

# Prometheus Bound, and other poems — Prometheus Bound

Elizabeth Barrett Browning



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# PROMETHEUS BOUND.

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## PROMETHEUS BOUND.

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### PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

PROMETHEUS.

HEPHÆSTUS.

OCEANUS.

IO, daughter of Inachus.

HERMES.

STRENGTH and FORCE.

CHORUS of Ocean Nymphs.

SCENE.—STRENGTH *and* FORCE, HEPHÆSTUS *and* PROMETHEUS, *at the Rocks*.

*Strength.*

WE reach the utmost limit of the earth,  
The Scythian track, the desert without man,—  
And now, Hephæstus, thou must needs fulfill  
The mandate of our father, and, with links  
Indissoluble of adamantine chains,  
Fasten against this beetling precipice,  
This guilty god! Because he filched away  
Thine own bright flower, the glory of plastic fire,  
And gifted mortals with it,—such a sin,  
It doth behoove he expiate to the gods,  
And learn free service to the rule of Zeus,  
And leave disused his trick of loving man.

*Hephæstus.* O Strength and Force,—for you, our Zeus's will  
Presents a deed for doing.—No more!—but *I*,  
I lack your daring, up this storm-rent chasm,  
To fix with violent hands a kindred god,  
Howbeit necessity compels me so  
That I must dare it,—and our Zeus commands  
With word as heavy as bolts—inevitable!  
Ho!—lofty son of Themis, who is sage,  
Thee loth, I loth, must rivet fast in chains  
Against this rocky height unclomb by man,  
Where never human voice nor face shall find  
Out thee, who lov'st them!—where thy beauty's flower,  
Scorched in the sun's clear heat, shall fade away,

And night come up with garniture of stars  
To comfort thee with shadow, and the sun  
Disperse, with retriect beams, the morning frosts;  
And through all changes, sense of present woe  
Shall vex thee sore, because, with none of them  
There comes a hand to free. Such fruit is plucked  
From love of man!—for in that thou, a god,  
Didst brave the wrath of gods, and give away  
Undue respect to mortals; for that crime  
Thou art adjudged to guard this joyless rock,  
Erect, unslumbering, bending not the knee,  
And many a cry and unavailing moan  
To utter on the air! For Zeus is stern,  
And new-made kings are cruel.

*Strength.* Be it so.  
Why loiter in vain pity? Why not hate  
A god the gods hate?—one too who betrayed  
Thy glory unto men?

*Hephæstus.* An awful thing  
Is kinship joined to friendship.

*Strength.* Grant it be;  
Is disobedience to the Father's word  
A possible thing? Dost quail not more for *that*?

*Hephæstus.* Thou, at least, art a stern one! ever bold!

*Strength.* Why, if I wept, it were no remedy!

And do not *thou* spend labor on the air  
To bootless uses.

*Hephæstus.* Cursed handicraft!  
I curse and hate thee, O my craft!

*Strength.* Why hate  
Thy craft, most plainly innocent of all  
These pending ills?

*Hephæstus.* I would some other hand  
Were here to work it!

*Strength.* All work hath its pain,  
Except to rule the gods. There is none free  
Except King Zeus.

*Hephæstus.* I know it very well:  
I argue not against it.

*Strength.* Why not, then,  
Make haste, and bind the fetters over HIM,  
Lest Zeus behold thee lagging.

*Hephæstus.* Here be chains—  
Zeus may behold these.

*Strength.* Seize him,—strike amain!  
Strike with the hammer on each side his bands—  
Rivet him to the rock.

*Hephæstus.*                    The work is done,  
And thoroughly done.

*Strength.*                    Still faster grapple him,—  
Wedge him in deeper,—leave no inch to stir!  
He's terrible for finding a way out  
Where others could not.

*Hephæstus.*                    Here's an arm, at least,  
Grappled past freeing.

*Strength.*                    Now, then, clench along  
The other strongly. Let the sophist learn  
He's duller than our Zeus.

*Hephæstus.*                    Oh, none but HE  
Accuse me justly!

*Strength.*                    Now, straight through the chest,  
Take him and bite him with the clenching tooth  
Of the adamantine wedge, and rivet him.

*Hephæstus.* Alas, Prometheus! what thou sufferest here,  
I sorrow over.

*Strength.*                    Dost thou shrink again,  
And breathe groans for the enemies of Zeus?  
Beware, lest thine own pity find thee out.

*Hephæstus.* Thou dost behold a spectacle that turns  
The sight o' the eyes to pity.

*Strength.* I behold  
A sinner suffer his sin's penalty.  
But lash the thongs about his sides.

*Hephæstus.* So much,  
I must do. Urge no farther than I must.

*Strength.* Ay, but I *will* urge!—and, with shout on shout,  
Will hound thee at this quarry! Get thee down  
And ring amain the iron round his legs!

*Hephæstus.* That work was not long doing.

*Strength.* Heavily now  
Let fall the strokes upon the perforant gyves!  
For He who rates the work has a heavy hand.

*Hephæstus.* Thy speech is savage as thy shape.

*Strength.* Be thou  
Gentle and tender! but revile not me  
For the firm will and the untruckling hate.

*Hephæstus.* Let us go! He is netted round with chains.

*Strength.* Here, now, taunt on! and having spoiled the gods  
Of honors, crown withal thy mortal men  
Who live a whole day out! Why how could *they*  
Draw off from thee one single of thy griefs?  
Methinks the Demons gave thee a wrong name,  
*Prometheus*, which means Providence,—because

Thou dost thyself require a providence,  
To escape the crushing of this rolling Doom.

*Prometheus alone.* O holy Æther, and swift-winged Winds,  
And River-wells, and laughter infinite  
Of yon Sea-waves! Earth, mother of us all,  
And all-viewing cyclic Sun, I cry on you!—  
Behold me a god, what I endure from gods!

Behold, with throe on throe,  
How, wasted by this woe,  
I wrestle down the myriad years of Time!

Behold, how, fast around me,  
The new King of the happy ones sublime  
Has flung the chain he forged, has shamed and bound me!  
Woe, woe! to-day's woe and the coming morrow's,  
I cover with one groan! And where is found me

A limit to these sorrows?  
And yet what word do I say? I have foreknown  
Clearly all things that should be—nothing done,  
Comes sudden to my soul—and I must bear  
What is ordained with patience, being aware  
Necessity doth front the universe  
With an invincible gesture. Yet this curse  
Which strikes me now, I find it hard to brave  
In silence or in speech. Because I gave  
Honor to mortals, I have yoked my soul  
To this compelling fate! Because I stole  
The secret fount of fire, whose bubbles went  
Over the ferule's brim, and manward sent  
Art's mighty means and perfect rudiment,

That sin I expiate in this agony;  
Hung here in fetters, 'neath the blanching sky!  
    Ah, ah me! what a sound,  
What a fragrance sweeps up from a pinion unseen  
Of a god, or a mortal, or nature between,—  
Sweeping up to this rock where the earth has her bound,  
To have sight of my pangs,—or some guerdon obtain—  
Lo! a god in the anguish, a god in the chain!  
    The god, Zeus hateth sore,  
    And his gods hate again,  
As many as tread on his glorified floor,—  
Because I loved mortals too much evermore!  
Alas me! what a murmur and motion I hear,  
    As of birds flying near!  
    And the air undersings  
    The soft stroke of their wings—  
And all life that approaches, I wait for in fear.

*Chorus of Sea Nymphs, 1st Strophe.*

Fear nothing! our troop  
Floats lovingly up,  
With a quick-oaring stroke  
Of wings steered to the rock;  
Having softened the soul of our father below!  
For the gales of swift-bearing have sent me a sound,—  
And the clank of the iron, the malleted blow,  
    Smote down the profound

Of my caverns of old,  
And struck the red light in a blush from my brow,—  
Till I sprang up unsandalled, in haste to behold,  
And rushed forth on my chariot of wings manifold.

*Prometheus.* Alas me!—alas me!  
Ye offspring of Tethys who bore at her breast  
Many children; and eke of Oceanus,—he,  
Who coils around earth with perpetual unrest;  
Behold me and see,  
How transfixed with the fang  
Of a fetter, I hang  
On the high-jutting rocks of this fissure, and keep  
An uncoveted watch o'er the world and the deep.

*Chorus, 1st Antistrophe.*

I behold thee, Prometheus—yet now, yet now,  
A terrible cloud, whose rain is tears,  
Sweeps over mine eyes that witness how  
Thy body appears  
Hung awaste on the rocks by infrangible chains!  
For new is the hand and the rudder that steers  
The ship of Olympus through surge and wind—  
And of old things passed, no track is behind.

*Prometheus.* Under earth, under Hades,  
Where the home of the shade is,  
All into the deep, deep Tartarus,  
I would he had hurled me adown!  
I would he had plunged me, fastened thus  
In the knotted chain, with the savage clang,  
All into the dark, where there should be none,  
Neither god nor another, to laugh and see!  
But now the winds sing through and shake  
The hurtled chains wherein I hang,—  
And I, in my naked sorrows, make  
Much mirth for my enemy.

*Chorus, 2d Strophe.*

Nay! who of the gods hath a heart so stern,  
As to use thy woe for a root of mirth?  
Who would not turn more mild to learn  
Thy sorrows? who of the heaven and earth,  
Save Zeus? But he  
Right wrathfully  
Bears on his sceptral soul unbent,  
And rules thereby the heavenly seed;  
Nor will he cease, till he content  
His thirsty heart in a finished deed;  
Or till Another shall appear,  
To win by fraud, to seize by fear  
The hardly captured government.

*Prometheus.* Yet even of *me* he shall have need,  
That monarch of the blessed seed;  
Of me, of me, who now am cursed  
    Beneath his fetters dire!  
To wring my secret out withal,  
    And learn by whom his sceptre shall  
Be filched from him—as was, at first,  
    His heavenly fire!  
Yet he never shall enchant me  
    With his honey-lipped persuasion;  
Never, never shall he daunt me  
    With the oath and threat of passion,  
Into speaking as they want me,  
Till he loose this savage chain,  
    And accept the expiation  
Of my sorrow, by his pain.

*Chorus, 2d Antistrophe.*

Thou art, sooth, a brave god,  
    And, for all thou hast borne  
From the stroke of the rod,  
    Naught relaxest from scorn!  
But thou speakest unto me  
    Too free and unworn—  
And a terror strikes through me,

And festers my soul,—  
And I fear, in the roll  
Of the storm, for thy fate,  
In the ship far from shore—  
Since the son of Saturnius is hard in his hate,  
And unmoved in his heart evermore.

*Prometheus.* I know that Zeus is stern!  
I know he metes his justice by his will!  
And yet, I also know his soul shall learn  
More softness when once broken by this ill,—  
That, curbing his unconquerable wrath,  
He shall rush on in fear, to meet with me  
Who rush to meet with him, in agony,  
To issues of harmonious covenant.

*Chorus.* Remove the veil from all things, and relate  
The story to us!—of what crime accused,  
Zeus smites thee with dishonorable pangs.  
Speak! if to teach us do not grieve thyself.

*Prometheus.* The utterance of these things is torture to me,—  
But so, too, is their silence! each way lies  
Woe strong as fate!—

When gods began with wrath,  
And war rose up between their starry brows,—  
Some choosing to cast Chronos from his throne,  
That Zeus might king it there; and some in haste

With opposite oaths that they would have no Zeus  
To rule the gods for ever,—I, who brought  
The counsel I thought meetest, could not move  
The Titans, children of the Heaven and Earth,—  
Because, disdainig in their rugged souls  
My subtle machinations, they assumed  
It was an easy thing for force to take  
The mastery of fate. My mother, then,  
Who is called not only Themis, but Earth too,  
(Her single beauty joys in many names,)  
Did teach me, with reiterant prophecy,  
What future should be,—and how conquering gods  
Should not prevail by strength and violence,  
But by guile only. When I told them so,  
They would not deign to contemplate the truth  
On all sides round;—and thus, I deemed it best  
To lead my mother upwards, willingly,  
And set my Themis face to face with Zeus,  
As willing to receive her! Tartarus,  
With its abysmal cloister of the Dark,  
Because I gave that counsel, covers up  
The antique Chronos and his siding hosts;  
And, by that counsel helped, the king of gods  
Hath recompensed me by these bitter pangs—  
For kingship wears a cancer at the heart,—  
To have no faith in friends. And then, ye ask,  
What crime it is for which he tortures me—  
It shall be clear before you. When at first  
He filled his father's throne, he made direct  
And various gifts of glory to the gods,

And dealt the empire out. Alone, of men,  
Of miserable men, he took no count,  
But yearned to sweep their track off from the world,  
And plant a newer race there! And was none  
Resisted that desire except myself!  
*I* dared it! *I* drew mortals back to light,  
From meditated ruin deep as hell,—  
And, for that wrong, I bow down in these pangs,  
Dreadful to suffer, mournful to behold,—  
And I, who pitied man, am thought myself  
Unworthy pity,—while I render out  
Deep rhythms of anguish 'neath the harping hand  
That strikes me thus!—a sight that shames your Zeus!

*Chorus.* Hard as thy chains, and cold as all these rocks,  
Is he, Prometheus, who withholds his heart  
From joining in thy woe. I yearned before  
To fly this sight—and, now I gaze on it,  
I sicken inwards.

*Prometheus.* To my friends, indeed,  
I must be a sad sight.

*Chorus.* And didst thou sin  
No more than so?

*Prometheus.* I did restrain, besides,  
My mortals from premeditating death.

*Chorus.* How didst thou medicine the plague-fear of death?



Beneath such pangs against such skiey rocks,—  
Doomed to this drear hill and no neighboring  
Of any life!—but mourn not *ye* for griefs  
I bear to-day!—drop rather to the plain,  
And hear how other woes creep on to me,  
And learn the consummation of my doom.  
Beseech you, nymphs, beseech you!—grieve for me,  
Who now am grieving!—for grief walks the earth,  
And sits down at the foot of each by turns.

*Chorus.* We hear the deep dash of thy words,  
Prometheus, and obey!  
And I spring with a rapid foot away  
From the rushing car, and the holy air  
The track of birds—  
And I drop to the rugged ground, and, there,  
Await the tale of thy despair.

*Enter OCEANUS.*

*Oceanus.* I reach the bourne of my weary road,  
Where I could see and answer thee,  
Prometheus, in thine agony!  
On the back of the quick-winged bird I glode,  
And I bridled him in  
With the will of a god,—  
And know, thy sorrow aches in me,  
Constrained by the force of kin.

Nay, though that tie were all undone,  
For the life of none beneath the sun,  
Would I seek a larger benison,  
    Than I seek for thine!—  
And thou shalt learn my words are truth,—  
That no fair parlance of the mouth  
    Grows falsely out of mine!  
Then give me a deed to prove my faith,—  
For no faster friend is named in breath,  
    Than I, Oceanus, am thine.

*Prometheus.* Ha! what has brought thee? Hast thou also come  
To look upon my woe? How hast thou dared  
To leave the depths called after thee, the caves  
Self-hewn and self-roofed with spontaneous rock,  
To visit Earth, the mother of my chain?  
Hast come indeed to view my doom, and mourn  
That I should sorrow thus? Gaze on, and see  
How I, the fast friend of your Zeus,—how I  
The erector of the empire in his hand,—  
Am bent beneath that hand, in this despair!

*Oceanus.* Prometheus, I behold,—and I would fain  
Exhort thee, though already subtle enough,—  
To a better wisdom. Titan, know thyself,  
And take new softness to thy manners, since  
A new king rules the gods. If words like these,  
Harsh words and sharp ones, thou wilt fling abroad,

Zeus haply, though he sit so far and high,  
May hear thee do it; and, so, this wrath of his  
Which now affects thee fiercely, shall appear  
A mere child's sport at vengeance! Wretched god,  
Rather dismiss the passion which thou hast,  
And seek a change from grief. Perhaps I seem  
To address thee with old saws and outworn sense,—  
Yet such a curse, Prometheus, waits indeed  
On lips that speak too proudly!—ne'ertheless,  
Thou dost not grow the meeker, nor dost yield  
To evil rule the sooner,—yearning still  
To swell the account of grief, with other griefs  
Than what are borne! Beseech thee, use me then  
For counsel! Do not spurn against the pricks,—  
Seeing that who reigns, reigns by cruelty,  
And not by right. And now, I go from hence,  
And will endeavor if a power of mine  
Can break thy fetters through. For thee,—be calm,  
And smooth thy words from passion. Knowest thou not  
Of perfect knowledge, thou who knowest too much,  
That where the tongue wags, ruin never lags?

*Prometheus.* I gratulate thee, who hast shared and dared  
All things with me, except their penalty!  
But now cease! leave these thoughts! It cannot be  
That thou shouldst move HIM. HE may *not* be moved!  
And *thou*, beware lest, this way, thou meet woe.

*Oceanus.* Ever thou wert more wise, for others' use,  
Than for thine own: the event, and not the word,

Attests it to me. Yet where now I rush,  
Thy wisdom hath no power to drag me back;  
Because I glory—glory in this aim—  
To win for thee deliverance from thy pangs,  
As a free gift from Zeus.

*Prometheus.*                      Why there, again,  
I give thee gratulation and applause!  
Thou lackest no good-will. But, as for deeds,  
Do naught! 'twere all done vainly! helping naught,  
Whatever thou wouldst do. Rather take rest,  
And keep thyself from evil. If I grieve,  
I do not therefore wish to multiply  
The griefs of others. Verily, not so!  
For still my brother's doom doth vex my soul,—  
My brother Atlas, standing in the west,  
Shouldering the column of the heaven and earth,  
Mete burden for a giant! And I have seen,  
And pitied as I saw, the earth-born one,  
The habitant of old Cilician caves,  
The great war-monster of the hundred heads,  
(All taken and bowed beneath the violent Hand,)  
Typhon the fierce, who did resist the gods,  
And, hissing slaughter from his dreadful jaws,  
Did flash out from his eyes a glory askance,  
As if to storm the throne of Zeus! But so,  
The sleepless arrow of Zeus flew straight to him,—  
The headlong bolt of thunder breathing flame,  
And struck him downward from his eminence  
Of boastful exaltation! Through the soul,

It struck him mainly; and his strength was shrunk  
To ashes, thunder-blasted. Now, he lies  
A helpless trunk supinely, at full length,  
Beside the strait of ocean; over-ridden  
By roots of Ætna,—high upon whose tops  
Hephæstus sits and strikes the flashing ore,  
From which the great fire-rivers shall burst away  
Hereafter, and devour with savage jaws  
The equal plains of fruitful Sicily!—  
Such passion he shall boil back in hot darts  
Of an insatiate fury and sough of flame,—  
Fallen Typhon;—howsoever struck and charred  
By Zeus's bolted thunder! But for thee,  
Thou art not so unlearned as to need  
My teaching—let thy knowledge save thyself.  
*I quaff the full cup of a present doom,*  
And wait till Zeus's soul hath quenched its wrath.

*Oceanus.* Hast thou no knowledge, then, of this, Prometheus  
—  
That words do medicine anger?

*Prometheus.* If the word  
With seasonable softness touch the heart,  
And, where the soul is ulcerous, sear it not  
With any rudeness.

*Oceanus.* With a noble aim  
To dare as nobly—is there harm in *that*?  
Dost thou discern it? Teach me.

*Prometheus.* I discern  
An empty wish,—and unresultive work.

*Oceanus.* Then let me bear the harm of punishment!  
Since it most profits that the truly wise  
Should seem not wise at all.

*Prometheus.* And this will seem  
A crime of mine.

*Oceanus.* In truth thine argument  
Sends me back home.

*Prometheus.* Because thy grief for me  
Might cast thee down to hate.

*Oceanus.* The hate of Him,  
Who sits a new king on the general throne?

*Prometheus.* Beware of him,—lest thine heart grieve by him.

*Oceanus.* Thy doom, Prometheus, be my teacher!

*Prometheus.* Go!  
Depart—beware!—and keep the mind thou hast.

*Oceanus.* Thy words drive after, as I rush before—  
Lo! my four-footed Bird sweeps smooth and wide  
The flats of air with balanced pinions, glad  
To bend his knee at home, in the ocean-stall.

[*Exit* OCEANUS.]

*1st Strophe.*

I moan thy fate, I moan for thee,  
Prometheus! From my restless eyes,  
Drop by drop intermittently,  
A trickling stream of tears supplies  
My cheeks all wet from fountains free,—  
Because that Zeus, the sternly bold,  
Whose law is taken from his breast,  
Uplifts his sceptre manifest  
Over the gods of old.

*1st Antistrophe.*

All the land is moaning  
With a murmured plaint to-day!  
All the mortal nations,  
Having habitations  
Near the holy Asia,  
Are a dirge entoning  
For thine honor and thy brother's,  
Once majestic beyond others  
In the old belief,—  
Now are groaning in the groaning  
Of thy deep-voiced grief.

*2d Strophe.*

Mourn the virgins, 'habitant  
Of the Colchian land,  
Who with white, calm bosoms, stand  
In the battle's roar—  
Mourn the Scythian tribes that haunt  
The verge of earth, Mæotis' shore—

*2d Antistrophe.*

And Arabia's battle crown,  
And dwellers in the lofty town  
Mount Caucasus sublimely nears,—  
An iron squadron, thundering down  
With the sharp-prowed spears.

But one other before, have I seen to remain,  
By invincible pain  
Bound and vanquished,—one Titan!—'twas Atlas who bears,  
In a curse from the gods, by that strength of his own  
Which he evermore wears,  
The weight of the heaven on his shoulder alone,  
While he sighs up the stars!  
And the ocean-tides bellow, in bursting their bars,—  
Murmurs stir the profound,—

And black Hades roars up through the chasm of the ground,—  
And the founts of the pure-running rivers moan low  
    In the pathos of woe.

*Prometheus.* Beseech you, think not I am silent thus  
Through pride or scorn! I only gnaw my heart  
With meditation, seeing myself so wronged!  
For so—their honors to these new-made gods,  
What other gave but I,—and shared them out  
With distribution? Ay—but here I am dumb;  
For here, I should repeat your knowledge to you,  
If I spake aught. List rather to the works  
I did for mortals, and how, fools before,  
I made them wise and true in aim of soul!—  
And I will tell you—not as taunting them,  
But teaching you the intention of my gifts;  
How, first beholding, they beheld in vain,  
And hearing, heard not, but, like shapes in dreams,  
Mixed all things wildly down the tedious time;  
Nor knew to build a house against the sun,  
With wicketed sides; nor any woodwork knew;  
But lived, like silly ants, beneath the ground  
In hollow caves unsunned. There, came to them  
No steadfast sign of winter, nor of spring  
Flower-perfumed, nor of autumn full of fruit,—  
But all things they did blindly and lawlessly,  
Until I taught them how the stars do rise  
And set in mystery; and devised for them



Discerned the vision from the common dream,  
And made them wise in vocal auguries  
Hard to interpret; and defined as plain  
The wayside omens,—flights of crook-clawed birds,—  
Showed which are, by their nature, fortunate,  
And which not so, and what the food of each,  
And what the hates, affections, social needs,  
Of all to one another; and what sign  
Of visceral lightness, colored to a shade,  
May charm the genial gods, and what fair spots  
Commend the lung and liver. Burning so,  
The limbs encased in fat, and the long chine,  
I led my mortals on to an art abstruse,  
And cleared their eyes to the image in the fire,  
Erst filmed in dark. Enough said now of this.  
And for those helps of man hid underground,  
The iron, and the brass, silver, and gold,  
Can any dare say that he found them out  
Before me? None, I know! Unless he choose  
To vaunt a vain lie. Learn the whole, in brief,  
That all arts came to mortals from Prometheus.

*Chorus.* Give mortals no unseasonable help,  
Neglecting thine own sorrow; since, for me,  
I have hope to see thee break these fetters still,  
And stand up strong as Zeus.

*Prometheus.* This ends not thus,  
The oracular Fate ordains. I must be bowed  
By infinite woes and pangs, to escape this chain.

Necessity is stronger than mine art.

*Chorus.* Who holds the helm of that Necessity?

*Prometheus.* The threefold Fates and the unforgetting Furies.

*Chorus.* Is Zeus less absolute than these are?

*Prometheus.* Yes,  
And therefore cannot fly what is ordained.

*Chorus.* What is ordained for Zeus, except to be  
A king for ever?

*Prometheus.* 'Tis too early yet  
For thee to learn it: ask no more.

*Chorus.* Perhaps  
Thy secret may be holy?

*Prometheus.* Turn thy mind  
To another matter! this, it is not time  
To speak abroad, but to veil utterly  
In silence still. For by that secret kept,  
I 'scape this chain's dishonor, and its woe.

*Chorus, 1st Strophe.*

Never, oh never,

May Zeus, the all-giver,  
Wrestle down from his throne,  
In that might of his own,  
To antagonize mine!  
Never let me delay  
To bend on my way  
To the gods of the shrine,  
Where the altar is full  
Of the blood of the bull,  
Near the tossing brine  
Of Ocean my father.

Nor my sin, be it sped in the word that is said,  
But my vow, be it rather  
Consummated,  
Nor evermore fail, nor evermore pine.

*1st Antistrophe.*

'Tis sweet to have  
Life lengthened out  
With hopes that are brave  
By the very doubt,  
Till the spirit swells bold  
With the joys foretold!  
But I thrill to behold  
Thee, victim doomed,  
By the countless cares  
And the drear despairs,

Lifelong, consumed.  
And all because thou, who art fearless now,  
    With Zeus above,  
Dost overflow, for mankind below,  
    With a free-souled, reverent love.

O friend, behold and see!  
What's all the beauty of humanity?  
    Can it be fair?  
What's all the strength?—is it strong?  
    And what hope can they bear,  
These dying livers—living one day long?  
    And seest thou not, my friend,  
    How feeble and slow,  
    And like a dream, doth go  
This poor blind manhood, drifted from its end?  
    And how no mortal wranglings can confuse  
    The harmony of Zeus?

*Prometheus.* I have learnt these things,  
    From the sorrow in thy face!  
    Another song did drop its wings  
    Upon my lips in other days,—  
    When round the bath, and round the bed,  
    The hymeneal chant instead,  
    I sang for thee, and smiled,—  
    And thou didst lead, with gifts, and vows,

Hesione, my father's child,  
To be thy wedded spouse.

*Io enters.*

*Io.* What land is this? what people is here?  
And who is he, who writhes, I see,  
    In the rock-hung chain?  
Now what is the crime that hath brought thee to pain?  
And what is the land—make answer free—  
Which I wander through, in my wrong and fear?—  
    Ah! ah! ah me!

The gad-fly stingeth to agony!  
O Earth, keep off that phantasm pale  
Of earth-born Argus!—ah!—I quail  
    When my soul descries  
That herdsman with the myriad eyes—  
Which seem, as he comes, one crafty eye!  
Graves hide him not, though he should die,—  
But he doggeth me in my misery  
From the roots of death, on high—on high—  
And along the sands of the siding deep,  
All famine-worn, he follows me,  
And his waxen reed doth undersound  
    The waters round,  
And giveth a measure that giveth sleep.

Woe, woe, woe!

Where shall my weary course be done?—  
What wouldst thou with me, Saturn's son?  
And in what have I sinned, that I should go,  
Thus yoked to grief by thine hand for ever?

Ah! ah! dost vex me so.

That I madden and shiver,  
Stung through with dread?

Flash the fire down, to burn me!

Heave the earth up, to cover me!

Or plunge me in the deep, with the salt waves over me,

Where the sea-beasts may be fed!

And, O king, do not spurn me

In my prayer!

For this wandering, everlonger, evermore,

Hath overworn me,—

And I know not on what shore

I may rest from my despair.

*Chorus.* Hearest thou what the ox-horned maiden saith?

*Prometheus.* How could I choose but hearken what she saith,  
The frenzied maiden?—Inachus's child?—  
Who love-warms Zeus's heart, and now is lashed  
By Here's hate, along the unending ways?

*Io.* Who taught thee to articulate that name,—

My father's? Speak to his child,  
By grief and shame defiled!  
Who art thou, victim, thou—who dost acclaim  
Mine anguish in true words, on the wide air?  
And callest too by name, the curse that came  
From Here unaware,  
To waste and pierce me with the maddening goad.  
Ah—ah—I leap  
With the pang of the hungry—I bound on the road—  
I am driven by my doom—  
I am overcome  
By the wrath of an enemy strong and deep!  
Are any of those who have tasted pain,  
Alas!—as sad as I?  
Now tell me plain, doth aught remain  
For my soul to endure beneath the sky?  
Is there any help to be holpen by?  
If knowledge be in thee, let it be said—  
Cry aloud—cry  
To the wandering, woeful maid.

*Prometheus.* All thou wouldst learn, I will make clear to thee

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No riddle upon my lips, but such straight words,  
As friends should use to each other when they talk.  
Thou seest Prometheus, who gave mortals fire.

*Io.* O common Help of all men, known of all,

O miserable Prometheus,—for what cause  
Dost thou endure thus?

*Prometheus.* I have done with wail  
For my own griefs—but lately—

*Io.* Wilt thou not  
Vouchsafe this boon to me?

*Prometheus.* Say which thou wilt,  
For I vouchsafe all.

*Io.* Speak then, and reveal  
Who shut thee in this chasm.

*Prometheus.* The will of Zeus,  
The hand of his Hephæstus.

*Io.* And what crime,  
Dost expiate so?

*Prometheus.* I have told enough for thee,  
In so much only.

*Io.* Nay—but show besides  
The limit of my wandering, and the time  
Which yet is lacking to fulfill my grief.

*Prometheus.* Why, not to know were better than to know,  
For such as thou.

*Io.* Beseech thee, blind me not  
To that which I must suffer.

*Prometheus.* If I do  
The cause is not because I grudge the boon.

*Io.* What is the cause, then, mars thy speaking out?

*Prometheus.* No grudging! but a fear to break thine heart.

*Io.* Less care for me, I pray thee! Certainty,  
I count for sweetness.

*Prometheus.* Thou wilt have it so,  
And, therefore, I must speak. Now hear—

*Chorus.* Not yet!  
Give half the sweetness my way. Let us learn  
First, what the curse is that befell this maid,—  
Her own voice telling her own wasting woes!—  
For what remains of anguish; let it wait  
The teaching of thy lips.

*Prometheus.* It doth behoove  
That thou, maid *Io*, should vouchsafe to these  
The grace they pray; and more, because they are called  
Thy father's sisters; since to open out  
And mourn out grief, where it is possible  
To draw a tear from the audience, is a work  
That pays its own price well.

*Io.*

I cannot choose

But trust you, nymphs, and tell you all ye ask,  
In clear words—though I sob amid my speech  
In speaking of the storm-curse sent from Zeus,  
And of my beauty, from which height it took  
Its swoop on me, poor wretch! left thus deformed,  
And monstrous to your eyes. For evermore  
Around my virgin-chamber, wandering went  
The nightly visions, and entreated me  
With syllabled smooth sweetness.—"Blessed maid,  
Why lengthen out thy maiden hours, when fate  
Permits the noblest spousal in the world?  
For Zeus burns with the arrow of thy love,  
And fain would touch thy beauty.—And for thee,—  
Girl—spurn not Zeus! but fly to Lerne's mead,  
That's green around thy father's flocks and stalls,  
Until the passion of the heavenly eye  
Be quenched in sight." Such dreams did, all night long,  
Constrain me—me, unhappy!—till I dared  
To tell my father how they trod the dark  
With visionary steps; whereat he sent  
His frequent heralds to the Pythian fane,  
And also to Dodona, and inquired  
How best, by act or speech, to please the gods,—  
And these returning, brought back oracles  
Of doubtful sense, indefinite response,  
Dark to interpret. Then, at last, there came  
To Inachus an answer that was clear,—  
Thrown straight as any bolt, and spoken out.  
This—"he should drive me from my home and land,

And bid me wander to the extreme verge  
Of all the earth—or, if he willed it not,  
Should have a thunder, with a fiery eye,  
Leap straight from Zeus, to burn up all his race,  
To the last root of it." By which Toxean word,  
Subdued, he drove me forth, and shut me out,  
He loth, me loth,—but Zeus's forceful bit  
Compelled him to the deed!—And instantly  
My body and soul were changed and distraught,  
And, hornöd as ye see, and spurred along  
By the fanged insect, with a maniac leap  
I rushed on to Kenchrea's limpid stream,  
And Lerne's fountain-well, And there, the earth-born,  
The herdsman Argus, most immitigable  
Of wrath, did find me out, and track me out  
With countless eyes, set staring at my steps!—  
An unexpected and most sudden doom  
Drew him from life—but I—curse-stricken still,  
Am driven from land to land before the scourge  
That gods hold o'er me. So, thou hast heard the past,  
And if the bitter future thou canst tell,  
Speak on! I charge thee, do not flatter me  
Through pity, with false words! for, in my mind,  
Deceiving works more shame than torturing.

*Chorus.*

Hush! silence here!

Nevermore, nevermore,  
Would I languish for  
The stranger's word  
To thrill mine ear!—  
Nevermore for the wrong and the woe and the fear,  
So hard to behold,  
And so hard to bear,  
To pierce my soul with a double-edged sword,  
And a sliding cold!  
Ah Fate!—ah me!—  
I shudder to see  
This wandering maid in her agony.

*Prometheus.* Grief is too quick in thee, and fear too full!  
Be patient till thou hast learnt the rest!

*Chorus.* Speak—teach!—  
To those who are sad already, it seems sweet,  
By clear foreknowledge, to make perfect, pain.

*Prometheus.* The boon ye asked me first was lightly won,—  
For first ye asked to hear this maiden's grief  
As her own lips might tell it—now remains  
To list what other sorrows she so young  
Must bear from Here!—Inachus's child,  
O thou!—drop down thy soul, my weighty words,  
And measure thence the landmarks which are set,  
To end thy wandering! Toward the orient sun

First turn thy face from mine, and journey on  
Along the desert flats, till thou shalt come  
Where Scythia's shepherd peoples dwell aloft,  
Perched in wheeled wagons under woven roofs,  
And twang the rapid arrow past the bow—  
Approach them not; but siding in thy course,  
The rugged shore-rocks sounding from the sea,  
Depart that country. On the left hand dwell  
The iron-workers, called the Chalybes,  
Of whom beware! for certes they are stern,  
And nowise bland to strangers. Reaching so  
The stream Hybristes, (well the *scorner* called,)  
Attempt no passage;—it is hard to pass.  
Or ere thou come to Caucasus itself,  
That highest of mountains,—where the river's strength  
Is juttred from the heights—and thou must climb  
Those mountain-tops that neighbor with the stars,  
And tread the southward way, and near, at last,  
The Amazonian host that hateth man,  
Who shall inhabit Themiscyra, close  
Upon Thermodon, where the sea's rough jaw  
Doth gnash at Salmydessa, and provide  
A cruel host to seamen, and to ships  
A stepdame harsh! The same shall lead thee on  
With unreluctant hand, till thou shalt drive  
Just where the ocean gates show narrowest,  
On the Cimmerian isthmus,—leaving which,  
Behooves thee swim with ghastly fortitude  
That strait Mæotis. Ay! and evermore  
That traverse shall be famous on men's lips,

That strait, called Bosphorus, the horned one's road,  
So named because of thee! Thou so wilt pass  
From Europe's plain to Asia's continent.  
How think ye, nymphs? the king of gods appears  
Impartial in his violent deeds? For lo!  
The god desirous of this mortal's love  
Hath cursed her with these wanderings. Ah, fair child,  
Thou hast met a bitter groom for bridal troth!  
For all thou yet hast heard, can only prove  
The incompleated prelude of thy doom.

*Io.* Ah, ah!

*Prometheus.* Is't thy turn, now, to shriek and moan?  
How wilt thou, when thou hast hearkened what remains?

*Chorus.* Besides the grief thou hast told, can aught remain?

*Prometheus.* A sea—of foredoomed evil worked to storm.

*Io.* What boots my life, then? why not cast myself  
Down headlong from this miserable rock,  
That, dashed against the flats, I may redeem  
My soul from sorrow? Better once to die,  
Than day by day to suffer.

*Prometheus.* Verily,  
It would be hard for thee to bare my woe,  
For whom it is appointed not to die.  
For Death redeems from woe: and now I see  
In all my far prevision, not a bound





*Io.* Point me not to a good,  
To leave me straight bereaved.

*Prometheus.* I am prepared  
To grant thee one of two things.

*Io.* But which two?  
Set them before me—grant me power to choose.

*Prometheus.* I grant it—choose—if I shall name aloud  
What griefs remain to wound thee, or what hand  
Shall save me out of mine.

*Chorus.* Vouchsafe, O god,  
The one grace of the twain to her who prays,  
The next to me—and turn back neither prayer  
Dishonored by denial. Thus, to her,  
Declare the future wandering of her feet—  
Then point me to the looser of thy chain—  
Because I yearn to know it.

*Prometheus.* Since ye will,  
Of absolute will, this knowledge, I will set  
No contrary against it, nor keep back  
A word of all ye ask for. *Io*, first  
To thee I must recount thy wandering course  
Far winding; as I tell it, write it down  
In thy soul's book of memories. When thou hast past  
The flowing bound that parts two continents,  
Track on the footsteps of the orient sun

In his own fire—across the roar of seas,  
Fly, till thou hast reached the Gorgonæan flats  
Beside Cisthene—there the Phorcides,  
Three ancient maidens, live, with shape of swan,  
One tooth between them, and a common eye,  
On whom the sun doth never look at all  
With all his rays, nor evermore the moon,  
When she looks through the night. And nigh to these  
The Gorgon sisters three, enclotted with wings,  
And wearing snakes for curls, and man-abhorred.  
There is no mortal gazes in their face,  
And gazing can breathe on. I speak of such  
To guard thee from their horror. Ay! and list  
Another tale of a dreadful sight! beware  
The Griffins, those unbarking dogs of Zeus,  
Those sharp-mouthed dogs, and the Arimaspians host,  
One-eyed, that moves on horseback, habiting  
Beside the river that runs bright with gold,  
The stream of Pluto—near them not! anon  
Thou'lt come to a distant land, a dusky tribe  
Of dwellers at the fountain of the Sun,  
Whence flows the river Æthiops!—wind along  
Its banks and turn off at the cataracts,  
Just as the Nile pours, from the Byblin hills,  
His holy and sweet wave!—his course shall guide  
Thine own to that triangular Nile-ground,  
Where, Io, is ordained for thee and thine,  
A distant exile. Have I said, in this,  
Aught darkly or incompletely?—now repeat  
The question, make the knowledge full! Behold

I have more leisure than I covet, here.

*Chorus.* If thou canst tell us aught that's left untold  
Or loosely told of her most dreary flight,  
Declare it straight! but if thou hast uttered all,  
Grant us that latter grace for which we prayed,  
Remembering how we prayed it.

*Prometheus.* She has heard  
The fullness of the wandering of her woe—  
But that she may have knowledge not to have heard  
All vainly, I will tell what she endured,  
Ere coming hither, and invoke the past  
To prove my prescience true. And so—to leave  
All crowd of jostling words, and pass at once  
To the first step of thy course—when thou hadst gone  
To those Molossian plains which sweep around  
Dodona shouldering Heaven, whereat the fane  
Of Zeus Thesprotian keepeth oracle,—  
And, wonder past belief, the oaks do wave  
Articulate adjurations—ay, and they  
Did so salute thee in no phrase perplexed,  
But clear with glory, noble wife of Zeus  
Who shouldst be—(Here some sweetness took thy sense!)  
Thou didst rush further onward,—stung along  
The ocean-shore,—toward Rhea's mighty bay,—  
And, tost back from it, wert tost to it again  
In stormy evolution!—and, know well,  
In coming time that hollow of the sea  
Shall bear the name Ionian, and present

A monument of Io's passage through,  
Unto all mortals. These words be the signs  
Of my soul's power to look beyond the veil  
Of visible things. The rest, to you and her,  
I will declare in common audience, nymphs,  
Returning thither where my speech brake off.  
There is a town Canobus, built upon  
The earth's far margin, at the mouth of Nile,  
And on the mound washed up by it!—Io, there  
Shall Zeus give back to thee thy perfect mind,  
And only by the touch and by the stroke  
Of his undreadful hand! and thou shalt bear  
A dusky son to Zeus, who shall be called  
Thence, Epaphus, the Touched! That son shall pluck the fruit  
From all that land wide-watered by the flow  
Of flooding Nile,—and, counting from his life  
The fifth full generation,—which involves  
Full fifty maidens, a fair woman-race,  
Shall back to Argos turn reluctantly,  
To fly the proffered nuptials of their kin,  
Their father's brother's. But they, passion-struck,  
Like falcons bearing hard on flying doves,  
Shall drive on, hunting on that quarry of love  
They should not hunt—till envious Heaven shall lay  
A curse betwixt that beauty and their desire,  
And Greece receive them, to be overcome  
In murderous woman-war, by fierce red hands,  
Round which the night keeps watch. For every wife  
Shall slay her husband, dyeing deep in blood  
The sword of double edges—(now do I wish

As fair a marriage-joy to all my foes!)  
One bride alone shall fail to smite to death  
The head upon her pillow, touched with love,  
And blunted in her purpose, and impelled  
To choose the lesser evil, and prefer  
The wearing on her cheeks the coward's shame,  
To blood-guilt on her hands. She shall give birth  
To a royal race in Argos—tedious speech  
Were needed to speak clearly and at large  
Of these things—'tis enough that, from this seed,  
Shall spring the strong He—famous with the bow,  
Whose arm shall break my fetters off! Behold,  
My mother Themis, that old Titaness,  
Instructed me in this oracular truth;  
But how and when, I should be long to speak,  
And thou, in hearing, wouldst not gain at all.

*Io.*            Eleleu, eleleu!

How the spasm and the pain,  
And the fire on the brain,

Strike, burning me through!

How the sting of the curse, all aflame as it flew,  
Pricks me onward again!

How my heart, in its terror, is spurning my breast,—  
And my eyes, like the wheels of a chariot, roll round,—  
I am whirled from my course, to the east, to the west,  
In the whirlwind of frenzy all madly inwound—  
And my mouth is unbridled for anguish and hate,  
And my words beat in vain, in wild storms of unrest,  
On the sea of my desolate fate.

*Chorus.—Strophe.*

Oh! wisest of the wise is he  
Who first within his spirit knew,  
And with his tongue declared it true,  
That love comes best that comes unto  
    The equal of degree!  
And that the poor and that the low  
Should seek no love from those above,  
Whose souls are fluttered with the flow  
Of airs about their golden height,  
Or proud because they see arow  
    Ancestral crowns of light!

*Antistrophe.*

Oh! never, never, may ye, Fates,  
Behold me with your awful eyes  
Lift mine too fondly up the skies  
Where Zeus, upon the purple, waits!—  
Nor let me step too near—too near—  
To any suitor, bright from heaven—  
Because I see—because I fear—  
This loveless maiden vexed and laden  
By this fell curse of Here,—driven  
On wanderings dread and drear!

*Epode.*

Nay, grant an equal troth instead,  
Of nuptial love to bind me by!—  
It will not hurt—I shall not dread  
To meet it in reply.  
And let not love, from those above,  
Revert and fix me, as I said,  
With that inevitable Eye!  
I have no sword to fight that fight—  
I have no strength to tread that path—  
I know not if my nature hath  
The power to bear,—I cannot see,  
Whither, from Zeus's infinite,  
I can have power to flee.

*Prometheus.* Yet Zeus, howbeit most absolute of will,  
Shall turn to meekness,—such a marriage-rite  
He holds in preparation, which anon  
Shall thrust him headlong from his gerent seat,  
And leave no track behind! and so the curse  
His father Chronos muttered in his fall,  
As he fell from his ancient throne and cursed,  
Shall be accomplished wholly—no escape  
From all this ruin shall the filial Zeus  
Have granted to him, from one of all his gods,

Unless I teach it—I, the refuge, know,  
And I, the means—Now, therefore, let him sit  
And brave the imminent doom, and fix his faith  
On his supernal noises, hurtling on  
With restless hand, the bolt that breathes out fire—  
For these things shall not help him—none of them—  
Nor hinder his perdition when he falls  
To shame, and lower than patience,—such a foe,  
He doth himself prepare against himself,  
A wonder of unconquerable Hate,  
A new deviser of a nobler fire  
Than shines in lightnings, and of grander sound  
Than aught the thunder rolls,—outthundering it,—  
Of power to shatter in Poseidon's fist  
The trident-spear, which, while it plagues the sea,  
Doth shake the shores around it. Ay, and Zeus,  
By this destruction, lost, shall mete at length  
The gulf which severs rule from servitude.

*Chorus.* Thou makest threats for Zeus of thy desires.

*Prometheus.* I tell you, all these things shall be fulfilled,  
As, also, I desire them.

*Chorus.* Must we then  
Look out for one to come, to master Zeus?

*Prometheus.* These chains weigh lighter than his sorrows  
shall.

*Chorus.* How art thou not afraid to speak such words?

*Prometheus.* What should *I* fear, who cannot die?

*Chorus.* But *he*  
Can visit thee with dreader woe than death's.

*Prometheus.* Why let him do it!—I am here, prepared  
For all things and their pangs.

*Chorus.* The wise are they  
Who reverence Adrasteia.

*Prometheus.* Reverence thou,  
Adore thou, flatter thou, whomever reigns,  
Whenever reigning—but for me, your Zeus  
Is less than nothing! Let him act and reign  
His brief hour out according to his will—  
He will not, therefore, rule the gods too long!—  
But lo! I see that courier-god of Zeus,  
That new-made menial of the new-crowned king—  
He doubtless comes to tell us something new.

HERMES *enters.*

*Hermes.* I speak to thee, that sophist, speaker down  
Of scorn by scorn,—that sinner against gods,—  
That reverencer of men,—that thief of fire,—  
I speak to and adjure thee! Zeus commands



*Hermes.* It seems that thou dost glory in thy despair.

*Prometheus.* I, glory? would my foes did glory so,  
And I stood by to see!—and naming them,  
Thou art not unremembered.

*Hermes.* Dost thou charge  
Me also with the blame of any grief?

*Prometheus.* I tell thee, I loathe the universal gods,  
Who for the good I gave them rendered back  
The ill of their injustice.

*Hermes.* Thou art mad—  
I hear thee raving, Titan, at the full!

*Prometheus.* If it be madness to abhor my foes,  
May I be mad!

*Hermes.* If thou wert prosperous,  
Thou wouldst be unendurable.

*Prometheus.* Alas!

*Hermes.* Zeus knows not that word.

*Prometheus.* But maturing time  
Doth teach all things.

*Hermes.* Howbeit, thou hast not learnt  
The wisdom yet, thou needest.

*Prometheus.* If I had,  
I should not talk thus with a slave like thee.

*Hermes.* Thou dost vouchsafe no answer, as I think,  
To the great Sire's requirements.

*Prometheus.* Verily  
I owe him grateful service,—and should pay it.

*Hermes.* Why thou dost mock me, Titan, as I stood  
A child before thy face.

*Prometheus.* No child, forsooth,  
But yet more foolish than a foolish child,  
If thou expect that I should answer aught  
Thy Zeus can ask. No torture from his hand  
Nor any machination in the world  
Shall force mine utterance, ere he loose, himself,  
These cankerous fetters from me! For the rest,  
Let him now hurl his blenching lightnings down,  
And with his white-winged snows, and mutterings deep  
Of subterranean thunders, mix all things;  
Confound them in disorder! None of this  
Shall bend my sturdy will, and make me speak  
The name of his dethroner who shall come.

*Hermes.* Can this avail thee? Look to it!

*Prometheus.* Long ago  
It was looked forward to,—precounselled of.

*Hermes.* Vain god, take righteous courage!—dare for once  
To apprehend and front thine agonies  
With a just prudence!

*Prometheus.* Vainly dost thou chafe  
My soul with exhortation, as the sea  
Goes beating on the rock. Oh! think no more  
That I, fear-struck by Zeus to a woman's mind,  
Will supplicate him, loathed as he is  
With womanly upliftings of my hands,  
To break these chains! Far from me be the thoughts!

*Hermes.* I have indeed, methinks, said much in vain,—  
For still thy heart, beneath my showers of prayers,  
Lies dry and hard!—nay, leaps like a young horse  
Who bites against the new bit in his teeth,  
And tugs and struggles against the new-tried rein,—  
Still fiercest in the weakest thing of all,  
Which sophism is,—for absolute will alone,  
When left to its motions in perverted minds,  
Is worse than null, for strength! Behold and see,  
Unless my words persuade thee, what a blast  
And whirlwind of inevitable woe  
Must sweep persuasion through thee! For at first  
The Father will split up this jut of rock  
With the great thunder and the bolted flame,  
And hide thy body where the hinge of stone  
Shall catch it like an arm!—and when thou hast passed  
A long black time within, thou shalt come out  
To front the sun; and Zeus's winged hound,

The strong carnivorous eagle, shall wheel down  
To meet thee,—self-called to a daily feast,—  
And set his fierce beak in thee, and tear off  
The long rags of thy flesh, and batten deep  
Upon thy dusky liver! Do not look  
For any end, moreover, to this curse,  
Or ere some god appear, to bear thy pangs  
On his own head vicarious, and descend  
With unreluctant step the darks of hell,  
And the deep glooms enringing Tartarus!—  
Then ponder this!—the threat is not a growth  
Of vain invention: it is spoken and meant!  
For Zeus's mouth is impotent to lie,  
And doth complete the utterance in the act—  
So, look to it, thou!—take heed!—and nevermore  
Forget good counsel, to indulge self-will!

*Chorus.* This Hermes suits his reasons to the times—  
At least I think so!—since he bids thee drop  
Self-will for prudent counsel. Yield to him!  
When the wise err, their wisdom proves their shame.

*Prometheus.* Unto me the foreknower, this mandate of  
power,

          He cries, to reveal it!  
And scarce strange is my fate, if I suffer from hate,  
          At the hour that I feel it!  
Let the locks of the lightning, all bristling and whitening,  
          Flash, coiling me round!  
While the æther goes surging 'neath thunder and scourging

Of wild winds unbound!  
Let the blast of the firmament whirl from its place  
The earth rooted below,—  
And the brine of the ocean, in rapid emotion,  
Be it driven in the face  
Of the stars up in heaven, as they walk to and fro!  
Let him hurl me anon, into Tartarus—on—  
To the blackest degree,  
With Necessity's vortices strangling me down!  
But he cannot join death to a fate meant for *me!*

*Hermes.* Why the words that he speaks and the thoughts that he thinks,

Are maniacal—sad!  
And if Fate, who hath bound him, just loosens the links,—  
Yet he's nigh to be mad.  
Then depart ye who groan with him,  
Leaving to moan with him—  
Go in haste! lest the roar of the thunder, in nearing,  
Should blast you to idiocy, living and hearing.

*Chorus.* Change thy speech for another, thy thought for a new,

If to move me and teach me, indeed be thy care!  
For thy words swerve so far from the loyal and true,  
That the thunder of Zeus seems more easy to bear.  
How! couldst teach me to venture such vileness? Behold!  
I *choose*, with this victim, this anguish foretold!  
For I turn from the traitor in hate and disdain,—  
And I know that the curse of the treason is worse

Than the pang of the chain.

*Hermes.* Then remember, O nymphs, what I utter before,—  
Nor, when pierced by the arrows that Até will throw you,  
Cast the blame on your fate, and declare evermore  
That Zeus thrust you on anguish he did not foreshow you.  
Nay, verily, nay! for ye perish anon  
For your deed—by your choice!—by no blindness of doubt,  
No abruptness of doom!—but by madness alone,  
In the great net of Até, whence none cometh out,  
Ye are wound and undone!

*Prometheus.* Ay! in act, now—in word, now, no more!  
Earth is rocking in space!  
And the thunders crash up with a roar upon roar—  
And red eddies of lightning flash fires in my face—  
And the whirlwinds are whirling the dust round and round—  
And the blasts of the winds universal, leap free,  
And blow each upon each, with a passion of sound,—  
And æther goes mingling in storm with the sea!  
Such a curse on my head, in a manifest dread,  
From the hand of your Zeus has been hurtled along!  
O my mother's fair glory! O, Æther, enringing,  
All eyes, with the sweet common light of thy bringing.  
Dost thou see how I suffer this wrong?



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