

Medea's Revenge (*Medea* 817-38)

Medea describes the resources she will use to prepare the magic robe which will consume the princess Creusa, her rival for the love of Jason.

You must now tincture the clothes for Creusa,
so the moment she wears them, crawling flame
may burn its way deep into her bones.

Enclosed and lurking in the tawny gold
is shrouded fire:

the one who pays for his theft from heaven
with the tissue that grows in him
gave it me and taught me
to store its power by craft: Prometheus.

Mulciber too

gave me fire concealed in fine-grained sulphur,
and I gathered the flashes of living flame
from the kindred body of Phaethon.

I possess gifts from the belly of Chimaera,

I possess flames

caught from the scorched throat of the bull,
which I compounded with Medusa's venom
and bade to preserve their harm in secret.

The Torment of Tantalus (*Thyestes* 152-75)

Tantalus is tortured by the sight of food and water that is always unattainable.

Tantalus stands spent and empty-throated.

Over his guilty head in abundance
hangs prey more fleeting than Phineus' birds.

Leaning around him with gravid branches,
curved and trembling with what it bears,
the tree mocks at his gaping jaws.

Though impatient and avid, he makes no effort
(deceived so often) to touch the fruit,

but averts his eyes and seals his lips
and fetters his hunger behind clenched teeth.

But then the whole orchard lowers its riches
closer still, and the fruits from above

taunt him, so mellow, with drooping leaves,
and inflame his hunger, which bids him busy
his hands in vain. As he stretches them out,
consents to be cheated, the entire harvest
is whisked on high with the nimble trees.
Next thirst attacks, no weaker than hunger.
Once it heats his blood and fires it with torches
of flame, the wretch stands chasing the offered
waters with his mouth; but the fleeing stream
turns away, and dwindles to a barren channel
and leaves him trying to follow. He drinks
the deeps left from the whirling flood: deep dust.