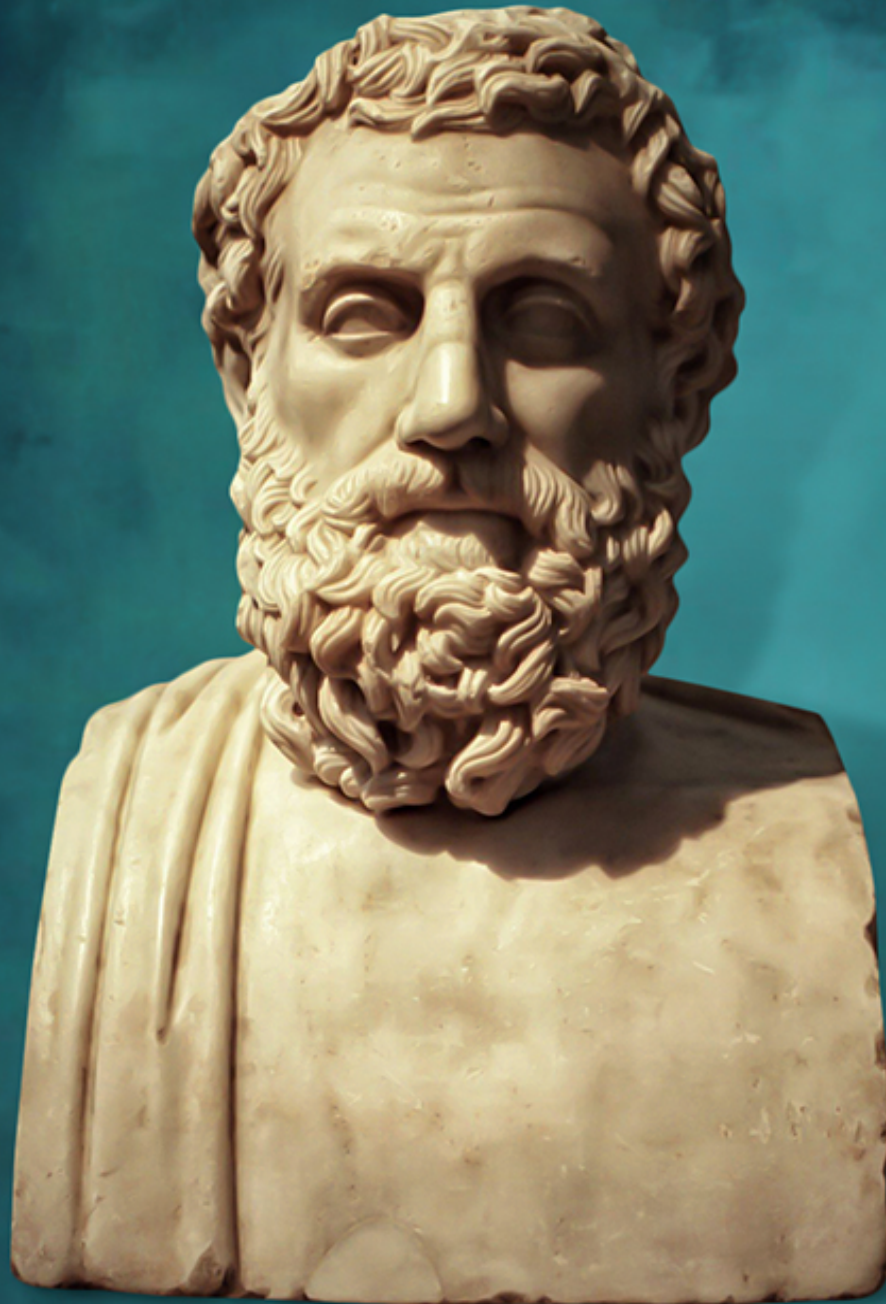


CLASSICS TO GO



**ÆSCHYLUS' PROMETHEUS BOUND
AND THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

ÆSCHYLUS

Æschylus' Prometheus Bound

And the Seven Against Thebes

Æschylus

INTRODUCTION.

Æschylus, the first of the great Grecian writers of tragedy, was born at Eleusis, in 525 B.C. He was the son of Euphorion, who was probably a wealthy owner of rich vineyards. The poet's early employment was to watch the grapes and protect them from the ravages of men and other animals, and it is said that this occupation led to the development of his dramatic genius. It is more easy to believe that it was responsible for the development of certain other less admirable qualities of the poet.

His first appearance as a tragic writer was in 499 B.C., and in 484 B.C. he won a prize in the tragic contests. He took part in the battle of Marathon, in 490 B.C., and also fought in the battle of Salamis, in 480 B.C. He visited Sicily twice, and probably spent some time in that country, as the use of many Sicilian words in his later plays would indicate.

There is a curious story related as to his death, which took place at Gela in 456 B.C. It is said that an eagle, mistaking his bald head for a stone, dropped a tortoise upon it in order to break its shell, and that the blow quite killed Æschylus. Too much reliance should not be placed upon this story.

It is not known how many plays the poet wrote, but only seven have been preserved to us. That these tragedies contain much that is undramatic is undoubtedly true, but it must be remembered that at the time he wrote, Æschylus found the drama in a very primitive state. The persons represented consisted of but a single actor, who related some narrative of mythological or legendary interest, and a chorus, who relieved the monotony of such a performance by the interspersing of a few songs and dances. To Æschylus

belongs the credit of creating the dialogue in the Greek drama by the introduction of a second actor.

In the following pages will be found a translation of two of the poet's greatest compositions, viz., the "Prometheus Chained" and the "Seven Against Thebes." The first of these dramas has been designated "The sublimest poem and simplest tragedy of antiquity," and the second, while probably an earlier work and containing much that is undramatic, presents such a splendid spectacle of true Grecian chivalry that it has been regarded as the equal of anything which the author ever attempted.

The characters represented in the "Prometheus" are Strength, Force, Vulcan, Prometheus, Io, daughter of Inachus, Ocean and Mercury. The play opens with the appearance of Prometheus in company with Strength, Force and Vulcan, who have been bidden to bind Prometheus with adamantine fetters to the lofty cragged rocks of an untrodden Scythian desert, because he has offended Jupiter by stealing fire from heaven and bestowing it upon mortals.

Vulcan is loth to obey the mandates of Jove, but urged on by Strength and Force and the fear of the consequences which disobedience will entail, with mighty force drives the wedges into the adamantine rocks and rivets the captive with galling shackles to the ruthless crags.

Prometheus, being bound and left alone, bemoans his fate and relates to the chorus of nymphs the base ingratitude of Jove, who through his counsels having overwhelmed the aged Saturn beneath the murky abyss of Tartarus, now rewards his ally with indignities because he had compassion upon mortals.

Ocean then comes to Prometheus, offering sympathy and counsel, urging him not to utter words thus harsh and

whetted, lest Jupiter seated far aloft may hear them and inflict upon him added woes to which his present sufferings will seem but child's play.

Ocean having taken his departure, Prometheus again complains to the chorus and enumerates the boons which he has bestowed upon mankind, with the comment that though he has discovered such inventions for mortals, he has no device whereby he may escape from his present misfortune.

Io, daughter of Inachus, beloved by Jove, but forced, through the jealous hatred of Juno, to make many wanderings, then appears, and beseeches Prometheus to discover to her what time shall be the limit of her sufferings. Prometheus accedes to her request and relates how she shall wander over many lands and seas until she reaches the city of Canopus, at the mouth of the Nile, where she shall bring forth a Jove-begotten child, from whose seed shall finally spring a dauntless warrior renowned in archery, who will liberate Prometheus from his captivity and accomplish the downfall of Jove.

Io then resumes her wanderings, and Mercury, sent by Jove, comes to question Prometheus as to the nuptials which he has boasted will accomplish the overthrow of the ruler of the Gods. Him Prometheus reviles with opprobrious epithets, calling him a lackey of the Gods, and refuses to disclose anything concerning the matter on which he questions him. The winged God, replying, threatens him with dire calamities. A tempest will come upon him and overwhelm him with thunderbolts, and a bloodthirsting eagle shall feed upon his liver. Thus saying, he departs, and immediately the earth commences to heave, the noise of thunder is heard, vivid streaks of lightning blaze throughout the sky and a hurricane—the onslaught of Jove—sweeps Prometheus away in its blast.

The "Seven against Thebes" includes in its cast of characters Eteocles, King of Thebes, Antigone and Ismene, Sisters of the King, a Messenger and a Herald. The play opens with the siege of Thebes. Eteocles appears upon the Acropolis in the early morning, and exhorts the citizens to be brave and be not over-dismayed at the rabble of alien besiegers. A messenger arrives and announces the rapid approach of the Argives. Eteocles goes to see that the battlements and the gates are properly manned, and during his absence the chorus of Theban maidens set up a great wail of distress and burst forth with violent lamentations. Eteocles, returning, upbraids them severely for their weakness and bids them begone and raise the sacred auspicious shout of the pæan as an encouragement to the Theban warriors. He then departs to prepare himself and six others to meet in combat the seven chieftains who have come against the city.

He soon re-enters, and at the same time comes the messenger from another part of the city with fresh tidings of the foe and the arrangement of the invaders around the walls of the city. By the gate of Præetus stands the raging Tydeus with his helm of hairy crests and his buckler tricked out with a full moon and a gleaming sky full of stars, against whom Eteocles will marshal the wary son of Astacus, a noble and a modest youth, who detests vain boastings and yet is not a coward.

By the Electron gate is stationed the giant Campaneus, who bears about him the device of a naked man with a gleaming torch in his hands, crying out "I will burn the city." Against him will be pitted the doughty Polyphontes, favored by Diana and other gods.

Against the gate of Neis the mighty Eteocles is wheeling his foaming steeds, bearing a buckler blazoned with a man in armor treading the steps of a ladder to his foeman's tower.

Megareus, the offspring of Creon, is the valiant warrior who will either pay the debt of his nurture to his land or will decorate his father's house with the spoils of the conquered Eteocles.

The fiery Hippomedon is raging at the gate of Onca Minerva, bearing upon his buckler a Typhon darting forth smoke through his fire-breathing mouth, eager to meet the brave Hyperbius, son of Ænops, who has been selected to check his impetuous onslaught.

At the gate of Boreas the youthful Parthenopæus takes his stand, a fair-faced stripling, upon whose face the youthful dawn is just making its appearance. Opposed to him stands Actor, a man who is no braggart, but who will not submit to boastful tauntings or permit the rash intruder to batter his way into the city.

The mighty Amphiarus is waiting at the gate of Homolöis, and in the meantime reproaches his ally, Tydeus, calling him a homicide, and Polynices he rebukes with having brought a mighty armament into his native city. Lasthenes, he of the aged mind but youthful form, is the Thebian who has been chosen to marshal his forces against this invader.

At the seventh gate stands Polynices, brother of Eteocles, bearing a well-wrought shield with a device constructed upon it of a woman leading on a mailed warrior, bringing havoc to his paternal city and desirous of becoming a fratricide. Against him Eteocles will go and face him in person, and leader against leader, brother against brother and foeman against foeman, take his stand.

Eteocles then departs to engage in battle, and soon after the messenger enters to announce that six of the Theban warriors have been successful, but that Polynices and Eteocles have both fallen, slain by each other's hand.

Antigone and Ismene then enter, each bewailing the death of their brothers. A herald interrupts them in the midst of their lamentations to announce to them the decree of the senate, which is that Eteocles, on account of his attachment to his country, though a fratricide, shall be honored with fitting funeral rites, but that Polynices, the would-be overturner of his native city, shall be cast out unburied, a prey to the dogs.

Against this decree Antigone rebels, and with her final words announces her unalterable intention of burying her brother in spite of the fate which awaits her disobedience to the will of the senate.

PROMETHEUS CHAINED.

Prometheus having, by his attention to the wants of men, provoked the anger of Jove, is bound down in a cleft of a rock in a distant desert of Scythia. Here he not only relates the wanderings, but foretells the future lot of Io, and likewise alludes to the fall of Jove's dynasty. Disdaining to explain his meaning to Mercury, he is swept into the abyss amid terrific hurricane and earthquake.

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

STRENGTH.

FORCE.

VULCAN.

PROMETHEUS.

CHORUS OF NYMPHS, DAUGHTERS OF
OCEAN.

IO, DAUGHTER OF INACHUS

MERCURY.

STRENGTH, FORCE, VULCAN, PROMETHEUS.

STRENGTH. ¹We are come to a plain, the distant boundary of the earth, to the Scythian track, to an untrodden² desert. Vulcan, it behooves thee that the mandates, which thy Sire imposed, be thy concern—to bind this daring wretch³ to the lofty-cragged rocks, in fetters of adamantine chains that can not be broken; for he stole and gave to mortals thy honor, the brilliancy of fire [that aids] all arts.⁴ Hence for such a trespass he must needs give retribution to the gods, that he may be taught to submit to the sovereignty of Jupiter, and to cease from his philanthropic disposition.

VULCAN. Strength and Force, as far as you are concerned, the mandate of Jupiter has now⁵ its consummation, and there is no farther obstacle. But I have not the courage to bind perforce a kindred god to this weather-beaten ravine. Yet in every way it is necessary for me to take courage for this task; for a dreadful thing it is to disregard⁶ the directions of

the Sire.⁷ Lofty-scheming son of right-counseling Themis, unwilling shall I rivet thee unwilling in indissoluble shackles to this solitary rock, where nor voice nor form of any one of mortals shalt thou see;⁸ but slowly scorched by the bright blaze of the sun thou shalt lose the bloom of thy complexion; and to thee joyous shall night in spangled robe⁹ veil the light; and the sun again disperse the hoar-frost of the morn; and evermore shall the pain of the present evil waste thee; for no one yet born shall release thee. Such fruits hast thou reaped from thy friendly disposition to mankind. For thou, a god, not crouching beneath the wrath of the gods, hast imparted to mortals honors beyond what was right. In requital whereof thou shalt keep sentinel on this cheerless rock, standing erect, sleepless, not bending a knee:¹⁰ and many laments and unavailing groans shalt thou utter; for the heart of Jupiter is hard to be entreated; and every one that has newly-acquired power is stern.

ST. Well, well! Why art thou delaying and vainly commiserating? Why loathest thou not the god that is most hateful to the gods, who has betrayed thy prerogative to mortals?

VUL. Relationship and intimacy are of great power.

ST. I grant it—but how is it possible to disobey the Sire's word? Darest thou not this the rather?

VUL. Ay truly thou art ever pitiless and full of boldness.

ST. For to deplore this wretch is no cure [for him]. But concern not thou thyself vainly with matters that are of no advantage.

VUL. O much detested handicraft!

ST. Wherefore loathest thou it! for with the ills now present thy craft in good truth is not at all chargeable.