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Twelve Plays for
THEATRE

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ROBERT COHEN



TWELVE PLAYS FOR THEATRE



ROBERT COHEN

University of California, Irvine



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✦ PREFACE ✦

THE TWELVE PLAYS IN THIS ANTHOLOGY REPRESENT a very broad spectrum of Western theatrical achievement since classical times. They are also outstanding dramas in their own rights; by turns moving, funny, enlightening, provocative, gripping, and/or enchanting.

Each, as far as we know, has thoroughly enthralled live audiences and will continue to do so for years if not centuries to come. I hope the book will be useful for students who wish to sample the wide range of Western drama, either as readers or actors, theatre enthusiasts or theatre practitioners.

The arrangement of plays is chronological, although readers may of course read them in any order. The first four represent, or reflect, a classical tradition. *Prometheus Bound*, probably by Aeschylus, is one of the most ancient-seeming tragedies that survives from the antique world: Its “Promethean” energy stems from its profound insistence on intellectual freedom within a divinely structured universe. Machiavelli’s *Clizia* (translated from Plautus’ *Casina*) is a classic of the Italian Renaissance, giving “rebirth” to a Greek and Roman style of comedy, and at the same time displaying the political wit and acumen of the brightest and most wide-ranging thinker of his day. Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, perhaps the most admired and debated play ever written, is a comprehensive study

of existence based on what was originally a medieval chronicle, a French short novel, and an English revenge play. But when Hamlet asks, “What is a man?” the audience—like the prince—spends the rest of the play struggling for an answer. And Molière’s *The Misanthrope* is a neoclassic masterpiece: a brilliant comedy of contemporary (1666) life, structured along classical lines, and resonant with universal human fears and aspirations.

Four plays from the last half of the past century through the first half of the current one center the volume and provide the reader with seminal influences on modern drama. Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, the first-produced of these, has proven one of the hallmarks of dramatic realism: It is a play that so penetratingly dissects and analyzes a woman’s role in marriage that audiences—in Ibsen’s time as well as the present—have been all but scandalized. Georg Büchner’s *Woyzeck*, which was not produced until more than seventy-five years after its author’s death, combines *Sturm und Drang* German Romanticism with a gritty social realism worthy of its Industrial Revolution setting; in an almost cinematic montage of scenes Büchner prefigured a new expression (sometimes called Expressionism) on the world’s stage with this play, which has become exceptionally popular on contemporary stages in both Europe and America in recent

years. George Bernard Shaw's *Major Barbara* is a free-flowing and highly engaging "discussion" (the playwright's term) of crucial cultural issues: politics, economics, religion, education, and aesthetics, to name but a few. The format is comedy, the style disputatious, and the conclusion—"Glory Hallelujah!"—is all but epiphanic; few if any other playwrights could put these together in one play. And Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is the quintessential mid-century American drama of sexual passion, erotic sensitivity, and family intrigue. Its regionalism (a southern plantation setting), atmosphere (crudely elegant and slightly fey), and highly poetic realism are typical of its author, but also of many subsequent American dramatists.

Four plays from the current generation of American authors complete the volume. David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross* is both brutal and comic as it presents, and critiques, the desperation and borderline criminality of American businessmen (yes, businessmen, in this case), grappling with customers and each other in search of the elusive dollar. Mamet's language is coruscating, violent, and deliberately offensive; his theme is the corruptness of certain elements in free-market, and male, societies. By contrast, Jane Wagner's *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe* is a remarkably powerful and enchanting play by (and largely about) women. It is (or was) also a "one-woman show," as Lily Tomlin, who had earlier created the principal character of Trudy (on the television show *Laugh-In*), performed all the play's roles on stage. The highly contemporary topics, mass media connection, and theatrically performative "stand-up" style of this work combine in a brilliant new dramaturgy. David Henry Hwang's

M. Butterfly is a spectacular staging of East-West and male-female relations, set in Paris and Beijing over a twenty-year period, with long-echoing themes of sexual duplicity, cultural stereotyping, and political exploitation, all to the interwoven refrains of both Italian and Chinese opera. The play was a stunning Broadway "hit" from a previously little-known young author. Last, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, by August Wilson, is the profoundly powerful masterpiece of the leading U.S. playwright of the 1990s. A true tragedy, Wilson's play sounds many of the ancient echoes that lie behind our modern and so-called civil civilizations. These four contemporary plays, while not yet accorded the dignity of historical acceptance, have been highly prized in their (and our) times, and speak powerfully and emphatically to current audiences and readers.

For those plays requiring translation, I have tried to select (or, in two cases, create) versions that are stageworthy as well as eminently readable. It is crucial that tragedies are moving and comedies are funny, and "translating" these dramatic values into an English reading text has been of prime consideration. I have provided only light footnotes for those plays that needed them, except in the case of *Hamlet*, for which I have commissioned a fully edited and footnoted text from Professor Marilyn Moriarty.

I am grateful to my colleagues who reviewed the manuscript and provided valuable comments and suggestions: Richard Dunham, State University of New York at Stony Brook; Stanley Kahan, California State University—Long Beach; Briant Hamor Lee, Bowling Green State University; James Norwood, University of Minnesota.

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1

PROMETHEUS BOUND



Aeschylus (?) • about 457 B.C.

Translated by David Grene

PROMETHEUS BOUND IS A PLAY THAT VIRTUALLY reeks with antiquity—yet one that still scorches with its fiery, over-the-top passion.

Once believed to be the world's oldest surviving drama (that honor now goes to Aeschylus' *The Persians*, written in 472 B.C.), *Prometheus Bound* is currently thought to have been written late in its author's career; a few scholars even believe the play is post-Aeschylean. Yet *Prometheus Bound*, with its soulful choruses, thundering soliloquies, and warring gods and demigods still seems to speak from the most ancient theatrical impulses: if in fact it is a later play, it was written in a deliberately antique style.

The story was known by every Athenian: it was, indeed, the primal story of Greek civilization, and the basis of the earliest Greek philosophies. In Aeschylus' accounting, Zeus and Prometheus, Olympian gods, have quarreled over the future of humanity: Zeus, newly crowned as king of the

gods, wishes humans to remain ignorant and subjugated; Prometheus wants humankind to reach its intellectual and artistic potential. Prometheus thus steals fire from the gods and gives it to humankind—and with it, light, warmth, illumination, knowledge, language, literature, and culture. Enraged, Zeus has Prometheus chained to a cliff, where, for the rest of eternity, he is to be torn to shreds by ravenous eagles. It is here that Aeschylus sets his play: at the edge of the universe, with the fate of humankind teetering in the balance.

Pure divinity is rarely shown on stage ("almighty" gods are simply too invulnerable to make interesting dramatic characters), and Zeus does not appear in *Prometheus Bound*; he is instead represented onstage by his servants (Might, Violence, Hephaestus, and Hermes), his sometimes apologist (Oceanos), and one of his victims (Io). Zeus's presence is defined, however, not so much by his representatives as by the defiance of Prometheus,

a demigod (and therefore capable of feeling pain) who struggles against his pain, his chains, and the injustice of his punishment. It is in his defiance—his fierce conflict against a superior force—that Prometheus becomes a tragic hero and *Prometheus Bound* becomes a dramatic play.

The structure of *Prometheus Bound* is simple and straightforward. The basic conflict is established physically and scenically in the first scene (the prologue), where Prometheus is nailed to the rock; subsequent scenes depict a series of arguments among Prometheus and his various tormentors, would-be helpers, and fellow victims. The language, which is highly musical, is deeply imagistic and evocative, with some of the most sublime religious poetry and political rhetoric of any era.

Watching everything along with us, of course, is the chorus—a striking invention of Greek dramaturgy, which is both audience to and participant in the action. Like the original Athenian audience, these “daughters of Oceanos” are both friends of Prometheus and subjects of Zeus, torn between their loyalty to the demigod who aided them, and to the king of gods, who terrifies them. Their odes between each scene, which were danced as well as sung, make this battle of deities deeply personal. For the chorus and audience alike, *Prometheus Bound* is both a thrilling and agonizing experience.

Prometheus Bound was originally part of a trilogy (collectively known as the *Prometheia*), which included a now-lost *Prometheus Unbound* that seems to have described the eventual reconciliation of Zeus and Prometheus; this was a subject that caught the fancy of the Romantic poet Percy Shelley, who wrote a long poem on that theme. But the sole surviving play, with its heroic defiance against authority and its sense of unresolved spir-

itual alienation, has proved immensely powerful and meaningful in numerous late twentieth-century productions, particularly in western Europe.

READING THE PLAY

Reading a Greek tragedy requires a certain amount of creative imagination, because we have little knowledge as to how the play was initially staged. Readers should be aware that the text of the play, as with all Greek tragedies of its time, was not simply spoken. Dialogue between characters was musically chanted, and the choral odes were sung outright—in parts and sometimes in unison—to the accompaniment of a flute. The chorus also danced during their odes, and at their entrance and exit as well. Unfortunately, none of the original music or choreography has survived. Some of the original Greek production techniques are a little better known. Principal actors wore masks. Stage effects were highly stylized, and it is likely that the “crag” on which Prometheus was nailed was, in fact, simply a stake erected in the orchestra (dancing circle that served as the main acting area) or on a slightly raised stage behind the orchestra. But we have no idea how Aeschylus intended the earth to “stagger” at the end of the play: the reader’s imagination, as the ancient Athenian spectator’s, should be enlivened by the challenge.

A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION

David Grene’s translation was initially published in 1941; nearly fifty years later, the translator returned to the text, and what follows is Grene’s 1990 revision. “The majestic poetry is beyond the reach of anyone not so great as the play’s author,” Professor Grene modestly notes, but his translation is a recognized masterpiece in its own right. Grene is also the co-editor, with Richmond Latti-

more, of the virtually definitive *The Complete Greek Tragedies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992; originally published 1959).

For the six footnotes in this printing, the current editor has in part relied on information in

James C. Hogan's *A Commentary on the Complete Greek Tragedies: Aeschylus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), to which the reader is referred for comprehensive annotations on all seven Aeschylean dramas.

✦ PROMETHEUS BOUND ✦

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MIGHT, a demon, servant of Zeus.

HEPHAESTUS, a blacksmith, employed by Zeus.

VIOLENCE (does not speak), another servant of Zeus.

PROMETHEUS, a demigod; his name means
“Forethought.”

OCEANOS, the god of the sea.

IO, a girl with horns, victim of Zeus.

HERMES, Zeus’s messenger.

A CHORUS of the birdlike daughters of Oceanos.

Scene: A bare and desolate crag in the Caucasus. Enter Might and Violence, demons, servants of Zeus, and Hephaestus, the smith.

MIGHT

This is the world’s limit that we have come to; this is the Scythian country, an untrodden desolation. Hephaestus, it is you that must heed the commands the Father laid upon you to nail this malefactor to the high craggy rocks in fetters unbreakable of adamantine chain. For it was your flower, the brightness of fire that devises all, that he stole and gave to mortal men; this is the sin for which he must pay the Gods the penalty—that he may learn to endure and like the sovereignty of Zeus and quit his man-loving disposition.

HEPHAESTUS

Might and Violence, in you the command of Zeus has its perfect fulfilment: in you there is nothing to stand in its way. But, for myself, I have not the heart to bind violently a God who is my kin here on this wintry

cliff. Yet there is constraint upon me to have the heart for just that, for it is a dangerous thing to treat the Father’s words lightly.

High-contriving Son of Themis of Straight Counsel: this is not of your will nor of mine; yet I shall nail you in bonds of indissoluble bronze on this crag far from men. Here you shall hear no voice of mortal; here you shall see no form of mortal. You shall be grilled by the sun’s bright fire and change the fair bloom of your skin. You shall be glad when Night comes with her mantle of stars and hides the sun’s light; but the sun shall scatter the hoar-frost again at dawn. Always the grievous burden of your torture will be there to wear you down; for he that shall cause it to cease has yet to be born.¹

Such is the reward you reap of your man-loving disposition. For you, a God, feared not the anger of the Gods, but gave honors to mortals beyond what was just. Wherefore you shall mount guard on this unlovely rock, upright, sleepless, not bending the knee. Many a groan and many a lamentation you shall utter, but they shall not serve you. For the mind of Zeus is hard to soften with prayer and every ruler is harsh whose rule is new.

MIGHT

Come, why are you holding back? Why are you pitying in vain? Why is it that you do not hate a God whom the Gods hate most of all? Why do you not

¹The reference is to Heracles, who frees Prometheus in the legend and presumably also in the subsequent play of the trilogy.

hate him, since it was your honor that he betrayed to men?

HEPHAESTUS

Our kinship has strange power; that, and our life together.

MIGHT

Yes. But to turn a deaf ear to the Father's words—how can that be? Do you not fear that more?

HEPHAESTUS

You are always pitiless, always full of ruthlessness.

MIGHT

There is no good singing dirges over him. Do not labor uselessly at what helps not at all.

HEPHAESTUS

O handicraft of mine—that I deeply hate!

MIGHT

Why do you hate it? To speak simply, your craft is in no way the author of his present troubles.

HEPHAESTUS

Yet would another had had this craft allotted to him.

MIGHT

There is nothing without discomfort except the overlordship of the Gods. For only Zeus is free.

HEPHAESTUS

I know. I have no answer to this.

MIGHT

Hurry now. Throw the chain around him that the Father may not look upon your tarrying.

HEPHAESTUS

There are the fetters, there: you can see them.

MIGHT

Put them on his hands: strong, now with the hammer: strike. Nail him to the rock.

HEPHAESTUS

It is being done now. I am not idling at my work.

MIGHT

Hammer it more; put in the wedge; leave it loose nowhere. He's a cunning fellow at finding a way even out of hopeless difficulties.

HEPHAESTUS

Look now, his arm is fixed immovably!

MIGHT

Nail the other safe, that he may learn, for all his cleverness, that he is duller witted than Zeus.

HEPHAESTUS

No one, save Prometheus, can justly blame me.

MIGHT

Drive the obstinate jaw of the adamantine wedge right through his breast: drive it hard.

HEPHAESTUS

Alas, Prometheus, I groan for your sufferings.

MIGHT

Are you pitying again? Are you groaning for the enemies of Zeus? Have a care, lest some day you may be pitying yourself.

HEPHAESTUS

You see a sight that hurts the eye.

MIGHT

I see this rascal getting his deserts. Throw the girth around his sides.

HEPHAESTUS

I am forced to do this; do not keep urging me.

MIGHT

Yes, I will urge you, and hound you on as well. Get below now, and hoop his legs in strongly.

HEPHAESTUS

There now, the task is done. It has not taken long.

MIGHT

Hammer the piercing fetters with all your power, for the Overseer of our work is severe.

HEPHAESTUS

Your looks and the refrain of your tongue are alike.

MIGHT

You can be softhearted. But do not blame my stubbornness and harshness of temper.

HEPHAESTUS

Let us go. He has the harness on his limbs.

MIGHT

[*to Prometheus*] Now, play the insolent; now, plunder the Gods' privileges and give them to creatures of a day. What drop of your sufferings can mortals spare you? The Gods named you wrongly when they called you Forethought; you yourself *need* Forethought to extricate yourself from this contrivance. [*Prometheus is left alone on the rock.*]

PROMETHEUS

Bright light, swift-winged winds, springs of the
rivers, numberless²
laughter of the sea's waves, earth, mother of all, and
the all-seeing

circle of the sun: I call upon you to see what I, a
God, suffer

at the hands of Gods—

see with what kind of torture
worn down I shall wrestle ten thousand
years of time—

such is the spiteful bond that the Prince
has devised against me, the new Prince
of the Blessed Ones. Oh woe is me!
I groan for the present sorrow,
I groan for the sorrow to come, I groan
questioning when there shall come a time
when He shall ordain a limit to my sufferings.
What am I saying? I have known all before,
all that shall be, and clearly known; to me,
nothing that hurts shall come with a new face.
So must I bear, as lightly as I can,
the destiny that fate has given me;
for I know well against necessity,
against its strength, no one can fight and win.

I cannot speak about my fortune, cannot
hold my tongue either. It was mortal man
to whom I gave great privileges and
for that was yoked in this unyielding harness.
I hunted out the secret spring of fire
that filled the narthex stem, which when revealed
became the teacher of each craft to men,
a great resource. This is the sin committed
for which I stand accountant, and I pay
nailed in my chains under the open sky.

Ah! Ah!

What sound, what sightless smell approaches me,
God sent, or mortal, or mingled?

Has it come to earth's end
to look on my sufferings,
or what does it wish?

You see me a wretched God in chains,
the enemy of Zeus, hated of all

the Gods that enter Zeus's palace hall,
because of my excessive love for Man.

What is that? The rustle
of birds' wings near? The air whispers
with the gentle strokes of wings.
Everything that comes toward me is occasion for
fear.

*[The Chorus, composed of the daughters of Oceanos,
enters, the members wearing some formalized
representation of wings, so that their general
appearance is birdlike.]*

CHORUS

Fear not: this is a company of friends
that comes to your mountain with swift
rivalry of wings.
Hardly have we persuaded our Father's
mind, and the quick-bearing winds
speeded us hither. The sound
of stroke of bronze rang through our cavern
in its depths and it shook from us
shamefaced modesty; unsandaled
we have hastened on our chariot of wings.

PROMETHEUS

Alas, children of teeming Tethys and of him
who encircles all the world with stream unsleeping,
Father Ocean,
look, see with what chains
I am nailed on the craggy heights
of this gully to keep a watch
that none would envy me.

CHORUS

I see, Prometheus: and a mist of fear and tears
besets my eyes as I see your form
wasting away on these cliffs
in adamantine bonds of bitter shame.
For new are the steersmen that rule Olympus:
and new are the customs by which Zeus rules,
customs that have no law to them,
but what was great before he brings to nothingness.

PROMETHEUS

Would that he had hurled me
underneath the earth and underneath
the House of Hades, host to the dead—
yes, down to limitless Tartarus,
yes, though he bound me cruelly
in chains unbreakable,
so neither God nor any other being

²The switch from prose to verse at this point is the translator's indication of a striking shift in dramatic tone. In the original Greek, the entire play is in verse.

might have found joy in gloating over me.
Now as I hang, the plaything of the winds,
my enemies can laugh at what I suffer.

CHORUS

Who of the Gods is so hard of heart
that he finds joy in this?
Who is that that does not feel
sorrow answering your pain—
save only Zeus? For he malignantly,
always cherishing a mind
that bends not, has subdued the breed
of Ouranos, nor shall he cease
until he satisfies his heart,
or someone take the rule from him—that hard-to-
capture rule—
by some device of subtlety.

PROMETHEUS

Yes, there shall come a day for me
when he shall need me, me that now am tortured
in bonds and fetters—he shall need me then,
this president of the Blessed—
to show the new plot whereby he may be spoiled
of his throne and his power.
Then not with honeyed tongues
of persuasion shall he enchant me;
he shall not cow me with his threats
to tell him what I know,
until he free me from my cruel chains
and pay me recompense for what I suffer.

CHORUS

You are stout of heart, unyielding
to the bitterness of pain.
You are free of tongue, too free.
It is my mind that piercing fear has fluttered;
your misfortunes frighten me.
Where and when is it fated
to see you reach the term, to see you reach
the harbor free of trouble at the last?
A disposition none can win, a heart
that no persuasions soften—these are his,
the Son of Kronos.

PROMETHEUS

I know that he is savage: and his justice
a thing he keeps by his own standard: still
that will of his shall melt to softness yet
when he is broken in the way I know,
and though his temper now is oaken hard
it shall be softened: hastily he'll come

to meet my haste, to join in amity
and union with me—one day he shall come.

CHORUS

Reveal it all to us; tell us the story,
on what charges Zeus has laid hold on you
and tortures you so cruelly, with dishonor.
Instruct us if the telling will not harm you.

PROMETHEUS

To speak of this is bitterness. To keep silent
bitter no less; and every way is misery.
When first the Gods began their angry quarrel,
and God matched God in rising faction, some
eager to drive old Kronos from his throne
that Zeus might rule—the fools!—others again
earnest that Zeus might never be their king—
I then with the best counsel tried to win
the Titans, sons of Ouranos and Earth,
but failed. They would have none of crafty schemes
and in their savage arrogance of spirit
thought they would lord it easily by force.
But she that was my mother, Themis, Earth—
she is but one although her names are many—
had prophesied to me how it should be,
even how the fates decreed it: and she said
that “not by strength nor overmastering force
the fates allowed the conquerors to conquer
but by guile only”: This is what I told them,
but they would not vouchsafe a glance at me.
Then with those things before me it seemed best
to take my mother and join Zeus's side:
he was as willing as we were:
thanks to my plans the dark receptacle
of Tartarus conceals the ancient Kronos,
him and his allies. These were the services
I rendered to this tyrant and these pains
the payment he has given me in requital.
This is a sickness rooted and inherent
in the nature of a tyranny:
that he that holds it does not trust his friends.
But you have asked on what particular
charge he now tortures me: this I will tell you.
As soon as he ascended to the throne
that was his father's, straightway he assigned
to the several Gods their several privileges
and portioned out the power, but to the unhappy
breed of mankind he gave no heed, intending
to blot the race out and create a new.
Against these plans none stood save I: I dared.

I rescued men from shattering destruction
that would have carried them to Hades' house;
and therefore I am tortured on this rock,
a bitterness to suffer, and a pain
to pitiful eyes. I gave to mortal man
a precedence over myself in pity: I
can win no pity: pitiless is he
that thus chastises me, a spectacle
bringing dishonor on the name of Zeus.

CHORUS

Of iron mind he must be, must be made of stone
who does not sympathize, Prometheus, with your
sufferings.

Myself, I would not have chosen to look on them;
now that I do, my heart is full of pain.

PROMETHEUS

Yes, to my friends the sight is pitiable.

CHORUS

Did you perhaps go further than you have told us?

PROMETHEUS

Yes, I stopped mortals from foreseeing doom.

CHORUS

What cure did you discover for that sickness?

PROMETHEUS

I sowed in them blind hopes.

CHORUS

That was a great help that you gave to men.

PROMETHEUS

Besides, I myself gave them fire.

CHORUS

Do now creatures of a day own bright-faced fire?

PROMETHEUS

Yes and from it they shall learn many crafts.

CHORUS

So it was on such charges as this that Zeus—

PROMETHEUS

Tortures me, gives me no respite from my pains.

CHORUS

Is there no term prescribed for your suffering?

PROMETHEUS

None save when it seems good to Zeus himself.

CHORUS

How shall it seem good? What hope is there? Do
you not see

that you were wrong? How you have been wrong, it
is not
a pleasure for me to say, and pain for you.
Let us let all this be; seek some deliverance
out of your trial.

PROMETHEUS

It is an easy thing for one whose foot
is on the outside of calamity
to give advice and to rebuke the sufferer.
I have known all that you have said: I knew,
I knew when I transgressed nor will deny it.
In helping man I brought my troubles on me;
but yet I did not think that with such tortures
I should be wasted on these airy cliffs,
this lonely mountain top, with no one near.
But do not sorrow for my present suffering;
alight on earth and hear what is to come
that you may know the whole complete: I beg you
alight and join your sorrow with mine: misfortune
wandering the same track lights now upon one
and now upon another.

CHORUS

Willing our ears,
that hear you cry to them, Prometheus.
Now with light foot I leave the rushing car
and sky, the holy path of birds, and light
upon this jutting rock: I long
to hear your story to the end.

[Enter Oceanos, riding on a hippocamp, or
sea monster.]³

OCEANOS

I come
on a long journey, speeding past the boundaries,
to visit you, Prometheus: with the mind
alone, no bridle needed, I direct
my swift-winged bird; my heart is sore
for your misfortunes; you know that. I think
that it is kinship makes me feel them so.
Besides, apart from kinship, there is no one
I hold in higher estimation: that
you soon shall know and know beside that in me
there is no mere word-kindness: tell me

³It is possible, even likely, that Aeschylus employed a giant crane to provide a flying entrance for Oceanos.

how I can help you, and you will never say that you have any friend more loyal to you than Oceanos.

PROMETHEUS

What do I see? Have you, too, come to gape in wonder at this great display, my torture? How did you have the courage to come here to this land, this Iron Mother, leaving the stream called after you and the rock-roofed, self-established

caverns? Was it to feast your eyes upon the spectacle of my suffering and join in pity for my pain? Now look and see the sight, this friend of Zeus, that helped set up his tyranny, and see what agonies twist me, by his instructions!

OCEANOS

Yes, I see, Prometheus, and I want, indeed I do, to advise you for the best, for all your cleverness. Know yourself and reform your ways to new ways, for new is he that rules among the Gods. But if you throw about such angry words, words that are whetted swords, soon Zeus will hear you, even though his seat in glory is far removed, and then your present multitude of pains will seem like child's play. My poor friend, give up this angry mood of yours and look for means of getting yourself free of trouble. Maybe what I say seems to you both old and commonplace;

but this is what you pay, Prometheus, for that tongue of yours which talked so high and haughty:

you are not yet humble, still you do not yield to your misfortunes, and you wish, indeed, to add some more to them; now, if you follow me as a schoolmaster you will not kick against the pricks, seeing that he, the King, that rules alone, is harsh and sends accounts to no one's audit for the deeds he does. Now I will go and try if I can free you: do you be quiet, do not talk so much. Since your mind is so subtle, don't you know that a vain tongue is subject to correction?

PROMETHEUS

I envy you, that you stand clear of blame, yet shared and dared in everything with me! Now let me be, and have no care for me. Do what you will, Him you will not persuade; He is not easily won over: look, take care lest coming here to me should hurt you.

OCEANOS

You are by nature better at advising others than yourself. I take my cue from deeds, not words. Do not withhold me now when I am eager to go to Zeus. I'm sure, I'm sure that he will grant this favor to me, to free you from your chains.

PROMETHEUS

I thank you and will never cease; for loyalty is not what you are wanting in. Don't trouble, for you will trouble to no purpose, and no help to me—if it so be you want to trouble. No, rest yourself, keep away from this thing; because I am unlucky I would not, for that, have everyone unlucky too. No, for my heart is sore already when I think about my brothers' fortunes—Atlas, who stands to westward of the world, supporting the pillar of earth and heaven on his shoulders, a load that suits no shoulders; and the earthborn dweller in caves Cilician, whom I saw and pitied, hundred-headed, dreadful monster, fierce Typho, conquered and brought low by force. Once against all the Gods he stood, opposing, hissing out terror from his grim jaws; his eyes flashed gorgon glaring lightning as he thought to sack the sovereign tyranny of Zeus; but upon him came the unsleeping bolt of Zeus, the lightning-breathing flame, down rushing, which cast him from his high aspiring boast. Struck to the heart, his strength was blasted dead and burnt to ashes; now a sprawling mass useless he lies, hard by the narrow seaway pressed down beneath the roots of Aetna: high above him on the mountain peak the smith Hephaestus works at the anvil. Yet one day there shall burst out rivers of fire, devouring with savage jaws the fertile, level plains of Sicily of the fair fruits; such boiling wrath

with weapons of fire-breathing surf, a fiery unapproachable torrent, shall Typho vomit, though Zeus's lightning left him but a cinder. But all of this you know: you do not need me to be your schoolmaster: reassure yourself as you know how: this cup I shall drain myself till the high mind of Zeus shall cease from anger.

OCEANOS

Do you not know, Prometheus,
that words are doctors for a diseased temper?

PROMETHEUS

Yes, if in season due one soothes the heart,
not violently reduces the swelling temper.

OCEANOS

In loyalty to you and courage to show it
what penalty do you see for me? Now tell me.

PROMETHEUS

Only futile effort and a silly good nature.

OCEANOS

Suffer me to be sick of this complaint,
for it is best for wise ones to seem foolish.

PROMETHEUS

The fault will seem to be mine if you do this.

OCEANOS

It is clear your words would send me home again.

PROMETHEUS

Yes, for lamenting now will lead to enmity.

OCEANOS

With him that now sits on the throne of power?

PROMETHEUS

His is a heart take heed you never vex.

OCEANOS

Your own misfortune, Prometheus, is my teacher.

PROMETHEUS

Off with you, then! Begone! Keep your present
mind.

OCEANOS

These words of yours reach one who is ready to go.
For my four-footed bird already paws
the level track of heaven with his wings
and gladly will he bend his knee
in his home stable.

CHORUS

*Strophe*⁴

I cry aloud, Prometheus, and lament your bitter
fate.

My tender eyes are trickling tears:
their fountains wet my cheek.
This is a tyrant's deed; this is unlovely,
a thing done by a tyrant's private laws,
and with this thing Zeus shows his haughtiness
of temper toward the Gods that were of old.

Antistrophe

Now all the earth has cried aloud, lamenting:
now all that was magnificent of old
laments your fall, laments your brethren's fall—
as many as in holy Asia hold
their stablished habitation, all lament
in sympathy for your most grievous woes.

Strophe

Dwellers in the land of Colchis,
maidens fearless in the fight,
and the host of Scythia, living
round the lake Maeotis, living
on the edges of the world.

Antistrophe

And Arabia's flower of warriors
and the craggy fortress keepers
near Caucasian mountains, fighters
terrible, crying for battle,
brandishing sharp pointed spears.

Strophe

One God and one God only I have seen
before this day, in torture and in bonds
unbreakable: he was a Titan,
Atlas, whose strength and might
ever exceeded; now he bends his back
and groans beneath the load of earth and heaven.

⁴The Greek choral ode was both sung and danced by the entire chorus, accompanied by a flute. The ode was broken up into dialectically contrasting rhythmic sections, known as the *strophe* and *antistrophe* (literally "turning" and "counter-turning"), which gave the ode a somewhat dialogue-like pattern.

Antistrophe

The wave cries out as it breaks into surf;
the depth cries out, lamenting you; the dark
Hades, the hollow underneath the world,
sullenly groans below; the springs
of sacred flowing rivers all lament
the pain and pity of your suffering.

PROMETHEUS

Do not think from pride and stubbornness I am
silent.

In self awareness my heart is eaten away
to see myself insulted as I am.

Yet to these new gods who but I assigned
their privileges of honor in full completion?

Of all that I say nothing, for I would speak
to you who know it. But man's tribulation,
that I would have you hear—how I found them
mindless

and gave them minds, made them masters of their
wits.

I will tell you this not as reproaching man,
but to set forth the goodwill of my gifts.

First they had eyes but had no eyes to see,
and ears but heard not. Like shapes within a dream
they dragged through their long lives and muddled
all,

haphazardly. They knew not how to build
brick houses to face the sun, nor work in wood.
They lived beneath the earth like swarming ants
in sunless caves. They had no certain mark
of winter nor of flowery spring nor summer,
with its crops, but did all this without intelligence
until it was I that showed them—yes, it was I—
stars' risings and their settings hard to judge.

And numbering as well, preeminent
of subtle devices, and letter combinations
that hold all in memory, the Muses' mother skilled
in craft,

I found for them. I was the first to yoke
beasts to be slave to the traces, and with their
bodies

to be man's substitute in the hardest work. I
harnessed

to the carriage horses obedient to the rein,
the crowning glory of the rich man's luxury.

And carriages that wander on the sea,
the ships sail-winged, who else but I invented?

Such, to my sorrow, were the devices which

I found for men, but have no clever means
to rid myself of the afflictions now oppressing me.

CHORUS

You have suffered terribly. Bewildered in your mind
you are astray, and like a bad doctor who
has fallen sick, you have lost heart not finding
by what drugs your own disease is curable.

PROMETHEUS

If you hear the rest, you will marvel even more
at what crafts and what resources I contrived.
Greatest was this: when one of mankind was sick,
there was no defense for him—neither healing food
nor drink nor unguent; for lack of drugs they
wasted,

until I showed them blendings of mild simples
with which they drive away all kinds of sickness.

The many ways of prophesying I charted;
I was the one who first judged what out of dreams
came truly real; and for mankind I gave meaning
to ominous sounds, hard of interpretation,
and to the significance of road encounters.

The flights of hook-taloned birds I analyzed,
which of them were in nature prosperous
and lucky, and what manner of life each led,
their hates and loves, companionships with each
other;

what smoothness of the entrails and what color
the gall should have if it were to please the Gods,
and also the dappled beauty of the lobe.

It was I bound the thighbones wrapped in fat,
and the long shank; it was I that set mortals on
the murky road of prophecy. Flaming signs
I made visible which till then were only dim.

So much for these things. Then beneath the earth
those hidden blessings for man, bronze, iron, silver
and gold—who can claim to have discovered before
me?

No one, I am sure, who wants to speak to the
purpose.

In one short sentence understand it all:
every art of mankind comes from Prometheus.

CHORUS

Do not help mortals beyond due occasion
while careless of your own misfortune.

For I am strong in hope that once released
from these chains you will be no less strong than
Zeus.