

CAG1002/CAC8097: WEEKS 2.2–5: GREEK IN ACTION
PROMETHEUS VINCTUS (*Prometheus Bound*)

[A play traditionally attributed to Aeschylus, which most (although not all) scholars nowadays believe not to be by him.]

Part of a trilogy of tragedies, telling the story of how the Titan Prometheus, who had helped the Olympian gods (Zeus etc.) win in their battle against the other Titans, defied Zeus by defending men and giving them the divine gift of fire. To punish Prometheus, Zeus has him chained to a rock on Mount Taygetos (which is where he spends the whole of this play!). But Prometheus knows a secret that could overthrow Zeus' power in the future; when Zeus realises this, at the end of *Prometheus Vincetus* he sends Hermes to threaten Prometheus with further punishment unless he reveals the secret. Prometheus remains defiant so the play closes with the mountain splitting open to send him into imprisonment in underground chasms for a while.

[Eventually, in the trilogy, with the help of Heracles Prometheus is freed and the conflict between him and Zeus is resolved.]

The last 14 lines of the play (1080–93):

PROMETHEUS:

1080 καὶ μὴν ἔργῳ κούκετι μύθῳ
χθῶν σεσάλευται,
βρυχία δ' ἡχῶ παραμυκάται
βροντῆς, ἔλικες δ' ἐκλάμπουσι
στέροπῆς ζάπυροι, στρόμβοι δὲ κόνιν
1085 εἰλίσσουσι, σκιρτᾷ δ' ἀνέμων
πνεύματα πάντων εἰς ἄλληλα
στάσιν ἀντίπνουν ἀποδεικνύμενα,
ξυντετάρακται δ' αἰθὴρ πόντῳ·
τοιὰδ' ἐπ' ἐμοὶ ῥιπὴ Διόθεν
1090 τεύχουσα φόβον στείχει φανερῶς.
ὦ μητρὸς ἐμῆς σέβας, ὦ πάντων
αἰθὴρ κοινὸν φάος εἰλίσσων,
ἐσορᾷς μ' ὥς ἔκδικα πάσχω.

Now it is words no longer: now in very truth
the earth is staggered: in its depths the thunder
bellows resoundingly, the fiery tendrils
of the lightning-flash light up, and whirling
clouds
carry the dust along: all the winds' blasts
dance in a fury one against the other
in violent confusion: earth and sea
are one, confused together: such is the storm
that comes against me manifestly from Zeus
to work its terrors. O Holy mother mine,
O Sky that circling brings the light to all,
you see me, what I suffer, how unjustly.

D. Grene (*Complete Greek Tragedies I*)

Notes:

σεσάλευται perfect passive from σάλευω. The ending is -ται; what person do you think this might be?

ξυντετάρακται what is the alternative form of the prefix ξυν-? (use vocabulary booklet to help you if you can't remember!) Then look up the verb with this alternative prefix in LSJ (you won't find an exact match of this form but should find a form which tells you the basic verb that this comes from. Note *both* the form you're told it is, and the basic verb.

τοιὰδ' what would the normal full form of this word be?

The suffix (added on ending) of this word is indeclinable (i.e. never changes form!). What is the case, number and gender of what is left when the suffix has been removed?

For each of the following sections of the passage:

- Find the Greek equivalent, and construct as close a translation as possible while still making sense in English.
- Think about the particular picture(s) which the Greek seems designed to create, and the possible impact of this/these.
- Compare the Greek with each of translations A, B, C & D, in terms of (i) sense and (ii) phrasing and style. How does each translation seek to render the effects noted at (b)? How successful are they? What are the effects of the differences in the way the translations phrase things, compared to the Greek?

A= D. Grene

B= Loeb translation H.W. Smyth (1926)

C= Penguin translation by E. Watling

D= Loeb translation A. H. Sommerstein (2009)

HINT: it is often a good idea to start, where possible, by comparing how the translations render individual words or phrases – keep the focus on detail.

- A: “in its depths the thunder/bellows resoundingly”
B: “the echoing thunder-peal from the depths rolls roaring past me”
C: “thunder, echoing from the depth./ Roars in answer.”
D: “From the depths, in accompaniment, there bellows the sound of thunder”
- A: “the fiery tendrils/of the lightning-flash light up”
B: “the fiery wreathed lightning-flashes flare forth”
C: “fiery lightnings twist and flash”
D: “fiery twists of lightning shine out”

Concentrate particularly here on how each version has rendered ἑλκες.

- A: “and whirling clouds/carry the dust along”
B: “and whirlwinds toss the swirling dust”
C: “Dust dances in a whirling fountain”
D: “the dust is whirled by whirlwinds”
- A: “all the winds’ blasts/ dance in a fury one against the other/in violent confusion”
B: “the blasts of all the winds leap forth and set in hostile array their embattled strife”
C: “Blasts of the four winds skirmish together./ Set themselves in array for battle”
D: “the blasts /of all the winds at once leap at one another/ in a raging display of mutual strife”
- A: “earth and sea are one, confused together”
B: “the sky is confounded with the deep”
C: “Sky and sea rage indistinguishably”
D: “and sky and sea are blended into one”
- A: “such is the storm/that comes against me manifestly from Zeus/ to work its terrors”
B: “Behold, this stormy turmoil advances against me visibly, sped of Zeus to work me terror”
C: “The cataclysm advances visibly upon me./sent by Zeus to make me afraid”
D: “Such is the tempest that has plainly come/ from Zeus upon me, to strike terror.”
- A: “O Holy mother mine./ O Sky that circling brings the light to all/
you see me, what I suffer, how unjustly”
B: “O holy mother mine, O thou firmament that dost revolve the common light of all,
thou seest the wrongs I suffer!”
C: “O Earth, my holy mother./ O sky, where sun and moon/Give light to all in turn/
You see how I am wronged!”
D: “O my honoured mother, O Sky/ around whom rolls the light that shines on all/
see how unjustly I suffer!”