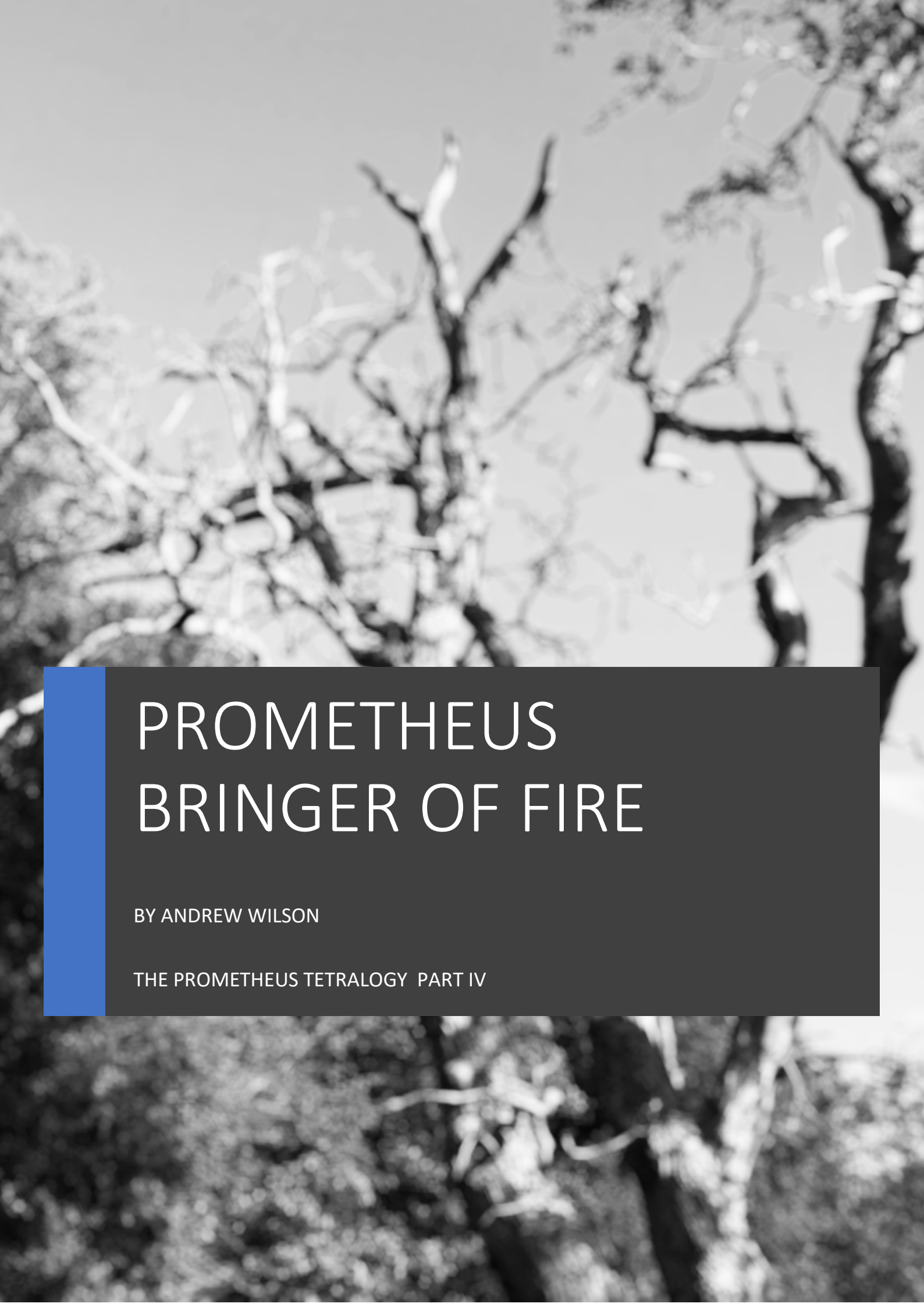




PROMETHEUS BRINGER OF FIRE

BY ANDREW WILSON

THE PROMETHEUS TETRALOGY PART IV

For JULIET

PROMETHEIA

THE PROMETHEUS TETRALOGY

PART IV

PROMETHEUS PYRPHOROS

(Prometheus, Bringer of Fire)

Prometheus Pyrphoros, known only from its title and a couple of dubious fragments, was assumed to be one of the plays making up a tetralogy, once ascribed to Aeschylus, which contained two known tragedies, P Desmotes and P Luomenos. The order of plays in this possible tetralogy is unknown – although Desmotes has to precede Luomenos. P Pyrphorus has variously been cast as the first play, the third play and the 4th play! My take on the Prometheia has Pyrphoros as the satyr-play. There is no evidence for this! (And no evidence that it wasn't, either). My imagined plot owes much to a myth about Hephaistos' return to Olympos, known from vase painting, but no literary source. Like all known Aeschylean satyr-plays, it concerns an incident that preceded the conclusion of the trilogy – thus not “interfering” with the overall dramatic purpose of the three tragedies.

CHARACTERS

KEDARION, Hephaistos's loyal and beefy assistant.

HEPHAISTOS, son of Zeus and Hera. God of Fire and handyman to the gods.

CHORUS of Humans. A pitiful species with no obvious reason for existence.

EPIMETHEUS, a Titan, son of Kronos and Themis

PROMETHEUS, his twin brother, sometime creator of the human race.

DIONYSUS, a young god, son of Zeus. Discoverer of the grape.

CHORUS of Satyrs, fun-loving alcohol addicts

SILENUS, their father

Several humans, of whom one might be DEUKALION, the first man.

POWER, an agent of Zeus

VIOLENCE, his partner.

SCENE

Interior of Hephaistos' forge on the island of Lemnos, and the surrounding area.
Beyond the clearing where the forge stands is dense woodland.

KEDARION

That's that one finished, master, what's the next?

HEPHAISTOS

Poseidon's trident. One of its prongs is bent.

KEDARION

Again! A fight with brother Zeus I guess?

HEPHAISTOS

Not this time, no, He struck the earth too hard...

KEDARION

So not a minor earthquake this time round!

HEPHAISTOS

Do you think it's hot enough yet to begin?

KEDARION

It's glowing red, I'll take it off the fire

HEPHAISTOS

Quick! On the anvil! Now, before it cools!

They swing their hammers alternately, beating the huge trident prong into shape. Ear-splitting noise..

KEDARION

That's done. And so am I! Let's have a break.

HEPHAISTOS

We can't; there's masses more we have to do!

KEDARION

Nothing that's urgent. Gods can wait. I'm whacked.

HEPHAISTOS

Tell that to Helios! Tomorrow's sun ...

KEDARION

..."won't rise all by itself!" His chariot?

HEPHAISTOS

Pranged it again. The axle's bent beyond repair.

KEDARION

Let's have a look. This wheel's a right-off too.

HEPHAISTOS

He should have kept his eyes more on the road...

KEDARION

And less on Rosy Dawn. He'll never learn.

As they expertly dismantle the chariot and replace the damaged parts...

HEPHAISTOS

I am a god, would you believe. The son

Of Zeus, no less, and Hera – Hephaistos.

My parents loathed me from the moment they

First saw me in my baby cot. The gods

Are all supposed to be perfect, to have

No blemishes, no weaknesses. But I

Was different. Not what they required:

An ugly hunchback with a crippled foot.

As I grew up they gave me dirty jobs,

No lyre, no rainbow, no footwear with wings,

No, it was "See that soot, son? There's your job!

Sweep the chimneys, clean the grate, make sure

Our precious fire is always kept alight!"

They made me labour like a slave! I suffered

Heat, grime and filth, a never-ending shift.

I cannot sweat: that is because I am

A god – we don't. My body still aches though.

I am the only god who has to work!

"Where are my thunderbolts!" "My bow is bent!"

"Oh dear, my lyre has got a broken string."

And every evening, desperate for rest

They made me wait at table for them at

Their endless feasts. I had to hobble round

Trying to keep their goblets filled as they

Shouted abuse, and roared with cruel laughter
Each time I slipped, or spilled a wretched drop.

KEDARION

They made a laughing-stock of you all right!

HEPHAISTOS

Correct. But as I worked for them my hands
Acquired a growing repertoire of skills.
Not only metalwork, but carpentry,
And engineering, making things that moved.
The gods enjoyed humiliating me
They mocked my bandy legs, and sneered
At me for working with my hands, although
There was nobody else to make the things
They wanted, or repair them when they broke.

KEDARION

But you got your revenge! Tell us the tale.

HEPHAISTOS

They thought it would be funny if they wed
Me to the goddess Aphrodite, whose
Outstanding beauty would ensure that I
Seen next to her would look ridiculous,
It was a marriage just for show, for laughs.
She never slept with me but took her pick
Of all Olympus' macho studs. Ares.
The god of war, became her favourite.

KEDARION

Go on now! Tell us what you did to them!

HEPHAISTOS

You've heard it all before, but every time
It gives me pleasure to go over it!
I made a super-cunning net which I

Concealed above the bed we never shared.
I told her that I had to go away –
To mend somebody's cart, (not that she took
The slightest interest in my work) – and then,
When she and lover boy were on the job,
I pulled a string and there they were, entwined
Like serpents in a passionate embrace.
I called out to the gods to come and see –
They laughed so much they would have wet themselves –
Had they been mortals! They enjoyed my prank
But soon went back to treating me the same
As they had always done. The cripple jokes,
The nightly torment of the dinner Hell.

KEDARION

But then you planned an even better jape,
To get your own back on those uncouth gods.

HEPHAISTOS

I had a plan to make my mother look
A fool in front of them. She'd never stopped
Insulting me, humiliating me
Since I was born. Time now to pay her back!
Pretending I forgave her for the things
She'd said, I made a brand-new throne for her.
All gold, with silken padding for the arms
And seat, a matching stool to rest her feet.
She loved it at first sight, and couldn't wait
To show off, smirking on her throne, truly
The radiant queen of heaven. But when she
Tried to get up again, she could not move!
As if by magic, clamps now held her wrists,
The trim "white arms" she always boasted of,

The shapely ankles, and the slender waist.
It wasn't magic, it was me. Her bottom
Touching the cushion triggered a device
Which activated the restraints. The gods
All tried to set her free. No chance of that!
She screamed and bawled all through the night, abusing
The wretched gods who came to help, with words –
Such language! -- goddesses are not supposed
To even know. They all knew it was me,
Of course, and Zeus summoned a gang of them
To hunt me down, and make me tell how she
Could be released. Her oaths and protests were
Making Olympus unendurable!
I would not say a word, and so the lads
Apollo, Hermes, old Poseidon too,
Grabbed hold of me and chucked me out! I fell –
For hours – to earth, and landed here,
An island local humans call “Lemnos”.
The fall did not affect me physically
A cripple like myself is used to pain.
To show I've no hard feelings, then, I've set
My workshop up, I said I'll work for them,
But Hera stays just where she is until
Zeus recognises my demands in full.
I'm starting for the first time in my life
To know Just how it feels to be a god!

Oh well! So back to work. No time to rest!

Hephaistos and Kedarion close the door. Sounds of metalworking continue, as smoke continues to curl from under the door. Enter a filthy, naked, starving band of Humans

CHORUS

What is that funny smell I smell
I never smelled before?
And what is this like frosty breath
That curls beneath the door?

There is a noise like roaring wind
Or twigs trod under foot.
It feels like summer's inside there
It's warmth is leaking out!

I'm peering through a little crack
I see a curious glow
A weird red as if the sun
Is trapped, nowhere to go.

Is it a nest of some strange bird?
The lair of some wild beast?
Something's inside there, that's for sure.
Don't want to be its feast

Let's keep well clear. If it comes out
It's sure to think we're food
It won't be friendly, that's for sure
*/shouted/*Nothing is.

We are wretched hapless creatures
Living lives of pain from birth
We are humans, lowest life-form
Homeless vagrants on the earth.

Naked, helpless, humans wander
Jumpy, fearful, full of cares
Lions, tigers, wolves and panthers
Eagles, elephants and bears

Frighten us and scare us witless,
We have no defence at all.
We can hide or try to scatter
Woe betide us if we fall —

When they catch us we get eaten,
We're the snack they love to munch
We are few and they are many
They're the hunters, we are lunch.

Animals have food aplenty
Eating us and other beasts.
We make do with roots and acorns,
For our drab and joyless feasts.

They have dens and nests in treetops,
Where it's safe to spend the night.
We lie down, but can't risk sleeping
Case a leopard needs a bite.

What's the point of our existence —
We seem useless there's no doubt —
Mere survival, or some purpose
We're too stupid to work out?

All we know is death awaits us,

And we count it as a boon.
Every human knows what's coming —
If we're lucky it comes soon.

There's some of us who'll die tomorrow,
Other have to wait their turn
But long or short our lives are pointless:
That's a lesson we all learn.

We're not part of Nature's purpose.
We were put here by a god —
For his personal amusement
He knocked us up out of mud.

Prometheus was our creator,
Moulded us from dust and clay
It's Prometheus' fault we suffer
Every hour of every day.

Every creature, every mammal
Every bird and every flea
Has a place on earth to live in
And a skill – save only me.

This was Epimetheus' duty,
To be fair, that was the plan.
He gave homes and useful weapons
To all animals – but Man.

Enter Prometheus and Epimetheus. The humans scatter.

EPIMETHEUS

Were those some of your humans who ran off?

PROMETHEUS

Indeed they were. And what a mess they looked!

EPIMETHEUS

Zeus has in mind to annihilate the lot.

PROMETHEUS

Zeus? Zeus! How dare you speak his name!

EPIMETHEUS

Forgot! I'm sorry. What a fool I am.

PROMETHEUS

When I created them it was for fun...

EPIMETHEUS

For you maybe – but not for those poor sods!

PROMETHEUS

I wish I could improve their lives somehow ...

EPIMETHEUS

For what? They're useless. There's no hope for them!

PROMETHEUS *after a pause*

You have just given me a great idea.

EPIMETHEUS

Another cunning scheme of yours? Spare us!

PROMETHEUS

They're "hopeless"! That's the thing! I'll give

Them Hope. Hope will transform their lives!

No longer will they creep around, knowing

The moment of their death. They won't know what

Is lurking round the bend. They will believe

It could be something truly marvellous –

A treasure trove of acorns! Nuts for life!

They'll realise that life's a lottery

That they could win! Henceforth they'll thrive on Hope!

EPIMETHEUS

Noy even I would fall for that, they're
Not as stupid as you think, Prometheus!

PROMETHEUS

Brother, you may, this once, be right. We'll see!

But Zeus. How can I punish Zeus? I need

A cunning plan to make him mad with rage.

EPIMETHEUS

I thought we weren't supposed to talk of him?

PROMETHEUS

I seethe with anger when I think of Zeus!

Smug on his throne with all the gods

Competing to suck up to him, whilst I

Who put him where he is, who sat beside him

Guiding his every move so he could oust

His father Kronos and his motley crew

From power, am side-lined, sacked, dismissed,

Despised, ignored, forgotten, shat upon.

EPIMETHEUS *after a slight pause*

What is that hut across the way? I see

Smoke rising. Hark! The sounds of metalwork!

PROMETHEUS

Go closer. Maybe there will be a chink

Or crack for you to peer through and find out

Who's there and what is going on inside.

EPIMETHEUS *creeping up to the hut*

I see a blazing furnace, leaping flames.

There's fire inside! I wonder what that means?

PROMETHEUS

No creature on this earth has use of fire,

The gods monopolise this element!
The magic, supernatural brilliance
Of fire! And of the gods there's only one
Who is allowed to handle it, whose job
It is to guard the flame, lest it by chance
Could fall into a hand not authorised!

EPIMETHEUS

You mean Hephaistos? What's he doing here
On earth? And yes, I see him through the smoke,
It's him, the god of Fire, and hard at work –
Hobbling around, and there's his massive chum:
About to do some hammering! Watch out!

Deafening noise of hammering.

PROMETHEUS

The noise! The smell! Let's move away a bit.

Pause

Idea!

Pause

I think I've got a cunning plan
To get revenge on Zeus for slighting me!
What is the secret of Zeus' hold on power?

EPIMETHEUS

He's brainier than all the other gods?

PROMETHEUS

He's certainly not brainier than me!
Think harder, try again, surely
Even a half-wit, like yourself can see!

EPIMETHEUS

Idea! A "flash" of inspiration! I know!
Zeus keeps us quiet with his thunderbolts!

PROMETHEUS

And what's the secret of his thunderbolts?

Who manufactures them and how?

What are they made of? Do you know?

EPIMETHEUS

His thunderbolts are made by Cyclopes

Inside a magic mountain far away

Of magic stuff, a secret process known

To Zeus' one-eyed workmen, only them.

PROMETHEUS

I showed Zeus how to make his thunderbolts!

His deadly weapon. It was *I* told him

What substances to use, and how he must

Ensure no rival god ever found out.

To make a thunderbolt is easy once

You know the elements required. Just two.

Iron and fire. Iron and Fire! If only there

Was somewhere we could source them from,

And find a craftsman with the skills to make

Us thunderbolts that we could use against...

EPIMETHEUS *impatiently interrupting*

Idea! A brilliant one! Why don't

We raid Hephaistos' hut and force him to

Make thunderbolts that we could use against...

PROMETHEUS

Epimetheus you are a genius!

Why they all call you stupid I don't know.

A problem, though. He's lame, but tough and strong,

And never sleeps. And that Kedarion

Who works with him! He's huge! Built like

A shithouse made of brick, as people say.

A few humans have crept near and are eavesdropping.

EPIMETHEUS

Idea! Another brilliant one! Why not
Use cunning, and not force, just like when you
Outsmarted all the Titans way back then?

PROMETHEUS

You're right. We need a cunning plan! That's it!
Have you got any cunning plan in mind?

EPIMETHEUS

I'm not a fool, what do you take me for?
My cunning plan's to have a cunning plan.

PROMETHEUS *sighs*

I need to think. Let's sit beneath those trees...
Don't talk! ...I need a plan, a cunning one...

Prometheus and Epimetheus retire. The mortals tentatively come out of hiding.

CHORUS

Did you recognise Prometheus?
How can he dare show his face?
All the harm he's done to mortals!
Why create the human race?

You'd have thought that he would have shown more
Interest in the creatures he
Just created and abandoned
To their hopeless misery.

What was it they spoke about? I
Did not understand their drift.
Words like "fire" and "iron" and "shithouse".
But what was all that talk of "gift"?

Hope is what he says he'll give us
I would rather have some food;
Place to live in, place to sleep in,
That might really be some good

What is hope then? Can you eat it?
If you can't I think I'll pass!
If it doesn't keep the cold out
You can stick it up your arse.

A sudden commotion. Noise of drums, flutes, cymbals.

What is all this noise and rumpus?
Watch out, humans, watch your backs
Something evil is approaching
Something that sees us as snacks.

As the mortals make themselves scarce once more, enter a party of rowdy satyrs, accompanying the god Dionysus.

DIONYSUS

Well here we are. I've got here. Thanks!
I'm Dionysus, god of wine, but lowest
In the pecking order of the gods. I've come –
I volunteered – to bring Hephaistos home.
Apparently the queen of heaven is
Displeased, and showing it. Her tantrums have
Gone on for weeks, since she sat on her throne
And found herself trapped there with clamps
That were invisible and that no god
Could break. I gave an inward cheer: Hera
Has always hated me: she had my mother

Fried to a crisp for having me, although
I'm Zeus's son, all right? The gods, before
They'd really thought it through, expelled Hephaistos,
They threw him out of heaven, workshop, tools
And all, because he wanted to piss off the gods
By leaving Hera screaming night and day.
But now they realise they need him back,
To free the wife of Zeus, and get
Some peace and quiet once more. They tried
Already, sending Ares, god of war
Assuming he'd intimidate the guy
And terrorise him into coming back.
That did not go so well. So I, in hopes
Of getting some respect from Zeus, said I
Would bring him home! I'd get him drunk and then
I'd lead him back to them triumphantly;
I drew a picture - of Hephaistos, wrecked,
Riding a donkey - too wasted to walk -
Back in Olympus to your rousing cheers
To find a lovely bride awaiting him.
"Go, do it!" was the message from the gods.
I've brought a good supply of wine along -
Unfortunately all these satyrs got
A whiff and have been stealing loads of it.
There's quite a party going on - and now
Do I see humans shyly creeping out
To join the fun? The satyrs won't be mean -
There's plenty here for everyone. Although
I don't think humans will have previously
Had opportunities to taste my stuff!
It will be interesting to observe

What humans make of this experience!

Humans and satyrs mingle as humans are introduced to alcohol. Much joy. Dionysus approaches Hephaistos' workshop, from which noise and smoke still issue. As he calls out, the door opens, and smoke billows out to reveal Hephaistos and his hefty workman. Kedarion comes to the door.

KEDARION

There's people at the door, boss. What to do?

HEPHAISTOS *within*

Don't let them in! Get rid of them. */shouts/*Get lost!

KEDARION

You heard my master's words. So bugger off!

There's nothing here, nothing for you to see.

Just simple workmen working at their work.

DIONYSUS

Please let me in, Hephaistos, I'm a friend.

HEPHAISTOS

How come you know my name? Are you from Zeus?

DIONYSUS

Of course not, though I am a god, a god

Who hates him just as much as you. A friend!

HEPHAISTOS

I do not recognise you. What's your name?

DIONYSUS

I'm Dionysus, son of Zeus, I'm new.

The gods are loath to see I'm one of them,

And that is why I offered to return

To Earth where I was born and raised

To help a fellow-victim, suffering

Exclusion from Olympus' private club.

HEPHAISTOS

You don't fool me, you "son of Zeus"!

I'm Zeus's son, how come I've never heard

Of you? I know the lot them, the ones
Who sneer and jeer, as I limp round to keep
Their goblets topped up every bloody night.

DIONYSUS

I've never been invited to those nightly dos
I haven't even visited Olympus yet!
I'm young, I'm new, I've spent my time on Earth
Discovering and testing out the properties
Of an invention which will change the world!
A plant to revolutionise our lives!

KEDARION

A revolutionary plant? My arse!

DIONYSUS

You're just like all the other gods, frightened
Of anything that's modern, new, that's why
They told me "Nectar is all right. Nectar
Is what we've always drunk. Nothing could be
As good as Nectar. We'll have Nectar, thanks."

HEPHAISTOS

So your invention is a drink? You've got
Me interested now. When I've been stood
All day roasting before a smoky forge
A cup of Nectar does not hit the spot.
I must admit I've often thought "Is this
The best a god can get to drink?"

DIONYSUS

You hear the noise outside your hut? It's clear
The satyrs and the humans who have tried
My potion are enjoying it. So will you try
A little drop? If you don't like the taste

I won't mind if you spit it out! Can I

Come in and join you by the fire?

HEPHAISTOS

Dear Dionysus, welcome to my shack!

Let's try some of your potion. There's no need

To waste it with libations to the "king of gods":

Just pour some out and let us get stuck in!

Dionysus enters the hut. Kedarion closes the door behind them. The satyrs and mortals are fraternising. Epimetheus is seen lurking and observing.

SATYRS

Welcome, humans, join our dancing!

Dionysus leads the line.

We were first to taste his bounty,

Product of the fruitful vine.

HUMANS

Such strange creatures! Just who are you?

Funny ears and hairy rumps

You have hoofs and tails like horses

Not like us poor naked chumps.

SATYRS

We're not human, we're immortal,

Though you'd hardly call us gods.

We are Dionysus' Satyrs

We drink every time he nods.

HUMANS

But that stuff that you are drinking,

Can I try some, just a sip?

We drink nothing else but water:

Only water's passed my lips.

SATYRS

Of course! Our drink's not just for Satyrs!

It's for everyone to share!

Have a cupful, have a skinful

Drink as deeply as you dare.

HUMANS

Just a little sip to start with

Ooo! it's nice! You are so right

Ooo! it makes my tummy tingle,

And my head feels strangely light.

SATYRS

That's the reason why we drink it

And why everybody should.

Soon you will feel liberated

All your cares begone for good!

HUMANS

This is wondrous. This is special!

I have never felt like this.

My legs it seems want to start dancing.

First I need to have a piss.

Some of the satyrs are now beating drums or tambourines, and a flute starts to play

SATYRS

Feel the rhythm, don't hold back now

Give in to the music's beat.

Don't stop drinking. All together

Let the wine inspire your feet.

HUMANS

Yeah, I feel it, can't control it

Drums are beating in my brain

I am feeling quite unusual,

Just can't wait to drink again!

SATYRS

Keep on drinking! Taste the freedom!

O how happy you must be!

All your misery forgotten

In the frenzied ecstasy.

HUMANS

It's exciting, it's amazing

I've an urge to prance and leap.

But my legs are feeling weary

First I must lie down and sleep.

SATYRS

Go to sleep then, gentle humans

We'll be gone when you awake

We must go with Dionysus –

Afraid your heads may ache a bit!

The hut door opens, and Dionysus emerges, supporting a very drunk Hephaistos. Kedarion appears with a donkey, onto which they manoeuvre Hephaistos, with considerable difficulty. They may need to strap him in place. All the while, the Satyrs “assist” – and eventually, the procession moves off, Dionysus leading – and the Satyrs bringing up the rear. Epimetheus slips away during the excitement.

SILENUS, or chief Satyr

And so with raucous songs and beating drums

Our god performs his self-appointed task.

Hephaistos is now firmly on his way

Back to Olympus, where my master will

Receive due honour for his handiwork.

As for Hephaistos, and his grievances,

Dionysus tells me Hera will apologise!

And all the gods will treat him with respect.

Young Ganymede will serve the nectar at

Their banquets from now on, while Hephaistos

Will sit down with them as an honoured guest —
All this presuming that when he arrives
In heaven he'll have sobered up enough
To free Queen Hera from her tricky throne.
And that's not all – they've got a lovely nymph
Eager and waiting there to be his bride.
Her name is Charis, the most beautiful
Of the Three Graces who are goddesses
Of Beauty, Charm and Youthfulness.
He will forget the wife he had before —
Quite pretty, but she really was a whore.

They move off, as Epimetheus leads his brother amid the sleeping humans.

EPIMETHEUS

So as I told you, they've all gone. The hut
That Hephaistos was working in — is empty!

PROMETHEUS

Hephaistos so it seems will not receive
More punishment for misbehaving thus
Beyond a brief vacation here on earth!
I wonder if he put his furnace out?

EPIMETHEUS *Checking the hut*

Obviously he'd not intentionally
Leave fire for humans to purloin. Fine thing
If these pathetic creatures ever got
Their hands on it, enjoyed its benefits,
The gods' own closely guarded privilege!
Suppose the Fire-god was responsible,
For making possible the theft of Fire!
Imagine Zeus's apoplectic rage,
And what a gruesome punishment he'd get!

PROMETHEUS

Well, is it out or is it still alight?

EPIMETHEUS

It's certainly still warm, and, yes, there is

A feeble glow, and if I blow on it ...

A flame! Careless Hephaistos must have been

Too drunk – unused to Dionysus' brew –

To make sure it was properly put out.

Thank Zeus I looked! I've got some water here....

PROMETHEUS

Don't move! Stay where you are! Do not

Pour water on the blaze! I need

A hollow fennel stalk. A fennel stalk!

EPIMETHEUS

A fennel stalk? What's that? Have you gone mad?

PROMETHEUS *with mounting hysteria*

Quite the reverse. I've never been

As sane as now. I have a cunning plan!

I'll get revenge on Zeus, and at a stroke

Stop the extermination of mankind,

My human race he plans to liquidate.

Thank you! You've given me a way to wipe

The smile off Zeus's face and put a stop

To all the fun and games they're having now.

I'll get Zeus into such a rage! He will

Be sorry that he ever spoke these words:

"As chief of staff you are no more required!"

He'll rue the day he told me I was fired

EPIMETHEUS

You're frightening me! Whatever scheme you have

Just count me out! I won't be fighting Zeus!

PROMETHEUS

Disloyalty once more! My brother too!
You haven't even heard what I intend!

EPIMETHEUS

And I don't want to. It will be, I'm sure
Something appalling which will get us killed
Or would, if we were not immortal gods!

PROMETHEUS

It was your fault my humans failed to get
A niche, a habitat, and weapons they
Could use to stop the wild beasts eating them!
I gave you this one simple task to do,
And you messed up, and catastrophically!

EPIMETHEUS

As boys I always had to do what you
Decided, follow what you planned, and if
I ever questioned you, you said I was
A moron, idiot, a brainless twerp.

PROMETHEUS

And so you were! You never understood
My cunning plans, my dreams to change the world!
If ever I allowed you to take part
You got it wrong. You blundering imbecile!
I'm giving mortals fire, what do you say
To that! With fire they'll rule the Earth, they'll be
A master race, and equals of the gods!

EPIMETHEUS

I don't think Zeus will be too keen on that!
I shall denounce your cunning plan
To Zeus — what do you say to that?

PROMETHEUS

Go to Olympus then. Tell Zeus the lot!
You shameless rat, you traitor, you have wrecked
My cunning plans at every turn. Fuck off!

EPIMETHEUS

I'm off! You can be sure when I tell Mum
You may no longer be the "favourite son".

Epimetheus departs.

PROMETHEUS

And don't come back. I'm better on my own.
Instead of telling you my plans, I'll share
Them with the sky, the winds that skim so fast,
Freshwater streams, you ever-smiling waves.
This is the cunning plan Prometheus,
The Titan, son of Earth, has figured out.
Straight from the smouldering embers in the forge
Hephaistos left behind, I'll snatch a glowing log.
Forget the fennel-stalk — a log will do.
I'll build a fire, and when these mortals wake,
I'll make them gather twigs and branches from
The woods, so it will blaze up mightily.
I shall then say "This fire's my gift to you,
And every wretched mortal on this Earth."
And I'll explain the many benefits
And the advantages that fire will bring;
To help the human race tame animals,
And turn them into slaves who'll carry them
In comfort everywhere. And who'll provide
Luxurious fur-coats to keep them warm,
And milk to drink, and butter, eggs — and cheese.
I'll show them how to cut the forests down
So animals can graze — and give them meat.

The wood the fallen trees supply will
Help them make sharp spears with which
They'll learn to kill the animals, and then
To roast them in the flames. With timber too
They'll conquer water, learning how to build
Boats that will ferry them across the seas.
And they will dig out gold and minerals
Galore from deep within the Earth. From these
They'll fashion swords with which to kill the men
Who steal their crops, and punish those who dare
To challenge their authority. They'll learn
To read, to write, to calculate. To think!
They'll build themselves houses from bricks, where they
Can sleep secure from thieves and murderers.

The humans begin to stir

Aha! They're waking up. They're coming round!
I cannot wait to see how they react when I
Reveal the precious gift I'm giving them,
The magic element of Fire, the privilege
Thus far of gods alone. Equipped with Fire
My human race will be like gods themselves,
As they evolve to dominate the world.

CHORUS

What was that delicious liquid
That we had to drink last night?
So delightful, so amazing
I feel higher than a kite!

Dionysus and the Satyrs
Shared the bounty of the vine.

They were generous and friendly,
Sharing drink they said was “wine”!

How it shimmered, sparkling, purple
In the evening firelight’s glow
How its perfume filled my nostrils
Feeling inhibitions go!

Is there more for us to sample?
I do hope that wasn’t all.
Just a cupful sends you soaring
Makes you feel you’re ten foot tall.

Thanks to all the Satyrs taught us
We know how to plant the vine;
When the grapes are ripe each autumn
We’ll be ready to make wine.

We must squish them, let the juice run,
Then we put it into casks
There’ll be wine for every season
Everyone will fill their flasks.

Wine allows us to forget that
Humans live in constant pain
It relieves us of our worries,
Otherwise we’d go insane.

PROMETHEUS

Hey! Humans, mortals, listen! Gather round!

Humans slowly and surlily assemble.

HUMAN

Prometheus! Bugger off! Leave us alone.

PROMETHEUS

As your creator, I'm concerned for you.

HUMAN

What have you ever done for us? Speak up!

PROMETHEUS

First off, I made you so you look like gods...

HUMAN

But mortal, so we only think of death!

PROMETHEUS

But I've a gift for you to change all that!

HUMAN

I've heard. You'll give us Hope. No thanks.

PROMETHEUS

But Hope will cure your wretchedness. You'll see!

HUMAN

Hope makes us want things we can never have.

Life may be shit, but "Let's hope for the best."

But anyway, we've got the remedy we need.

We've got a gift more valuable by far

Than foolish hope. Wine makes the human race

Feel happy now, an instant benefit:

Nothing like hope which promises that we'll

Find happiness tomorrow, if we're fortunate

But if we're not maybe we never will.

We've got the greatest gift, a gift that brings

Joy and contentment, freedom from all care,

And it was not from you, Prometheus!

A god, a real god appeared and gave

Us wine, a drink to conquer pain and grief

The pain and grief that, living in this world,
We suffer every minute of our lives,
Thanks to our fine creator who left us
Defenceless, cold and hungry – the saddest
Of all the creatures who exist on earth.

The humans stand staring dejectedly at the ground.

PROMETHEUS

You'll change your mind when you see what I've got
For you today. Heads up! Look over there!

HUMAN

I see a stupid pile of sticks, so what?

PROMETHEUS

All in good time. This gift I'm giving needs
You first to do a simple task for me.
Go each of you into the wood and bring
Back logs and fallen branches, twigs or leaves,
And add them to that little heap of sticks.

HUMAN

It's pointless, but we've nothing else to do.

The humans quickly assemble a large pile of wood. Meanwhile Prometheus has entered the hut and returns with a smouldering twig. Unobserved, he insets it into the pile.

CHORUS

Prometheus moulded us from clay
We're creatures made of mud.
He gave us life, he gave us hope
His gifts are no damn' good.

Why we've been told to gather sticks
I really cannot think

Let's get it over quickly, so
We'll have more time to drink.

PROMETHEUS

And now sit round the pile you've built. Get close!
Now blow, blow hard, use all your puff, and fan
Your arms like this. Keep going, don't give up!

A thin wisp of smoke begins to drift upwards from the pile.

Blow harder, harder still, you're nearly there!

HUMAN

Is this the gift? That nasty smell? That's making my eyes sting?

Suddenly the fire catches. Flames shoot up. The humans scatter.

HUMAN

Ototototoi! Popoi! Da!

What is that stuff? It's hot! The red bit hurts
My skin! The white bit makes me choke!
It's getting in my eyes, they're watering!
If that's your latest gift, please take it back!

PROMETHEUS

My gift - sorry I frightened you - is FIRE
A secret element known only to
The gods until this moment. Fire! Fire is
Their pride and joy, it's how they dominate
The universe; possessing it is what
It means to be a god, one of the master race.

HUMAN

Then I am glad I'm not a god. If Fire
Makes one a god, I'm happy I'm a man.

PROMETHEUS

But wait until I tell you all that Fire can do!

HUMAN

It stings your eyes. It's hot, It's smelly too.

PROMETHEUS

But Fire will help men master every skill!

HUMAN *gestures*

I need one skill – it's how to raise the wrist.

PROMETHEUS

Listen to me, ungrateful mortal fools!

HUMAN

I'm listening but I haven't heard a word.

PROMETHEUS

Your lives are pointless, humans, do you see?

HUMAN

Not if you point us to the booze. Which way?

PROMETHEUS

Do you not long to live in brick-built homes?

HUMAN

Nah. Caves are fine, when we've got wine to drink.

PROMETHEUS

And go on living underground, like ants?

HUMAN

As long as we've got alcohol, who cares?

PROMETHEUS

I'll teach you how to tell the time!

You'll understand the seasons, get to know

The meaning of the movements of the stars!

HUMAN

I saw some stars when I was drunk last night.

I don't see what this Fire will do for us.

We're better off without it, seems to me.

PROMETHEUS

Trust me, you haven't understood!

All mortal skills come from Prometheus!
From me you'll learn to read and write things down,
To add, subtract, divide and multiply.

HUMAN

I know already how to multiply! But thanks.

PROMETHEUS

You'll learn to harness savage beasts:

The young of wild asses, horses, bulls,
You'll train as slaves who'll come and work for you.

fr.194 N = 336 M

HUMAN

Bullshit they will! Wild asses sweep our caves?
Young horses dig up and acorns for our meals!
We are the asses listening to you.

PROMETHEUS

You will have wooden boats, with sails
Filled by the wind to carry you across
The seas, to trade and bring you luxuries.

HUMAN

Stop using words I do not understand.
I've never heard of "boat" or "trade" or "sea".
I know what wind is, though. It's when I fart
If I've had lots of acorns for my tea.

PROMETHEUS

But when you're sick, and miserable
I'll show you drugs to help you bear the pain.

HUMAN

Well, yesterday I would have welcomed that.
But now we have the only drug we need.
Take wine for misery! Drink wine for pain!

PROMETHEUS

Now to the most important skill you'll learn

From me – the most essential role of fire.
I'll teach you how to understand the gods,
The subtle ways that they communicate.
You'll learn to dissect animals, to learn
What colour of the bile will find the gods'
Approval and which blotches on the liver
Bring news of better fortune yet to come.

The humans seem unimpressed

And then there's metal hidden underground
Which I will show you how to find: iron,
And gold and silver. Without me, mortals,
You never will extract them from the earth!

HUMAN

Blotches on liver? Bile? And "metal" what
Is that? No word of this makes any sense.
Nothing you've said makes "fire" appeal to me!

PROMETHEUS

You think you don't like what you haven't tried.
Just hear what I am offering, you dolts!

Mortals mutter

Keep quiet, and realise what's good for you!!

fr. 118 N = 328 M

HUMAN

Prometheus, why don't you go away?
Just leave us to our innocence, we beg.
We do not want your education, nor
Your patronising guff. Let us work out
What sort of life we humans want to lead,
We humans, by ourselves. On balance, we
Are grateful you created us. And then
You offered Hope. An unappealing gift,
But you meant well, I think. So thanks.

However, if compared with wine, not much
To recommend it. On the other hand
We do appreciate the other god
Who gave us wine. That really helps mankind!
If left alone, maybe in time we'll find
A use for fire –and now the flames die down,
It seems less threatening. My friends, let's move
A little closer: yes, the warmth is comforting!
Perhaps I can foresee **some** benefits.
I can imagine sitting round a fire
Having a good supply of wine to hand,
Together with our family and friends,
Conversing, arguing perhaps, and then
Inventing stories, telling tales of men
And gods, and improvising music while
We laugh and sing and dance a bit.
This fire I prophesy may come to be
A focus for our creativity.
A fireside and jugs of wine as we,
Relaxed with drink and genial company
Sit down together and start to explore
The many possibilities that face
This new and uncorrupted human race.
PROMETHEUS

I have to say I'm disappointed by your words.
Your attitude. It seems you don't appreciate
The future for the human race that I
Am prophesying. With Prometheus' help
The race of humans would soon dominate
The Earth, and gain complete control
Of all the wealth the land conceals, would rule

The lesser creatures, take their habitats,
And populate the world, build cities where
Thousands, and tens of thousands of you men
Would live a life of luxury beyond
Imagination, and amass such wealth
As none of you poor feeble creatures could
Have dreamed of in your wildest fantasies.
And you think fire is something nice that might
Keep you pathetic mortals warm at night!

HUMAN

We're not ungrateful don't be mad at us.
But when you give someone a gift you can't
Expect to tell them what to do with it!
I'm warming to your gift of fire -so please
Let us decide on what we do with it.
We need to share it with our fellow men.
We'll send out runners with a blazing branch,
A torch let's call it, each will run with fire
And take it to another group of men,
Who will relay the flame to others, and
So on, until all of us humans have a chance
To sit around a blazing fire and warm
Ourselves, and sing our human songs
Of love, and joy and righting wrongs.

CHORUS

Come let us sit around the fire
And warm our aching feet
Let's look into the flames awhile,
Enjoy the blissful heat.

I like to watch the curling smoke
It puts me in the mood
It chokes me less. I find I love
The scent of burning wood

At first I found Prometheus' fire
Was strange and made me run
But now it's rather comforting
And warms me like the sun

So Fire was once the privilege
Of those that they call divine
When I sit down beside the fire
The pleasure is all mine.

A good idea occurs to me
Fire has another role
Those chestnuts that are hard to eat
Might soften in the coal!

We humans ought to celebrate
Prometheus' gift of flame
We should devise a festival
Commemorate his name!

I have a vision how mankind
Might honour him. In days
To come there'll be a shrine where fire
Is always kept ablaze

From this fire men will kindle brands
And run where men in turn
Stand ready to receive the fire
And watch their torches burn!

So mortals re-enact the gift
Of fire, as in a game
And how it spread from man to man
Till all had received the flame.

*The humans play out the first ever relay of torches, to be re-enacted evermore at the
Prometheia festival of Fire in the cities of Hellas.*

The play should probably end at this point!

Or maybe this happens..

It seems we may have to suspend our joy.
Two fearsome burly figures head this way
See there! They look like executioners:
Their cruel features and their steady gait
Seem ominous. I hope their business
Is not with me or any human here.

Who are you that disturb our peace? We are
Enjoying Fire, a gift we have just now
Received – the welcome warmth of glowing coals.

POWER [KRATOS]

My name is Power, and he is Violence..
You wretched humans are not our concern.
We represent the power and might of Zeus.
Our mission is to find Prometheus

And tie him up and take him to the boss.

PROMETHEUS

I am Prometheus, what do you want from me?

POWER

Prometheus! I'm arresting you for theft.

The charge is that you stole the gods'

Prerogative, a substance known as Fire,

Exclusively the property of Zeus.

And furthermore that you deliberately

And with premeditation gave away

Said element of fire to human beings.

All-seeing Zeus was witness to your crime.

PROMETHEUS

That's nonsense, I refuse to go with you!

I did not steal the fire, I found it there

Abandoned in his forge by Hephaistos,

Who as the god of fire should have been more

Responsible, not left it smouldering!

POWER

Save all your arguments for Zeus. Tell Zeus

You found it! Not that it bothers me.

I do my job. I do what I am told.

Me and my mate.. Our job is rounding up

The guilty criminals and bringing them

To Zeus, for sentencing and then we drag

Them off for punishment. That is the bit

What we enjoy. He's most ingenious

Is Zeus, inventing punishments to suit

The criminal. I wonder what he has

In mind for you. If it was up to me

I'd have you stapled to a lonely rock

And have an eagle come each day and peck
your innards out. There's nothing worse, I say,
Than gods who steal from other gods.

PROMETHEUS

I did it to protect the human race!
I have a right to help the creatures that
I fashioned out of clay. The human race
Depends on me! Without me they are doomed!

POWER

Enough! No more complaining. Whine to Zeus!
When you're found guilty doubtless you
Will have millennia to make your protests to
The winds and waves, the barren emptiness
Where you'll be sent, that's if you're lucky and
You don't get thrown straight into Tartaros

PROMETHEUS

Take me away. Put me in chains. I won't
Waste breath and energy discussing this
With underlings. I'll put my case to Zeus,
Remind him how I planned his route to power,
How without me he'd be the one in Tartaros!

POWER

Make sure the chains are tight. All done. Let's go.
Power and Force drag Prometheus away.