



Epimetheus

One-Act Play in Three Scenes

By Carlos Parada

ARGUMENT

After the ravaging war that ended with the overthrow of Cronos, the world must still recover and find its own shape under the new rule of Zeus. Prometheus, discontent with the new order that he helped to establish, wages war against Heaven, championing a defenceless mankind. But Epimetheus, having in the meantime discovered Hope and learned about the advent of womankind, questions his brother's strategy.

Dramatis Personae

EPIMETHEUS A Titan of the second generation
PROMETHEUS Brother of Epimetheus
SATYR One of the last deities on earth

Scene I

Epimetheus, in a traveler's attire, sits to rest in the moonlight.

EPIMETHEUS:
Only yesterday, reluctant to dismiss
the clamors of the cruel heavenly war,
I bewailed the Titans' fate, the golden lore
that's buried with Cronos in the abyss.

His own son, wrapping guile in tricky folds,
came forth from a hidden, stony womb,
to exact an ambiguous, ancient doom,
which spoke of the office he now holds.

With Shrewdness at his side, he won the day.
Thus Hatred, the primordial, was reborn,
whose servants—a wild gang led by crude Scorn—
the world plunder, ravage, rape, turn into prey.

Zeus rules after his mood, which no shelter would allow:
Freezing winds blow from the north, petrifying every bough,
as he sends from the far south such scourching, deadly heat,
that a dragon's mouth, though fiery, seems a gentler thing to meet.

Either cracks the earth by thirst,
or by dirty mud is cursed,
as decay corrupts each field
which no seed could prompt to yield.
And behind this gloomy scene,
reign the sad, the obscure and mean,
who promote greed and famine,
and on crime are the most keen.

For this tyrant, my brother paved the way,
having learned that the clever, not the strong,
Fate should guide and assist to win the day.
That, perhaps, was my brother's greatest wrong.
For the victor has the sacred world upset,
letting evils at the world's wheel take their spells.
So my brother, who in bitterness now dwells,
has repented of his help, and takes on threat.

Thus with mankind as his pawn,
he defies his former friend,
staining day, dusk, night, and dawn
with a war that has no end.

Only yesterday, I said,
all these thoughts were tears shed
for the gold of Cronos' day
that so swiftly went away.

Only yesterday, I say,
for today is not the same:
A new joy dispels dismay
as bright Hope enters the game.

To my brother with these news!
They will chase his bitterness.
For delay, there's no excuse
while he grieves under distress ...

(Exit Epimetheus.)

Scene II

Prometheus sits absorbed in his study in the mountains of Caucasus when the sound of a gong brings him to the window.

PROMETHEUS:
When to prayers and to silence calls this gong,
humans gather to rest from aimless wander.
They expect their devotion to chase wrong
while they find in their stillness time to ponder.

Inattentive, the burnt earth receives their tears,
which—men think—could entice the soil to live.
And that failing, they desire that Death appears
with the tranquil, sleepy potion he can sieve.

Deities dwelling in the last tree-meager grove,
who disdained in the past the life of man,
now emerge as a trembling, nervous drove,
and feel envy for his shortened life span.

Yet has Pride at least once granted petitions?
Or the blameless honored with a crown?
Or to mercy joined his dispositions?
Or for comfort won widespread renown?

In deep Tartarus, the Golden Lord now groans.
But is Zeus, the new ruler, worth the throne?
Who'll appease the pain of man with soothing tones
if there's darkness where the pristine gods once shone?

He shall learn the limits of his power!
Listen, Zeus, the prayer of this hour:

A stern race of men I'll forge, with a pride that will match yours,
with such hardness in their hearts, to endure a thousand wars!
You will rain over their grief, and will thunder upon fear,
yet their souls will be unmoved, and your reign they won't revere!

(Enter a Satyr.)

SATYR *(knocking softly at the slightly open door)*:
Good evening, my Lord,
I'm sorry to interrupt ...

PROMETHEUS:
Who's there, of own accord,
and being so abrupt?

SATYR:
The warden of the orchard,
who suffers as if tortured ...
Please, sir, look at my beard.
I fear something weird ...

PROMETHEUS:
Come closer to the light!
Your beard is out of sight.

SATYR:
No light can show my beard.
It's gone, has disappeared!

PROMETHEUS:
You're right, it has been burned.
No hair can be discerned.
Your beard has been outdone.
It could have been the sun ...

SATYR:
No, sir, 'twas on night shift.
While bathing in moonshine,
I kissed your lovely gift,
just once, close to the shrine.

PROMETHEUS:
Yet to deities of the woods, and to mortal men as well,
I have said, "Don't kiss the fire, do not touch, do not smell!"

SATYR:
Yes, you have. But why a wonder
needs to be a cause of blunder?
Lovely things are there to kiss,
to hold tight—that's the great bliss ...

PROMETHEUS:
Fire is quite another deal,
not for skin or beard to feel.
You'll discover its appeal
if you learn to cook a meal.

SATYR:
What the goddess serves uncooked is for me as fresh as done.
How could I her sacred diet leave aside or start to shun?

PROMETHEUS:
Warm yourself by means of fire,
and this gift you'll soon admire!

SATYR:
For warmth, my Lord, a nymph I must employ,
who is, besides, a lovely source of joy.
Or else, a skin could prove to be enough,
when rain and wind become a bit too rough.

PROMETHEUS:
Well then, just use it for its light:
Make bright the darkness of the night!

SATYR:
What that light usually misses
are the sweet nocturnal kisses.
And who would more light display
in the middle of the day?

PROMETHEUS:
Patience is, besides the fire,
the one thing you do require
to understand its many uses,
and avoid making excuses.
Now, go home and don't complain.
Just don't kiss the flames again!

(Light fades.)

Scene III

Studio of Prometheus, the next day. Enter Epimetheus.

EPIMETHEUS *(embracing his brother)*:
Good morning, my brother, I'm back!

PROMETHEUS:
Since when with such vigor you slap?
Where were you? I had lost all track.
I dreamt you'd been caught in a trap!

EPIMETHEUS:
No troubles! I've spent a short while—
guess where! ... the wondrous White Isle!

PROMETHEUS:
So now floats the island again?
It's out from the mist and the rain?

EPIMETHEUS:
Above the waves, the white cliffs climb
since the last war, for the first time!
But listen now, refrain your speech:
I met a goddess on the beach!
Her divine head shone like a star
as she cried out: "Don't stay afar!"
I slowly approached, but most bizarre
was that she then turned into a jar!

PROMETHEUS:
That is of course a wild occurrence,
though in accordance with recurrence.

EPIMETHEUS:
It was marvelous this jar,
the most beautiful by far!
So I wondered: Does it hide
yet more marvels deep inside?
And to see what the jar hid,
I attempted to lift the lid.

PROMETHEUS:
It's with jars as it's with fire:
You will know if you inquire,

EPIMETHEUS:
Yet she knew to change attire,
to come forth and to retire.
She resumed her normal shape:
as a jar, she could escape.

Looking right and looking left, I felt lost in the world's middle,
but the goddess, with a smile, talked to me and gave me a riddle:

"Let us see if with your wit
you can rightly these words knit:

*What is here, yet is yonder,
Lays aside, but helps to squander?
What, though blind, helps all to wander,
Has no wit, but helps to ponder?*

If in answering you're swift,
that same thing you'll get as gift!"

PROMETHEUS:
To dangerous cliffs you've drifted.
She seems to me truly gifted!
But why should you start to fiddle
with such a delusive riddle?

Have you answered and accepted?
Has your mind been intercepted?

EPIMETHEUS:
Let me speak and do not dread,
otherwise I'll lose the thread.

Once the lid I had lifted, on top of her head,
I saw darkness inside, I feared to tread.
But the thrust of bright Hope, I suddenly felt
as it seized the arc that's behind my wide belt.

PROMETHEUS:
The wounds of blind Hope could leave a slight scar ...
But tell me, what else did you find in that jar?

EPIMETHEUS:
Mute evils departed, dispersed by the breeze,
like plague and mischief, old age and disease ...

PROMETHEUS:
All pearls in the necklace that wears blind Hope.
Round each human neck, a most deadly rope!

EPIMETHEUS:
Yet Hope with her wings may evils appease,
at once, it could be, or else by degrees ...

PROMETHEUS:
Hope is a snare which Heaven conceived,
and you are the fool whom Heaven deceived!
I surely warned you: "Close every door!
Refuse Heaven's gifts while we are at war!"

EPIMETHEUS:
And yet you gave men the heavenly fire,
and told everyone: "See here! Admire!"

PROMETHEUS:
But men are like leaves ... the wretches are weak.
How could they survive without the wretches technique?
The heavenly fire no doubt will provide
assistance and pride to enhance their short ride.

EPIMETHEUS:
I've seen that short ride by crafts become labors,
and how men with flames burn houses and neighbors.
Enhance it with Hope, which holds a wide span,
for fiery tools shrink the heart of each man.

PROMETHEUS:
But help him to fight, stand up and be proud,
and keep at a distance the jar's evil cloud.

EPIMETHEUS:
Your crafts and your fire can't make evils cease,
but Hope with her voice may lend the mind peace.

PROMETHEUS:
Injustice and Peace do not ever blend!

EPIMETHEUS:
Let's then make the latter our most dear friend!
This war feeds injustice and merges with her.
When we thus choose war, injustice prefer.

PROMETHEUS:
Should evils go free? Free men become slaves,
and live as the dead who lie in their graves?

EPIMETHEUS:
What freedom could be which nails us to war?
Good brother, desist! How must I implore?
Why should we be climbing this terrible slope
instead of embracing the new dream of Hope?

Myself I shall wed the Lady of the Jar,
Pandora's her name, she shines like a star!
And as I have learned, mankind she'll divide:
To men she'll add women, they'll live side by side.
No longer will men grow forth from the earth.
Lovemaking alone will be cause of birth.

PROMETHEUS:
And that you find good? Two kinds out of one?
Two minds and two hearts? It's better with none!

You've been well ensnared by this your new bride,
thus doubling my work for man's life and pride!
I always have known I can't trust your brain.
Go now! Don't return! I feel but disdain!

EPIMETHEUS:
What's there in your brain that makes it so sane?
That Hope in your wisdom you cannot explain?
Your work invites grief, hard toil and cruel war.
Away I will stay, and you, I'll ignore!

(Exit Epimetheus.)

PROMETHEUS *(pacing back and forth)*:
The new ruler's cold derision
is the cause of our division.
He makes brother part with brother,
should we also hate our father?
All good things he tears asunder
by his thunder or his blunder.
From one head, two brains arise,
who each other must despise.
There's no unity of mind,
but a brew that's ill combined!
Why by woman split this race?
New division, new disgrace!

(Looking out the window)
Soon will the stars send the dark light
which cloaks the Eastern pillars first,
and brings the chill of dreadful Night,
who makes all evils worse than worst.

Gone are the times when from the West,
like warming milk or a caress,
came Night with garlands at her breast
to nurse the world, cheer up, and bless.

The gods have changed, as has the world.
Their ruler's pride they must obey,
or else will join whom he has hurled
down to the realm of deep dismay.

Only my voice, my will, and mind,
today defy his cruel empire.
But after me will come mankind,
armed with cunning, pride, and fire!

(Darkness falls before curtain.)

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