

# **PROMETHEUS BOUND**

by Aeschylus



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# PROMETHEUS BOUND

# PROMETHEUS BOUND

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## Characters in the Play

Kratos  
Bia  
Hephaestus  
Prometheus  
Chorus of the Oceanides  
Oceanus  
Io  
Hermes

Mountainous country, and in the middle of a deep gorge a Rock, towards which KRATOS and BIA carry the gigantic form OF PROMETHEUS. HEPHAESTUS follows dejectedly with hammer, nails, chains, etc.

### **KRATOS**

Now have we journeyed to a spot of earth  
Remote—the Scythian wild, a waste untrod.  
And now, Hephaestus, thou must execute  
The task our father laid on thee, and fetter  
This malefactor to the jagged rocks  
In adamantine bonds infrangible;  
For thine own blossom of all forging fire  
He stole and gave to mortals; trespass grave  
For which the Gods have called him to account,  
That he may learn to bear Zeus' tyranny  
And cease to play the lover of mankind.

### **HEPHAESTUS**

Kratos and Bia, for ye twain the hest  
Of Zeus is done with; nothing lets you further.  
But forcibly to bind a brother God,  
In chains, in this deep chasm raked by all storms  
I have not courage; yet needs must I pluck  
Courage from manifest necessity,  
For woe worth him that slights the Father's word.  
O high-souled son of them is sage in counsel,  
With heavy heart I must make thy heart heavy,  
In bonds of brass not easy to be loosed,  
Nailing thee to this crag where no wight dwells,  
Nor sound of human voice nor shape of man  
Shall visit thee; but the sun-blaze shall roast  
Thy flesh; thy hue, flower-fair, shall suffer change;  
Welcome will Night be when with spangled robe  
She hides the light of day; welcome the sun  
Returning to disperse the frosts of dawn.  
And every hour shall bring its weight of woe  
To wear thy heart away; for yet unborn

## PROMETHEUS BOUND

Is he who shall release Chee from thy pain.  
This is thy wage for loving humankind.  
For, being a God, thou dared'st the Gods' ill will,  
Preferring, to exceeding honour, Man.  
Wherefore thy long watch shall be comfortless,  
Stretched on this rock, never to close an eye  
Or bend a knee; and vainly shalt thou lift,  
With groanings deep and lamentable cries,  
Thy voice; for Zeus is hard to be entreated,  
As new-born power is ever pitiless.

**KRATOS**

Enough! Why palter? Why wast idle pity?  
Is not the God Gods loathe hateful to thee?  
Traitor to man of thy prerogative?

**HEPHAESTUS**

Kindred and fellowship are dreaded names.

**KRATOS**

Questionless; but to slight the Father's word—  
How sayest thou? Is not this fraught with more dread?

**HEPHAESTUS**

Thy heart was ever hard and overbold.

**KRATOS**

But wailing will not ease him! Waste no pains  
Where thy endeavour nothing profiteth.

**HEPHAESTUS**

Oh execrable work! I handicraft!

**KRATOS**

Why curse thy trade? For what thou hast to do,  
Troth, smithcraft is in no wise answerable.

**HEPHAESTUS**

Would that it were another's craft, not mine!

**KRATOS**

Why, all things are a burden save to rule  
Over the Gods; for none is free but Zeus.

**HEPHAESTUS**

To that I answer not, knowing it true.

**KRATOS**

Why, then, make haste to cast the chains about him,  
Lest glancing down on thee the Father's eye  
Behold a laggard and a loiterer.

**HEPHAESTUS**

Here are the iron bracelets for his arms.

**KRATOS**

Fasten them round his arms with all thy strength!  
Strike with thy hammer! Nail him to the rocks!

**HEPHAESTUS**

'Tis done! and would that it were done less well!

**KRATOS**

Harder—I say—strike harder—screw all tight  
And be not in the least particular  
Remiss, for unto one of his resource

## PROMETHEUS BOUND

Bars are but instruments of liberty.

**HEPHAESTUS**

This forearm's fast: a shackle hard to shift.

**KRATOS**

Now buckle this! and handsomely! Let him learn  
Sharp though he be, he's a dull blade to Zeus.

**HEPHAESTUS**

None can find fault with this: –save him it tortures.

**KRATOS**

Now take thine iron spike and drive it in,  
Until it gnaw clean through the rebel's breast.

**HEPHAESTUS**

Woe's me, Prometheus, for thy weight of woe!

**KRATOS**

Still shirking? still a–groaning for the foes  
Of Zeus? Anon thou'lt wail thine own mishap.

**HEPHAESTUS**

Thou seest what eyes scarce bear to look upon!

**KRATOS**

I see this fellow getting his deserts!  
But strap him with a gelt about his ribs.

**HEPHAESTUS**

I do what I must do: for thee–less words!

**KRATOS**

"Words," quotha? Aye, and shout 'em if need be.  
Come down and cast a ring–bolt round his legs.

**HEPHAESTUS**

The thing is featly done; and 'twas quick work.

**KRATOS**

Now with a sound rap knock the bolt–pins home!  
For heavy–handed is thy task–master.

**HEPHAESTUS**

So villainous a form vile tongue befits.

**KRATOS**

Be thou the heart of wax, but chide not me  
That I am gruffish, stubborn and stiff–willed.

**HEPHAESTUS**

Oh, come away! The tackle holds him fast.

**KRATOS**

Now, where thou hang'st insult Plunder the Gods  
For creatures of a day! To thee what gift  
Will mortals tender to requite thy pains?  
The destinies were out miscalling the  
Designer: a designer thou wilt need  
From trap so well contrived to twist thee free.  
Exeunt.

**PROMETHEUS.**

O divine air Breezes on swift bird–wings,  
Ye river fountains, and of ocean–waves  
The multitudinous laughter Mother Earth!  
And thou all–seeing circle of the sun,

## PROMETHEUS BOUND

Behold what I, a God, from Gods endure!  
Look down upon my shame,  
The cruel wrong that racks my frame,  
The grinding anguish that shall waste my strength,  
Till time's ten thousand years have measured out their length!  
He hath devised these chains,  
The new throned potentate who reigns,  
Chief of the chieftains of the Blest. Ah me!  
The woe which is and that which yet shall be  
I wail; and question make of these wide skies  
When shall the star of my deliverance rise.  
And yet—and yet—exactly I foresee  
All that shall come to pass; no sharp surprise  
Of pain shall overtake me; what's determined  
Bear, as I can, I must, knowing the might  
Of strong Necessity is unconquerable.  
But touching my fate silence and speech alike  
Are unsupportable. For boons bestowed  
On mortal men I am straitened in these bonds.  
I sought the fount of fire in hollow reed  
Hid privily, a measureless resource  
For man, and mighty teacher of all arts.  
This is the crime that I must expiate  
Hung here in chains, nailed 'neath the open sky. Ha! Ha!  
What echo, what odour floats by with no sound?  
God—wafted or mortal or mingled its strain?  
Comes there one to this world's end, this mountain—girt ground,  
To have sight of my torment? Or of what is he fain?  
A God ye behold in bondage and pain,  
The foe of Zeus and one at feud with all  
The deities that find  
Submissive entry to the tyrant's hall;  
His fault, too great a love of humankind.  
Ah me! Ah me! what wafture nigh at hand,  
As of great birds of prey, is this I hear?  
The bright air fanned  
Whistles and shrills with rapid beat of wings.  
There cometh nought but to my spirit brings  
Horror and fear.  
The DAUGHTERS OF OCEANUS draw near in  
mid—air in their winged chariot.

### CHORUS

Put thou all fear away!  
In kindness cometh this array  
On wings of speed to mountain lone,  
Our sire's consent not lightly won.  
But a fresh breeze our convoy brought,  
For loud the din of iron raught  
Even to our sea—cave's cold recess,  
And scared away the meek—eyed bashfulness.  
I tarried not to tic my sandal shoe



## PROMETHEUS BOUND

But haste, post haste, through air my winged chariot flew.

### PROMETHEUS

Ah me! Ah me!

Fair progeny

That many-childed Tethys brought to birth,

Fathered of Ocean old

Whose sleepless stream is rolled

Round the vast shores of earth

Look on me! Look upon these chains

Wherein I hang fast held

On rocks high-pinnacled,

My dungeon and my tower of dole,

Where o'er the abyss my soul,

Sad warder, her unwearied watch sustains!

### CHORUS

Prometheus, I am gazing on thee now!

With the cold breath of fear upon my brow,

Not without mist of dimming tears,

While to my sight thy giant stature rears

Its bulk forpined upon these savage rocks

In shameful bonds the linked adamant locks.

For now new steersmen take the helm

Olympian; now with little thought

Of right, on strange, new laws Zeus stablisheth his realm,

Bringing the mighty ones of old to naught.

### PROMETHEUS

Oh that he had conveyed me

'Neath earth, 'neath hell that swalloweth up the dead;

In Tartarus, illimitably vast

With adamantine fetters bound me fast—

There his fierce anger on me visited,

Where never mocking laughter could upbraid me

Of God or aught beside!

But now a wretch enskied,

A far-seen vane,

All they that hate me triumph in my pain.

### CHORUS

Who of the Gods is there so pitiless

That he can triumph in thy sore distress?

Who doth not inly groan

With every pang of thine save Zeus alone?

But he is ever wroth, not to be bent

From his resolved intent

The sons of heaven to subjugate;

Nor shall he cease until his heart be satiate,

Or one a way devise

To hurl him from the throne where he doth monarchize.

### PROMETHEUS

Yea, of a surety—though he do me wrong,

Loading my limbs with fetters strong—

The president

## PROMETHEUS BOUND

Of heaven's high parliament  
Shall need me yet to show  
What new conspiracy with privy blow  
Attempts his sceptre and his kingly seat.  
Neither shall words with all persuasion sweet,  
Not though his tongue drop honey, cheat  
Nor charm my knowledge from me; nor dures  
Of menace dire, fear of more grievous pains,  
Unseal my lips, till he have loosed these chains,  
And granted for these injuries redress.

### CHORUS

High is the heart of thee,  
Thy will no whit by bitter woes unstrung,  
And all too free  
The licence of thy bold, unshackled tongue.  
But fear hath roused my soul with piercing cry!  
And for thy fate my heart misgives me! I  
Tremble to know when through the breakers' roar  
Thy keel shall touch again the friendly shore;  
For not by prayer to Zeus is access won;  
An unpersuadable heart hath Cronos' son.

### PROMETHEUS

I know the heart of Zeus is hard, that he hath tied  
Justice to his side;  
But he shall be full gentle thus assuaged;  
And, the implacable wrath wherewith he raged  
Smoothed quite away, nor he nor I  
Be loth to seal a bond of peace and amity.

### CHORUS

All that thou hast to tell I pray unfold,  
That we may hear at large upon what count  
Zeus took thee and with bitter wrong affronts:  
Instruct us, if the telling hurt thee not.

### PROMETHEUS

These things are sorrowful for me to speak,  
Yet silence too is sorrow: all ways woe!  
When first the Blessed Ones were filled with wrath  
And there arose division in their midst,  
These instant to hurl Cronos from his throne  
That Zeus might be their king, and these, adverse,  
Contending that he ne'er should rule the Gods,  
Then I, wise counsel urging to persuade  
The Titans, sons of Ouranos and Chthon,  
Prevailed not: but, all indirect essays  
Despising, they by the strong hand, effortless,  
Yet by main force—supposed that they might seize  
Supremacy. But me my mother Themis  
And Gaia, one form called by many names,  
Not once alone with voice oracular  
Had prophesied how power should be disposed—  
That not by strength neither by violence

## PROMETHEUS BOUND

The mighty should be mastered, but by guile.  
Which things by me set forth at large, they scorned,  
Nor graced my motion with the least regard.  
Then, of all ways that offered, I judged best,  
Taking my mother with me, to support,  
No backward friend, the not less cordial Zeus.  
And by my politic counsel Tartarus,  
The bottomless and black, old Cronos hides  
With his confederates. So helped by me,  
The tyrant of the Gods, such service rendered  
With ignominious chastisement requites.  
But 'tis a common malady of power  
Tyrannical never to trust a friend.  
And now, what ye inquired, for what arraigned  
He shamefully entreats me, ye shall know.  
When first upon his high, paternal throne  
He took his seat, forthwith to divers Gods  
Divers good gifts he gave, and parcelled out  
His empire, but of miserable men  
Recked not at all; rather it was his wish  
To wipe out man and rear another race:  
And these designs none contravened but me.  
I risked the bold attempt, and saved mankind  
From stark destruction and the road to hell.  
Therefore with this sore penance am I bowed,  
Grievous to suffer, pitiful to see.  
But, for compassion shown to man, such fate  
I no wise earned; rather in wrath's despite  
Am I to be reformed, and made a show  
Of infamy to Zeus.

### CHORUS

He hath a heart  
Of iron, hewn out of unfeeling rock  
Is he, Prometheus, whom thy sufferings  
Rouse not to wrath. Would I had ne'er beheld them,  
For verily the sight hath wrung my heart.

### PROMETHEUS

Yea, to my friends a woeful sight am I.

### CHORUS

Hast not more boldly in aught else transgressed?

### PROMETHEUS

I took from man expectancy of death.

### CHORUS

What medicine found'st thou for this malady?

### PROMETHEUS

I planted blind hope in the heart of him.

### CHORUS

A mighty boon thou gavest there to man.

### PROMETHEUS

Moreover, I conferred the gift of fire.

### CHORUS

## PROMETHEUS BOUND

And have frail mortals now the flame—bright fire?

**PROMETHEUS**

Yea, and shall master many arts thereby.

**CHORUS**

And Zeus with such misfeasance charging thee—

**PROMETHEUS**

Torments me with extremity of woe.

**CHORUS**

And is no end in prospect of thy pains?

**PROMETHEUS**

None; save when he shall choose to make an end.

**CHORUS**

How should he choose? What hope is thine? Dost thou

Not see that thou hast erred? But how thou erredst

Small pleasure were to me to tell; to the

Exceeding sorrow. Let it go then: rather

Seek thou for some deliverance from thy woes.

**PROMETHEUS**

He who stands free with an untrammelled foot

Is quick to counsel and exhort a friend

In trouble. But all these things I know well.

Of my free will, my own free will, I erred,

And freely do I here acknowledge it.

Freeing mankind myself have durance found.

Natheless, I looked not for sentence so dread,

High on this precipice to droop and pine,

Having no neighbour but the desolate crags.

And now lament no more the ills I suffer,

But come to earth and an attentive ear

Lend to the things that shall befall hereafter.

Harken, oh harken, suffer as I suffer!

Who knows, who knows, but on some scatheless head,

Another's yet for the like woes reserved,

The wandering doom will presently alight?

**CHORUS**

Prometheus, we have heard thy call:

Not on deaf cars these awful accents fall.

Lo! lightly leaving at thy words

My flying car

And holy air, the pathway of great birds,

I long to tread this land of peak and scar,

And certify myself by tidings sure

Of all thou hast endured and must endure.

While the winged chariot of the OCEANIDES comes

to ground their father OCEANUS enters, riding on a monster.

**OCEANUS**

Now have I traversed the unending plain

And unto thee, Prometheus, am I come,

Guiding this winged monster with no rein,

Nor any bit, but mind's firm masterdom.

And know that for thy grief my heart is sore;

## PROMETHEUS BOUND

The bond of kind, methinks, constraineth me;  
Nor is there any I would honour more,  
Apart from kinship, than I reverence thee.  
And thou shalt learn that I speak verity:  
Mine is no smooth, false tongue; for do but show  
How I can serve thee, grieved and outraged thus,  
Thou ne'er shalt say thou hast, come weal, come woe,  
A friend more faithful than Oceanus.

### PROMETHEUS

How now? Who greets me? What! Art thou too come  
To gaze upon my woes? How could'st thou leave  
The stream that bears thy name, thine antres arched  
With native rock, to visit earth that breeds  
The massy iron in her womb? Com'st thou  
To be spectator of my evil lot  
And fellow sympathizer with my woes?  
Behold, a thing indeed to gaze upon  
The friend of Zeus, co-stablisher of his rule,  
See, by this sentence with what pains I am bowed I

### OCEANUS

Prometheus, all too plainly I behold:  
And for the best would counsel thee: albeit  
Thy brain is subtle. Learn to know thy heart,  
And, as the times, so let thy manners change,  
For by the law of change a new God rules.  
But, if these bitter, savage, sharp-set words  
Thou ventest, it may be, though he sit throned  
Far off and high above thee, Zeus will hear;  
And then thy present multitude of ills  
Will seem the mild correction of a babe.  
Rather, O thou much chastened one, refrain  
Thine anger, and from suffering seek release.  
Stale, peradventure, seem these words of mine:  
Nevertheless, of a too haughty tongue  
Such punishment, Prometheus, is the wage.  
But thou, not yet brought low by suffering,  
To what thou hast of ill would'st add far worse.  
Therefore, while thou hast me for schoolmaster,  
Thou shalt not kick against the pricks; the more  
That an arch-despot who no audit dreads  
Rules by his own rough will. And now I leave thee,  
To strive with what success I may command  
For thy deliv'rance. Keep a quiet mind  
And use not over-vehemence of speech—  
Knowest thou not, being exceeding wise,  
A wanton, idle tongue brings chastisement?

### PROMETHEUS

I marvel that thou art not in my case,  
Seeing with me thou did'st adventure all.  
And now, I do entreat thee, spare thyself.  
Thou wilt not move him: he's not easy moved

## PROMETHEUS BOUND

Take heed lest thou find trouble by the way.

### OCEANUS

Thou art a better counsellor to others  
Than to thyself: I judge by deeds not words.  
Pluck me not back when I would fain set forth.  
My oath upon it, Zeus will grant my prayer  
And free thee from these pangs.

### PROMETHEUS

I tender thee  
For this my thanks and ever-during praise.  
Certes, no backward friend art thou; and yet  
Trouble not thyself; for at the best thy labour  
Will nothing serve me, if thou mean'st to serve.  
Being thyself untrammelled stand fast.  
For, not to mitigate my own mischance,  
Would I see others hap on evil days.  
The thought be far from me. I feel the weight  
Of Atlas' woes, my brother in the west  
Shouldering the pillar that props heaven and earth,  
No wieldy fardel for his arms to fold.  
The giant dweller in Cilician dens  
I saw and pitied—a terrific shape,  
A hundred-headed monster—when he fell,  
Resistless Typhon who withstood the Gods,  
With fearsome hiss of beak—mouth horrible,  
While lightning from his eyes with Gorgon—glare  
Flashed for the ravage of the realm of Zeus.  
But on him came the bolt that never sleeps,  
Down—crashing thunder, with emitted fire,  
Which shattered him and all his towering hopes  
Dashed into ruin; smitten through the breast,  
His strength as smoking cinder, lightning—charred.  
And now a heap, a helpless, sprawling hulk,  
He lies stretched out beside the narrow seas,  
Pounded and crushed deep under Etna's roots.  
But on the mountain-top Hephaestus sits  
Forging the molten iron, whence shall burst  
Rivers of fire, with red and ravaging jaws  
To waste fair-fruited, smooth, Sicilian fields.  
Such bilious up-boiling of his ire  
Shall Typho vent, with slingstone—showers red-hot,  
And unapproachable surge of fiery spray,  
Although combusted by the bolt of Zeus.  
But thou art not unlearned, nor needest me  
To be thy teacher: save thyself the way  
Thou knowest and I will fortify my heart  
Until the wrathfulness of Zeus abate.

### OCEANUS

Nay then, Prometheus, art thou ignorant  
Words are physicians to a wrath-sick soul?

### PROMETHEUS

## PROMETHEUS BOUND

Yes, if with skill one soften the ripe core,  
Not by rough measures make it obdurate.

**OCEANUS**

Seest thou in warm affection detriment  
Or aught untoward in adventuring?

**PROMETHEUS**

A load of toil and a light mind withal.

**OCEANUS**

Then give me leave to call that sickness mine.  
Wise men accounted fools attain their ends.

**PROMETHEUS**

But how if I am galled by thine offence?

**OCEANUS**

There very palpably thou thrustest home.

**PROMETHEUS**

Beware lest thou through pity come to broils.

**OCEANUS**

With one established in Omnipotence?

**PROMETHEUS**

Of him take heed lest thou find heaviness.

**OCEANUS**

I am schooled by thy calamity, Prometheus!

**PROMETHEUS**

Pack then! And, prithee, do not change thy mind!

**OCEANUS**

Thou criest "On" to one in haste to go.  
For look, my dragon with impatient wings  
Flaps at the broad, smooth road of level air.  
Fain would he kneel him down in his own stall.  
Exit OCEANUS.

**CHORUS** (after alighting)

I mourn for thee, Prometheus,  
minished and brought low,  
Watering my virgin cheeks with these sad drops, that flow  
From sorrow's rainy fount, to fill soft-lidded eyes  
With pure libations for thy fortune's obsequies.  
An evil portion that none coveteth hath Zeus  
Prepared for thee; by self-made laws established for his use  
Disposing all, the elder Gods he purposeth to show  
How strong is that right arm wherewith he smites a foe.  
There hath gone up a cry from earth, a groaning for the fall  
Of things of old renown and shapes majestic,  
And for thy passing an exceeding bitter groan;  
For thee and for thy brother Gods whose honour was thine own:  
These things all they who dwell in Asia's holy seat,  
Time's minions, mourn and with their groans thy groans repeat.  
Yea, and they mourn who dwell beside the Colchian shore,  
The hero maids unwedded that delight in war,  
And Scythia's swarming myriads who their dwelling make  
Around the borders of the world, the salt Maeotian lake.  
Mourns Ares' stock, that flowers in desert Araby,

## PROMETHEUS BOUND

And the strong city mourns, the hill–fort planted high,  
Near neighbour to huge Caucasus, dread mountaineers  
That love the clash of arms, the counter of sharp spears.  
Beforetime of all Gods one have I seen in pain,  
One only Titan bound with adamantine chain,  
Atlas in strength supreme, who groaning stoops, downbent  
Under the burthen of the earth and heaven's broad firmament.  
Bellows the main of waters, surge with foam–seethed surge  
Clashing tumultuous; for thee the deep seas chant their dirge;  
And Hell's dark under–world a hollow moaning fills;  
Thee mourn the sacred streams with all their fountain–rills.

### PROMETHEUS

Think not that I for pride and stubbornness  
Am silent: rather is my heart the prey  
Of gnawing thoughts, both for the past, and now  
Seeing myself by vengeance buffeted.  
For to these younger Gods their precedence  
Who severally determined if not I?  
No more of that: I should but weary you  
With things ye know; but listen to the tale  
Of human sufferings, and how at first  
Senseless as beasts I gave men sense, possessed them  
Of mind. I speak not in contempt of man;  
I do but tell of good gifts I conferred.  
In the beginning, seeing they saw amiss,  
And hearing heard not, but, like phantoms huddled  
In dreams, the perplexed story of their days  
Confounded; knowing neither timber–work  
Nor brick–built dwellings basking in the light,  
But dug for themselves holes, wherein like ants,  
That hardly may contend against a breath,  
They dwelt in burrows of their unsunned caves.  
Neither of winter's cold had they fixed sign,  
Nor of the spring when she comes decked with flowers,  
Nor yet of summer's heat with melting fruits  
Sure token: but utterly without knowledge  
Moiled, until I the rising of the stars  
Showed them, and when they set, though much obscure.  
Moreover, number, the most excellent  
Of all inventions, I for them devised,  
And gave them writing that retaineth all,  
The serviceable mother of the Muse.  
I was the first that yoked unmanaged beasts,  
To serve as slaves with collar and with pack,  
And take upon themselves, to man's relief,  
The heaviest labour of his hands: and  
Tamed to the rein and drove in wheeled cars  
The horse, of sumptuous pride the ornament.  
And those sea–wanderers with the wings of cloth,  
The shipman's waggons, none but I contrived.  
These manifold inventions for mankind



## PROMETHEUS BOUND

I perfected, who, out upon't, have none—  
No, not one shift—to rid me of this shame.

### CHORUS

Thy sufferings have been shameful, and thy mind  
Strays at a loss: like to a bad physician  
Fallen sick, thou'rt out of heart: nor cans't prescribe  
For thine own case the draught to make thee sound.

### PROMETHEUS

But hear the sequel and the more admire  
What arts, what aids I cleverly evolved.  
The chiefest that, if any man fell sick,  
There was no help for him, comestible,  
Lotion or potion; but for lack of drugs  
They dwindled quite away; until I taught them  
To compound draughts and mixtures sanative,  
Wherewith they now are armed against disease.  
I staked the winding path of divination  
And was the first distinguisher of dreams,  
The true from false; and voices ominous  
Of meaning dark interpreted; and tokens  
Seen when men take the road; and augury  
By flight of all the greater crook-clawed birds  
With nice discrimination I defined;  
These by their nature fair and favourable,  
Those, flattered with fair name. And of each sort  
The habits I described; their mutual feuds  
And friendships and the assemblages they hold.  
And of the plumpness of the inward parts  
What colour is acceptable to the Gods,  
The well-streaked liver-lobe and gall-bladder.  
Also by roasting limbs well wrapped in fat  
And the long chine, I led men on the road  
Of dark and riddling knowledge; and I purged  
The glancing eye of fire, dim before,  
And made its meaning plain. These are my works.  
Then, things beneath the earth, aids hid from man,  
Brass, iron, silver, gold, who dares to say  
He was before me in discovering?  
None, I wot well, unless he loves to babble.  
And in a single word to sum the whole—  
All manner of arts men from Prometheus learned.

### CHORUS

Shoot not beyond the mark in succouring man  
While thou thyself art comfortless: for  
Am of good hope that from these bonds escaped  
Thou shalt one day be mightier than Zeus.

### PROMETHEUS

Fate, that brinks all things to an end, not thus  
Apportioneth my lot: ten thousand pangs  
Must bow, ten thousand miseries afflict me  
Ere from these bonds I freedom find, for Art

## PROMETHEUS BOUND

Is by much weaker than Necessity.

### CHORUS

Who is the pilot of Necessity?

### PROMETHEUS

The Fates triform, and the unforgetting Furies.

### CHORUS

So then Zeus is of lesser might than these?

### PROMETHEUS

Surely he shall not shun the lot apportioned.

### CHORUS

What lot for Zeus save world–without–end reign?

### PROMETHEUS

Tax me no further with importunate questions.

### CHORUS

O deep the mystery thou shroudest there

### PROMETHEUS

Of aught but this freely thou may'st discourse;  
But touching this I charge thee speak no word;  
Nay, veil it utterly: for strictly kept  
The secret from these bonds shall set me free.

### CHORUS

May Zeus who all things swayeth  
Ne'er wreak the might none stayeth  
On wayward will of mine;  
May I stint not nor waver  
With offerings of sweet savour  
And feasts of slaughtered kine;  
The holy to the holy,  
With frequent feet and lowly  
At altar, fane and shrine,  
Over the Ocean marches,  
The deep that no drought parches,  
Draw near to the divine.  
My tongue the Gods estrange not;  
My firm set purpose change not,  
As wax melts in fire–shine.  
Sweet is the life that lengthens,  
While joyous hope still strengthens,  
And glad, bright thoughts sustain;  
But shuddering I behold thee,  
The sorrows that enfold thee  
And all thine endless pain.  
For Zeus thou hast despised;  
Thy fearless heart misprized  
All that his vengeance can,  
Thy wayward will obeying,  
Excess of honour paying,  
Prometheus, unto man.  
And, oh, beloved, for this graceless grace  
What thanks? What prowess for thy bold essay  
Shall champion thee from men of mortal race,

## PROMETHEUS BOUND

The petty insects of a passing day?  
Saw'st not how puny is the strength they spend?  
With few, faint steps walking as dreams and blind,  
Nor can the utmost of their lore transcend  
The harmony of the Eternal Mind.  
These things I learned seeing thy glory dimmed,  
Prometheus. Ah, not thus on me was shed  
The rapture of sweet music, when I hymned  
The marriage—song round bath and bridal bed  
At thine espousals, and of thy blood—kin,  
A bride thou chosest, wooing her to thee  
With all good gifts that may a Goddess win,  
Thy father's child, divine Hesione.  
Enter IO, crazed and horned.

### IO

What land is this? What people here abide?  
And who is he,  
The prisoner of this windswept mountain—side?  
Speak, speak to me;  
Tell me, poor caitiff, how did'st thou transgress,  
Thus buffeted?  
Whither am I, half—dead with weariness,  
For—wandered?  
Ha! Ha!  
Again the prick, the stab of gadfly—sting!  
O earth, earth, hide,  
The hollow shape—Argus—that evil thing—  
The hundred—eyed—  
Earth—born—herdsman! I see him yet; he stalks  
With stealthy pace  
And crafty watch not all my poor wit baulks!  
From the deep place  
Of earth that hath his bones he breaketh bound,  
And from the pale  
Of Death, the Underworld, a hell—sent hound  
On the blood—trail,  
Fasting and faint he drives me on before,  
With spectral hand,  
Along the windings of the wasteful shore,  
The salt sea—sand!  
List! List! the pipe! how drowsily it shrills!  
A cricket—cry!  
See! See! the wax—webbed reeds! Oh, to these ills  
Ye Gods on high,  
Ye blessed Gods, what bourne? O wandering feet  
When will ye rest?  
O Cronian child, wherein by aught unmeet  
Have I transgressed  
To be yoke—fellow with Calamity?  
My mind unstrung,  
A crack—brained lack—wit, frantic mad am I,

## PROMETHEUS BOUND

By gad-fly stung,  
Thy scourge, that tarres me on with buzzing wing!  
Plunge me in fire,  
Hide me in earth, to deep-sea monsters fling,  
But my desire—  
Kneeling I pray—grudge not to grant, O King!  
Too long a race  
Stripped for the course have I run to and fro;  
And still I chase  
The vanishing goal, the end of all my woe;  
Enough have I mourned!  
Hear'st thou the lowing of the maid cow-horned?

### PROMETHEUS

How should I hear thee not? Thou art the child  
Of Inachus, dazed with the dizzying fly.  
The heart of Zeus thou hast made hot with love  
And Hera's curse even as a runner stripped  
Pursues thee ever on thine endless round.

### IO

How dost thou know my father's name? Impart  
To one like thee  
A poor, distressful creature, who thou art.  
Sorrow with me,  
Sorrowful one! Tell me, whose voice proclaims  
Things true and sad,  
Naming by all their old, unhappy names,  
What drove me mad—  
Sick! Sick! ye Gods, with suffering ye have sent,  
That clings and clings;  
Wasting my lamp of life till it be spent!  
Crazed with your stings!  
Famished I come with trampling and with leaping,  
Torment and shame,  
To Hera's cruel wrath, her craft unsleeping,  
Captive and tame  
Of all wights woe-begone and fortune-crossed,  
Oh, in the storm  
Of the world's sorrow is there one so lost?  
Speak, godlike form,  
And be in this dark world my oracle I  
Can'st thou not sift  
The things to come? Hast thou no art to tell  
What subtle shift,  
Or sound of charming song shall make me well?  
Hide naught of ill  
But—if indeed thou knowest—prophecy—  
In words that thrill  
Clear-toned through air—what such a wretch as  
Must yet abide—  
The lost, lost maid that roams earth's kingdoms wide?

### PROMETHEUS

## PROMETHEUS BOUND

What thou wouldst learn I will make clear to thee,  
Not weaving subtleties, but simple sooth  
Unfolding as the mouth should speak to friends.  
I am Prometheus, giver of fire to mortals.

**IO**

Oh universal succour of mankind,  
Sorrowful Prometheus, why art thou punished thus?

**PROMETHEUS**

I have but now ceased mourning for my griefs.

**IO** Wilt thou not grant me then so small a boon?

**PROMETHEUS**

What is it thou dost ask? Thou shalt know all.

**IO**

Declare to me who chained thee in this gorge.

**PROMETHEUS**

The hest of Zeus, but 'twas Hephaestus' hand.

**IO**

But what transgression dost thou expiate?

**PROMETHEUS**

Let this suffice thee: thou shalt know no more.

**IO**

Nay, but the end of my long wandering  
When shall it be? This too thou must declare.

**PROMETHEUS**

That it is better for thee not to know.

**IO**

Oh hide not from me what I have to suffer!

**PROMETHEUS**

Poor child! Poor child! I do not grudge the gift.

**IO**

Why then, art thou so slow to tell me all?

**PROMETHEUS**

It is not from unkindness; but I fear  
'Twill break thy heart.

**IO**

Take thou no thought for me  
Where thinking thwarteth heart's desire!

**PROMETHEUS**

So keen

To know thy sorrows! List I and thou shalt learn.

**CHORUS**

Not till thou hast indulged a wish of mine.  
First let us hear the story of her grief  
And she herself shall tell the woeful tale.  
After, thy wisdom shall impart to her  
The conflict yet to come.

**PROMETHEUS**

So be it, then.

And, Io, thus much courtesy thou owest  
These maidens being thine own father's kin.  
For with a moving story of our woes

## PROMETHEUS BOUND

To win a tear from weeping auditors  
In nought demeans the teller.

### IO

I know not  
How fitly to refuse; and at your wish  
All ye desire to know I will in plain,  
Round terms set forth. And yet the telling of it  
Harrows my soul; this winter's tale of wrong,  
Of angry Gods and brute deformity,  
And how and why on me these horrors swooped.  
Always there were dreams visiting by night  
The woman's chambers where I slept; and they  
With flattering words admonished and cajoled me,  
Saying, "O lucky one, so long a maid?  
And what a match for thee if thou would'st wed  
Why, pretty, here is Zeus as hot as hot—  
Love—sick—to have thee! Such a bolt as thou  
Hast shot clean through his heart And he won't rest  
Till Cypris help him win thee! Lift not then,  
My daughter, a proud foot to spurn the bed  
Of Zeus: but get thee gone to meadow deep  
By Lerna's marsh, where are thy father's flocks  
And cattle—folds, that on the eye of Zeus  
May fall the balm that shall assuage desire."  
Such dreams oppressed me, troubling all my nights,  
Woe's me! till I plucked courage up to tell  
My father of these fears that walked in darkness.  
And many times to Pytho and Dodona  
He sent his sacred missioners, to inquire  
How, or by deed or word, he might conform  
To the high will and pleasure of the Gods.  
And they returned with slippery oracles,  
Nought plain, but all to baffle and perplex—  
And then at last to Inachus there raught  
A saying that flashed clear; the drift, that  
Must be put out from home and country, forced  
To be a wanderer at the ends of the earth,  
A thing devote and dedicate; and if  
I would not, there should fall a thunderbolt  
From Zeus, with blinding flash, and utterly  
Destroy my race. So spake the oracle  
Of Loxias. In sorrow he obeyed,  
And from beneath his roof drove forth his child  
Grieving as he grieved, and from house and home  
Bolted and barred me out. But the high hand  
Of Zeus bear hardly on the rein of fate.  
And, instantly—even in a moment—mind  
And body suffered strange distortion. Horned  
Even as ye see me now, and with sharp bite  
Of gadfly pricked, with high—flung skip, stark—mad,  
I bounded, galloping headlong on, until

## PROMETHEUS BOUND

I came to the sweet and of the stream  
Kerchneian, hard by Lerna's spring. And thither  
Argus, the giant herdsman, fierce and fell  
As a strong wine unmixed, with hateful cast  
Of all his cunning eyes upon the trail,  
Gave chase and tracked me down. And there he perished  
By violent and sudden doom surprised.  
But I with darting sting—the scorpion whip  
Of angry Gods—am lashed from land to land.  
Thou hast my story, and, if thou can'st tell  
What I have still to suffer, speak; but do not,  
Moved by compassion, with a lying tale  
Warm my cold heart; no sickness of the soul  
Is half so shameful as composed falsehoods.

### CHORUS

Off! lost one! off! Horror, I cry!  
Horror and misery  
Was this the traveller's tale I craved to hear?  
Oh, that mine eyes should see  
A sight so ill to look upon! Ah me!  
Sorrow, defilement, haunting fear,  
Fan my blood cold,  
Stabbed with a two-edged sting!  
O Fate, Fate, Fate, tremblingly I behold  
The plight of Io, thine apportioning!

### PROMETHEUS

Thou dost lament too soon, and art as one  
All fear. Refrain thyself till thou hast heard  
What's yet to be.

### CHORUS

Speak and be our instructor:  
There is a kind of balm to the sick soul  
In certain knowledge of the grief to come.

### PROMETHEUS

Your former wish I lightly granted ye:  
And ye have heard, even as ye desired,  
From this maid's lips the story of her sorrow.  
Now hear the sequel, the ensuing woes  
The damsel must endure from Hera's hate.  
And thou, O seed of Inachaeon loins,  
Weigh well my words, that thou may'st understand  
Thy journey's end. First towards the rising sun  
Turn hence, and traverse fields that ne'er felt plough  
Until thou reach the country of the Scyths,  
A race of wanderers handling the long-bow  
That shoots afar, and having their habitations  
Under the open sky in wattled cotes  
That move on wheels. Go not thou nigh to them,  
But ever within sound of the breaking waver,  
Pass through their land. And on the left of the  
The Chalybes, workers in iron, dwell.

## PROMETHEUS BOUND

Beware of them, for they are savages,  
Who suffer not a stranger to come near.  
And thou shalt reach the river Hybristes,  
Well named. Cross not, for it is ill to cross,  
Until thou come even unto Caucasus,  
Highest of mountains, where the foaming river  
Blows all its volume from the summit ridge  
That o'ertops all. And that star-neighbour'd ridge  
Thy feet must climb; and, following the road  
That runneth south, thou presently shall reach  
The Amazonian hosts that loathe the male,  
And shall one day remove from thence and found  
Themiscyra hard by Thermodon's stream,  
Where on the craggy Salmadessian coast  
Waves gnash their teeth, the maw of mariners  
And step-mother of ships. And they shall lead the  
Upon thy way, and with a right good will.  
Then shalt thou come to the Cimmerian Isthmus,  
Even at the pass and portals of the sea,  
And leaving it behind thee, stout of heart,  
Cross o'er the channel of Maeotis' lake.  
For ever famous among men shall be  
The story of thy crossing, and the strait  
Be called by a new name, the Bosphorus,  
In memory of thee. Then having left  
Europa's soil behind thee thou shalt come  
To the main land of Asia. What think ye?  
Is not the only ruler of the Gods  
A complete tyrant, violent to all,  
Respecting none? First, being himself a God,  
He burneth to enjoy a mortal maid,  
And then torments her with these wanderings.  
A sorry suitor for thy love, poor girl,  
A bitter wooing. Yet having heard so much  
Thou art not even in the overture  
And prelude of the song.

**IO**

Alas! Oh! Oh!

**PROMETHEUS**

Thou dost cryout, fetching again deep groans:  
What wilt thou do when thou hast heard in full  
The evils yet to come?

**CHORUS**

And wilt thou tell  
The maiden something further: some fresh sorrow?

**PROMETHEUS**

A stormy sea of wrong and ruining.

**IO**

What does it profit me to live! Oh, why  
Do I not throw myself from this rough crag  
And in one leap rid me of all my pain?



## PROMETHEUS BOUND

Better to die at once than live, and all  
My days be evil.

**PROMETHEUS**

Thou would'st find it hard  
To bear what I must bear: for unto me  
It is not given to die,—a dear release  
From pain; but now of suffering there is  
No end in sight till Zeus shall fall.

**IO**

And shall  
Zeus fall? His power be taken from him?  
No matter when if true—

**PROMETHEUS**

'Twould make thee happy  
Methinks, if thou could'st see calamity  
Whelm him.

**IO**

How should it not when all my woes  
Are of his sending? learn how  
These things shall be.  
The tyrant's rod?  
And fond imaginings.

**IO**

But how? Oh, speak,  
If the declaring draw no evil down I

**PROMETHEUS**

A marriage he shall make shall vex him sore.

**IO**

A marriage? Whether of gods or mortals?  
Speak!

If this be utterable!

**PROMETHEUS**

Why dost thou ask  
What I may not declare?

**IO**

And shall he quit  
The throne of all the worlds, by a new spouse  
Supplanted?

**PROMETHEUS**

She will bear to him a child,  
And he shall be in might more excellent  
Than his progenitor.

**IO**

And he will find  
No way to parry this strong stroke of fate?

**PROMETHEUS**

None save my own self—when these bonds are loosed.

**IO**

And who shall loose them if Zeus wills not?  
Of thine own seed.  
How say'st thou? Shall a child

## PROMETHEUS BOUND

Of mine release thee?

**PROMETHEUS**

Son of thine, but son

The thirteenth generation shall beget.

**IO**

A prophecy oracularly dark.

**PROMETHEUS**

Then seek not thou to know thine own fate.

**IO**

Nay,

Tender me not a boon to snatch it from me.

**PROMETHEUS**

Of two gifts thou hast asked one shall be thine.

**IO**

What gifts? Pronounce and leave to me the choice.

**PROMETHEUS**

Nay, thou are free to choose. Say, therefore, whether

I shall declare to thee thy future woes

Or him who shall be my deliverer.

**CHORUS**

Nay, but let both be granted! Unto her

That which she chooseth, unto me my choice,

That I, too, may have honour from thy lips.

First unto her declare her wanderings,

And unto me him who shall set thee free;

'Tis that I long to know.

**PROMETHEUS**

I will resist

No further, but to your importunacy

All things which ye-desire to learn reveal.

And, Io, first to thee I will declare

Thy far-driven wanderings; write thou my words

In the retentive tablets of thy heart.

When thou hast crossed the flood that flows between

And is the boundary of two continents,

Turn to the sun's uprising, where he treads

Printing with fiery steps the eastern sky,

And from the roaring of the Pontic surge

Do thou pass on, until before thee lies

The Gorgonean plain, Kisthene called,

Where dwell the gray-haired three, the Phorcides,

Old, mumbling maids, swan-shaped, having one eye

Betwixt the three, and but a single tooth.

On them the sun with his brightbeams ne'er glanceth

Nor moon that lamps the night. Not far from them

The sisters three, the Gorgons, have their haunt;

Winged forms, with snaky locks, hateful to man,

Whom nothing mortal looking on can live.

Thus much that thou may'st have a care of these.

Now of another portent thou shalt hear.

Beware the dogs of Zeus that ne'er give tongue,

## PROMETHEUS BOUND

The sharp-beaked gryphons, and the one-eyed horde  
Of Arimaspians, riding upon horses,  
Who dwell around the river rolling gold,  
The ferry and the frith of Pluto's port.  
Go not thou nigh them. After thou shalt come  
To a far land, a dark-skinned race, that dwell  
Beside the fountains of the sun, whence flows  
The river Ethiops: follow its banks  
Until thou comest to the steep-down slope  
Where from the Bibline mountains Nilus old  
Pours the sweet waters of his holy stream.  
And thou, the river guiding thee, shalt come  
To the three-sided, wedge-shaped land of Nile,  
Where for thyself, Io, and for thy children  
Long sojourn is appointed. If in aught  
My story seems to stammer and to er  
From indirectness, ask and ask again  
Till all be manifest. I do not lack  
For leisure, having more than well contents me

### CHORUS

If there be aught that she must suffer yet,  
Or aught omitted in the narrative  
Of her long wanderings, I pray thee speak.  
But if thou hast told all, then grant the boon  
We asked and doubtless thou wilt call to mind.

### PROMETHEUS

Nay, she has heard the last of her long journey.  
But, as some warrant for her patient hearing  
I will relate her former sufferings  
Ere she came hither. Much I will omit  
That had detained us else with long discourse  
And touch at once her journey's thus far goal.  
When thou wast come to the Molossian plain  
That lies about the high top of Dodona,  
Where is an oracle and shrine of Zeus  
Thesprotian, and-portent past belief-  
The talking oaks, the same from whom the word  
Flashed clear and nothing questionably hailed the  
The destined spouse-ah! do I touch old wounds?-  
Of Zeus, honoured above thy sex; stung thence  
In torment, where the road runs by the sea,  
Thou cam'st to the broad gulf of Rhea, whence  
Beat back by a strong wind, thou didst retrace  
Most painfully thy course; and it shall be  
That times to come in memory of thy passage  
Shall call that inlet the Ionian Sea.  
Thus much for thee in witness that my mind  
Beholdeth more than that which leaps to light.  
Now for the things to come; what I shall say  
Concerns ye both alike. Return we then  
And follow our old track. There is a city

## PROMETHEUS BOUND

Yclept Canobus, built at the land's end,  
Even at the mouth and mounded silt of Nile,  
And there shall Zeus restore to thee thy mind  
With touch benign and laying on of hands.  
And from that touch thou shalt conceive and bear  
Swarth Epaphus, touch-born; and he shall reap  
As much of earth as Nilus watereth  
With his broad-flowing river. In descent  
The fifth from him there shall come back to Argos,  
Thine ancient home, but driven by hard hap,  
Two score and ten maids, daughters of one house,  
Fleeing pollution of unlawful marriage  
With their next kin, who winged with wild desire,  
As hawks that follow hard on cushat-doves,  
Shall harry prey which they should not pursue  
And hunt forbidden brides. But God shall be  
Exceeding jealous for their chastity;  
And old Pelasgia, for the mortal thrust  
Of woman's hands and midnight murder done  
Upon their new-wed lords, shall shelter them;  
For every wife shall strike her husband down  
Dipping a two-edged broadsword in his blood.  
Oh, that mine enemies might wed such wives!  
But of the fifty, one alone desire  
Shall tame, as with the stroke of charming-wand,  
So that she shall not lift her hands to slay  
The partner of her bed; yea, melting love  
Shall blunt her sharp-set will, and she shall choose  
Rather to be called weak and womanly  
Than the dark stain of blood; and she shall be  
Mother of kings in Argos. 'Tis a tale  
Were't told in full, would occupy us long.  
For, of her sowing, there shall spring to fame  
The lion's whelp, the archer bold, whose bow  
Shall set me free. This is the oracle  
Themis, my ancient Mother, Titan-born,  
Disclosed to me; but how and in what wise  
Were long to tell, nor would it profit thee.

### IO

Again they come, again  
The fury and the pain!  
The gangrened wound! The ache of pulses dinned  
With raging throes  
It beats upon my brain—the burning wind  
That madness blows!  
It pricks—the barb, the hook not forged with heat,  
The gadfly dart!  
Against my ribs with thud of trampling feet  
Hammers my heart!  
And like a bowling wheel mine eyeballs spin,  
And I am flung

## PROMETHEUS BOUND

By fierce winds from my course, nor can rein in  
My frantic tongue  
That raves I know not what!—a random tide  
Of words—a froth  
Of muddied waters buffeting the wide,  
High-crested, hateful wave of ruin and God's wrath!  
Exit raving.

### CHORUS

I hold him wise who first in his own mind  
This canon fixed and taught it to mankind:  
True marriage is the union that mates  
Equal with equal; not where wealth emasculates,  
Or mighty lineage is magnified,  
Should he who earns his bread look for a bride.  
Therefore, grave mistresses of fate, I pray  
That I may never live to see the day  
When Zeus takes me for his bedfellow; or  
Draw near in love to husband from on high.  
For I am full of fear when I behold  
Io, the maid no human love may fold,  
And her virginity disconsolate,  
Homeless and husbandless by Hera's hate.  
For me, when love is level, fear is far.  
May none of all the Gods that greater are  
Eve me with his unshunnable regard;  
Fir in that warfare victory is hard,  
And of that plenty cometh emptiness.  
What should befall me then I dare not guess;  
Nor whither I should flee that I might shun  
The craft and subtlety of Cronos' Son.

### PROMETHEUS

I tell thee that the self-willed pride of Zeus  
Shall surely be abased; that even now  
He plots a marriage that shall hurl him forth  
Far out of sight of his imperial throne  
And kingly dignity. Then, in that hour,  
Shall be fulfilled, nor in one tittle fail,  
The curse wherewith his father Cronos cursed him,  
What time he fell from his majestic place  
Established from of old. And such a stroke  
None of the Gods save me could turn aside.  
I know these things shall be and on what wise.  
Therefore let him secure him in his seat,  
And put his trust in airy noise, and swing  
His bright, two-handed, blazing thunderbolt,  
For these shall nothing stead him, nor avert  
Fall insupportable and glory humbled.  
A wrestler of such might he maketh ready  
For his own ruin; yea, a wonder, strong  
In strength unmatchable; and he shall find  
Fire that shall set at naught the burning bolt

## PROMETHEUS BOUND

And blasts more dreadful that o'er-crow the thunder.  
The pestilence that scourgeth the deep seas  
And shaketh solid earth, the three-pronged mace,  
Poseidon's spear, a mightier shall scatter;  
And when he stumbleth striking there his foot,  
Fallen on evil days, the tyrant's pride  
Shall measure all the miserable length  
That parts rule absolute from servitude.

### CHORUS

Methinks the wish is father to the thought  
And whets thy railing tongue.

### PROMETHEUS

Not so: the wish And the accomplishment go hand in hand.

### CHORUS

Then must we look for one who shall supplant  
And reign instead of Zeus?  
Far, far more grievous shall bow down his neck.

### CHORUS

Hast thou no fear venting such blasphemy?

### PROMETHEUS

What should I fear who have no part nor lot  
In doom of dying?

### CHORUS

But he might afflict the  
With agony more dreadful, pain beyond  
These pains.

### PROMETHEUS

Why let him if he will  
All evils I foreknow.

### CHORUS

Ah, they are wise  
Who do obeisance, prostrate in the dust,  
To the implacable, eternal Will.

### PROMETHEUS

Go thou and worship; fold thy hands in prayer,  
And be the dog that licks the foot of power!  
Nothing care I for Zeus; yea, less than naught!  
Let him do what he will, and sway the world  
His little hour; he has not long to lord it  
Among the Gods.

Oh here here runner comes  
The upstart tyrant's lacquey! He'll bring news,  
A message, never doubt it, from his master.  
Enter HERMES.

**HERMES.** You, the sophisticated rogue, the heart of gall,  
The renegade of heaven, to short-lived men  
Purveyor of prerogatives and titles,  
Fire-thief! Dost hear me? I've a word for thee.  
Thou'rt to declare—this is the Father's pleasure  
These marriage-feasts of thine, whereof thy tongue  
Rattles a-pace, and by the which his greatness

## PROMETHEUS BOUND

Shall take a fall. And look you rede no riddles,  
But tell the truth, in each particular  
Exact. I am not to sweat for thee, Prometheus,  
Upon a double journey. And thou seest  
Zeus by thy dark defiance is not moved.

### PROMETHEUS

A very solemn piece of insolence  
Spoken like an underling of the Gods! Ye are young!  
Ye are young! New come to power And ye suppose  
Your towered citadel Calamity  
Can never enter! Ah, and have not  
Seen from those pinnacles a two-fold fall  
Of tyrants? And the third, who his brief "now"  
Of lordship arrogates, I shall see yet  
By lapse most swift' most ignominious,  
Sink to perdition. And dost thou suppose  
I crouch and cower in reverence and awe  
To Gods of yesterday? I fail of that  
So much, the total all of space and time  
Bulks in between. Take thyself hence and count  
Thy toiling steps back by the way thou camest,  
In nothing wiser for thy questionings.

### HERMES

This is that former stubbornness of thine  
That brought thee hither to foul anchorage.

### PROMETHEUS

Mistake me not; I would not, if I might,  
Change my misfortunes for thy vassalage.

### HERMES

Oh! better be the vassal of this rock  
Than born the trusty messenger of Zeus

### PROMETHEUS

I answer insolence, as it deserves,  
With insolence. How else should it be answered?

### HERMES

Surely; and, being in trouble, it is plain  
You revel in your plight.

### PROMETHEUS

Revel, forsooth!  
I would my enemies might hold such revels  
And thou amongst the first.

### HERMES

Dost thou blame me  
For thy misfortunes?

### PROMETHEUS

I hate all the Gods,  
Because, having received good at my hands,  
They have rewarded me with evil.  
Proves thee stark mad!

### HERMES

This proves thee stark mad!

## PROMETHEUS BOUND

### **PROMETHEUS**

Mad as you please, if hating  
Your enemies is madness

### **HERMES**

Were all well  
With thee, thou'dst be insufferable!

### **PROMETHEUS**

Alas!

### **HERMES**

Alas, that Zeus knows not that word, Alas!

### **PROMETHEUS**

But ageing Time teacheth all knowledge.

### **HERMES**

Time

Hath not yet taught thy rash, imperious will  
Over wild impulse to win mastery.

### **PROMETHEUS**

Nay: had Time taught me that, I had not stooped  
To bandy words with such a slave as thou.

### **HERMES**

This, then, is all thine answer: thou'lt not  
One syllable of what our Father asks.

### **PROMETHEUS**

Oh, that I were a debtor to his kindness!  
I would requite him to the uttermost!

### **HERMES**

A cutting speech! You take me for a boy  
Whom you may taunt and tease.

### **PROMETHEUS**

Why art thou not

A boy—a very booby—to suppose  
Thou wilt get aught from me? There is no wrong  
However shameful, nor no shift of malice  
Whereby Zeus shall persuade me to unlock  
My lips until these shackles be cast loose.  
Therefore let lightning leap with smoke and flame,  
And all that is be beat and tossed together,  
With whirl of feathery snowflakes and loud crack  
Of subterranean thunder; none of these  
Shall bend my will or force me to disclose  
By whom 'tis fated he shall fall from power.

### **HERMES**

What good can come of this? Think yet again!

### **PROMETHEUS**

I long ago have thought and long ago  
Determined.

### **HERMES**

Patience! patience! thou rash fool  
Have so much patience as to school thy mind  
To a right judgment in thy present troubles.

### **PROMETHEUS**



## PROMETHEUS BOUND

Lo, I am rockfast, and thy words are wave  
That weary me in vain. Let not the thought  
Enter thy mind, that I in awe of Zeus  
Shall change my nature for a girl's, or beg  
The Loathed beyond all loathing—with my hands  
Spread out in woman's fashion—to cast loose  
These bonds; from that I am utterly removed.

### HERMES

I have talked much, yet further not my purpose;  
For thou art in no whit melted or moved  
By my prolonged entreaties: like a colt  
New to the harness thou dost back and Plunge.  
Snap at thy bit and fight against the rein.  
And yet thy confidence is in a straw;  
For stubbornness, if one be in the wrong,  
Is in itself weaker than naught at all.  
See now, if thou wilt not obey my words,  
What storm, what triple-crested wave of woe  
Unshunnable shall come upon thee. First,  
This rocky chasm shall the Father split  
With earthquake thunder and his burning bolt,  
And he shall hide thy form, and thou shalt hang  
Bolt upright, dangled in the rock's rude arms.  
Nor till thou hast completed thy long term  
Shalt thou come back into the light; and then  
The hound of Zeus, the tawny eagle,  
Shall violently fall upon thy flesh  
And rend it as 'twere rags; and every day  
And all day long shall thine unbidden guest  
Sit at thy table, feasting on thy liver  
Till he hath gnawn it black. Look for no term  
To such an agony till there stand forth  
Among the Gods one who shall take upon him  
Thy sufferings and consent to enter hell  
Far from the light of Sun, yea, the deep pit  
And mirk of Tartarus, for thee. Be advised;  
This is not stuffed speech framed to frighten the  
But woeful truth. For Zeus knows not to lie

### CHORUS

To our mind  
The words of Hermes fail not of the mark.  
For he enjoins thee to let self-will go  
And follow after prudent counsels. Him  
Harken; for error in the wise is shame.

### PROMETHEUS

These are stale tidings I foreknew;  
Therefore, since suffering is the due  
A foe must pay his foes,  
Let curled lightnings clasp and clash  
And close upon my limbs: loud crash  
The thunder, and fierce throes

## PROMETHEUS BOUND

Of savage winds convulse calm air:  
The embowelled blast earth's roots uptear  
And toss beyond its bars,  
The rough surge, till the roaring deep  
In one devouring deluge sweep  
The pathway of the stars  
Finally, let him fling my form  
Down whirling gulfs, the central storm  
Of being; let me lie  
Plunged in the black Tartarean gloom;  
Yet–yet–his sentence shall not doom  
This deathless self to die!

### HERMES

These are the workings of a brain  
More than a little touched; the vein  
Of voluble ecstasy!  
Surely he wandereth from the way,  
His reason lost, who thus can pray  
A mouthing mad man he!  
Therefore, O ye who court his fate,  
Rash mourners–ere it be too late  
And ye indeed are sad  
For vengeance spurring hither fast–  
Hence! lest the bellowing thunderblast  
Like him should strike you mad I

### CHORUS

Words which might work persuasion speak  
If thou must counsel me; nor seek  
Thus, like a stream in spate,  
To uproot mine honour. Dost thou dare  
Urge me to baseness! I will bear  
With him all blows of fate;  
For false forsakers I despise;  
At treachery my gorge doth rise:  
I spew it forth with hate!

### HERMES

Only–with ruin on your track–  
Rail not at fortune; but look back  
And these my words recall;  
Neither blame Zeus that he hath sent  
Sorrow no warning word forewent!  
Ye labour for your fall  
With your own hands I Not by surprise  
Nor yet by stealth, but with clear eyes,  
Knowing the thing ye do,  
Ye walk into the yawning net  
That for the feet of is set  
And Ruin spreads for you.  
Exit.

### PROMETHEUS

The time is past for words; earth quakes

## PROMETHEUS BOUND

Sensibly: hark! pent thunder rakes  
The depths, with bellowing din  
Of echoes rolling ever nigher:  
Lightnings shake out their locks of fire;  
The dust cones dance and spin;  
The skipping winds, as if possessed  
By faction—north, south, east and west,  
Puff at each other; sea  
And sky are shook together: Lo  
The swing and fury of the blow  
Wherewith Zeus smiteth me  
Sweepeth apace, and, visibly,  
To strike my heart with fear. See, see,  
Earth, awful Mother! Air,  
That shedd'st from the revolving sky  
On all the light they see thee by,  
What bitter wrongs I bear!  
The scene closes with earthquake and thunder,  
in the midst of which PROMETHEUS and the DAUGHTERS OF OCEANUS  
sink into the abyss.  
THE END