

PROMETHEUS THE PRISONER

By AESCHYLUS

Translated by ANDREW WILSON

THE PROMETHEUS TETRALOGY PART I



For Juliet

PROMETHEIA

THE PROMETHEUS TETRALOGY

PART I

PROMETHEUS DESMOTES

(Prometheus the Prisoner)

Translated by ANDREW WILSON

Traditionally known as Prometheus Bound, **Prometheus Desmotes** is a tragic drama formerly assumed to be by Aeschylus, but now generally ascribed to an unknown Athenian tragedian of the 5th century BC. It is apparently, although not certainly, the first play in a tetralogy whose other components are uncertain. The iambic trimeters of the original become blank verse in my translation, while in the choral passages I attempt to mimic the original verse forms as far as is possible in English.

Characters

KRATOS, “POWER”

BIA, “FORCE” [silent]

HEPHAISTOS, son of Zeus, god of fire

PROMETHEUS, a Titan

DAUGHTERS OF OKEANOS, the Chorus

OKEANOS, a Titan

IO, daughter of Inakhos, a woman

HERMES, son of Zeus, messenger of the gods

Scene

A desolate crag at the edge of the world

Power and Force march Prometheus, their prisoner to the spot where he is to be impaled. Hephaistos follows, reluctantly.

POWER

We've come, then, to the place, the furthest edge,
The Scythian zone, wasteland where no man lives.
Hephaistos, you must follow the commands
Your father gave you: fix this criminal
To rocks, high, inaccessible, with fetters
He cannot break, in chains of hardened steel.
It was your pride, fire, key to all the skills,
He stole and gave to mortal men. For wrong
Like this he needs to pay the gods a price,
So that he can be taught to love the rule
Of Zeus, recant his human-loving ways.

10

HEPHAISTOS

Power, and Force: the job entrusted you
By Zeus is done. There's no more need of you.
Though I am loth to violently clamp
A god, a cousin, to some wintry crag,
I have no choice, must make myself perform.
To brush aside one's father's wish is serious.
Proud son of Themis, she of sound advice,
It is against my will no less than yours
To nail you fast with pins of bronze to this
Rock far from human voice or human eyes.
Scorched by the sun's bright flame your skin
Will lose its texture. And how glad you'll be
When spangle-suited night removes the glare,
When, too, the sun dissolves the frost at dawn.
The weight of unrelenting misery
Will crush you. No saviour has yet been born!

20

25

Such are the fruits of your man-loving ways.
A god, you scorned the anger of the gods,
Gave men our privilege. You went too far.
To make amends you'll guard this dreadful rock,
Stood upright, sleepless, not flexing your legs.
Constant will be the groans and protests you
Shall voice. The mind of Zeus is hard to sway:
All those new to command are pitiless.

30

POWER

Come on! Why waste your time with squeamishness?
Why don't you hate the god the gods most hate?
Who gave away your rights to mortal men?

HEPHAISTOS

Family's a powerful thing, and so is friendship.

POWER

Agreed. But disobeying father's words –
What is that like? Does this not scare you more?

40

HEPHAISTOS

Cruel, as you always were. Hot-tempered too.

POWER

The cure is not to make lament for him.
It's useless. Why waste energy on grief?

HEPHAISTOS

O how I hate the work my hands must do!

POWER

Why hate it so? Frankly, your trade is not
At all to blame for what's occurring now.

HEPHAISTOS

I wish another had been burdened with it!

POWER

All jobs cause pain, except king of the gods!
No one is truly free, except for Zeus.

50

HEPHAISTOS

I know – here is the proof! I can't dispute it.

POWER

Then hurry up and get these chains on him:

You won't want father seeing you slack off?

HEPHAISTOS

You see I have the bonds here in my hands.

POWER

Then use your strength and clamp them round his wrists.

Hammer them home, rivet him to the cliff.

HEPHAISTOS

The job is being done, and properly.

POWER

Hit harder, make it tight, leave nothing loose.

A clever man finds ways where none exists!

HEPHAISTOS

This elbow's fixed! There's no way out of that!

60

POWER

Now pin this one securely too, so that

"Brains" learns how dim he is compared with Zeus.

HEPHAISTOS

No one could fault my work – except for him!

POWER

Now hammer firmly through his chest the wedge

Of hardened steel with its unyielding point.

HEPHAISTOS

Aargh! Aargh!

Prometheus, I feel pity for your pain!

POWER

Get on! Waste pity on the enemies

Of Zeus? Mind you don't need it for yourself!

HEPHAISTOS

You see a sight that eyes can't bear to see.

POWER

I see him someone getting his deserts.

70

Just thread the chest-straps round his ribs.

HEPHAISTOS

I have to do this: don't keep on at me!

POWER

I shall keep on, keep barking orders too!

Move lower. Force his legs into the rings.

HEPHAISTOS

Look then, it's done. It wasn't very hard.

POWER

The shackles now. Make sure they're good and tight,

The supervisor of our work is tough.

HEPHAISTOS

Your speech is hard, matching the way you look.

POWER

Be soft, then. Just don't criticise my pride:

My passionate commitment makes me tough.

80

HEPHAISTOS

Let's go. His legs are tied up and secure.

Hephaistos departs, as Power confronts Prometheus

POWER

That's it! Now do your worst! Go on

Robbing the gods, sharing their privilege

With mortals: can they mitigate your pain?

The gods were wrong to call you "Prometheus:

Who sees it coming". You cannot foresee,

The means to extricate yourself from this!

Power and Force depart

PROMETHEUS

Sky! Zeus's sky! You winds that skim so fast,
Fresh-water streams, you ever-smiling waves
Of ocean tides, and Earth, mother of all, 90
And you, the sun's all-seeing disk, I summon.
Look how I'm treated by the gods, a god!

Do you see with what violent contempt *[anapaests]*

I am torn apart, for I shall be in pain

For ten thousand years.

This vicious cell the young Tsar of the gods

Has contrived for me is such as you see.

Argh! Argh! I wince at the pain I feel now

And for what is to come. Where and when shall

Any limit be set to my torment? 100

What am I saying, though? I know exactly

Before it happens what's to come. No blow

Can fall that's unforeseen. I have to bear

The fate decreed as best I can, knowing

The power of destiny's invincible.

Impossible for me both silence and

Not to be silent, since, for giving men

A gift, I'm strapped in these restraints. It hurts.

I hunted down the source of fire and stole it

Inside a hollow fennel stalk: it proved 110

A teacher: path for men to every skill.

Such is the sin for which I pay the price,

Clamped in these bonds exposed to storms and gales.

He cries out in protest, then exclaims in surprise, as he realises someone is approaching.

What sound's this? What perfume comes drifting? Mysterious! *anapaests*

Is it from a god, or mortal or from something else,

Come to the world's very edge, here to this rock

To goggle at my pain, or wanting what?

Take a good look, a sad god in captivity!
 Enemy of Zeus, who am held in contempt
 By all of the gods, each one who frequents
 The heavenly halls where Zeus presides,
 All because I showed too much affection to men.
 What's this? What's the fluttering noise I can hear?
 Is it birds nearby? There's a whistling sound
 In the air, not loud, as of beating wings.
 Anything that comes makes me fearful!

CHORUS

Strophe 1

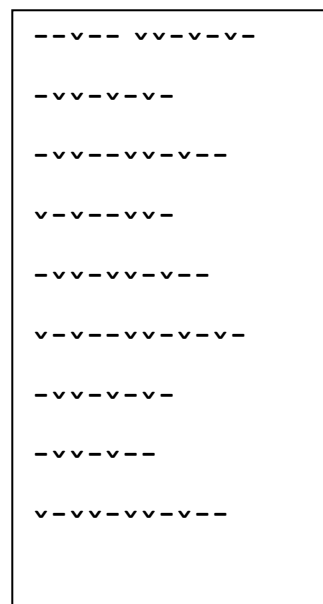
Please don't be fearful! We are friends in this contin-
 gent, with our wings competing fast
 Eager to reach this precipice. Reluctant
 Our father was for us to come,
 Violent breezes, though, brought me swiftly.
 The banging steel noise penetrating deep inside
 My little cave drove out my qualms,
 Modesty lost to wonder,
 I hurried to jump in the winged-car – barefoot!

PROMETHEUS

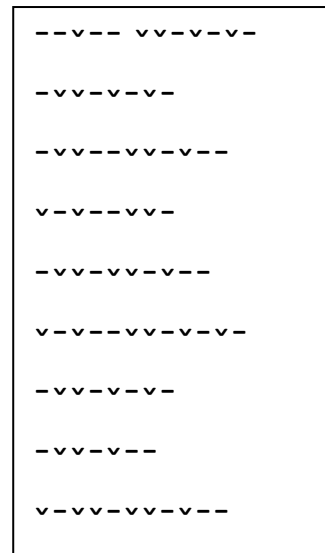
Cries of agony

Daughters of Tethys, mother to many, *anapaests*
 And of Okeanos, who encircles all
 Of the earth with his stream, constant flowing
 Never pausing to rest. Look at me, take it in!
 How I am bound, pinioned, nailed down,
 On the highest rocks of this steep ravine,
 Where I have my unenviable watch post. CHORUS

Antistrophe 1



I look, Prometheus, and a mist now veils my sight,
 Caused by the fear which burns my eyes,
 Brimming with tears as I make out your body
 Becoming withered on the rock,
 Held by those hateful restraints you can't break.
 For new they are, those who control Olympus' helm;
 New are the laws that rule us now:
 Zeus is in charge, not rightly.
 The grandees of old are annihilated.



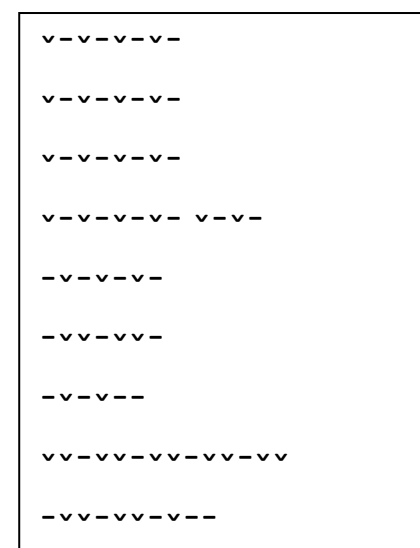
PROMETHEUS

If he only had sent me down below *[anapaests]*
 Fiercely pinioned with unbreakable chains
 To the vastness of Tartaros, kingdom
 Of Hades who welcomes the dead,
 So neither a god nor anyone else could
 Laugh at my troubles.
 But now poor fool I'm stuck in the air,
 As a butt for my enemies' insults.

CHORUS

Strophe 2

Which of the gods has such a ston-
 -y heart, to find amusement here?
 Who would not feel indignant at
 Your plight, except for Zeus? For always he'll
 Angrily refuse to bend
 As he relentlessly hounds
 Ouranos's children,
 Until either he softens his stance, or- so hard! -
 Someone can make him give up his kingship.



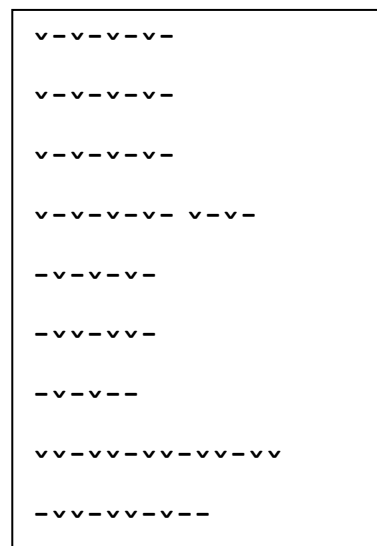
PROMETHEUS

Yet the gods' president shall still have need [anapaests]
 Of my help, although he maltreats me thus
 With these oppressive, crippling fetters,
 To reveal new plans which will end with him
 Stripped of his sceptre and royal power.
 And he will not charm me with his sweet talk
 Trying to persuade me, nor will I, cowering
 At his merciless threats, ever speak of this thing
 Until he frees me from this bondage,
 And agrees to pay for this outrage.

CHORUS

Antistrophe 2

You are belligerent, you love
 To wallow in your grief and pain.
 You are too free in how you speak.
 A fear is gnawing at my heart relentlessly.
 I'm afraid, when I survey your fate,
 Can one imagine you'll reach
 A harbour where it all ends?
 Because Kronos's son has a character one cannot
 Read, and his mind is unbending, rigid.



PROMETHEUS *anapaests*

I know that he's brutal and has his own take
 On what's just. I know too that some day,
 He will show he's a heart of gold!
 When he's been shattered by his new plans,
 And calmed that wilful temper of his,
 He'll return to peace and friendship with me,
 He'll be as keen as I am keen.

CHORUS

Unwrap it all, speak to us of the reason,

What was it Zeus accused you of, that he
Treats you so harshly and so disgracefully?
Tell us, unless retelling it hurts you.

PROMETHEUS *iambics*

To speak of this is painful for me, true,
But so is not to speak, both things are hard.
When the immortals first began their strife,
Quarrels broke out between them all,
Some wanted to drive Kronos off his throne
To make Zeus king - believe that? - others wished
The opposite, that Zeus should never rule
The gods. I gave the best advice, but failed
To win the Titans over, children all
Of Earth and Sky. My clever plans they scorned,
Believing they knew better, thinking they
Would triumph easily through violence.
My mother, Themis, more than once, or Earth -
She is one goddess who has many names -
Prophesied how the future would turn out.
The victory would not be won by strength,
Or force: those with more cunning would prevail.
When I expounded arguments like these
They spurned them, would not look at them at all.
The best option available to me
Seemed this: bringing my mother with me, offer
To join with Zeus, an offer he welcomed.
Because of my advice, the deep dark hole
Of Tartaros conceals the ancient Kronos, and
His gang. Having received such benefits
From me, the upstart autocrat god-king
Repaid me with this uncouth punishment.
Endemic to dictatorship is this
Disease, to treat one's friends with no respect.

Your question, then, you asked, the reason why
He treats me badly; this I'll now disclose.
The moment he possessed the throne that was
His father's, he at once began to dole
Out posts to all the gods, sharing out power
Among them, but poor wretched humans he
Ignored: his plan was to obliterate
That race, and then create a different one.
And no one went against this but myself.
I stuck my neck out. And I saved mankind
From doom, packed off to Hades' realm.
Because of this I'm racked with such torments
Painful to suffer, pitiful to view.
I pitied humans and protected them: I don't
Deserve to suffer this, but I am brought
To order thus, a sight to disgrace Zeus.

240

CHORUS

So. Iron-hearted or fashioned from stone
Is one, Prometheus, who is not outraged
By this. I'd wish never to see such pain,
But having seen it, how my heart now aches.

PROMETHEUS

To friends at least I am a pitiful sight to see.

CHORUS

Did you go further, though, than you admit?

PROMETHEUS

Well, yes. I stopped humans foreseeing death!

CHORUS

What is the cure you found for this disease?

PROMETHEUS

Blind hope is what I introduced them to.

CHORUS

A massive benefit you gave mankind!

PROMETHEUS

As well as this gift, though, I gave them fire...

CHORUS

And now these “mayflies” have the flames of fire?

PROMETHEUS

And from it many are the skills they’ll learn.

CHORUS

And this indeed is what Zeus blames you for...

PROMETHEUS

And penalises me relentlessly.

CHORUS

No date was given for when your suffering will
end? PROMETHEUS

No, none at all – only when he decides.

CHORUS

“When he decides”. What hope is there? You sinned!

Do you not see? To say that you did wrong

Is hard for me, and gives you pain. Let’s say

No more, find some way to reduce your pain.

PROMETHEUS

Simple for one who’s kept their feet well clear

Of cares to lecture, give advice to those

In trouble. But I knew this well, all this.

I admit I sinned on purpose, willingly.

I did myself no good in aiding men,

Not that I thought my punishment would be

Like this, left rotting, dangling on these rocks,

My home this lonely god-forsaken cliff.

But, please, do not spend all your grief on what

Is happening now. Come down and listen to

What is to come, so you may see it all.

Believe in me, give me your trust: work with me:

Now I'm in trouble. Trouble's flighty, though.

She rooms with different men at different times.

276

CHORUS

We have sympathy for these painful cries

You utter, Prometheus. I, nimbly

Getting down from the speedy conveyance which

Took us airborne through the domain of the birds,

Shall step now on to this rocky ground.

I want to hear all

Of your story from the beginning.

283

The Okeanids' father Okeanos makes an unexpected appearance, riding on a somewhat bizarre contraption.

OKEANOS

I am here, having reached the end of a long

Journey to see you, Prometheus, steering

This buzzard with its furious flapping

By the power of my mind – no need for reins.

I feel for your misfortunes, sure,

And family ties, I think, compel

Me too, but even if we weren't close

None would deserve my respect more than you, friend.

You'll learn how true this is. It is not

In me to flatter with insincerity.

Come, tell me what I must do to help.

For you shall never say there's a friend more

Loyal to you than Okeanos.

297

PROMETHEUS

Eh? What is this? You've really come to gawk

At my mischance. How come you were so bold,

To leave the stream that bears your name, your rock-

Roofed grottoes nature made for you, to come
To land, where iron's found? To view my fate?
Or come to join my protest at these crimes?
Take in the sight! Behold the friend of Zeus,
The one who helped set up his monarchy,
How I by him am tortured with such pains.

OKEANOS

I see, Prometheus, and I wish to offer
You, clever though you are, the best advice.
Grasp who you are: fit in with new arrangements:
There is a new regime among the gods.
If you persist hurling these crude and pointed
Insults, then Zeus, perhaps, although he sits
So far above, may hear you, and your throng
Of woes today could seem like children's play.
You are in pain: give up this posturing,
Seek out release from all this suffering.
Perhaps I seem an antiquated fool
To tell you this, Prometheus, but it is
The consequence of your unguarded tongue.
You've never been submissive, giving in,
You add more troubles to the ones you have.
You won't, if schooled by me, invite the goad
By lengthening your stride, since, you observe,
This monarch's harsh, with none to check his power.
And I shall now depart and do my best
To see if I can free you from this pain.
You, though, stay calm, and don't speak out so much.
You are intelligent: surely you know
That punishment falls hard on foolish speech?

PROMETHEUS

I envy you: beyond the range of blame
For sharing all and taking risks for me!

So, leave it now: it's no concern of yours.
You'll never win: he's not persuadable.
Watch out! This trip could damage you yourself!

OKEANOS

Experience tells me you are better far
Advising others, rather than yourself.
You'll not divert me from the task in hand.
I'm confident, quite confident that Zeus
Will grant this gift: your freedom from your pains.

339

PROMETHEUS

For this I do commend you, and shall do
Always: in your good will I find no fault.
But it's no use. Your work on my behalf
Is pointless, though it's clear you want to help.
Don't cause a stir, then, keep out of the way.
Because I'm in distress, for this,
I have no wish to share it far and wide.
No, no! I am tormented by the fate
Of brother Atlas, standing in the west,
Who holds a pillar up from earth to heaven,
Shouldering a load not easy to sustain.
I see and pity him as well, earth-born
Typhos, whose home is a Cilician cave,
That dangerous hundred-headed giant confined
There after his defeat. He stood against
All gods, hissing out death through grisly jaws,
While dazzling lightning sparked fire from his eyes
As he set out to smash the tyranny of Zeus.
But Zeus, alert, sent him his own weapon,
A crashing thunderbolt blasting out flame,
Which shook him from his high and mighty words,
His boastfulness. Struck to the very guts,
His strength now seared, and thundered, out of him,

He lies, a useless sprawling hulk of flesh,
Near where the sea is narrowed to a strait,
Squashed flat beneath Mount Etna's massive slopes.

While on the highest peaks Hephaistos has
His forge, from where rivers of fire one day
Shall surge, devouring with cruel appetite
The level fields of fertile Sicily.

Such rage shall Typhos then send boiling up:
Hot spears of fiery hail consuming all -
Despite his roasting by Zeus' thunderbolt.
All this you know; you have no need for me
To lecture you. You know how to keep safe.
I shall keep coping with my current woes,
Until the heart of Zeus is freed from rage.

OKEANOS

Surely, Prometheus, you know this: that words
Are doctors for a fevered, troubled mind.

PROMETHEUS

If it's the time to cool it down, then yes;
You cannot treat a mind still swollen up.

OKEANOS

What is the harm you see in being keen,
Making an effort? Please enlighten me.

PROMETHEUS

A waste of energy. Sheer foolishness.

OKEANOS

Then let me suffer from this failing, since
It's best a man of sense appears not so.

PROMETHEUS

Appearing stupid is what's wrong with me!

OKEANOS

Clearly, your attitude sends me back home!

PROMETHEUS

Lest pitying me make you unpopular!

OKEANOS

With the new tyrant on the throne, you mean?

PROMETHEUS

Watch out for him! Don't let him get annoyed!

OKEANOS

Your fate, Prometheus, is a lesson learned!!

PROMETHEUS

Away! Be gone! Keep thinking as you do.

OKEANOS

No need to shout! I'm going anyway!

With whirring wings he'll fly straight up to heaven,

My four-legged bird. He will be glad indeed

To settle back in his own stall at home.

Okeanos mounts his strange ornithopter and flies off.

CHORUS

First strophe

I weep, Prometheus, at your overwhelming fate,

Pour from my eyes, blinking and dim,

Rivers of tears, fed by my grief;

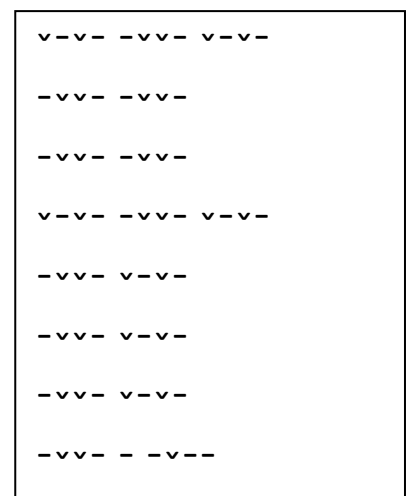
I've soaked my cheeks, made my face wet, with flowing streams.

This is the way, without restraint,

Zeus shows his power, with laws his own;

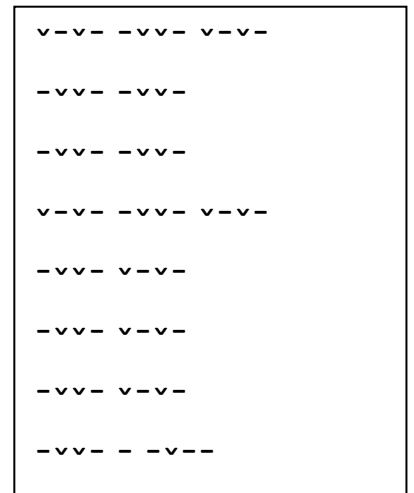
How he displays to gods of old,

Haughtily demonstrates his violence.



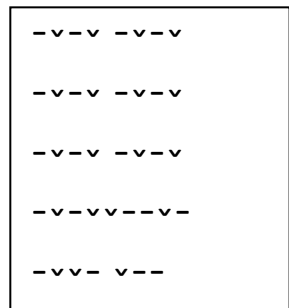
First antistrophe

Already now, all of the land, has cried aloud,
Venting her grief; <men of the west>
Grieve over you, you and your blood-
kin's ancient rank: settlers who now call Asia home
Living their lives in virgin lands,
Suffer with you in sympathy
Sharing your pain, with loud laments,
Though they are mortals who must all die.



Second strophe

You whose home's the land of Kolkhis
Fearless Women, battle-hardened
Band of sisters, you who live in
Earth's remotest and most far-flung place
All around Lake Maiotis,



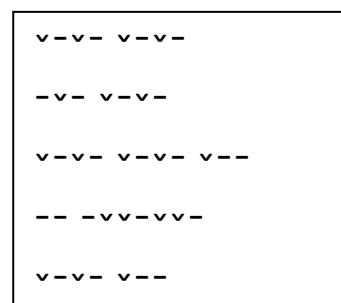
Second antistrophe

You, too, warlike Arab flowers
Growing in your city high up,
Midst the crags of Kaukasos, a
Tribe, aggressive, with all weapons sharp
Making a noise like thunder.



Epode

The waves that break along the coast
Roar, the ocean deep complains
The dark recesses deep in Hades rumble,
Pure springs too from which rivers are fed
All grieve and pity your plight.



PROMETHEUS

Do not be thinking it's self-confidence
Or vanity that keeps me quiet. Not so:
I see what's coming: future pain eats up
My soul. Yet who apart from me devised
The regime for these brand-new gods? I say
No more. You know of what I speak. Think of
The misery of man, how innocent he was
Before I gave him consciousness and thought.
What I shall say is not to criticise
Mankind, but to explain the love I gave them.
At first, they looked but did not see, they listened
But did not hear, like figures in a dream;
Throughout their lives they made a mess
Of everything, chaotically; they knew
Nothing of brick-built, sunlit houses nor
Of carpentry. They lived below the ground,
Like feeble ants, in sunless nooks of caves.
They had no certain means to tell winter
Apart from flowering spring, or summer with
Its fruits: but they did everything without
Comprehension until I showed to them
The subtle rise and settings of the stars. 458
And number, furthermore, the prince of skills,
I found for them, and writing letters down,
The key to memory, and mother of the arts.
And I was first to harness wild beasts,
And yoke them into slavery, so they
Could free mankind from their most strenuous tasks,
And I made horses love the rein, to pull
The chariots, mark of the wealthiest.
And it was I devised the sea-borne shells
With linen wings, sailors' conveyances.

Such were the inventions I produced for men –
Poor fool, but have no trick whereby I can
Myself escape my present agonies.

471

CHORUS

Pain undeserved you've suffered, and your wits
Wander. Like a poor doctor fallen sick,
You're in despair, and cannot find what drugs
You need as remedy for your disease.

PROMETHEUS

Hearing the rest, you will be more amazed,
The kinds of crafts and skills that I thought up.
The most important: if someone fell ill
There was no remedy to take or to
Apply, nothing that worked, and so for lack
Of medicines they pined away, until
I showed them how to mix up healing drugs,
To protect themselves against all illnesses.

483

The many modes of divination I
Set up; was first to tell from dreams what will
Occur awake; I made them grasp the sense
Of unclear omens, meetings on the road.
I taught precise interpretation of
The flight of raptors, which were good to see
Which ominous, what haunts each type of bird
Favoured, and which showed enmity to which,
Or shared a roost or joined in flocks.

492

And I explained the entrails' smoothness, and
What colour of the bile would find the gods'
Approval and which blotches made the liver
Look good. And I set mortals on the road
To a hard skill – wrapping in fat back-bone
And thigh-bones – and I made them see the signs
In flames they were too blind to see before.

Well, that's enough of that. Below the ground,
Good things concealed of benefit to man,
Metals: bronze, iron, gold and silver – who
Could claim to have unearthed them before me?
No one, for sure, not choosing to talk rot.
To put it all together and sum up:
All mortal skills come from Prometheus.

506

CHORUS

Do not, though, go so far to help mankind
That you neglect your own sad plight. I am
So full of hope that you will yet be freed
From these restraints, and Zeus won't get more power.

PROMETHEUS

That bringer-to-a-finish, Fate, has not yet
Been given charge to end this thing this way.
Much pain to suffer still before I lose
My chains! Feebler than Fate is intellect.

CHORUS

Who then is it controls the course of Fate?

PROMETHEUS

The three Moirai: the Erinyes enforce.

CHORUS

And is Zeus then less powerful than these?

PROMETHEUS

Of course, he could not run away from Fate...

CHORUS

What is Zeus' fate, if not to rule for ever?

PROMETHEUS

No more than this will you find out: don't ask.

CHORUS

You keep this holy secret to yourself!

PROMETHEUS

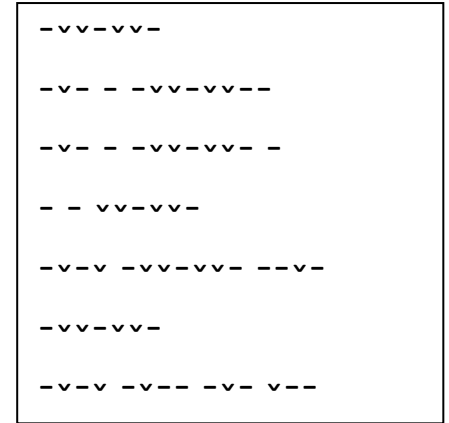
Select another subject: it's not time

To speak of this; it must stay unrevealed
 As long as possible. Keeping it quiet,
 I shall escape these chains, this agony.

CHORUS

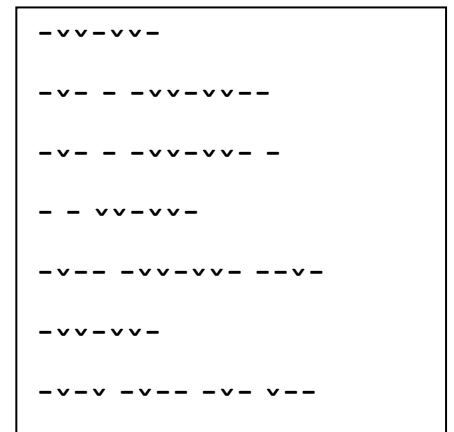
First strophe

Never may almighty Zeus
 Use his brute force focusing his will against mine,
 Never may I weary of pleasing immortals
 With sacrifice, slaughtering cows,
 There beside our father Okeanos' stream which always flows,
 Nor may I sin with my tongue.
 And may this remain with me, and never ever leave me:



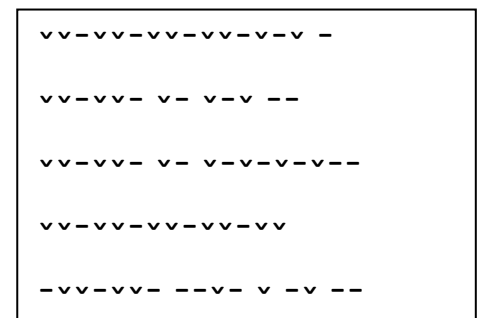
First antistrophe

How very pleasant to live
 Out one's whole life confident, hopeful; to nourish,
 Feed one's spirit brightly, and brimming with joy:
 I shudder when looking at you
 Tortured with pains no one is able to count, < for mankind's sake >,
 Showing no terror of Zeus.
 Your own wish it was to give men such respect, Prometheus.



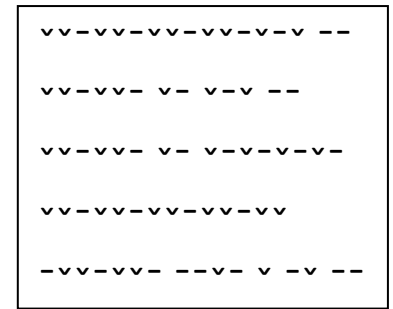
Second strophe

Tell me how was your favour a favour, my friend? Where is the support?
 From your mortals what help appeared? Can you not see how
 They are helpless and feeble, dreamlike figures? How the sightless nation
 Of mankind is in shackles, and how the ambitions of
 Mortals will never escape that ordered world which Zeus established?



Second antistrophe

I was taught all these things as I looked on your awesome fate, Prometheus.
And a melody wholly different struck my senses,
From the one I was singing, by your bath and by your bedside then,
At the time of your wedding that day you persuaded our
Sister Hesione she should be your wife and share your bed always.



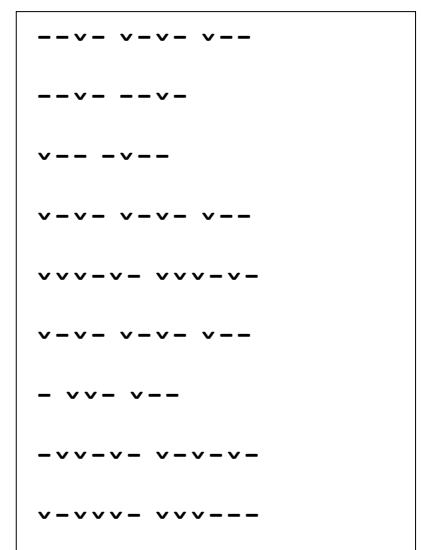
A strange, distressed creature comes bounding in – she is a mortal girl, currently though, in the form of a heifer.

IO

What land? And what race? Who is it I see,
This man strapped by those chains to the rockface
At the mercy of storms? What is he guilty of,
To be punished like this? Just tell me, where
In the world I have strayed to, poor woman?

Io screams. She is terrified and in pain.

Once more a gadfly stings! O how it hurts me!
Your spectre, Argos, earth-born fiend!
O help me! Panic! Horror!
I see him with his hundred eyes, my keeper!
Here he comes haunting me, flashing his cheating eyes,
He's dead, but still the earth can't hide his image,
Still he pursues me, poor sad
Creature; he's back from hell, keeps driving me along
The sand, down by the sea, won't let me eat, no rest!!



Strophe

And now the reed stems, joined together with wax, sing soft

Comforting melodies urging sleep.

What are you doing to me? Where is this unending maze directing me to?

What is your plan, Kronos's son, what have I done

So sinful you scourge me by heaping these torments upon me?

She screams again

Why send the horse fly, scaring me witless, why

Do you so oppress me, poor wretch?

Why not just burn me up, bury me underground, make me food for all the ocean's fish?

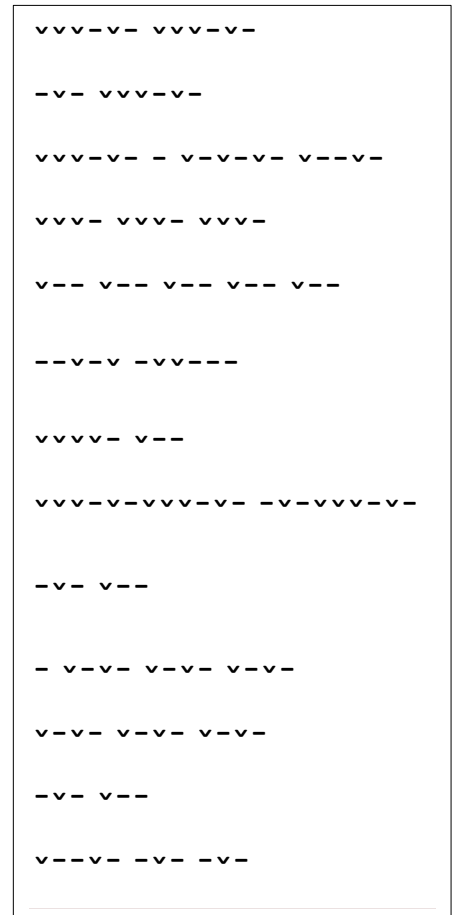
But do not begrudge me,

Sire, my prayers! These wanderings that never have an end

Have exercised me quite enough. What medicine can

Free me from my anguish?

Can you not hear my cries I'm the girl, girl with horns?



PROMETHEUS

Surely, I hear that girl stung by the fly,

Daughter of Inakhos, who stirred the heart

Of Zeus to love, and now through Hera's hate

Is forced to run this race without an end?

IO

Antistrophe

How do you know the name? You said my father's name!

Who are you? Tell me, I'm all confused

Who on earth are you, poor wretch, who can call out to me with such words of truth,

Giving a name to the infection from the gods,

The one which defiles me and stings me and drives me to madness?

She cries out in pain

I, made to starve and goaded to leap, writhing,

Have come to this place in fury,

Driven by Hera's spite, consciously aimed at me. Are there others who are suffering?

She screams

So unjustly, like me?

Tell me clearly what remains for me, what's still for me

To bear. What remedy, what cure for my disease?

If you know, reveal it.

Just tell me - a young girl so lost, far from home.

PROMETHEUS

I'll tell you plainly all you wish to know.

Not wrap it up in riddles - simple words -

The proper way one ought to speak to friends.

You see Prometheus, who gave fire to men.

IO

You're known as benefactor of mankind,

What is the crime you suffer for, Prometheus?

PROMETHEUS

I just now stopped protesting at my pains!

vvv-v- vvv-v-
-v- vvv-v-
vvv-v- -v-v-v- v-v-v-
vvv- vvv- vvv-
v-- v-- v-- v-- v--
--v-v- -vv--
vvvv- v--
vvv-v-vvv-v- -v-vvv-v-

-v- v--
- v-v- v-v- v-v-
v-v- v-v- v-v-
-v- v--
v-v-v- -v- -v-

IO

Won't you grant me a favour just this once?

PROMETHEUS

Tell me your question. You'll learn all from me.

IO

Reveal who strapped you to this precipice.

PROMETHEUS

The plan of Zeus. Hephaistos' handiwork.

IO

What kind of wrongdoing earns this penalty?

PROMETHEUS

I've said enough – that's all there is to tell.

IO

As well as this, at least reveal to me

My wandering's end, how long it will go on.

PROMETHEUS

To not know this is better than to know.

IO

Do not hide from me what I shall endure.

PROMETHEUS

I won't hold back. I will grant you your wish. [But he is still hesitant]

IO

Then what is stopping you from telling me?

PROMETHEUS

It's not ill will: I fear I'll break your heart.

IO

No need to worry any more: it's what I want.

PROMETHEUS

Since you are keen, then speak I must. Hear then!

CHORUS

Not yet. Allow a thing that would please me.

First let us learn about this girl's affliction;

Let her describe her dreadful fate herself.

Let her then learn her future trials from you.

PROMETHEUS

Your job, Io - to grant them this favour.

They are my father's sisters, after all!

It's no bad thing to weep, bemoan one's fate

When one is sure of getting sympathy

From those who hear your words. It is worthwhile.

IO

To disappoint you I can see would not

Be right, you'll learn all that you want to, told

Straightforwardly. And yet I weep to speak

About this god-sent sea of woe, and how

My dreadful change of shape occurred.

The dreams came visiting me every night

In my bedroom, and kept soft-talking me

With silky tones: "You lucky, lucky girl,

Why save up your virginity when you

Could wed the greatest catch of all? For Zeus,

Pricked by desire, is hot for you, and wants

To share his love. My girl, do not refuse him!

Go down to Lerna, where the grass is long,

Near where your father has his sheep and cows,

So Zeus may find an outlet for his lust."

Poor fool, I was upset by dreams like this

Each night, until I felt quite brave enough

To tell my father what nightmares I'd had.

He sent one party off to Delphi and

One to Dodona, so that he could learn

What he should say or do to please the gods.

The oracles they brought back were unclear,

Ambiguous and worded obscurely.

But finally, a clear pronouncement came

To Inakhos. It spoke out straight and clear:

Expel me from my home and fatherland,
 To wander loose towards the furthest edge
 Of Earth, unless he wished a thunderbolt
 From Zeus to fall and extirpate his race.
 Convinced by Loxias's oracles
 He pushed me out and banished me from home
 Against my will, and his. Zeus forced him to,
 Bridled just like a horse new-broken-in.
 At once my shape, my mind as well, became
 Distorted: as you see, I grew these horns
 And maddened by the biting fly, I charge,
 Insane, leaping to drink from Kerkhneia's stream
 And Lerna's spring. The brutal cowherd born
 From Earth, Argos the violent, chases me,
 Watching my every step with sleepless eyes.
 A sudden unexpected blow robs him
 Of life. But I, still goaded by the fly,
 Am whipped from land to land by heavenly hate.
 You've heard my history. If you can tell
 What pain awaits, don't try to comfort me
 With lies, through sympathy, but speak! Lying,
 I say, is of evils the most obnoxious.

CHORUS

Such pain, such pain! Stop it! Enough!
 Never did I expect I would hear
 Such strange sounds, such words. I never heard such things!
 Such agony to watch, to bear, such outrage,
 Suffering chills me and leaves me
 Feeling I've been struck by some two-pointed goad.
 O god, o god, fated, destined!
 When I look at Io's plight, I shudder!



PROMETHEUS

Too soon to break down and display your fear.
Hold back until you learn what is to come.

CHORUS

Speak. Tell us all. It's good for those who're sick
To clearly understand their future pain.

PROMETHEUS

Your first request I easily fulfilled.
You wanted first to be informed about
The ordeal she has up till now gone through.
Now listen to her future, what she must
Endure at Hera's hands, this poor young girl.
Daughter of Inakhos, you too must take
My words to heart, to know your journey's end.
First then from here align yourself towards
The rising sun; make for the unploughed plains.
You'll reach the Scythian nomads, who with homes
On carts of woven reeds, live off the ground;
Equipped with bows they shoot from far away.
Do not approach them, but bypass their land,
Guiding your footsteps through the breaking surf.
On your left hand the Chalybes reside,
Beware of them, the iron-working race:
They're savages who do not welcome guests.
You'll reach the river Violent aptly named:
Don't go across it – there's no easy way to cross –
Until you reach the actual Caucasus,
Highest of mountains, where down from the peaks
The river bursts out in full force. Crossing
The summit, neighbour to the stars, you must
Bend your way south, where you will reach the race
Of Amazons, man-haters, who one day
Will found Themiskyra, near the Thermodon,

Where Salmydessa's jaw juts out to sea,
No friend to sailors, stepmother to ships.
These women will most gladly guide your way.
You'll reach the narrow entrance to the lake,
The Crimean Peninsula, which you
Must boldly leave to leap Maiotis' strait.
Men will forever be impressed by your
Crossing, and after you it shall be named
The Bosphorus. Leaving the soil of Europe
You'll reach the Asian continent. Does not
The tyrant of the gods seem to you all
A ruthless predator? A god, lusting
To fuck a mortal girl, imposed this journey!
How vile a suitor for your hand, my love,
You have encountered! But the words you've heard
So far, trust me, are barely a prelude.

IO

She shrieks.

PROMETHEUS

Again, you scream, more floods of tears! What will
You do when you find out there's worse to come?

CHORUS

You mean there's still more suffering for her?

PROMETHEUS

Yes, there's a wintry sea of maddening pain.

IO

Why do I go on living then? Why don't
I hurl myself down from this jagged rock?
So plunging earthwards I would find relief
From all my pains? Better to die just once
Than suffer horribly each single day!

PROMETHEUS

Then you would find it hard to bear my trials,

Since it is fated for me not to die.

This would indeed provide relief from pain.

But there's no end prescribed for my troubles,

Until Zeus is removed from monarchy.

IO

Could it be one day Zeus will fall from power?

PROMETHEUS

A catastrophe you would be pleased to see!

IO

Why wouldn't I, foully abused by Zeus?

PROMETHEUS

You can feel happy then, this is a fact!

IO

Who will he be stripped of his power by?

PROMETHEUS

All by himself, by his own foolish plans.

IO

Precisely how? Tell, if it does no harm.

PROMETHEUS

He'll have a love affair which ruins him.

IO

A woman? Or a goddess? Can you say?.

PROMETHEUS

Don't ask me who. That can't be spoken of.

IO

A woman though will make him lose his throne!

PROMETHEUS

She'll bear a son more powerful than his father.

IO

Is there no way he could avoid this fate?

PROMETHEUS

There's not. Except through me, freed from these chains.

IO

Who would free you against the will of Zeus?

PROMETHEUS

It must be one descended from yourself.

IO

What did you say? My son will set you free?

PROMETHEUS

The thirteenth generation after you.

IO

This prophecy is hard to make sense of.

PROMETHEUS

And don't expect to learn of your own fate.

IO

Don't take away the gift you offered me!

PROMETHEUS

I'll give you this: a choice of two accounts.

IO

Which two? Reveal them, let me have my choice.

PROMETHEUS

My offer. Choose. Should I reveal either

Your future pains or who shall set me free?

CHORUS

Would you grant her request, and one for me?

Be generous, do not ration your words!

Explain, for her, her future wandering;

For me, who'll free you! This I long to hear.

PROMETHEUS

Since you are eager, I shall not refuse

To explain all that you desire me to.

For you, Io: your enforced journey first.

Record it in the tablets of your mind.

You've crossed the strait between the continents:

Turn now towards the fiery rising sun.

Cross then a sea which has no waves, until

You reach the Gorgons' plains of Kisthene,
Where dwell three ancient crones, the Grey Sisters,
Hair white like swans, who share a single eye,
A single tooth. On them the sun does not
Shine with his rays, nor does the moon by night.
Nearby, their sisters, three of them, with wings,
Snake-haired, the Gorgons, loathed by all mankind,
Whom none can look upon and still take breath.
The Gorgons' stronghold is as I describe.
Hear now of more unpleasant sights to see.
Beware the sharp-beaked, barkless hounds of Zeus,
The Griffins, and the Arimaspians,
A horde of one-eyed horsemen living near
The river Ploutos where it flows with gold.
Keep well away from them. Then you will reach
A far-flung land, its people black, who live where
The sun comes up – the river Aethiops.
Travel along its banks, until you reach
The rift, where from the Byblis hills the Nile
Sends forth his holy water, good to drink.
The river god will guide you to the Delta of
The Nile, where it is fated, Io, you'll
With children found a famous settlement.
If anything's obscure or hard to grasp,
Ask questions and receive a clear response.
I've more time on my hands than I would wish!

CHORUS

If you have something more to tell, something
Left out of her distressing odyssey,
Say on; but if you've said it all, then grant us
The wish we asked before – you know the one!

PROMETHEUS

She's heard about her travels' end in full.

But so you'll know that what you heard was true,
I'll tell what she'd endured before she came,
I offer this as proof of what I've said!
The bulk though of the story I'll leave out:
I shall cut to her wanderings' final stage.

To Io

When you arrived in the Molossian Plain,
And near Dodona on its mountain ridge,
Where lies Thesprotian Zeus's oracle -
Unlikely wonder, the oak trees that speak -
Beneath them clearly, unmistakably,
You were informed that you were going to be
The glorious wife of Zeus. That ring a bell?
Thence driven by the cleg you flashed along
The coastal track towards the Gulf of Rhea,
From where you're storm-blown back the way you came;
For ever more - believe that this is true -
That sea will be known as "Ionian",
Reminding all mankind of your journey.
These signs tell you the working of my mind,
Which sees so much more than it can reveal.

To Io and the Chorus

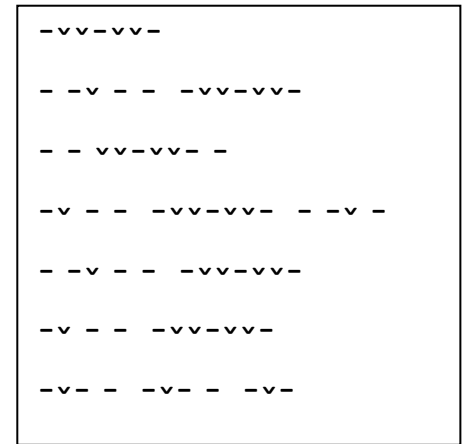
The rest I'll say for you and her as well,
Returning to the road I started on.
Canopus is a city far away,
Near to the mouth, the delta of the Nile;
There Zeus at last will make you well in mind,
Caress you, stroking with a gentle hand.
And you'll give birth to a black son of Zeus,
Called Epaphos, from how he was conceived.
He'll harvest all land watered by the Nile.
Five generations after him, fifty
Young girls come back unwillingly to Argos

Escaping kindred-marriage with their cousins.
Out of their wits with terror, as when doves
Find hawks in hot pursuit, hunting to wed
Those whom they may not hunt: a god, though, will
Deny the men possession of their wives.
When they are tamed, at night, and daringly,
Argos will bathe in death from women's hands.
Each woman robs her man of life, dousing
Her double-bladed sword in victims' blood.
May this be how Love hits my enemies!
But sympathy will lead one of the girls
To spare her man when her resolve grows weak:
She makes her choice of two evils. Better
Be called a coward than a murderess.
In Argos she'll be mother of a royal line.
To tell the details needs a longer time:
In short there shall be born of her descent
A hero, expert with the bow, who shall
Release me from this pain. This prophecy
My Titan mother Themis told me of.
But how and when would take me long to say,
And hearing it would not help you at all.
IO *[Anapaests]*
[Eleleu! Eleleu!] Pity me! Pity me!
I feel like inside convulsions and blows
To my brain are burning me up – madness!
Gadfly arrows sting like fire.
And my heart through fear kicks at my ribcage,
While my eyes spin like a cartwheel skidding,
I am thrown from my course by a frenzied blast,
I lose all control of my tongue, my speech,
Muddy word-streams randomly lashing out
At the sea of loathsome destruction.

CHORUS

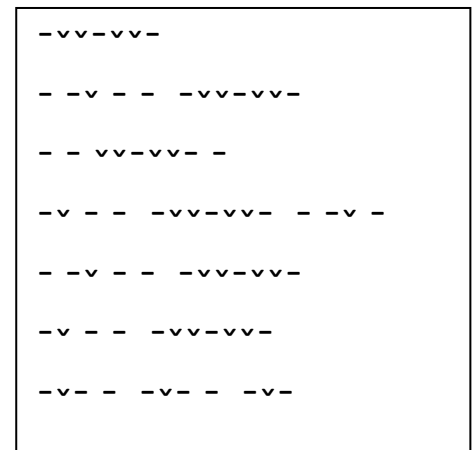
Strophe

Wise, yes he was, he was wise-
First one who weighed this up in his mind and then put
His thoughts into words and expressed them:
Better marry someone who boasts of an equal rank in life.
Never should one who works with his hands ever feel
Lust to wed with someone corrupted by wealth,
One who vaingloriously flaunts his ancestry!



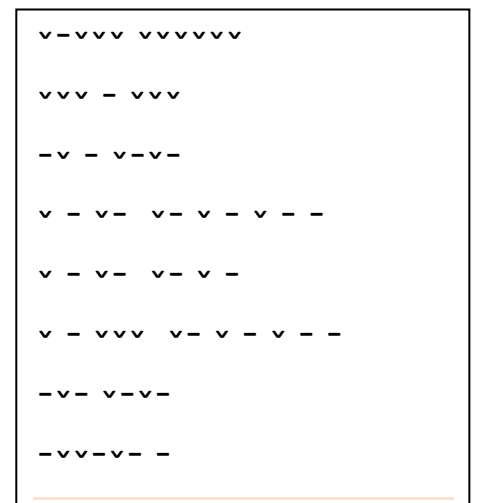
Antistrophe

Never, o never may you
Goddesses, who dispense us our fate, witness me
Fond lover of Zeus, or his bed-mate!
Don't let me be drawn towards marrying someone from the sky!
I dread a girlhood hating a man I can't love,
Watching lo being destroyed by the cruel
Wanderings inflicted by Queen Hera's spite.



Epode

For me, when a marriage is between equals,
I have no fear of it, but
May no powerful god confront
Me with a lustful glance I can't escape from!
This is a war that is not war,
No way to fight back. What would become of me, I
Do not know. I can't see how
I could be safe from Zeus' schemes.



PROMETHEUS

But truly, Zeus, pig-headed though he is,
Will be brought low: he plans a marriage such
As will uproot him from his tyrant's throne,
Condemned to sink into oblivion.
Then shall be fully carried out the curse
His father made, pushed off his ancient throne.
No other god but I can put him straight,
Show how he can avoid the coming doom.
I know and I know how. In face of this
Let him sit smugly trusting in his bang-
Bangs in the sky, waving his fiery tools.
Nothing that he can do to save himself
From an ugly, humiliating, fall!
He is creating a competitor,
For himself, himself, a formidable foe;
Who will invent a flash more potent than
The lightning, boom louder than thunder's clap;
He'll shatter, too, the seas' bane, earth's shaker,
The three-pronged fishing-spear of Poseidon.
And made to crash by this hard blow he'll learn
How great the gulf between ruler and slave.

CHORUS

These threats to Zeus are what you wish for, sure!

PROMETHEUS

They're what I wish, and what will be fulfilled.

CHORUS

Should we expect, then, one who'll lord it over Zeus?

PROMETHEUS

Yes, and his neck will bear worse pains than mine!

CHORUS

Are you not scared to broadcast views like these?

PROMETHEUS

Why scared? I am not mortal, can't be killed!

CHORUS

He could, though, make your present pains much worse.

PROMETHEUS

Then let him do it! I'd expect no less.

CHORUS

A wise man shows respect for Nemesis!

PROMETHEUS

Bow down, say prayers, suck up to who's in power!

I don't have no regard for Zeus, I've less!

Let him be busy chief, the way he likes,

His short time left. He won't rule gods for long.

Hermes approaches

But I can see the minion of Zeus,

The poodle of the new dictatorship.

Of course! He's got some vital news to break!

943

Hermes lands

HERMES

Hey! Master-brain! It's you I'm talking to!

The bitter twisted one who robbed the gods

Of what was theirs – mistake! - the fire-thief!

Father's orders. Speak out about this marriage

You bragged of, through which he will fall from power.

And I don't mean wrapped up in metaphors,

But tell it now in full detail! Do not,

Prometheus, force me to come here again.

Be sure that Zeus would not be pleased if so.

PROMETHEUS

How cocksure and crammed with pomposity

The speech of this errand-boy of the gods!

Your power is new, and you are young; you live

Behind those cosy battlements, you think!
D'you know I've thrown out two regimes from there?
The current one, the third, I expect to watch
Go quickest and most abjectly. Maybe
I seem to cower and fear the new young gods?
Sadly, I lack emotions of that kind.
So, you now, bustle off the way you came;
You'll get no answers to your questions here.

HERMES

It was presumptuousness like this, I'd say,
That got you stuck in this predicament!

PROMETHEUS

Be sure! I would not swap my evil luck
For that demeaning servitude of yours.

HERMES

Much better, yes, to be a slave here, to
This rock, than trusted messenger of Zeus!

PROMETHEUS

Bullies can only bully, as you prove.

HERMES

It seems you're spoilt with your lifestyle today!

PROMETHEUS

Spoilt? Yes! I'd love to see my enemies
Get spoiled like me – including you, first off!

HERMES

Then is it me you blame for your ill luck?

PROMETHEUS

In simple terms, it's all the gods I hate,
Who do so nicely, while they're wronging me.

HERMES

I hear a person gravely sick in mind.

PROMETHEUS

I'm sick, if hating enemies is sick!

HERMES

You would be hard to stomach, were you free.

PROMETHEUS

Poor me!

HERMES

Not an expression Zeus would ever use!

PROMETHEUS

Although with age, time teaches everything.

HERMES

It's not yet taught you to be wise, it seems.

PROMETHEUS *shrugs*

Would I be talking to a slave like you?

HERMES

You won't, it seems, discuss father's demands.

PROMETHEUS

And yet there is a favour I owe him...

HERMES

Stop teasing me as if I were a child.

PROMETHEUS

You must be a child or else half-witted if

You really think you'll get something from me!

There is no torment, no device whereby

Zeus will induce me to speak of these things,

Before he has these filthy chains undone.

Let his response be hurling red-hot fire,

Let there be white-outs, blizzards, swirling snow

Storms, rumbling subterranean thunderings.

Nothing he does will bend me, make me tell

Who must oust him from his dictatorship.

HERMES

How helpful is this attitude, d'you think?

PROMETHEUS

All was foreseen, decided long ago.

HERMES

Be bold enough, you lunatic, be bold!
What is the right thing for your problems now?

PROMETHEUS

I'm like the sea, your words have no effect.
Don't ever kid yourself that I through fear
Of Zeus would turn into a feeble-minded girl
Effeminately stretching out my hands,
Begging the one I loathe most bitterly,
To free me from these chains. I'm not that man.

HERMES

My words, I see, are vain: more would be fruitless.
In no way are you touched or softened by
My pleas. You have the bit between your teeth
And fight the reins like a new-broken foal.
You trust your feeble strategy too much.
Pig-headedness, for one not thinking straight,
All by itself, cannot achieve a thing.
Think. If you're not persuaded by my words,
What furious storm, what tsunami of pain
Will surely hit you. First my father will
Shatter this rugged cliff with thunderbolts
And lightning strikes, entombing you like this,
Still tightly clamped to this same chunk of rock.
After you've served a mighty length of time,
You will come back into the light. But then,
Zeus' flying harrier, an eagle, hot
For blood, will rip your body into rags,
An uninvited diner, all day long,
Who'll gorge upon your liver till it's black.
Do not expect an end to this ordeal,
Until a god appears to take your pains
Upon himself, and wants to enter sunless

Hades, and those dark deeps of Tartaros.
Think on these things. This is no made-up
Storyline, but absolutely true indeed.
The mouth of Zeus does not know how to lie:
And every word he says comes true. So, you
Take care, consider well if you believe
Pig-headedness worth more than good advice.

CHORUS

To us what Hermes says appears to be
Appropriate. Then urge yourself to quit
Your stubbornness and follow good advice.
Give in. A wise man who goes wrong is shamed.

PROMETHEUS

I already knew the messages which
Came snarling from him, but suffering badly
From my enemy's spite is no disgrace.
So let the forking flash from his fire-stick
Be aimed at me; let the sky be enraged
With thunder and turmoil as the winds howl
Angry and wild. Let a hurricane shake up
Earth to its core, to its deep foundations,
May a tidal wave in a violent surge
Black out the orbiting worlds of the heavens,
And may he, Zeus, hurl this body of mine
Headlong down into darkest Tartaros,
Forced by the mighty maelstrom's eddies ...
The whole repertoire! Me he won't kill.

HERMES

These are the kind of ideas one can hear,
Let me say, uttered by crazy people.
How does this man's boastful talking
Differ from that of a madman? No sign
He's improving. You who were happy to share

This person's misfortunes: get out now!
Leave this place, leave now, quickly, or else
The unbearable noise of the thunder's roar
Will blow your wits and strike you dumb.

CHORUS

If you want to persuade me, use other means,
Different voice tone! No way on earth
Have you brushed my tale of hurting away.
How can you tell me to embrace cowardice?
I choose to endure what I must with him
I have learned to despise all forms of betrayal.
There is no disease
I abhor any more than that one.

HERMES

Fine! But remember what I predicted,
Do not blame the outcome and say you were dogged
By cruel fate! Please don't ever say that
The catastrophe Zeus threw at you was not
Foreseen. Not so, but you, yourselves
Brought it upon yourselves. Fully conscious,
Not unexpectedly, eyes wide open,
You got entrapped in catastrophe's meshes
All through your own misjudgement.

PROMETHEUS

Not a threat anymore, it is happening now:
Earthquakes have begun.
Rumblings of underground thunder resounding
Echo, spiralling flashes of fiery
Lightning bedazzle, tornadoes twist up
Dust storms. From all quarters gales spring
Butting each other, setting in motion
Rioting winds, gusts matching counter-gusts.
Sky and sea are confounded together.

Such is the violent assault from Zeus who
Aims his terror at me for all to see.
Mother, the one we all worship, and Sky, you
Who beam your dancing light on us all.
See how I suffer injustice!

1093

Earthquakes, thunderstorms etc ad lib

AMW Keeper's Cottage, Marshfield Woods, 21 August 2021

