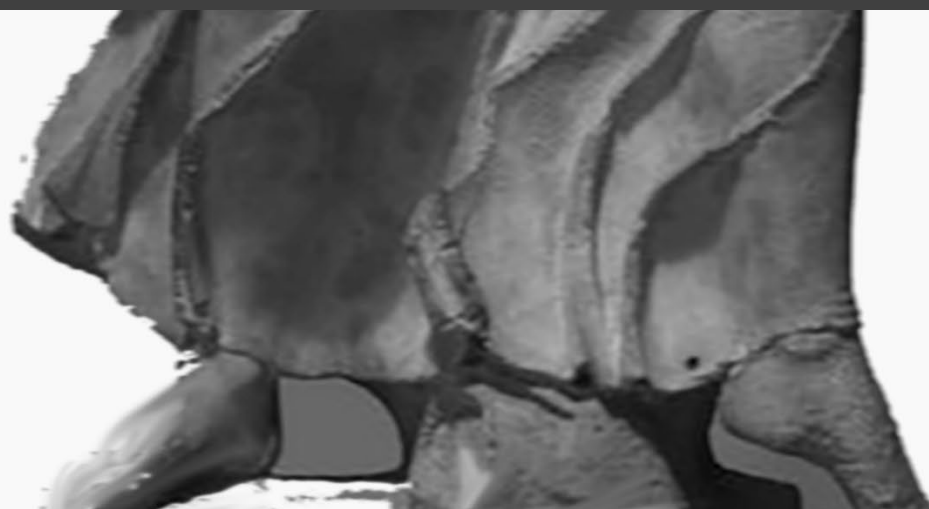




PROMETHEUS RELEASED

Reconstructed by ANDREW WILSON

THE PROMETHEUS TETRALOGY PART III



For Juliet, as ever!

“The true God is God conceived as all-powerful, but not as commanding everywhere he has the power to do so ... God causes the universe to exist, but he consents not to command it.”

SIMONE WEIL, *Attente de Dieu* 1942

Through Creation, God renounces being “everything”. To revolt against God because of human misery is to misrepresent God as a “sovereign” or tyrant who rules the world, as opposed to a deity who has laid down his power. It falls on humans to create a better world – a form of freedom, or divine abandonment, or both.

JAQUELINE ROSE, reviewing *The Subversive Simone Weil* by Robert Zaretsky in NYRB Jan 13, 2022

PROMETHEIA

THE PROMETHEUS TETRALOGY

PART III

PROMETHEUS LUOMENOS

(Prometheus Released)

The play consists of several fragments of a tragedy - traditionally ascribed to Aeschylus - written in Athens in the 5th century BC probably by the same poet who wrote Prometheus Desmotes.. Original fragments are indicated in heavy type in the text, Translated and supplemented by an imagined reconstruction by Andrew Wilson.

CHARACTERS

CHORUS of Titans, children of Ouranos and Ge, recently released from imprisonment in Tartaros.

PROMETHEUS, a Titan

HERAKLES, a hero, son of Amphitryon and Alkmena

GE, or Gaia, also known as Themis, mother of Prometheus and the other Titans

THETIS, a sea-nymph

HERMES, son of Zeus

SCENE

A desolate rocky ravine. Prometheus, centre, is fixed upright to the rock by means of wedges, clamps and chains. The chorus of Titans arrive in a winged vehicle, or perhaps several.

CHORUS *[anapaests]*

We are here, Prometheus, our brother,

fr 190N = 322aM (Arrian)

Come to inspect these torments of yours

And to see for ourselves the chains you endure

Zeus has allowed us to leave for a short while

Our new home in the Isles of the Blessed!

I am a Titan

An immortal

Though a god no more.

Our generation walked the Earth

When it was new and fresh

We Titans were a brutish, uncouth race

We coupled with each other

And brought forth monsters,

It was right

That we were replaced,

Sent where we could do no harm

To Tartaros,

And now the Blessed Isles

Where an eternity

Of non-importance

Waits for us.

Did you know that Zeus has pardoned us?

We've been released from the gloom of Tartaros,

Thanks to his new-found kindness and mercy.

Even his father Kronos is now free,

To preside over Zeus's new domain:

In spite of the dreadful war we Titans

Fought against Zeus, he has granted us pardon,
Making us lords of these glorious islands,
Where Kronos and Rhea are king and queen.
Prometheus, you were the mastermind,
Helping Zeus to defeat us.
We should hate you, rejoice at your troubles,
Gloat at the pain our enemy suffers.
But Zeus is no longer the tyrant who
Vindictively punishes those he hates:
We have shown remorse for our actions,
Not only has Zeus freed us from our chains,
He's restored our dignity, given us
Paradise for eternity. Surely he'll grant
You pardon, as we do. Show your remorse!
Imagine, once free, how you'll enjoy
The Isles of the Blest in the Ocean's stream,
Far from the troublesome world of mortals,
Far from the stressful world of the young gods
Thronging Olympus. There you'll recover
From your pain you have suffered for centuries.
Imagine the endless summer, the cloudless skies,
The crystal-clear waters, eternal bliss.
It was hard for us Titans to leave our
Paradise! It's a long arduous journey.
We left our lovely Islands behind us,
Swooped swiftly across the Ocean stream
And then the sacred surf of the Red Sea
With its coral-pink floor
And near the Ocean a lagoon sparkling
Like bronze nourishing all Ethiopia,
Where all-seeing Helios every day
Refreshes the bodies of gods, horses

fr 192N = 323M (Strabo)

Too from their labours.

With fountains of warm and gentle water.

On from the peaceful realm of the race loved

By the gods, we passed through the land where Zeus

Partnered with Io, and thence through treeless

Deserts and snow-swept mountains, to the plains

Where the river Phasis is a boundary

fr 191N = 322M (Arrian)

Each way between Europe and Asia.

Then on we continued through mists and rain

Till the fearsome mass of the Caucasus rose

Before us, and from our feathered ship

We spied your lonely figure strapped

To the face of a rock in this desolate chasm.

PROMETHEUS

My Titan family, blood-kin of mine, *[anapaests]*

fr 193N = 324M (Cicero)

Children of Ouranos, look at me, bound

By chains to these vile rocks, moored like a ship

Whose scared crew fears night's raging storm.

So Zeus, the son of Kronos, tied me up. *[iambics]*

Zeus's the power: Hephaistos' hand performed,

With cruel skill; knocking these wedges in

He split my joints apart. Thanks to his art,

I occupy, poor wretch, this Furies' fort.

One day of doom in three, Zeus' minion

Swoops grimly down, and with her hook-like claws

Rips me to pieces for her bestial meal.

Then crammed with juicy liver, fully stuffed,

She gives a piecing shriek, and soars away,

With her tail-feathers soaking up my blood.

And when my nibbled liver's grown again

Then back she comes agog to her vile feast.
This way I grimly feed my torturer,
Who butchers me alive, in constant pain.
For as you see, hobbled by Zeus's chains,
I cannot brush the brutal buzzard off my chest.
Helpless like this I host my cruel tormentor,
Longing for death I seek an end to pain:
But I'm kept far away by Zeus's power.
This ghastly pain though has gone on so long,
Worsened through time, it's now a part of me.
The sun makes drops of moisture fall from me
Which drip upon the rocks of Caucasus.

CHORUS

First stasimon

Zeus! How much we loathed to hear that name!
Zeus who made war against his own father
And banished him, with us to Tartaros,
That freezing dungeon as far below the earth
As heaven is above, that place where light is not,
And darkness rules, where hope does not exist.
We fought and lost; we took our punishment:
We would have done the same to Zeus, if we had won.
Then suddenly he sent his messenger,
From high above, to deep below.
And suddenly we found that we were free!
Our former enemy had pardoned us
And we were freed from that black nothingness.
And more than free - a special place was now reserved
For us, where Kronos would be king once more.
The Blessed Isles to where, in times to come,
Zeus would allow the finest mortals, men's,

Elite, to join us in our paradise.

Zeus, so harsh, uncompromising
When he was new to power
Has changed, has learned,
Has embraced Wisdom
And has come to realise and now regret
The follies of his former self.
He gave us leave to visit you
To view your suffering for ourselves
Suffering you could have ended long ago
Had you revealed that secret
That you guard so jealously.
It is the will of Zeus that you be freed
Forthwith from all the agonies
You go through every day.
You could resume your place at Zeus's side
Once more his valued counsellor, or join
Your brothers in our wonderful
Exclusive new domain.
One simple thing you have to do:
Reveal the secret: it can do no harm.
Zeus is no more the god who punished you.

Enter HERAKLES. He seems lost.

HERAKLES

What is this land? Who are these beings? Are you
A wild race of mountain men, or are
You gods banished to this forlorn wasteland?
You are the only living creatures I
Have met since I retreated from the bleak
Unstirring waters of the Outer Sea.

CHORUS

We are an ancient race, who long ago
Were lords of all the universe. We fell
From power defeated by the thunderbolts
Of Zeus and cunning of the traitor who
Contrived humiliation and defeat
For us – the Titans we were called. But
Zeus has set us free from Tartaros,
Where we were sent for punishment.
But in return, now tell us who you are.

HERAKLES

I know you now. The giant overlords
Who terrorised the Earth in aeons past.
My name is Herakles, a mortal and
A most unhappy one. The gods have seen
That I should suffer every day since I
Was born. An evil man, backed by the gods
Has forced me to perform a set of tasks –
Two more to go, and then the end's end in sight,
I'm told –but why should I believe their lies?
Each one's much harder than the one before.
During this quest – to find the golden fruit
Of the Hesperides –I've been compelled
To take on further labours. I've fought Kyknos,
Ares's son, I've wrestled with Antaios,
Lifting him off the ground to finish him,
I killed Bousiris, king who sacrificed
All visitors as if to honour Zeus.
And now I'm lost – Illyria, Egypt,
Arabia – I've been there, but where's this?
And where to go to find the Hesperides?

CHORUS

This barren desolation is the Caucasus.
We're here to help Prometheus, our Titan
Cousin: before our enemy, but now
A friend. Prometheus can see all that
Has ever happened, and all that's to come.
He will be able to direct your steps from here.

HERAKLES

Prometheus! Creator of my race!
I wince to see you shackled to this rock!
I have been told you suffer here because
You dared to save the human race when Zeus
Was minded to exterminate our kind.

There is a sudden noise of rushing, flapping wings, and an unearthly shriek as the eagle alights on Prometheus' chest, as he screams with agony.

What ghastly sight is this? Look there!
An eagle, noble bird of Zeus alights
And with its hateful beak begins to tear
Prometheus' chest. And now it's ripping out
Raw gobbets from the cavity. Look how
It grips his ribcage with its claws, to tug
The choicest entrails from within, And now
It's got his liver, oozing blood, and gulps
It greedily, stuffing its gizzard with
Hideous nauseating gluttony.
Now satisfied apparently, and soaked
With gore, it flaps its wings again. I can
Not let it live to perpetrate such deeds,
Such vileness as not even I have seen
In all the horrors witnessed through my life.
I have my bow; it must not get away

He releases the arrow as the eagle flies away.

It falls! My aim was true. Thanks to Apollo
That bird will not return to feast again,
Prometheus! Farewell, you gruesome dinner-guest!

CHORUS

What have you done, you rash young man?
The eagle had been sent by Zeus. To watch
It feed was shocking, we agree to that,
But only Zeus had power enough to stop
Its visitations. That brave act of yours
Was not just foolish but may also prove
A fatal one to you. The rage of Zeus
Is hard to pacify, and his revenge
Will be sudden and irresistible.

PROMETHEUS

Not so. I have been waiting for this man
For centuries! He is the rescuer, at last,
That Fate appointed to relieve my pain.
As Themis, Earth, my mother promised me.
Your name is Herakles, my son, is that not so?

HERAKLES

I'm Herakles, son of Amphytrion.

PROMETHEUS

And were you born in Thebes, where cattle thrive?

HERAKLES

Yes, born in Thebes — to Argive royalty!

PROMETHEUS

Alkmena is your mother's name, that's right?

HERAKLES

She was an exile driven out of Argos by....

PROMETHEUS

A treacherous uncle, who usurped the throne...

HERAKLES

That's true, and his son cheated me in turn....

PROMETHEUS

And backed by Zeus made you, poor wretch, perform....

HERAKLES

A dozen tasks, not yet complete, alas.

PROMETHEUS

Your current quest sends you to find and steal...

HERAKLES

The golden apples from the Hesperides!

PROMETHEUS

I can show you the route that you must take...

HERAKLES

Then help me, please, I'm not sure where to go.

PROMETHEUS

Of course, my son, if you will help me first!

HERAKLES

Release you from your bonds? No need to ask.

I never would have left you here in chains!

They say I am the strongest man alive,

Let me examine what my hands must do.

He climbs up to inspect Prometheus' chains

PROMETHEUS

It won't be easy. Power and Violence

Insisted on good workmanship that day

Hephaistos nailed me to this rock. Through fear

Of Zeus, he did a proper job. His skill

Has stood the test of time, of centuries.

HERAKLES

Let me inspect his handiwork This wedge

Is not so tight — it moves quite easily –

See how I've pulled it out! And now let's look –

This spike right through your chest, I think

That I can loosen it and ease it free.

There now — let's hope withdrawing it does not

Hurt you as much as when they banged it in.

PROMETHEUS

It hurts,, but not too much. It's easier

To bear pain when it's doing good! Thank you.

HERAKLES

Now for the shackles that secure your legs:

If I use all my strength they'll bend and break:

Like so! The iron has been through the years

Weakened by rust. The bands that hold your wrists

Will also give when I apply my strength.

PROMETHEUS

I'm able once again to flex my arms:

Something I have not done for countless years.

And see, my legs now bend, and with your help

I think I may have strength enough to stand

Upon the earth and feel beneath my feet.

My mother's firm support. I'm free, at last!

Just as my mother prophesied, a man

Armed with a bow has come and rescued me!

HERAKLES

It pleases me that I was able to

Do service for the founder of our race.

All of mankind will celebrate with joy

Now you are free to carry on your work —

Our champion against the threats from Zeus.

PROMETHEUS

And in return to show my thanks I shall
Now help to guide you in your mission to
The Garden of the Hesperides. You'll find
It is a journey long and perilous.

HERAKLES

Don't spare the details, lord Prometheus.
After so much, I'm used to suffering –
As you could testify, to suffer pain
Becomes a way of life: the senses numb.
Though I would dearly wish to know just why
The goddess Hera shows me so much hate,
And has done so relentlessly since I
Was born in Thebes, son of Amphytrion.

PROMETHEUS

Zeus is my enemy, who has punished me
For thirteen generations, centuries
In human years, and still would see me bound!

This is his hated father's dearest child!

fr 201N = 333M (Plutarch, Life of Pompey)

It was no part of Zeus's plans that you
Should rescue me: you saw my suffering
And sympathised, took pity on my plight.
You've earned the right to know the truth.
The real nature of your parentage.
Herakles, the reason Hera loathes you so
Is this: you're not Amphytrion's son. Zeus raped
Your mother masquerading as that man
Whom she believed had finally come home,
Having fulfilled his vow of chastity.
You are the mortal son of mighty Zeus.
Your actual father has been one in name

Alone: he has allowed his wife to torment you
With freedom and impunity. But things are not
Always exactly what they seem. Zeus has
In mind a glorious future for his son:
But he cannot prevent your having to
Fulfil the labours Hera wished on you.
Be patient; Zeus will keep you safe throughout
The dangerous encounters you
Must face before acknowledging that you
Are rightly to be called the son of Zeus
HERAKLES

My mother dared not tell the truth, I see,
For fear of Hera's bitter jealousy.
To be the son of Zeus has been no joy,
No benefit, so far as I can see for me
In this unending punishment that is
The wretched life I have been forced to lead.
A father should protect a son, not stand
Aside as he's assailed by enemies.
Tell me, Prometheus what comes next?
Where is the road to the Hesperides?

PROMETHEUS

.From here follow the chain of mountain peaks:

Go straight along this route. And first of all
You'll reach the north wind, where be wary of
The deafening roar, in case it snatches you
And sweeps you off trapped in its wintry blast:

fr 195 N = 327 M (Galen)

Do not venture into the realms of Boreas!
Avoid the long-lived Hyperboreans
Who see the sun one day in every year,
They'll try to keep you from your quest.
From where the river Ister flows in spate.

Your course must aim for where the chariot
Of Helios returns to rest each evening.

Move every day towards the setting sun.

You'll reach a race, immune to heat and cold,

The peaceful mares-milk-drinking Scythians,

Who know no settled home, but constantly

Change habitation following their herds.

And then you'll reach a people, the most fair

fr 196 N = 329 M (Stephanus Byzant.)

And friendliest to strangers of all men,

The Gabioi, where neither plough nor hoe

Cuts through the soil, but where the fields

Self-sown bring life to men abundantly.

But you must not be tempted to neglect

Your task and linger here: you must press on,

And then you'll reach the Ligurians' fearless horde,

fr 199 N = 326a M (Strabo)

Where though you're tough, know you will not find fault

With how they fight. Fate says your arrows will

Fail here; you won't be able to pick up

Stones from the earth, the ground is all too soft.

Seeing you foiled your father pities you:

Sending a cloud, he'll make the land all dark

While showers of rounded stones descend, with which

You pelt their army and rout them with ease.

You're getting close now to your goal:

Not far from the Ligurians' land you'll find

The sea-god Nereus, the only one

Who knows exactly where the orchard lies,

And he is slippery and hard to catch!

He loves to change his shape continually,

But you will find him while he is asleep,

And force him to reveal where you must go..

Before long you will reach Okeanos,

The stream whose current marks the boundary,
Across which no man is allowed to go.

CHORUS

Only the Titans live beyond that sea:
In those fair islands Zeus reserved for us.

PROMETHEUS

A narrow strait divides the land just here,
You'll cross from Europe into Africa,
Now soon you'll see the awesome towering bulk
Of Atlas, Titan brother to these here.
Alone among his race he's still in thrall
To Zeus, who has him holding up the sky
Upon his shoulders. He will fetch the fruit
The golden apples that you need, if you
Agree to hold the heavens up while he
Visits his daughters in their Garden, who
Distract the serpent while he gathers them.
He will not want to take his burden on
Again, quite naturally, but you will show
Him how you'll raise a pair of mountains which
Will do the task and leave him free to join
His fellow Titans in their cherished home.
These mountains in the west will become known
As "Herakles's Pillars" in your name.
The apples you'll take to Eurystheus,
Who'll strangely give them back to you. But you
Are not allowed to keep them: Athena
Will make sure they return where they belong.
There now remains one final task, just one.

HERAKLES

And will you tell me what that task will be?

PROMETHEUS

I know, but telling it will cause you grief..
Suffice it will be the most dangerous
And difficult of all the Labours you
Perform. But understand: you will succeed,
And be released from your long servitude.

HERAKLES

Then let me know the worst, so I can summon
The courage that I'll need to see it through.

PROMETHEUS

You'll make a journey no mortal has made,
You'll have to travel to a place from which
No traveller returns, where entry is
Denied to one who lives and breathes. Barring
The entrance is a creature, Kerberos,
Who has three heads, each of a snarling dog,
A dragon's tail, and snakes' heads on its back.

HERAKLES

It sounds as if I'm destined to go down
To Hell, to Hades, when I'm still alive!

PROMETHEUS

Not only that, but your allotted task,
Will be to capture Kerberos, and bring
Him from the underworld into the light.

HERAKLES

Will I succeed? it sounds impossible!

PROMETHEUS

Remember you are Zeus's son. Failure
Will not be countenanced, although Hades
Will make it very hard, forbidding you
To use the weapons you are carrying.
You will need all your strength, and power
Of mind to conquer him. The lion's skin

Will save you from its jaws, although the dragon
In its tail will give you agonising bites:
But when you throw your arms around and grasp
Its heads, you force it to succumb to your
Superior desire, and make it come with you.
Once you have shown Eurystheus the hound,
And you've returned the creature to its home,
Your tasks are over, and no more a slave
You will return back home to Thebes at last.

HERAKLES

Then let that be enough. It is a comfort
To know my father Zeus will not allow
His son to fail despite the danger and
The stress he'll go through on these painful tasks.
Farewell, Prometheus, may your love of Man
Continue to improve our race's lot.

Herakles departs

PROMETHEUS

I did not have the heart to tell the brave
Young man, that his return to Thebes will not
Be where his troubles end — indeed he will
Face situations worse by far than those
Twelve Labours he's performed for Eurystheus.
After a lifetime of danger and sacrifice,
A woman's love will bring about his death.
The world's most famous hero has to die.
You do not need to know exactly how.
But this I can reveal: when he is dead
And flames consume his funeral pyre, lightning
Will flash, and thunder roll, as Herakles
Is taken up to heaven as a god.

Hera who tried to wreck his life on earth,
Will make her peace with him, and give
Her daughter Hebe, patroness of Youth,
To be his loving wife eternally.

CHORUS

Second stasimon

May Fate be kind to you, good Herakles
A mortal to whose suffering as yet
No final limit has been set, save death,
Though, as it seems, the great majority
Of humankind lead lives of misery,
Enslaved or hungry, forced to serve the will
Of those glad few who tyrannise their fellow-men
As Zeus in the immortal realm
Has been allowed to do.

No one it seems is truly free,
Except the tyrant who secures his privilege
By force. Would Zeus still rule
Without his thunderbolts?
Would there be kings in Thebes or Argos now
Without their bodyguards with spears?

We Titans once were free, we had the run of Earth,
We used our size and strength
To please ourselves.
But we were outmanoeuvred by a greater force,
Backed by our brother's cunning it is true,
But force it was that won the day.
We lost our freedom
We were pent in Tartaros.

In Tartaros, that place of absence,
No light, no warmth, no sound
Save disembodied groans from others
We could never see. Was it a cousin, friend,
Or some appalling monster banished there
Before our time? There was no pain,
No agony, no sign of torments men believe
Are there – no Danaids
Refilling leaky buckets from the well,
No Tantalus, no Sisyphus
Just nothingness: an endless nullity.
No day, no night, no months, no years.

And then came sudden freedom
Dependent once again upon the whim of Zeus.
But how to measure freedom?
We Titans can't return to Earth, take up
Our former roles. Poseidon rules
Where once Okeanos had sway; Hyperion
Has lost his job to Helios.
So what is freedom? We're not free to disobey
Not free to move – we're isolated in our
Blessed Isles.. Not free to change the world.
We're free to sing, and dance, we're free to feast,
We're free to tell our stories of the days of old.

And now Prometheus is “free” again. But has he lost
His freedom to defy the gods? His freedom to invent
A future for himself and man, his favoured race?
Or should he fear revenge, expect a swift
And savage retribution for his daring to

Escape his bonds without permission?

Should Herakles not fear the thunderbolt?

Or will Zeus just ignore, dismiss the one

Who dared to kill his favoured bird, and then

Released the prisoner he had ordered bound?

PROMETHEUS

No need to fear the thunderbolts of Zeus!

I know the king of gods can't punish us.

He's desperate to learn the secret which

I've kept for all the years he's had me nailed

To this benighted rock, for all the time

He had me pent in sunless Tartaros,

Prevented from all movement by his clamps

And iron chains. He can't do anything

To hurt me, or this wondrous boy whose strength

And bravery have brought me my release.

CHORUS

What is this secret Zeus is keen to learn?

PROMETHEUS

It's prophesied that Zeus will fall from power

Be overthrown, just as his father was,

By his own son: and as we speak, he is

About to take first steps along the road,

The fatal journey that will lead to his

Destruction, and the end of Zeus's reign.

No one but I can save the king of gods

And men, no one but I can tell great Zeus,

What he must do, or not, to stay in power.

He promised he would free me if I told

My secret: I refused, and said I would

Not tell him unless he released me first!
But as my mother promised me there'd come
A rescuer, I was prepared to wait
Accept the pain, knowing I would be free
One day, and with my secret still intact,
Owe Zeus no debt for my deliverance!

CHORUS

You would be wise to tell your secret now,
Before Zeus knows that you have broken free.

PROMETHEUS

He knows I'm free. And he already knows
What price he'll have to pay to be informed.
I shall reveal it when the time is right:
Not now, for at this moment Zeus' thoughts
Are fixed on other things. He has been changed
As you report – but he has set his heart
On one last conquest to console himself,
One final rape before he gives his nod
To Metis' programme of reform. And this
Final affair will mean his doom unless
I intervene to save him from himself.

CHORUS

Now you are free, what do you ask of Zeus
As payment for the secret that preserves
His kingship of the gods for evermore?

PROMETHEUS

He'll be persuaded to bestow on Man,
Mankind, the human race I brought to life,
My protégés, my pride and joy, a gift,
A gift more valuable than Fire, which taught
Them how to dominate the Earth, and Hope
Which made the wretched creatures who could not

Share in the wealth the lucky few produced
Content, believing they perhaps one day
Might benefit as much, if fortune smiled.
My mother and my brother hate the way
My human race has spoiled the harmony
The Earth displayed before I intervened.
And I must now admit I think they're right
To criticise what mortals have done to
Upset Earth's balanced interplay of life.
But only Zeus can offer them the gift
Which could ensure Man keeps his privilege
But uses it to benefit the whole.

CHORUS

In days when Titans ruled the earth,
To spot a mortal was a rare event:
They lived as best they could on wild fruits
And spent their time in holes and caves
In terror of the other creatures, who
It seemed were quite at home,
Sure of their roles, their place
Among the seas and mountains,
Grasslands, forests ...
Man was defenceless, homeless,
Surviving — just — among the rocks
And desert spaces unfrequented by
The larger and more savage beasts.

Prometheus gave them Fire, and Hope,
What gift more valuable than these
Could Zeus now give to benefit mankind?

Before Prometheus can answer this crucial question.: music. The immortal sea-nymph THETIS suddenly appears.. She seems exhausted and unhappy. She doesn't see Prometheus or the Chorus of Titans. She is looking nervously behind her.

THETIS

I can't see him,
His menacing bulk,
Can't hear his
Footsteps thumping,
Can't smell
The odour of power.
Perhaps I've lost him
Perhaps I've got away.
But who's to know?
He can transform himself
To any creature he desires,
A fly, an ant, a swan, a crow
Or to a cloud, a rock, a wave upon the beach.
I'm tired of running.

Thanks to my father Nereus,
I too can change my shape,
Enough to slide away
From grabbing, clasping, groping hands
But I've run through my repertoire,
I'm back where I began, as me.
Thetis. Object of every god's
Erotic fantasy..
Can I keep running
Running on and on for ever?
Or is it my inevitable fate
That he will catch me,
Crush me

Overpower me,
Force me to accept
The sickening
The shaming
The inevitable end?

She notices the Chorus, who have moved towards her, screening Prometheus. She shrieks.

People! Not men, not human!
Are you gods, a troop of strongmen he
Has trained and sent to capture me
And tie me up
And take me to him,
Trussed, bound
Gift-wrapped
Helpless, victim
For sacrifice upon
The altar of his lust?

Don't dare come near!
Don't touch me!
I am too weak to run.
I cannot use my powers
To shift my shape.
I have exhausted them.
Don't hurt me
I'll surrender to your
Mighty masculinity,
Your overwhelming dominance;
How brave, how bold
To trap me, take me down.
Plunder, booty

Won by naked force.
Your brutish master will I'm sure
Be ready to reward your handiwork,
Your bravery
A dozen of you, more, it takes
To seize a single, slight,
Exhausted tearful girl.

CHORUS

Don't be afraid. We are not what we seem to be.
Though we indeed are Titans, members of that race
Which terrorised the world in years gone by,
Our power is neutered, we have lost our fight,
We have been conquered, punished, and now willingly
We are in thrall to Zeus. We serve the king of gods.

THETIS

Then I was right. You are the agents of
My nemesis, my stalker, friends of his, the one
Who would possess me, rape me, force me to his will.

Prometheus pushes through the mass of Titans.

PROMETHEUS

Ignore them. They are has-beens, impotent,
They cannot harm you, and they have no power
To save you from the king of gods and men.
But I am one, in fact the only one, who can
Protect you from the violence of Zeus,
The most implacable, the most ruthless
Of all the demons who have ruled our world.

THETIS

You claim that you can thwart the will of Zeus?

PROMETHEUS

Because I know that he will lose his power.

THETIS

Maybe he will. Can that save me today?

PROMETHEUS

Your beauty has marked you for victimhood.

THETIS

My sisters all are beautiful, but I am said...

PROMETHEUS

To be the loveliest, that's what I've heard.

THETIS

The gods competed —who could bed me first...

PROMETHEUS

Each wanting to claim victory as his...

THETIS

Poseidon never stopped pursuing me...

PROMETHEUS

Until he made a deal with Zeus, to hand...

THETIS

Me over to his older brother's lust.

PROMETHEUS

And you've been running, hiding ever since?

THETIS

I've no more strength . I'm ready to give up...

PROMETHEUS

And yield yourself to him you loathe, detest?

THETIS

I can't go on. There's no fight left in me.

PROMETHEUS

Then you must trust me. I will keep you safe.

THETIS

You cannot stand against his thunderbolts.

PROMETHEUS

No weapon will I need to lay him low.

THETIS

What then? Will cunning be enough?

PROMETHEUS

I have a piece of knowledge which will end...

THETIS

His rule, you say. But will that save me too?

PROMETHEUS

It will. He'll send his messenger to me

Just as he did before — when I refused

To listen to his stream of threats. Result?

Zeus hurled me down to Tartaros, then brought

Me back again so he could have me tortured

Where he could see me and enjoy the sight.

But now, just as it was foretold, I'm free.

His lickspittle will come again to beg

Me tell my secret. You'll be safe with me.

CHORUS

We too will help to keep her from all harm.

Thetis, you are a Titan's grand-daughter,

We stand with Prometheus to shelter you.

Thetis hides among the Titan throng.

In Zeus's world

As in the world of Kronos long before

And in the time of ancient Ouranos

The males ruled

And ruled by force.

The feelings of the female sex

Were crushed, unrecognised.

However much our mother, Ge —
The Earth— protested, no one heard.
The wife of Zeus, Queen Hera
Was reduced to acts
Of petty spite to take revenge
On Zeus's flagrant,
Uncontrolled contempt for her.

But Zeus we hear
Has changed? Meagre signs,
As this pursuit of Thetis
Shows the world!
If he's sincere in wishing to
Reset the world, improve
The lives of more humans than
Just a spoiled and pampered few
He won't be able to enjoy
His random visitations to the girls of Earth.
He can no longer dominate, humiliate
An independent spirit like this nymph,
Whose only wish might be
To skim the sea-surf, with her sisters,
Calming the restless waves with tranquil dance.

But here he comes, the errand-boy of Zeus
On cue, exactly as Prometheus said..

The messenger of Zeus, HERMES, flies in.

HERMES

I am not pleased that I've been forced to come
Again to this cold wasteland hated by
The gods, a place where none of us would wish

To spend a moment more than necessary.
I came before to urge you to obey
The direct order of the king of gods,
My father Zeus who trusts me with
Missions that need finesse and tact.
You have been freed, illegally, we see,
Without fulfilment of the contract which
You made. The price of liberty was this:
Reveal the details of the marriage which
You boasted would be terminal for him.
Additionally we know you're harbouring
A child, my father's niece who he believes
May have been kidnapped by someone who means
Her harm. I dread to think what punishment
Zeus will devise for these new crimes.

PROMETHEUS

Welcome back, Hermes, to my humble rock.
The one who means to harm the girl is Zeus.
I shall not be releasing her to you.
But would you like to know the secret I
Have kept from Zeus for all this time?
The knowledge of just how the tyrant will
Be ousted from the power he loves to wield?

HERMES

Of course. Don't talk in riddles. Out with it!

PROMETHEUS

All in good time. Impatience will not help!

HERMES

Just tell me, if you're going to. Why delay?

PROMETHEUS

No reason, but to taunt my enemies.

HERMES

Why give a secret to an enemy?

PROMETHEUS

Though it may save his rule, it will cause grief!

HERMES

My father will accept some pain to keep his power.

PROMETHEUS

He won't be able to keep all of it.

HERMES

Is that a threat? What do you mean exactly?

PROMETHEUS

My price means he gives something in return.

HERMES

Do you dare bargain with the king of gods?

PROMETHEUS

I do. He can accept, or be deposed.

This is the simple choice he's free to make.

HERMES

Then tell me what the secret is, the one...

PROMETHEUS

I say will save great Zeus from Tartaros?

HERMES

Don't go on taunting me. Just spell it out.

PROMETHEUS

Although it pleases me to see you beg!

HERMES

Must I fall to my knees, and touch your beard?

PROMETHEUS

And see you prostrate, grovelling? But no.

HERMES

In simple words just tell me what you know.

PROMETHEUS

Thetis can be no more the object of his lust.

HERMES

A brief flirtation is all he intends...

PROMETHEUS

He must abandon his pursuit of her.

HERMES

I doubt he will. He's always wanted her.

PROMETHEUS

Then he is doomed. His rule cannot be saved.

HERMES

Why her? Why Thetis? He's had countless girls...

PROMETHEUS

And she will be the final one. The end.

HERMES

How could a love-affair with her destroy...

PROMETHEUS

The rule of Zeus and all his dynasty?

HERMES

I can't see how a night of love could cause...

PROMETHEUS

Such fatal harm to a tyrant so serene?

HERMES

Kings fall through plots, not love affairs.

PROMETHEUS

You are naïve, You'll learn that is not true!

HERMES

How will this nymph bring all Olympus down?

PROMETHEUS

She is the one who's destined to give birth...

HERMES

To bear the son who's mightier than he?

PROMETHEUS

The son will oust the father — just as Zeus

Once ousted Kronos, and as Ouranos
Was hurled by Kronos into Tartaros..
It was my plan that overthrew them both.

HERMES

I've heard these stories many times, but Zeus...

PROMETHEUS

Believed the danger was that he would mate...

HERMES

With some important goddess, not a nymph!

PROMETHEUS

Well there you have it. Now you know the truth.

If Zeus makes love to Thetis here, she'll have

A son as stronger than himself as he

Was stronger than his father, old Kronos.

This son will overthrow him and replace

The current dynasty, including you, and your

Fine siblings who all revel in their power.

There's ample room in gloomy Tartaros!

HERMES

Then I must tell my father straightaway.

Let Thetis stay with you. He's very close:

You will have stopped him in the nick of time!

Hermes flies off

PROMETHEUS

Farewell! You know you're always welcome here!

THETIS

I'm safe at last No more to fear from Zeus.

I hope now to resume my peaceful life

Beneath the waves. Or riding on the surf...

PROMETHEUS

Alas, that may not be what Fate decrees.

THETIS

Am I not free to join my sister Nereids?

CHORUS

This freedom we all seem to love so much,

What is it? Which of us is truly free?

Not even Zeus, I think. The Fates foresee

A future which cannot be known – although

The future of the king of gods and men

Was known to Gaia who, to help her son,

Gave secret knowledge to Prometheus.

A knowledge he has used rescue both

Himself from punishment, and father Zeus

From violent overthrow — and saved as well

The honour of this innocent young nymph.

Not even gods are free, since Fate controls

Their destiny, as much as it controls

The lowest, least important of mankind.

Immortals, like ourselves,

must accept change.

“Immortal” does not

As once we may perhaps

Have told ourselves

Mean “changeless”.

Nor that we are immune somehow

To Fate. It seems that Fate and not

The current king of gods controls the world.

Ouranos – if he was indeed the first — did not

Expect to be castrated by son, but that was Ouranos’s fate.

Kronos supposed he would be permanent

As ruler of the gods. But Fate decreed

He would be ousted by his son.

Zeus seems to have escaped his fate for now:

But does that mean that he will rule

For all eternity? If Thetis' son does not
Unseat him, surely there will come a time
When it will be indeed his fate to fall!

Was he enabled to avoid this latest throw of fate
By changing? Fate awaited Zeus the tyrant,
Zeus molester of young girls.
Has Zeus survived because Zeus
Is no more that Zeus of old?
Just how much has his love affair
With noble Metis altered him?

Enter GE , in a chariot decked with greenery, drawn by animals and birds, attended by nymphs of the forests, the rivers, the mountains, the seas. Thetis, the Nereid, immediately recognises her great-grandmother.

THETIS

I bow before you, Mother of the World,
Earth, Gaia, Ge, the mother of us all!

GE

Thetis! I've found you! With my helpers
I have been searching everywhere throughout
My realm to save you from that predator
Who was relentlessly pursuing you.
My son has given Zeus the knowledge he
Required to save his kingdom, and preserve
Your honour. And to express his gratitude,
Zeus plans to compensate you for the grief
He caused you by his importunity.

THETIS

How can he possibly make up for all
The anguish, all the fear he put me through?

GE

There'll be the finest wedding ever seen!

When you are married, all the gods, and all
The goddesses will be your guests, a feast,
A celebration never seen since Harmony
Became the bride of Kadmos king of Thebes.

THETIS

I'll be the bride? But who will be the groom?

GE

Zeus has picked out for you a king, a mortal,
A man of courage and experience,
To be your husband. The immortal gods
Will bring you gifts beyond imagining,
And all will revel in your happiness.

THETIS

I won't be used to soothe the conscience of Zeus!
I will not marry him or any man. I'll run
And hide and change my shape! He'll never catch me!

GE

Do what you please, my child. This is your fate.
You will in time be Peleus' wife, and bear
A son who'll be the greatest warrior....

THETIS

No! I refuse! I won't! If only I could die!

Thetis runs off

GE

Poor child! Just as it was her fate to be
The bride of Zeus, until things changed,
So she in time will come to see it is her fate
To marry Peleus, and become devoted
Mother of the greatest Greek of all.

CHORUS

She proves that mortals and immortals both
Are indeed subject to the whims of Fate.

PROMETHEUS

But mother, tell me, what of Zeus' fate?
Now he has given up his doomed pursuit
Of "love" with nymphs and mortal girls,
Has he consented to the gift that we
Insisted he should give mankind, the gift
They need to save themselves from ruin?
Which complements my gifts of Fire and Hope?

GE

The women of my family and I,
Three generations with a single task,
Have made him truly realise the power
A god, a king of gods, can wield. To date
He has abused that power, he's intervened
In mortal lives to gratify himself.
For sex, for entertainment, randomly.
Metis, Athena and myself have urged
Him to withdraw from managing mankind.
A really powerful ruler does not need
To demonstrate that power to weaker folk,
Indeed the ruler who is seen to act
With arrogance and overbearing strength
Loses respect, and earns the tyrant's name.
Seduced by Metis's intelligence
He's come to realise the time has come
For change, to bury the tyrannical
Despot, abuser of young girls and boys,
The tetchy father, and the autocrat
Ignoring all advice unless it fits his whims.
A god can do this — one of the perks perhaps
Of immortality! So Zeus has vowed
To reinvent himself. We have a daughter,

It will be said, do Zeus and I, a child
As it were of our collaboration.

PROMETHEUS

And my mankind will welcome her, this “child”,
Begotten from the power of Zeus and brought
To birth by Gaia — Themis, Nature’s Law.
Like Hope, my former gift to Man, Dike —
That is her name — will be available
To every human who is willing to
Possess her, and enjoy her company.

GE

I Themis, Gaia, Earth, support, and have
Done since the world began, the principle
Of fairness, balance, equilibrium
Between the lives of creatures who enjoy
Our world’s resources, all of them. But Man,
The newcomer, Prometheus.’ progeny were
Not happy just to share the gifts of Earth.
No, no, they sought to dominate, to grab
As many of Earth’s riches as they could.
Imagine that this “child” of ours, Dike,
A frail and sensitive young girl,
Has been despatched by us to change the way
Mankind behaves. But she is shy, and needs
Encouragement, and willingness from Man
To accept what she offers, as the gift —
The priceless gift it is. There may be some
Who will refuse her offer of a better life,
Through arrogance, or pride or stubbornness,
Or pure misguided masculinity.
Though they rebuff her, she will not refuse
To smile on them, and help them change their mind.

PROMETHEUS

My human race won't want to be thought fools:
In time they will embrace her as their friend.

GE

Dike, or "Justice" — if you like — will change
The way men treat each other, and the world.
They will be able to foresee the consequence
Of each and every action, and decide
Whether to hold themselves in check or not.
Dike will not use force to get her way.
Men have free-will to ignore what she says.
And there'll be maybe just a few at first
Who understand her power, and undertake
To welcome her, and cherish her and heed
Her sound advice, and check their baser thoughts.
And so in time, as generations pass,
Mankind will have the chance to learn to treat
All creatures, and each other, and the Earth
With due respect, helped by the power
Of Love, without whose influence
The world and all the creatures it supports
Would never have been brought to birth.
Remember it was Aphrodite who
Caused Ouranos and Gaia to unite!

PROMETHEUS

So now my human race, for whom I sacrificed
So much, endured millennia of pain,
Will finally be left alone: no gods
To interfere, to interrupt their lives
To terrify them for their own delight.
Justice at first will be a tender plant,
Hard to make grow in unfamiliar soil,

Easy to trample or uproot. But men
Will see in time how Justice can
Improve their lives and make the Earth
Reflect their thoughtfulness, and so create
A world of mutual trust and happiness.
Zeus will encourage humankind to love
His daughter: he will circulate a tale
That there may be some mortals who
Escape the unrelenting law of death,
By living lives with thoughtfulness and care
And will be granted immortality,
Retiring to those Islands of the Blest.

GE

Well said, Prometheus, my son. And now
Let us return to join our brother and
Our sister gods, on Mount Olympus' peak.
Not even there do gods and goddesses
Yet live in peace and harmony! It will
Be hard for some of us to keep away
From Earth, but we must learn that gods
No longer can compel Man to perform
For their amusement And in time perhaps
Mankind will honour us, not out of fear,
But out of thanks for all we did for them!
Ge and Prometheus drive off in the chariot, accompanied by cheering nymphs.

CHORUS

Allowed by Zeus to leave our new abode,
The Islands of the Blest, far out from land
In Ocean's stream, we came to sympathise
With poor Prometheus, our Titan brother.
We reached this desolate landscape in time

To see him freed from all his bonds, a sight
We never thought to see. And now he has
Revealed his secret to the king of gods
And saved him from the fate that overthrew
His father and grandfather. In return
Zeus has agreed to leave mankind alone:
They will control their destiny themselves,
Thanks to the gift of Justice from the gods.

How will that work?
I ask myself.
How many of the teeming race of men
Must honour Justice
If she is to change mankind,
Divert them from
Their age-old exploitation of the Earth,
Its creatures and its natural wealth,
And, sad I am to say, each other too?

My guess is change will take millennia,
If it occurs at all..
Immortals, as we've said, do not experience
The ,march of time. Their lives are spent
In one perpetual present tense.
That's why Zeus and his fellow gods were not distressed
To leave the world of men and women
To men and women to control.
The meagre entertainment to be had
From teasing and tormenting humankind
With endless repetition becomes meaningless.
There is no thing that is a novelty for gods.-
Thus if they feast and celebrate at home

On Mount Olympus, it makes no odds to them
If partying lasts half an hour or several centuries.

Now Zeus's generation seeks
To retire
From interference in the world of men
They will no longer judge and punish
Their human counterparts
Capriciously,
Vindictively,
Mortals will learn to judge themselves,
Alone with no help from gods.
They'll distribute rewards
And punishments,
All by themselves.
As they see fit.
And if they choose their judges wisely, they
Will lead the human race towards
Making their Earth a safe and comfortable place
For themselves and all the life
They share their homeland with.

It seems to me as if the plan
To civilise the human race
Will not be swiftly realised –
Nor will this cause the gods a moment's thought.
Maybe it will be several millennia before
Mortals progress in understanding
What the meaning
The potential
The benefits to their race
Of Zeus's Justice which he's sent to them.

I don't anticipate the end
Of greed,
Of wars,,
Of tyranny
Despoliation of the earth
Immediately!
But to the gods when it occurs
If it occurs
It will seem just as if
It happened yesterday,
Or now, today,
All human history could pass
Unnoticed
While Apollo seeks
To tune his lyre, after the trauma of
A broken string.

Our feathered transport has been waiting long
The time has come to leave this barren place,
Returning now to take our longed-for rest
In our secluded Islands of the Blest!
The Chorus depart as they arrived, in a flotilla of winged vehicles.

AMW The Hut, Marshfield Woods, January 2022

