced to fight against -
A monstrous lion - a terror to Nemea.
Its hide cannot be pierced by arrows or
By spears: your son will throttle it, and strip
Its skin off with the beast's own claw. From this
Your son will make a cloak to wear, and give
Himself a shield to withstand swords and spears.
Eurystheus, angry that your son survives
Will hide away in fear of his return.
But Herakles, your son, is still his slave,
And soon his second task's allotted him.
The Hydra, a huge water snake, equipped
With nine heads baring fangs, haunts Lerna's swamps.
Each time he lops one off, no easy task,
Two more grow in its place. He finds a friend,
To help him Iolaus, his brother's son,
Who sets the woods ablaze, takes glowing brands
And seals the gaping necks with fire, to stop
Regrowth, until his uncle's cut all nine.

ALCMENA

But Herakles — how strange it seems to use
His name before he's even born — what next
Will the tyrant think up to punish him?

GE

There lives in forests near Kerynea
A hind with golden horns, which he must catch
And bring to Argos still alive. He can't
Kill it or wound it as, it is sacred,
The joy of Artemis, who after he
Has stalked it for a year, allows your son
To capture it, rewarding his patience.

ALCMENA

That will annoy Eurystheus, I am sure!
It's good that Artemis is on his side.
But then a fourth task is assigned to him?

GE

Before he'll reach the mountains where a boar,
A monstrous boar lays waste the countryside -
His task: catch it alive and bring it back -

CHORUS

Does Herakles ensnare the hateful boar?

GE

he does! But his next labour faces him:
Your son agrees to clean the dung-filled stalls
Of Augeas's hundred herds of cows,
All in a day. He'll do it for a share
In those fine cows. A river he diverts
To wash away the dung of ages, and
Though Augeas will try to cheat your son,
He'll win his hard-earned prize. Your son,
I'm sad to say has much more pain to face.

ALCMENA

As Herakles's mother I am doomed
To suffer for him twice: as now I listen,
And then once more, again, in years to come .
Not that I do not wish to know the full
Extent of what his sufferings will mean.

GE

Strangely, his next task proves an easy one.
At Stymphalos, there is a plague of birds,
Who've found a taste for human flesh. Your son
Will scare them into flight, with clashing bronze,
And with his arrows shoot them down. Then next
The tyrant orders him to go to Crete
To fetch a bull, ejected from its herd:
It's fierce, but Herakles will capture it
And take it back to Argos for the king.

CHORUS

His mission is to help mankind, it seems,
Eliminating monsters from the earth!

GE

Yes, that will a benefit your son will bring
To mortals, though not part of Hera's plan!
And next he's forced to go to Thrace, whose king,
Diomedes, feeds unsuspecting passers-by
To his man-eating horses. Herakles
Will feed the evil tyrant to his mares,
And bring them back to Argos for the king.

ALCMENA

Let's hope that they'll devour Eurystheus!

GE

Unfortunately not: he'll turn them loose.

They'll terrorise Olympus till they're killed
By wolves upon that mountainside.
What's next? You'll find this very hard to take!
Eurystheus will have a daughter Admete.
Whose whims he won't be able to resist.
She says she wants the belt Hippolyta,
Queen of the Amazons, who hate all men,
Possesses – Ares her father, war-god,
Once gave it as a gift to her, it's said.

ALCMENA

Disgraceful task this, surely, asked to steal
A belt! A woman's cherished property!

GE

Poor Herakles cannot object. But when
She meets your son she offers him the belt,
Quite freely, as a gift. But this Hera
Will not allow. The goddess turns herself
Into an Amazon, and whips up hate
Against your son, "He's trying to snatch our queen",
She shouts, and soon a hostile crowd surrounds him,
Threatening his life. Assuming it's a plot,
That Hippolyta's offer was a trap,
He kills her, takes her belt, and sails away.

CHORUS

So once again he's tricked by Hera to
Perform a shameful deed. But Eurystheus
Could gratify his daughter's greed, at least.

GE

There still remain three Labours to perform:
The next will take your son far to the west.
There monsters still survive, the last of those

Most loathsome creatures who the Titans spawned.
The triple-bodied Geryon — six arms, three heads —
Whose voice is louder than a thousand men —
Owns herds of oxen. Two repulsive guards
Look over them, Eurytion and his dog
Orthos, a sibling of the Hydra and
The Lion of Nemea, and of Kerberos,
Three-headed hound that guards the underworld.
Herakles kills the oxherd and his dog,
Then drives the cattle to his boats. Alas!
Geryon will catch him as he sails away
But Herakles's bow will prove a match for him.

ALCMENA

I make that ten tasks that my son's performed.
Is it not time for him to rest, and then to claim
His rightful place as Argos' king, being
Amphitryon's son - and heir - at last?

GE

This should have been Herakles' final task,
But there'll be two Eurystheus would not count.
And so a further task is set: one thought impossible.
I gave to Hera when she married Zeus —
How full of hope I must have been— a gift:
A golden tree, that brought forth golden fruit.
This tree she planted far way, in the garden of,
Atlas's daughters, the Hesperides,
And had it guarded by a hideous snake.
Your son's task is to fetch this golden fruit.

CHORUS

To kill a dragon and to steal some fruit?
That does not sound too onerous for him!

He's dealt with snakes and monsters many times!

GE

It sounds a simple task and should have been.

Yet on his journey to this distant land

He'll be beset by more of Hera's tricks

Until he finds a mighty mountain range

Blocking his path, the fearsome Caucasus.

Where he will see a sight that moves to tears

Even the world's most hardened warrior,

Even the hero, Herakles, your son.

ALCMENA

O when will all his suffering end? And mine?

ATHENA suddenly appears on the roof of the house, in a blaze of light. The mortals cower, as Ge stands her ground. She recognises her grand-daughter.

ATHENA

Great-grandmother, I warn you not to say

Too much. I know that women who've grown old

Do love to gossip and enthrall the young

With tales of gods and heroes – stories set

In ages past or in times yet to come.

Mere tittle-tattle though so many are!

But as the great-grandmother of the gods

You know too many secrets! So I've come

To urge restraint. You were exciting your

Young audience with stories of a man

Who's not yet even born! No need to cause

His mother so much grief today, since she

Will have a life-time to lament his fate.

GE

Welcome Athena, Metis' child. If you've

Been sent as messenger by Father Zeus
And not Hermes, that irritating boy,
The message must be serious indeed.
Apologies to Zeus if I let slip
Some information not to be disclosed.
I get myself caught up too far, I can't
Remember I'm a goddess all the time!
I am a mother and grandmother too.
The Earth is my responsibility,
I hate the way my son has treated it.
Prometheus showed he had no care for Earth,
Beyond the nurture of his darling Man.
I did allow myself to tell them things
They have no need to know. I gave my word
To dear Alcmena, though, that Herakles
Her son would triumph in the end.
May I at least comfort the girl with how
His story's end will be most glorious?
So she'll be reassured, better to stand the pain

ATHENA

We may relieve her of anxiety
About her son – she must know he'll be safe
At last after his Labours are complete.
Alcmena, come, and learn the rest from me.

ALCMENA

Tell me the truth if I'm allowed to know.

ATHENA

Your son completes his Labours, twelve in all.
And then continues to perform more feats,
More feats than any man who ever lived.

ALCMENA

My son will suffer more than any man:
But I can now be brave, because I know
His life will bring him glory and much fame.

ATHENA

I want to free your mind from fear, my dear.
You shall have your revenge on vile Eurystheus,
Who cheated Herakles of kingship, and
Then forced him into years of servitude.
You'll have a long and happy life beside
Amphitryon, who will think Herakles his son,
And swell with pride at his accomplishments.
He'll die a hero's death in battle, fighting
Alongside Herakles, father and son.
But there's more happiness to come for you:
You'll find love with another gentle man,
In Rhadamanthus, son Europa bore
For Zeus, the fairest man who ever lived.

ALCMENA

I'll try to think of happy times to come,
So worry for the fate of Herakles
May never crush my spirit, or my hope.
I'm strong enough to face my Fate:
My husband's home. Amphitryon, at last!

Exit Alcmena

ATHENA

Accept your fate! Be brave, my love. You'll be
The mother of the greatest of mankind.
But I must now go to Olympus, where
My father Zeus needs my advice. Metis
Has for a long time now been by his side,
His closest confidante. He won't decide

On anything he's not discussed with her.
And I need to be there to back her up:
It needs two women to convince one man!
Your great grand-daughter has stood by,
Assisting Metis in this vital task:
To civilise the king of gods and men!
She disappears

CHORUS

Prometheus' agony to us seems hard to bear
But to a god who cannot die, ten thousand years
Of pain could seem a fleeting moment, nothing more.

GE

Prometheus' pain is caused by rage,
Frustration at his loss of influence,
Humiliation at his punishment.

CHORUS

We are the children of Prometheus' race
Feeble and unprepossessing we were once
Mere creatures of a day, destined to be replaced.

GE

Prometheus saved mankind because he knew
How much his theft of Fire would anger Zeus,
A sweet revenge for slighting him.

CHORUS

How badly he misjudged the power of Zeus.
There comes a time when cunning yields to force.
Though Zeus could not destroy the human race!

GE

But just as humans' mastery of Fire
Made them significant, and confident enough

To try to change the Earth to suit their needs ...

CHORUS

So Zeus is now preparing to bestow
On them another gift, that may divert
Their selfish spoliation of the Earth ...

GE

When Zeus no longer rules through *Force* and *Violence*
He'll reign with Metis by his side, and demonstrate
What fairness and intelligence can do.

CHORUS

And so persuade Prometheus to accept
A second benefit to help his favoured race:
The gift Athena and Metis devise.

GE

I know my son will welcome this
Improvement to his human race. And so release
The secret that will keep Zeus on his throne.

CHORUS

But how could Prometheus agree to save
The rule of Zeus while he is hanging there in chains
Tormented, as you told us by, that dreadful bird?

GE

You'll find today's events in Thebes
Will hasten the fulfilment of events long prophesied.
Since Io yielded to the touch of Zeus ..

CHORUS

Her dynasty, you told us moved from Egypt
Back to Argos, where Elektryon was king,
The father of Alcmena, she who came to Thebes ..

GE

To bear a son, who will be skilful with the bow...

Zeus will reveal his plan for Justice soon
Then mortals will begin a new and glorious age!

CHORUS

Prometheus gave two gifts to us:
First Fire and with it ingenuity
To help us dominate the Earth.
Then Hope, so the most wretched of
Our race could bear a life of pain.
We did not see how by our lust
To rule the world we were in fact
Disrupting and destroying it.
Poor mother Earth, you've suffered rape
From Ouranos who forced you to
Give birth to monsters, and now too
From selfish creatures Prometheus unleashed.
For Zeus, Earth was a playground, pleasure-world
Where he could entertain himself
With random acts of cruelty
And satisfy his sexual needs
By bizarre copulations with
A hapless string of human girls.
We wait to see the new King of
The Gods – reformed, revitalised,
Re-educated through the power
Of Metis, who is giving him
The skill to judge based on intelligence,
And careful thought, not rage or wilfulness.
He must repair his quarrel with
Prometheus, who too must learn
To welcome changes to the Earth
The common ancestor of both of them.

#AMW Marshfield 27 March 20

