

EURIPIDES'
Phoenician Women
Produced,
ca 412-408 BCE
Prize won: possibly 2nd

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Dramatis Personae:

Jocasta

(Oedipus' ageing mother and wife)

Tutor

(Antigone's aged, male tutor and servant)

Antigone

(Oedipus' daughter)

Polyneices

(Oedipus' exiled son)

Eteokles

(Oedipus second son. King of Thebes)

Creon

(Jocasta's brother)

Menoceus

(Creon's son)

Chorus

(Of young Phoenician female servants of the temple)

Teiresias

(Theban seer)

Messenger

(Soldier in Eteocles' army)

Second Messenger

(Slave to Eteokles)

Oedipus

(Former king of Thebes)

The Royal palace of Thebes, a two story building.

To its right stands an altar, the last hints of the smoke, after the burning of sacrifices, rising from its centre.

To its left, a statue of Apollo.

The palace doors open and Jocasta walks out slowly, wearily and with the aid of a walking stick.

She is dressed in black and her hair is cut short. She is in mourning.

Jocasta:

Lord, Sun!

With your speedy horses and your golden chariot you cut a blazing track across the starry sky! But it was you, Lord Sun, you who had sent that cursed ray upon us, upon Thebes, that ray that a long time ago, saw Cadmus leaving his sea-girt Phoenicia to come to this land.

Cadmus had married Harmonia, Aphrodite's daughter and with her he had the boy Polydorus, who, they say, had Labdacus and who, in turn, had Laius.

10

As for me, I am known as the daughter of Menoeceus. Creon is my brother and we both have the same mother.

My father named me Jokasta.

Laius married me but, even after a long time, we had no children, so he went to Phoebus Apollo, the prophet god to ask him what we could do about it to beg him to grant that this house acquire male heirs.

But the god, instead, gave him a warning.

"Lord of horse-raising Thebes," he told Laius, "don't sow children against the will of the gods! If you do have a son, that very son will kill you and your whole house will be drenched in blood!"

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But, one night, during a drunken fit, Laius succumbed to lust and so, I gave birth to our son. Then, when the boy was born, Laius remembered what the god had told him and realised the error of his deed, so he gave the baby boy to a shepherd and told him to, first pierce the child's ankles with iron spikes (that's why the Greeks later called him Oedipus – swollen foot) and then to expose it on the rocky, Mount Citheron, in Hera's meadow.

But then Polybus' horse herders found him and took him to the palace of their mistress and handed him to her who put to her breast the baby which was born by my own labour pains and convinced her husband to let her raise him.

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Eventually, when my son had reached the state of manhood and the tawny beard first covered cheeks, he either suspected something, or had heard something from someone and so he went to the temple of Phoebus Apollo, anxious to find out who his parents were. Laius, my husband and the boy's father, also started off to visit the god and ask him if the child was still alive.

The two came across each other at the Spilt Path, in Phocis.

40

Laius' driver called out to Oedipus to make way for the king but Oedipus, arrogantly kept walking until the horses' hooves stepped onto his feet and injured and bloodied his tendons.

Then, but there's no need for me to go on about these sad events... then the son slew the father, took his father's chariot and handed it to his foster father, Polybus.

Then, after my husband's death, the Sphinx began to pillage and torment the city and my brother Creon announced that he would marry me to whoever could solve that wily maiden's riddle.

50

Somehow or other, Oedipus, my son, managed to solve the riddle in the Sphinx's song and so, he was handed the sceptre of this land and became its king and then, totally without knowing married me, his own mother while his mother, too, was totally unaware that she was sleeping with her own son.

I gave him two sons, Eteokles and the glorious Polyneices and two daughters, one of whom her father named Ismene and the other, her older sister, I named Antigone.

59

Eventually Oedipus –what pain had not the poor man endured!- discovered that he was married to his mother and committed a most horrible deed upon his eyes. With a golden brooch he tore out his pupils, turning them into pools of blood.

But when my sons grew up, when the first beards began to darken the cheeks, they put Oedipus –their father!- behind locked doors, to hide him and to hide also the shame of his fate so that it might be forgotten. And to achieve this it took a great deal of cunning.

He lives here, still. In the palace.

His pains have so deranged his mind that he shouts at his sons the most unholy curses. He prays that they would tear this house apart –sword against sword!

69

So, the two brothers, afraid that the gods would heed Oedipus' curses and act upon them if they continued to live together, decided that the younger of the two, Polynices, would volunteer to leave the country and that Eteocles would remain here as the king. Then, every year they would trade places. But, the moment Eteokles took over the throne, refused to give it up and drove his brother out of the country and into exile.

Polyneices then went to Argos, married the princess, king Adrastus' daughter, raised a large army and brought them here to Thebes, the city of seven gates.

80

He is just outside the walls and demands that Eteokles hands him the throne and his share of the land. I

tried to end this dreadful squabble by asking the two to call a truce and come to a meeting before they take up their spears. My messenger came back with the news that Polyneices agreed.

Raises her hands in prayer

Come Zeus!

Zeus, who lives in the brilliant halls of the heavens, come and save us all! Bring peace between my sons! If you are a wise god then you should not allow a man to suffer eternal misery.

Exit Jocasta into the palace

Antigone's Tutor appears on the roof via steps behind it.

He is talking to Antigone who is waiting on the steps below for his permission to join him.

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Tutor:

Dear Antigone, you are your father's true daughter. You bring glory to his house!

Your mother has given you permission to leave your young women's quarters and to come up here, the highest part of the palace because you want to take a look at the Argive army. Hold on a minute, dear, so that I see if there are any people in the street because if they see us, they'll have words to say not only to me but also to you. Slaves and mistresses should not be seen together in public.

I'll tell you everything I know, everything I saw and heard when I went down there, to their camp, offering a truce to your brother; and then all I saw and heard here, when I returned with his own truce.

He looks all around

100

No, I cannot see any people nearby so you can climb this old cedar step-ladder.

Come up and look there! Come and look at the size of the enemy's army, Antigone! It spreads across the plains from the streams of Ismenus all the way to the waters of Dirce!

Antigone:

Help me climb the steps, old friend.

Stretch out your aged hand to help my young hand!

Tutor:

Here, my young lady. Take it!

Antigone appears beside the Tutor

You're just in time to see the army of the Pelasgians in motion. They are now separating the different companies from each other.

109

Antigone:

Great Hecate, Leto's daughter!

The whole place is ablaze with bronze!

Tutor:

That's right, Antigone.

This is no trifling little visit that your brother, Polyneices, is paying us.

That's a huge cavalry and an even greater infantry out there!

Antigone:

Have the bronze bolts been shot across the gates on Amphion's walls of stone?

Tutor:

Have no fear, my lady. The city is safe inside.

Look out for the head of the army. See if you can recognise him.

119

Antigone:

Who is that man there, the one who stands in front of the army, with the white crest, the one who holds that heavy bronze shield so lightly?

Tutor:

One of the captains, my lady.

Antigone:

What is his name, old friend and where is he from?

Tutor:

That's Lord Hippomedon, my lady and they say that he is a Mycenaean. He lives near the springs of Lerna.

Antigone:

How frightening he looks! How wild!

Like one of those earth-born giants. He has a face like one of those dazzling stars, like those they draw in pictures.

Unlike any mortal!

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Tutor:

And what about that captain there? Can you see him, crossing the waters of Dirce?

Antigone:

Who is he? His armour looks different.

Tutor:

That's Oeneus' son, Tydeus.

His heart is full of war. Like all the Aetolians.

Antigone:

Is he the one who married my brother's wife's sister?

What strange weapons he carries. They look half foreign.

Tutor:

Yes, my young lady. The Aetolians have small shields and hurl small spears – very accurately.

141

Antigone:

How do you know all this, old teacher?

Tutor:

I saw their shield markings when I went there carrying the truce offerings to your brother, Polyneices.

I recognise the warriors from their shields.

Antigone:

And that young man with the long curls and the grim face, the one who is walking near Zethus' tomb, who is it? Obviously a captain also, judging by all those armed men who are following close behind.

150

Tutor:

That there is Atalanta's son, Parthenopaeus.

Antigone:

The goddess, Artemis, who hunts in the forests, should shoot him and his mother with her arrows and kill them both for coming here to sack my city!

Tutor:

I hope she does, too, child but they have a right to come here and I'm afraid the gods will see and recognise that right.

Antigone:

My dear old teacher, please show me the man who, by a miserable fate, was born of the same mother as me!

Tell me, old friend, who is Polyneices?

Tutor:

There! See that tomb there?

That's the tomb of Niobe's seven virgin daughters.

Next to it is Adrastus. Polyneices is standing next to him.

Can you see him?

161

Antigone:

Yes but not too clearly.

I can barely make out his face and the outline of his chest.

Ah, my darling brother! How I wish I could just rush high up into the clouds! To run over one that's been caught in the grips of a speeding wind!

Rush to him and wrap my arms tightly around his dear neck!

Poor, unfortunate exile!

Look how he stands out in his golden armour, old friend! It flashes like the rays of the morning sun!

170

Tutor:

Well, if he heeds the truce, child, he'll be here soon and fill your heart with joy!

Antigone:

And that man, over there, old friend. The one holding the reins of that white chariot, who is he?

Tutor:

That, my dear young mistress is the prophet Amphiaraus. He has the sacrificial victims with him, to quench the thirsty earth with their blood.

Antigone:

Dear goddess Selene, girdled by a light of gold, daughter of the dazzling Sun, look at him!

Look how steadily, how knowledgeably, he uses the goad on his horses!
But where is that man, Capaneus, the one who utters such dreadful insults at our city?

181

Tutor:

There he is, Antigone! Calculating. Working out how to scale our walls. Measuring them all from top to bottom.

Antigone:

Oh, Nemesis! Goddess of retribution!

And you, too, crashing thunders and piercing lightning of Zeus!

You have the power to subdue the undisciplined arrogance of men.

That is the man who says that he will capture the women of Thebes with his spear and hand them over as slaves, to Mycenae and to the Trident of Lerna, the waters of Poseidon's Springs!

O blessed Artemis, blessed daughter of Zeus! You with your golden hair!

Don't ever let it happen that I should suffer such slavery!

193

Tutor:

Go inside, my child.

You have seen all you wanted to see. Go inside and stay within the walls of your own chambers. The city is in a terrible chaos and a crowd of women has entered the royal palace and women, by their very nature love to criticise.

200

They love to grab onto some little thing and exaggerate it, add to it; they just love to say terrible things about one another!

Antigone and the Tutor descend into the palace.

Enter the chorus of Phoenician Women. They are dressed in foreign clothes and, while they say they are slaves, they are not slaves of war but free women, who were chosen to serve in the temple of Apollo.

Chorus:

We have left behind the Phoenician island, washed by the Tyrian sea, to come here as the finest prize to Apollo, to serve in his temple, his home, beneath the snow-covered peaks of Parnassus.

210

Chorus:

We have sliced the Ionian waters with our oars, aided by the blasts of Zephyros that sang sweet songs in the skies above the unharvested briny fields all along the shores of Sicily.

Chorus:

Our city chose us as the fairest in beauty to be a gift for Loxias Apollo and so we have been sent here, to Cadmus' land, to Laius' towers, the home of my kin, the glorious sons of Tyrian Agenor.

Chorus:

And so we are Apollo's servants!

220

Chorus:

We are dedicated to him, like offerings of gold.

Chorus:

And the purifying waters of Castalia are waiting for me now to wash my splendid, maidenly tresses, in reverence to Phoebus Apollo.

Chorus:

Oh, you shining rock of fire! Twin-peaked light of Dionysus!

230

Chorus:

And you, too, vine that bursts forth the daily bunch of lush grape blossoms!

Chorus:

And you, too, Cave where the god slew the dreaded Python!

Chorus:

And you, mountain tips where the nymphs keep a lookout!

Chorus:

And you, too, sacred snow-lashed mountain!

Chorus:

How I wish I could dance free of fear, a circle around you, to please those free of death!

Chorus:

We have left behind Dirce, now, for Phoebus' sacred hollows in the centre, the navel, of the Earth.

Chorus:
But now, look!

240

Chorus:
The deathly god of war, Ares, has come before these walls and set ablaze the blood of hatred for this city!

Chorus:
Oh, may this never happen!

Chorus:
Friends share the pains of friends and Phoenicia will share the pains of this city of seven gates.

Chorus:
Ah! The pain, the pain!

Chorus:
The race and the children are from the same mother, Io the horned woman whose pains are my pains also.

250

Chorus:
The city is surrounded by a blaze!

Chorus:
A cloud, thick with flashing shields, a true sign of a blood-shedding war!

Chorus:
Yet the god of war knows that very soon the dreaded Erinyes, those goddesses of retribution, will visit the sons of Oedipus!

Chorus:
Argos! Pelasgian Argos, I fear your might!

Chorus:
And I fear, too what the gods are about to bring!

Chorus:
He comes to take back his house and he rightly comes bearing weapons!

Enter Polyneices.

He is anxious. Cautious. Sword in hand and suspicious of a possible ambush.

261

Polyneices:
It was easy for me to enter the city. The bolts were drawn back and the gates opened for me. That's why I'm afraid that they've set up a trap for me. They want to catch me and then not let me go without first covering my body with bloody wounds.

I must turn my eye carefully in every direction, to make sure I escape their treachery.

This trusty sword gives me the courage and confidence to go on.

Suddenly a noise that startles him

Who's there?

Or have I jumped at a mere noise?

270

Every little thing seems like imminent danger to brave men, when they are walking on enemy territory! But I trust my mother who persuaded me to come here under a truce.

I trust her, yet I don't trust her!

Noise from people coming and going within the palace

Still, the altar is just here and there are people in the palace. I'd better put my sword back into its dark scabbard and ask these women here who they are.

To the chorus

Foreign ladies, tell me what country have you left to come here to this Greek house?

280

Chorus:
Phoenicia.

Chorus:
That's the land we were born and raised.

Chorus:
Agenor's descendants have sent us here as gifts to Phoebus Apollo, the first fruits of victory but when Eteocles, Oedipus' noble son, was about to escort us to Phoebus' sacred temple and altars, the Argive army came to attack the city.

Chorus:

Now you tell us in turn, who you are and why you are here, within the walls of the kingdom of Thebes with its seven gates.

Polyneices:

The people of Thebes call me Polyneices. My father is Oedipus, who is the son of Laius. My mother is Jocasta and she is Menoeceus' daughter.

291

Chorus:

Ah!

A son of the race of Agenor!

It is they, our royal family, who have sent us here!

They fall to their knees before Polyneices

Chorus:

We fall at your knees, my lord, as the customs of our land demand.

Chorus:

At long last, my lord, you have returned to your birthplace!

The chorus stands and one of them goes to the gate of the palace

Chorus:

Ey, in there! open up!

Chorus:

My queen, come out here! Come, open the gates!

Chorus:

My queen, do you hear us? You are this man's mother.

Chorus:

Come, my queen, leave the chambers of this high roofed palace and come to embrace your son!

Enter Jocasta walking slowly but excitedly, supported by a walking stick.

301

Jocasta:

Young ladies, I've heard your Phoenician calls and so I managed to drag my ageing and trembling legs, supported by this third one, all the way out here to see my son!

She sees Polyneices

Oh! Oh, my son! Oh my child!

After all this time, after all these days, I finally see your face!

Come, my son, wrap your arms around your mother!

Come, let me touch your cheek!

310

Come, let your thick black hair shade my neck!

They embrace

Oh, my son!

My son!

Finally! Here you are, in your mother's arm!

I could have never foresee this. I could have never dared to hope for this!

She separates from him and begins to walk around him, examining him with joy.

Oh, my son! What words can I say to you? What things can I do to remember the old joys? Shall I let my happiness make me dance round and round? Like this – or like that? Oh, how I missed the pleasure of those joys, my son!

My son, my son!

How empty you left your father's house when you went away, exiled by your brother, by his madness!

320

How you are missed!

Missed by your friends and missed by the whole of Thebes!

That's why I've cut short this gray hair of mine! Let it fall to the ground along with my tears!

How I grieved, my boy!

Look at my clothes, my son! They are not white! No, they are dreadful, miserable, black rags!

And your father! He is inside the palace. Blind, old, steeped in misery and regret for the loss of a pair of sons, let loose from the yoke of his house.

330

He rushes to draw a sword upon himself, one minute and then throws a noose over the rafters the next, all the while groaning and lamenting the curses he has hurled upon his sons. He cries and cries and hides himself in his darkness.

But I hear you have married a foreign wife, my son! You have married and you are enjoying fatherhood in a foreign house, away from your mother! You have made foreigners your new relatives!

340

This is a heavy blow to me, my son. To me and to Laius, your ancestor. It is a heavy blow to us, this foreign marriage of yours!

And it was not me who lit the wedding torches for you, my son, as our custom requires of a blessed mother. Nor has the river Ismenus enjoyed your marriage and you have stayed distant from him. You did not take the wedding baths in his springs and Thebes did not shout out for you those joyful cries they shout when a bride enters her house.

351

Curse them whoever it was who caused all this!

Curse it, if it was the sword!

Curse her if it was Eris, the goddess of strife!

Curse him if it was Oedipus, your father!

Curse him if it was some malevolent god who brought havoc into the house of Oedipus!

Curse them all because it is I who has suffered the pains of their work!

Chorus:

The pains of childbirth are powerful!

Chorus:

All women –all of them!- love their children!

360

Polyneices:

Mother, it was both wise and foolish for me to come here and walk among enemies!

There is no question about the fact that all men love their country and if anyone says otherwise, well, that man just loves words. His sentiments though are elsewhere.

But, mother, I was gripped by the fear that my brother might set a trap for me and kill me. That's why I had my sword drawn at the ready and walked cautiously around the city, my eyes scanning its every corner. There is only one thing that gives me relief from that fear and that is your truce; that and your trust it was that made me enter the walls of my paternal home.

370

And I have shed many tears, mother, when, after such a long time, I saw our palace, the altars of our gods, the training grounds of my childhood and the waters of Dirce!

How unjustly I was driven away from all this!

Tears flooded my eyes, mother!

And then, grief upon grief, I see you, my darling mother, with your hair cut short and dressed in these black rags!

Ah! Such misery!

How dreadful it is, mother, for members of the same family to hate one another!

How impossible it is to bring about a settlement!

And how does my blind father cope in the palace with his darkness? And my two sisters, how are they? No doubt they would be also mourning my exile!

379

Jocasta:

Some god has corrupted the seed of the race of Oedipus and it began with me. It was I who broke Apollo's law and in an unfortunate hour, married your father and gave birth to you.

But let's not think of these things. Mortals must endure what the immortals send them.

Now, my son, I am afraid to ask you what I want to ask you because I don't want to hurt you but my wish to do so is great.

Polyneices:

Ask me whatever you want, mother. Leave no questions unasked. Your wish is my pleasure to fulfil.

Jocasta:

Well then, son, the first thing I long to know is this: What is it like, to be deprived of one's own home? Is it a great suffering?

Polyneices:

Much greater a suffering to experience than to talk about, mother!

390

Jocasta:

How do you mean? What's the worst of it for the exiles?

Polyneices:

The worst of it, mother, is the fact that there is no free speech.

Jocasta:

That's a slave's life, you're describing, not to be able to speak freely.

Polyneices:

And you are forced to put up with the stupidity of those in power.

Jocasta:

Yes, that, too is a great suffering: To be forced to join company with fools!

Polyneices:

Yet, for a man to get what he wants, he must go against his own nature and act like a slave.

Jocasta:

They say that exiles live on hopes.

Polyneices:

Yes, hopes that look good in the mind but slow to arrive.

Jocasta:

Hopes, make men love their misery

Polyneices:

But has time not shown how hollow these hopes are?

400

Jocasta:

How did you survive before you got married?

Polyneices:

Sometimes I got enough to eat and sometimes I didn't.

Jocasta:

But didn't your father's friends out there not help you?

Polyneices:

One must try to do well by himself. Friends disappear the moment luck disappears.

Jocasta:

And what of your noble birth? Did that not raise high your prospects?

Polyneices:

No, noble birth did not feed me. It is a curse to be poor.

Jocasta:

It seems then that a mortal's best friend is his country.

410

Polyneices:

No words can describe just how true that is, mother!

Jocasta:

Why go to Argos, though? What did you have in mind?

Polyneices:

Some oracle that Apollo gave to Adrastus.

Jocasta:

What oracle? What did it say? I haven't heard of this oracle.

Polyneices:

The oracle had told him to marry his daughters to a boar and a lion.

Jocasta:

But what did you have to do with these beasts, my son?

Polyneices:

I have no idea. God took a hold of my fate.

Jocasta:

The god is wise. And what about the wife? How did you come to select her?

Polyneices:

It was night and I had gone to Adrastus' house.

Jocasta:

Looking for a bed for the night as a wandering exile would?

420

Polyneices:

That's right but then, a little later, another exile turned up.

Jocasta:

And who was that, no doubt another poor miserable soul!

Polyneices:

Oeneas' son, a man called Tydeus.

Jocasta:

But how did Adrastus come to think you were beasts?

Polyneices:

Because we began fighting about the night's bed.

Jocasta:

And so, that's how Adrastus came to understand the meaning of Apollo's oracle.

Polyneices:

And that's how he came to give us his daughters!

Jocasta:

But how are you managing with your wife, are you happy with her or unhappy?

Polyneices:

So far, I have no complaints about my marriage.

Jocasta:

How did you manage to bring such an army with you here?

430

Polyneices:

Adrastus swore to both his sons-in-law, me and Tydeus, that he would restore us both to our country, me first and so, many Argive and Mycenaean nobles came to do me this miserable but necessary favour. Miserable, because I am marching against my own city.

I swear by the gods, mother, that I raise my spear against my loved ones against my will. But it's now up to you mother, to bring these troubles to an end. It is up to you to bring two loving brothers together again and to put an end to my pains as well as yours and those of the whole city.

441

It's an old saying, mother but I will say it, just the same: Among mortals, wealth is held with the greatest esteem and of all things that this world has, wealth is the most powerful and it is for this wealth that I have come here with thousands of armed men.

A poor noble, mother, counts for nothing!

Chorus:

Ah, here's Eteocles!

He, too has come to discuss the truce.

Chorus:

Come, now, mother Jocasta. It is your task to speak such words that will reconcile your two sons.

Enter Eteocles with his men.

449

Eteocles:

Here I am, mother! I've come only because you've asked me to come.

So! Now, what are we to do? Let the words begin!

I've stop arranging the two divisions of our troops around the walls of the city so that I could come and listen to your wise words about how to resolve our differences.

It is the promise of these negotiations that made me allow this man to enter our city.

He moves threateningly towards Polyneices but Jocasta stops him.

Jocasta: *Raising her hand to stop Eteocles.*

Stop!

Justice never comes with haste!

It is the slowly considered words that often bring about the wise result.

Tame those fierce glares and stop all this maddened huffing and puffing!

You are not staring at a gorgon's severed head but at your very own brother who has come here.

460

And you, Polyneices! Turn and look at your brother in the eye. It is only when you talk face-to-face that your tongue softens and your ears become more receptive.

The brothers obey her reluctantly

Now, I want to give you two some wise advice and it is this: When one angry friend visits another angry friend, when they meet face-to-face, all other matters should be forgotten and the only thought in their minds should be the business that had brought them together.

So, now, you Polyneices, my son, you speak first. You have come here at the head of an Argive army, as one who has been wronged.

May one of the gods be the judge of the matter and reconcile your troubles.

472

Polyneices:

Truth's words are simple to utter and justice needs no subtle explanations. Justice is self explanatory.

Injustice, however, being a sickness, requires complicated medicines and it is this sort of thinking that I have constructed about my father's house.

I have left the house, of my own will, so as to save both of us –Eteocles and me- from the curses Oedipus, has made against us. I have left the house and the land for him to rule until a year has passed and I returned to rule in turn. That, I thought, would save all of us, including myself, from falling into this dreadful hatred and animosity, the way it's happening now.

481

But, he went back on his word. First he consented to this way of doing things and took great oaths, calling the heavens to witness them but then he kept none of his promises! Here he is, still holding on to the throne and onto my share of its wealth.

490

But I am still prepared to simply take what is mine and to dismiss my army so long as I take my turn at the throne and return it back to him when his turn comes about.

I would rather not sack my own city or plant ladders up against its walls but I would try to do if I don't receive justice.

The heavens know that in spite of doing the just thing in every respect, I am being deprived of my own country in the most unjust and unholy manner.

Mother, I have used clear and simple words to show the justice of my story, instead of gathering up tricky and complicated arguments. These should satisfy both, the wise as well as the simple folks.

500

Chorus:

It seems to me that you are telling the truth, though I wasn't born nor raised in Greece.

Eteocles:

If all agreed with what is wise and what is just then there'd be no disputes between men. But, mother, the way things are right now there is nothing among mortals that is the same and equal. Perhaps in words but certainly not in practice.

Mother, I will speak fully and leave nothing out.

Mother, I would go to the heavens, if I could. To the stars and to where the sun rises in the morning, and then to the depths of the earth to take a hold of the greatest goddess ever, Kingdom!

510

Mother, I will not allow anyone else to take this great blessing from me. Mother, I want to keep it for myself! Only cowards will exchange the greater for the lesser.

And then, what shame I would feel if I allowed this man here, this man who has come here with an army so as to destroy our city, to get what he wants!

Thebes would feel disgraced if I were to show that I was afraid of those Mycenaean spears and let him take her throne.

It is not right for him to try and reach some agreement by force of arms, mother because words can achieve everything that the arms of an enemy can achieve.

520

Still, if he wants to live here, in our city, in any other manner, than that will be fine but I will never tolerate being a slave to anyone when I can be the ruler!

Well then!

Now let the fire start!

Let the swords clash!

Fill the battle ground with chariots of war!

I will not give my kingdom to this man!

And if one should perform a deed of injustice, then let it be performed for the sake of a kingdom. Let virtue be done for all else!

Chorus:

Eloquent speeches should not be made to justify wicked deeds. Such practice bitterly harms justice.

531

Jocasta:

My son! Eteocles!

My son, not everything about old age is bad. Experience, for example makes the aged wiser than the youth.

But, my son, why do you revere the goddess Ambition, the worst of all the deities? She is not for the just! Shun her! We've seen her work often enough in the past. She enters the cities and houses of prosperous people and then leaves only after ruining those who had dealings with her and yet you've lost your mind over her!

No, my son. The goddess you should revere is Equality.

540

She unites friend to friend, city to city, ally to ally because among mortals, the ways of Equality are the ways of their laws. Where we see one with less than another, there we also see the makings of war.

It is this very divinity, Equality, who has set up man's measuring devices and standards. She it is who constructed ways, numbers, for different measures, like weight.

Night's dark eyelid and the rays of the Sun travel the same distance around the year and neither of them is envious when the other dominates and both serve our needs.

So, you, my son, a mere mortal, should you not accept to hand your brother his rightful share of your father's estate? Where then do you see Justice?

551

To be a king is an unjust thing. A thing of unjust prosperity. Why do you place such an excessive value upon it? Why think of it as such a big thing, full of honour and glory? It's a hollow thing! Why work so hard just so you can pile up the possessions in your halls? Where's the value in that? There is none! The wise folks know that what suffices is ample.

We, mortals have no possessions of our own. We simply take care of those that belongs to the gods. Then they simply take it back when they want it.

560

Wealth is not permanent a thing. It is short-lived.

But if I were to ask you to choose one of these two things: which do you prefer to save, your throne or your country, what would your answer be?

Would it be, the throne?

What if your brother and his Argive spears smash the spears of Thebes?

Then you will witness the fall of this city's walls, and a great many Theban girls being dragged away against their will by the enemy's men.

That wealth you're so much in love with, will become a most dreadful thing for Thebes.

570

But then again, you are also in love with ambition and with that throne!

That's what I say to you, Eteocles and to you, Polyneices, I say that Adrastus did you a stupid favour and you, my son, are doing a stupid thing, coming here to destroy your own city! May you never succeed in this but let us say you did. How on earth will raise the trophy of victory to Zeus? How could you perform any sacrifices after you have destroyed your own city? What will you inscribe upon the spoils that you'll set up by the streams of our river Ismenus? Will it be, "Polyneices has dedicated these shields to the gods after he has set flames to Thebes?" I hope, my son, that you will never receive such a fame from Greece!

580

Then, what if you lose and he survives and you leave behind countless of dead soldiers? How will you ever make it back to Argos after that sort of loss?

Some Argive citizen will tell, Adrastus, "What a dreadful marriage you've given us, Adrastus! You have ruined us for the sake of a bride!"

Polyneices, my son, you are in pursuit of a twofold ruin: You will lose everything you have there and you will gain nothing here.

Forget all this, my sons! Both of you, forget all this extreme violence!

There is nothing worse than the madness of two fools!

589

Chorus:

Oh, Gods!

Avert this evil! Bring pace to the sons of Oedipus!

Eteocles:

Mother, there's no time left for a subtle war of words. The time has run out and, in any case, your wisdom will be wasted. We will love one another only on the terms I have said, which are that I hold onto the throne of this land and rule it as its king.

So give up on your silly, lengthy admonitions and leave me alone.

Indicating Polyneices.

And you! Get out of here! Out of our walls or else die!

Anger rising on both sides

Polyneices:

Is that so? And who is this brave, invincible man who will plunge his sword into my body and escape his own death?

Eteocles:

Who? He's right here, in front of you. *He grasps the hilt of his sword.* Can you see what I have in my hands?

600

Polyneices:

I do. But the wealthy are cowards and far too much in love with life.

Eteocles:

Is this why you brought a whole army here, to fight a coward?

Polyneices:

Yes. It's wiser for a general to be safe in his victory than to be bold and sorry in defeat.

Eteocles:

Such bold words from you! Your boldness comes from mother's truce and it is that which will save your life.

Polyneices:

I'll say it once more: I am here to get both, the throne and my share of the estate.

Eteocles:

We owe you nothing!

This is my house and I shall stay in it.

Polyneices:

And you will hold on to my share!

Eteocles:

Yes. Now go! Leave this place!

Polyneices:

O, altars oh of my father's gods!

Eteocles:

Altars that you came to destroy!

Polyneices:

Listen to me gods!

Eteocles:

What god would hear you after you have marched here to destroy your own country?

Polyneices:

And you, shrines of Amphion and Zethus, sons of Zeus, riders of white horses!

Eteocles:

They, too, hate you!

Polyneices:

Hear me, gods! I am sent away from my own land!

610

Eteocles:

Yes, the land to which you have come to sent us away!

Polyneices:

Such injustice, gods!

Eteocles:

Save your praying for Mycenae, not here!

Polyneices:

You utter such sacrilege!

Eteocles:

But I am not my country's enemy, like you!

Polyneices:

Because you have exiled me without my share of father's wealth.

Eteocles:

Not only that but I will also kill you!

Polyneices:

O, father, father! Listen to what I must endure!

Eteocles:

And he can hear what you're up to with your army, as well!

Polyneices:

And you, mother?

Eteocles:

It is not proper for you to call her "mother!"

Polyneices:

Oh, Thebes, my city!

Eteocles:

No, not Thebes! Go to Argos and call upon the waters of Lerna, instead!

Polyneices:

Don't worry, I am going.

Mother, thank you!

Eteocles:

Go! Get out of this country!

Polyneices:

I am going but let me see my father!

Eteocles:

That is one wish you won't be enjoying!

Polyneices:

What about my young sisters?

Eteocles:

No, you'll never see them either!

Polyneices: *Shouting towards the palace*

Sisters!

620

Eteocles:

Why call them? You are their bitterest enemy!

Polyneices:

Well, then, mother, farewell to you!

Jocasta:

Well, I shall fare, my son, with what I am about to suffer!

Polyneices:

Miserable Fate!

I am no longer your son, mother!

Jocasta:

A fate miserable in so many ways!

Polyneices: *Indicating Eteocles*

He has made my life a miserable insult!

Eteocles:

Insults to the insulter!

Polyneices:

Where will you be making your stand outside the walls?

Eteocles:

Why ask that?

Polyneices:

So that I may stand directly opposite you and kill you!

Eteocles:

Precisely what I wish for, as well!

Jocasta:

Oh what horror!

What will you do, my sons?

Polyneices:

That will become obvious very soon, mother!

Jocasta:

Can you not escape your father's curses, my sons?

Eteocles:

Let the whole house come down!

Polyneices: *Brandishing his sword*

This sword will not stay idle for long. Soon it will be covered in blood.

And I call upon Thebes, this land that raised me and to her gods, to witness just what bitter dishonour I have suffered here and how like a slave I am driven away! Like a slave and not like one whose father is Oedipus, who is his father also!

631

Thebes, my city, if you suffer anything at all, blame it on this man, here, not on me!

It was not my wish to come here and it is not my wish to wage war against you.

Turning to the statue of Apollo

And you, too, Phoebus Apollo, lord of the highways, farewell!

My house, my childhood friends and statues of all our gods, who receive our sacrifices, farewell to you all! I have no idea if I will ever address you again though, hope never sleeps and I hope that with the help of the gods, I will kill this man and rule this country!

Eteocles: *To Polyneices:*

Go! Leave this land!

It was by divine inspiration that our father called you Polyneices, "man of much strife!"

Exit Polyneices.

Eteocles and Jocasta, enter the palace.

641

Chorus:

Cadmus came from Tyre to this land where the four legged calf let her virgin body fall upon the ground for him, and so, the words of Apollo's oracle came true.

Chorus:

This was the place he had to found a city, this was the place where the fields grew wheat, and where the streams of Dirce nourished the lush and fertile plains.

650

Chorus:

And this was the place where Zeus lay with Semele and Dionysus was born; and when still but a baby, the curly shoots of ivy wove a burgeoning green wreath all around him...

Chorus:

...a blessing to the god who the women of Thebes worshipped with dances in bacchic ecstasy.

660

Chorus:

This was the place where Ares' murderous serpent, a guard most fierce watched over the watered fields and the rushing streams with an ever-roving eye.

Chorus:

Cadmus killed that beast!

Chorus:

Killed it with a marble stone.

Chorus:

Bashed and bloodied its head with his mighty murderous arm.

Chorus:

He had come to that stream to use its lustral waters.

670

Chorus:

Then he obeyed Pallas Athena, the goddess who was not born of a mother, and threw the snake's teeth into the deep furrows of the fertile earth.

Chorus:

And from the earth's top soil the vision sprung of men in full armour who fought a full and slaughtering fight among themselves and, once again, became one with the deep, dear earth.

Chorus:

And the fight soaked with blood the good earth that had brought them forth to the light of the sunny breezes of the heavens.

680

Chorus:

O, Epaphus, son of Zeus, child of the heifer, Io, our ancestor, I call on you in my foreign tongue!

Chorus:

I call on you, Epaphus, with the call of a foreigner!

Chorus:

Come, Epaphus, come, I pray to you, come to Thebes!

Chorus:

Come to this land which your descendants founded and in which the twin goddesses settled, Persephone and Demeter, the all-loving, the torch bearer, the mistress and nurse of all, the goddess of the Earth.

691

Chorus:

Bring them here, Epaphus, bring these torch bearing goddesses to defend this land.

Chorus:

All things are easy for the gods!

Enter Eteocles and some men.

Eteocles: *To one of his men*

You! Go and bring here Creon, son of Menoeceus and brother to Jocasta, my mother!

Tell him that I wish to talk with him before we begin the battle and the shooting of spears – about private and state matters.

He suddenly sees Creon approaching

Ah! Never mind. The man has saved you the trouble. I see he's heading towards my palace.

Enter Creon

703

Creon:

Ah, king Eteocles! It took a lot of work to find you, sir!

I have walked over to all the gates and to all the guard posts of Thebes, looking for you!

Eteocles:

Uncle Creon! I, too wanted to see you!

I have talked with Polyneices about the terms of peace but, personally, I have found them most unsatisfactory.

Creon:

What I've heard is that, relying on the support he has from his father-in-law, Adrastus, Polyneices considers himself greater than the whole of Thebes!

710

But let us leave this for the gods to decide my boy. I have come to talk to you about something that is far more important.

Eteocles:

Oh, yes, and what is this? What do you mean, "important?"

Creon:

A prisoner has arrived, one of our men who has escaped from the hands of the Argives.

Eteocles:

Yes? And what news has he brought us from their camp?

Creon:

That the Argives will surround the city walls with their spears.

Eteocles:

In that case, let the city send out its troops!

Creon:

Send them out where, my boy?

Are you so young that you cannot see what's in front of you?

720

Eteocles:

What do you mean, where? Outside, of course, at the trenches, to fight our enemies!

Creon:

But our army is small, Eteocles, whilst theirs is vast!

Eteocles:

Bah! I know what that lot is like. Brave in words, weak in action!

Creon:

But the Argives, my boy! They are well respected by all the Greeks.

Eteocles:

Don't worry, Creon. I'll soon cover the plain out there with their corpses!

Creon:

That's my wish, as well but, from what I can see, it will take a great deal of pain.

Eteocles:

Are you suggesting I should keep our army locked up within the walls?

Creon:

Well, my boy, victory depends entirely upon wisdom.

Eteocles:

So you think that I should follow some different paths to it, do you?

Creon:

Yes, you should follow all the paths available. Try them all first before you risk everything.

730

Eteocles:

Should we set up an ambush at night, perhaps?

Creon:

Only if you can secure a safe way back here, if things go wrong.

Eteocles:

Night evens things out for both sides but it favours the daring.

Creon:

The darkness of the night can be terrible if your plan misfires.

Eteocles:

What if I attack them while they're having their supper?

Creon:

That might cause them a bit of panic but in the end, what we are after is victory.

Eteocles:

They can't retreat from there because Dirce's ford is too deep.

Creon:

The best plan is to be well prepared and well defended.

Eteocles:

What if we attack them with our cavalry?

Creon:

The Argives are well protected all around by their chariots.

740

Eteocles:

What should I do, then? Hand the city over to them?

Creon:

Of course not, my boy! But you are a smart man, think of a smart plan.

Eteocles:

What plan, Creon? What plan is smarter than those I have already suggested?

Creon:

I hear that they have seven chiefs who...

Eteocles:

...who have been ordered to do what? What strength could there be in seven men?

Creon:

They have been ordered to lead seven companies of men and storm our seven gates.

Eteocles:

So, what should we do about that, Creon? My patience has run out.

Creon:

Do the same. Choose seven chiefs yourself and set them at the gates, against theirs.

Eteocles:

To do what, do the fighting themselves or lead companies of soldiers?

Creon:

Lead companies.

Choose the bravest of your men, Eteocles.

750

Eteocles:

I understand. To hold back the Argives from scaling our walls.

Creon:

And for them to be co-commanders to you. One chief cannot see everything that is going on, on a battlefield.

Eteocles:

And how shall I choose them? Should I seek out bravery or wisdom?

Creon:

Both. The one is nothing without the other.

Eteocles:

Fine. I shall do as you suggest, Creon.

I will go to our seven towers and there place guards, equal in number to those of the enemy. It would take me too long to mention each one of them by name and the enemy is already hard against our walls.

I must leave for the battle now and not have my hand stay idle.

760

If only I could meet my brother, face to face, clash with him spear to spear and kill him for coming here, to destroy my city! Still, Creon, if Fate fails me, you should make sure that my sister, Antigone, marries your son, Haemon. Now, as I go out on my way to the battle, I confirm their previous betrothal to each other. You are my uncle, my mother's brother, so there's no need to say too much about this: look after her well, for your sake as well as mine.

770

My father has acted like a fool, taking his own eyes out! He'll receive no praise from me for that act but his curses might well kill both, me and my brother.

Oh and one more thing remains to be done. We must ask the seer, Teiresias if he has a message from the heavens to tell us but I will send your son, Menoeceus, named after your own father, to bring him here. He'll talk with you freely but not with me because I have often scorned his prophetic art to his face and so he bears a grudge against me.

780

But now, Creon, I leave you with this command for Thebes: If victory is mine, then the corpse of Polyneices should not be buried within these walls and if anyone dares bury it, even if he is one of his kin, then he should be put to death. These are my words to you, Creon.

Now these are my words to my slaves.

To his men

Bring my weapons out here. My weapons and my armour for the spear clash ahead. The victory of that will be mine because I have justice on my side.

Some men come out from the palace with his armour and help him wear it.

And now I pray to the goddess Eulabeia, the most apt of the gods to save this city.

Exit Eteocles and his men (SL)

Exit Creon (SR)

790

Chorus:

O, Ares!

Chorus:

O, god of war!

God of many toils!

Why do you love blood and death so much?

Chorus:

Why are so much out of harmony with the songs and dances of Dionysus?

Chorus:

Come, toss your curls to the breeze with the young garlanded dancers!

Chorus:

Come, Ares! Sing to the lute's soft breaths, the home of the grace of their dancing! feet!

Chorus:

Why do you, instead, lead the gloomy dance of war, breathing into the chests of the Argives the lust for Theban blood?

Chorus:

It's not Bacchus' thyrsus that you wave madly, nor do you dance dressed in fawnskin but among chariots and with bridled steeds you wheel about your strongly hoofed colt.

800

Chorus:

And with frenzy you push and you urge your wild horses by the waters of Ismenus and charge with spears and hatred against the race of the earth born!

Chorus:

And against these stone walls you marshal a chorus of war, armed with bronze swords and spears.

Chorus:

How dreadful a goddess is Strife!

She has brought these troubles to the lords of this land, the sons of Labdacus whose sorrows are endless.

Chorus:

Kitheron!

Chorus:

Kitheron, Artemis' most loved sacred precinct!

Chorus:

Kitheron, rich with leaves, rich with snow, rich with wild beasts!

810

Chorus:

How I wish you had not saved the discarded baby, Oedipus, Jocasta's son, a boy cast away from his home to die!

Chorus:

A child marked with golden pins on his feet.

Chorus:

How I wish the winged virgin, Sphinx, that beast from the mountain, had not come to bring bitter death to this land, singing her vile, unmusical songs.

Chorus:

She hovered over our walls and with her four taloned feet she snatched away Cadmus' sons. Away into the light of the boundless sky.

Chorus:

A murderous beast sent by Hades from his halls to destroy the Cadmeans.

820

Chorus:

And now a new strife has sprung among Oedipus' sons and inside his palace and inside his city!

Chorus:

That which is wrong can never be called right and children of such a sinful marriage can never be a source of pride for the mother who bore them.

Chorus:

And they are a stain upon their father, the man who is also their brother.

Chorus:

There is a tale, Earth, there is a tale which the barbarians tell and which I heard, here, at home, how you once, a long time ago, brought forth the race of the red crested snake, whose teeth were sown in your soil.

Chorus:

A snake, they say that fed on beasts, a glory and a censure to the ears of the Thebans.

830

Chorus:

Then came Harmonia's wedding where the gods, children of Heaven were invited

Chorus:

Amphion was also there and with his lyre, charmed the rocks and so the fortress of this land rose up between the eddies of the double river, Dirce which nourish the lush valley at the mouth of Ismenus.

Chorus:

And so, Io, my horned ancestress, gave birth to the Cadmeian race, to the kings of Thebes.

Chorus:

And so it is that Thebes, our city, with the countless blessings bestowed upon her, blessings on top of blessings, became the pinnacle on Ares' crown.

Enter Creon (SR), immediately before the blind seer, Teiresias, who enters the stage from the opposite direction. Teiresias is walking with the aid of a walking stick and is led by his daughter. He is wearing a golden crown. These two are accompanied by Menoecus.

The girl is holding under her right arm tablets of Teiresias' oracles.

842

Teiresias:

Lead on, my daughter. You are the eyes that can guide my blind man's steps, just like the stars are guides to the sailors. Walk in front of me and make sure I place my feet securely upon this level ground. Don't let me fall, my child.

Ah, how feeble is your father!

Hold well in your maiden hand the divinations I made when I sat in my holy chair of prophesy and examined the signs made by the birds.

850

Turning to Menoecus

Tell me, Menoecus my child, tell me son of Creon, how much further through the city do we have to go to reach your father?

My knees are tired, my son and I must make far too many short steps. It's hard for me to go on for much longer.

Creon:

Ah! Teiresias! Courage, old friend!

You can now anchor your feet here, near your friends.

To Menoecus

Son, give him a hand.

When an old man travels, whether he's on foot or on a carriage, he still needs the help of others.

Teiresias:

Ah, I am here!

But what is the urgency, Creon?

Creon:

First take a breath and gather your strength after this steep climb up here and then I'll tell you.

860

Teiresias:

It's true, the journey has exhausted me!

I've only just come back from Athens, the land of the Erecthians, yesterday.

There, too, there was war! Eumolpus, king of Thrace had declared it against the Athenians, descendants of Cecrops for whom I had declared a splendid victory and for which I was awarded this golden crown you see on my head. It was from the Athenians' first spoils of war.

Creon:

I'll take your victory crown as a good omen, Teiresias.

You know well that we, too are tossing about in a most perilous tempest of war with the Greeks!

Perilous, indeed for Thebes!

Eteocles, our king has asked me to call for you and to learn from you what we should do to save the city. He has already donned his armour and he is on his way to do battle with the Argives.

873

Teiresias:

Had it been Eteocles asking me that question, I would have held my tongue and uttered no oracle but since it is you who needs to know, I shall tell you.

This city, Creon, has been sick for a long time, from that day that Laius had his son, a son which the gods did not want and who had become his mother's husband.

This was a wise warning sent by the gods to the Greeks when they caused poor Oedipus to destroy his eyes in such a bloody manner.

880

It was a warning which Oedipus' sons wanted to conceal, thinking that they could trick the gods and escape their wrath but, in that, they had made a dreadful mistake. Because, in order to hide this warning from the eyes of the world, they have not only neglected to give their father the honour due to him but they have also forbidden him from going outside of the palace. This has enraged the poor man most violently and so, hurt by the suffering and the indignity, he lashed out at them by uttering the most terrible curses.

About all this I spoke often and did all I could but this only made me their enemy.

But their death is imminent, Creon. Each will die by the hand of the other and the dead will be many, both, from the Argives, as well as the Thebans and their corpses will be heaped the one upon the other and Thebes will fall into bitter mourning!

890

And you, poor Thebes, you and your army, will be totally destroyed, unless someone listens to my words.

What should have happened is that neither of these two men be made citizens or rulers of this city because they are both cursed by the gods and they will overturn it and destroy it.

But, since evil has now triumphed over virtue, there is only one remedy left for the survival of Thebes, though, because it is neither safe for me to reveal the medicine that will save it, nor is it too easy for those who have been hurt by this misfortune to accept it, I shall go.

900

Farewell, Creon!

I, too, as one man among many, shall suffer what I must.

What else can I do?

He turns to go by Creon holds him back

Creon:

No, no, stay here, old man!

Teiresias:

No, don't try to stop me, Creon.

Creon:

But why do you want to leave?

Teiresias:

It is not I who is leaving Creon but your own fortune.

Creon:

Tell me what can save Thebes and her people!

Teiresias:

You want to know this now but soon, you will not want to know.

Creon:

What? Why would I ever not want to know how to save my city?

Teiresias:

So, do you really want to know?

910

Creon:

Yes, I do. Really! What is there in the world that I should want more?

Teiresias:

Then I shall tell you my prophesies.

First though, tell me, where is Menoeceus, the boy who brought me here?

Creon:

He is right here, old man. Standing next to you.

Teiresias:

Then tell him to go away. he must not hear my prophesies.

Creon:

Menoceus is my son and, if he has to, he will be quiet.

Teiresias:

So, you want me to speak in front of him?

Creon:

Yes, it would make him very happy to hear how we can save our city.

919

Teiresias:

Well then, hear the path of my oracles and what you should do if you want to save Thebes.

You have asked most earnestly to hear what Fate declared. Well, then listen: This child of yours, Menoeceus, you must sacrifice him for the sake of the city.

Creon:

What? What tale is this you're telling me, old man?

Teiresias:

I have told you what it is you must do!

Creon:

Oh! So much pain in such few words!

Teiresias:

Pain, yes, to you, Creon but salvation to your city!

Creon:

No, I have heard nothing!

No, I have understood nothing!

To Hades with the city!

Teiresias:

Ha! Creon is no longer Creon. He is some other man! He is going back on his word.

Creon:

Go Teiresias! Go and farewell to you. I have no need of your oracles.

930

Teiresias:

Has your misfortune killed the truth, Creon?

Creon: *Falling to his knees before Teiresias in desperate supplication*

Old man, I beg you, by your knees and by your grey beard!

Teiresias:

Creon, why, pray to me? Fate's ill cannot be averted.

Creon:

Teiresias, keep this quiet. Tell none of the citizens about this.

Teiresias:

Are you asking me to act unjustly? No, I cannot keep silent!

Creon:

But do you want to kill my son?

Teiresias:

Others will consider that. I will simply speak.

Creon:

Ah! How did this curse ever fall upon me and upon my son?

Teiresias:

Well may you ask that question and it is well that you wish to discuss it.

This young man must be sacrificed. Killed in the chamber where the earthborn serpent, the guardian of Dirce's waters was born, giving the earth a libation with his blood.

940

This he must do to placate the ancient wrath that Ares, the god of war, is holding against Cadmus for seeking to avenge the slaughter of the earthborn serpent.

Do this and you'll have Ares as your ally!

Then, if the earth receives fruit, in return for fruit and mortal blood for the loss of the blood of her offspring, she will look kindly towards you again after having sent to you a race of sown men, wearing golden helmets.

But a descendant of those men, Creon, one who is born from the jaw of the serpent, must die and of those men, of that race of the sown men, you are the only survivor.

950

You alone, are pure in the lineage from both sides, that of your mother as well as of your father and so are your sons.

Haemon can not be sacrificed because, though he has not yet married and has not tasted of the bed of love, he is, nonetheless, betrothed and has a wife. Menoeceus, here, however is not and so, if he is indeed devoted to Thebes, he will save her and give her glory, by offering himself, like a colt, for the sacrifice.

This will cause great consternation to Adrastus and his Argives as they go back home, leaving behind their many dead.

960

Creon, you can choose one of these two fates: to save you city or your son.

So, now, I have told you all I know!

To his daughter

Take me home, now child.

Prophets are fools to practice their art. If they prophesy things that are disagreeable to those who have consulted them, then they are seen as hateful creatures; but then, again, if they feel sorry for them and they lie to them, then they sin against the heavens!

Only Phoebus Apollo, who is afraid of no mortal, should utter oracles for us.

Exit Teiresias and the girl

Chorus:

Creon, you are speechless!

Chorus:

Not a word from you!

Chorus:

But I am just as shocked as you are Creon!

970

Creon:

But what could I say? It's obvious what I'm going to say: I'll never fall so low as to offer my own child to be slaughtered for the sake of the city!

Everyone loves his child and no one would offer it for slaughter.

I have no desire to be praised for having murdered my own son.

But I am old enough to do this myself and I am ready to do it: to die for my country.

Come now, my son. You must flee! Quick before the whole city finds out.

980

Forget these incoherent utterances of the prophets and hurry, leave Thebes!

Run my son because he will go to the all the authorities and to all the generals at the seven gates and tell every captain there! If we hurry we may be able to save your life, otherwise, they'll kill you!

Menoceus:

But go where, father? To which city? To which friend?

Creon:

Go as far away from Thebes as you can, my boy!

Menoceus:

Tell me where and I will obey.

Creon:

Go through Delphi.

Menoceus:

In what direction, father?

Creon:

Towards Aetolia.

Menoceus:

Then? Where to after Aetolia?

990

Creon:

Onward towards Thespotia.

Menoceus:

To the sacred precincts of Dodona?

Creon:

That's right.

Menoceus:

Then? Where to after Dodona?

Creon:

The god will tell you which way.

Menoceus:

What about money, father?

Creon:

I'll give you some gold.

Menoceus:

Very well, father.

Now you go and I'll make one last visit to my aunt Jocasta, your sister, whose breast I first sucked when I was left a motherless orphan baby.

I shall go and say good bye to her and then go off to escape death and save my life.

Creon:

Then go my son and go quickly and don't give obstacles to your self!

Exit Creon

999

Menoceus:

See how easily I took my father's fear away, ladies? Tricked with mere words!

Now I can do as I like.

He wants to send me away and deprive Thebes of her good fortune.

He wants to send me away and turn me into a coward.

It's something that can be excused of an old man but not for one like me, to betray the country that has given birth to me.

Let me tell you this, ladies:

I shall go and save Thebes!

I shall go and give my life for her!

1010

How shameful it would be if, while those men who are not bound by any oracles or even by any of Fate's decrees, stand out there, outside these walls, by their shield, ready to fight and risk their lives for their country, I, like a coward, try to escape? I would be no better than a traitor to my father and to my brother and to my city and I will be shown to be that wherever I go!

By Zeus, who sits in his throne among the stars, no!

And I swear by Ares, the god of blood, the god who had established as rulers of this land, the sown men who rose from the earth: I shall go to the highest peak of the battlements and there kill myself with my own sword so that my blood will spill upon the serpent's dark and deep cave, the very place that the prophet had named and thus, save my city.

1020

I have said what I wanted to say.

Now I go to give the city a gift. Not a mean gift at that. My life. A cure from this plague!

If every man could take a hold of every useful thing he can his hands on and contribute it to his country's common good, then cities would suffer less and prosper more.

Exit Menoceus.

1029

Chorus:

Winged Sphinx, you came!

Chorus:

You came, daughter of Earth and of the murderous Snake, the Echidna of the Underworld!

Chorus:

A dire lineage!

Chorus:

A long time ago, you came, murderer of myriads!

Chorus:

A long time ago you came and plundered ruthlessly the land of the Thebans!

Chorus:

You came and brought myriads of groans and sighs of bitter lament!

Chorus:

And of destruction!

Chorus:

Half virgin beast with blood dripping talons you swooped onto the land with your fast-fluttering wings and tore away our young men from the waters of Dirce!

1040

Chorus:

You came and you sang a cursed song of death -no lyre beside it- that filled the land with wails.

Chorus:

Some murderous god was the cause of it all!

Chorus:

And so the mothers cried!

Chorus:

And so the daughters cried!

Chorus:

Shrieks of wailing upon shrieks of wailing!

Chorus:

The houses groaned with the weeping!

1050

Chorus:

And the whole city groaned with the shrieks of wailing. One street, then the next, all weeping in their turn!

Chorus:

One groan after another! An unbearable, irrepressible noise, a fierce thunder rose every time the winged virgin took away one more man from our city.

Chorus:

And so the time rolled on and Apollo, through his oracles, had sent poor Oedipus to Thebes and, for a time, the Thebans rejoiced and then, in turn, were made to grieve.

Chorus:

He had solved the riddle of the Sphinx, a glorious victory, but then, the poor man, married his mother, poor man, a dire marriage –

Chorus:

Poor man! A bitter marriage that polluted the whole city and brought about the bloody curses he drove upon his sons, to fight a gory battle against each other.

Chorus:

Poor man!

1070

Chorus:

How I admire!

How I admire Menoeceus, the man who's gone to die for his country!

Chorus:

He will bring tears to his father's eyes but a glorious victory to his city, this city, Thebes, of the seven gates!

Chorus:

Dear Pallas Athena!

Grant that we be mothers of such great sons!

Chorus:

Dear Pallas Athena! You, it was who inspired Cadmus to performing that brave deed which made the serpent's blood soak the rock, which cast the divine curse, the murderous curse upon this land.

Enter Messenger

He rushes and knocks hard on the palace gate

1080

Messenger:

Hey there!

Anyone guarding this gate?

Open up! Send Jocasta out here!

Hey! Can't you hear me? How long must I bang on this gate?

Jocasta, Oedipus' beautiful wife! Come out here! I have good news for you! Come, stop your grieving,

Jocasta! Shed no more tears!

Enter Jocasta from the palace

Jocasta:

Ah! Dear man!

Are you here with bad news? Is my son, Eteocles dead?

You have always stood by his shield, my good man, always protecting him from enemy arrows so you must have something terrible to tell me about him.

Is my son alive or dead, my good man? Tell me!

1091

Messenger:

He's alive, my lady! Don't worry. Let me free you of that fear.

Jocasta:

And the walls? The seven gates? How are they?

Messenger:

The walls are not breached, my lady. The city is safe.

Jocasta:

And another question that matters to me, my good man. What about Polyneices, do you know if he's alive or dead?

Messenger:

So far, my lady, both your sons are alive.

1100

Jocasta:

Bless you!

Now tell me, how did you manage to keep the Argive spears away from our gates from where you stood, inside the walls? Tell me so that I can go upstairs and brighten the blind man's heart! Tell me how our city was saved.

Messenger:

Thebes was saved because Creon's son, Menoecus, died for her.

He went and stood at the summit of our battlements and plunged his black sword deep into his throat.

Then your son assigned seven companies of men, each with their own captain and placed them at each of the seven gates to look out for the Argives and ward off their spears.

1100

Then he made up a force of reserves for the cavalry and another of shieldsmen for the infantry so that they could rush quickly to any weak spot along the walls when the need arose.

From high up our towers we saw the Argive army with its white shields, leave Teumessus and come charging towards the trenches. Then they burst forth and surrounded our Cadmean lands. Suddenly and all at the same time, war cries and trumpets howled from both sides, from theirs as well as from our own battlements.

1120

The first of their captains was Parthenopaeus, son of the huntress, Atalanta. He charged at our Neistean Gate with his men, a company thick with shields held high. In the centre of his shield was embossed his family emblem, his mother, killing the Aetolian boar with her far-shooting bow.

Next came Amphiaraus, the seer, with his sacrificial offerings on his chariot. He charged at our Proetid Gates. His shield was of a humble design, with no brightly coloured emblems embossed on it.

Then came Prince Hippomedon. He marched to the Ogygian Gate. The emblem on his shield was that of the all-seeing Argus his dappled eyes gazing, some opening as the stars were rising and others closing with those setting, something we discovered after his death.

1132

Tydeus was stationed at the Homoloian Gate. His shield was embossed with the skin of a lion, its mane standing on end and, like the Titan Prometheus, he carried a torch in his right hand, ready to burn our city.

Polyneices, your son, charged with his men against the Crenaean Gate. On his shield were the flesh-eating steeds of Potniae, all in a frenzied gallop.

1140

They were grouped around the centre of the shield, near its strap, which made them look even more wild.

No less a lover of war than Ares, the god himself himself, Capaneus drew up his company against the Electran Gate. On the iron circle of his shield he had embossed the image of one of the earth born giants who had just torn up from its foundations a whole city and was now carrying it on his shoulders, a message for us about what he intended to do to Thebes.

Adrastus stood at the seventh gate. He carried his shield with his left arm and on that shield were drawn a hundred hydras, the proud emblem of Argos.

1150

And from the middle of the battlements the hydras were snatching with their jaws our sons, the sons of Cadmus.

I was able to see all these things, my lady as I was taking our watch-word around to all our captains along our walls.

In the beginning, my lady, we were fighting with bows and arrows and with spears and with slings, weapons for distance, and with huge stones.

1160

We were winning the battle when Tydeus and your son together, shouted out, "Hey, sons of the Danaans! Why wait until we are cut to pieces by their missiles? Let's all rush at the gates together! All of us, footmen and cavalry, chariots, all of us together!"

When they heard these words, everyone moved!

Many of them fell to the ground with their heads steeped in blood. Many from our side, too, fell to the ground, in front of our walls, their last breath gone and their rushing blood, quenching the earth's thirst. Then Atalanta's son, who's from Arcadia and not from Argos, threw himself upon our gates like a typhoon and shouted to have fire and picks brought around to raze the city to the ground.

1170

But our own Periclymenos, Poseidon's son, breaks his rage by hurling at his head a rock so large it could fill a wagon! A huge, coping stone he tore away from the battlements. It smashed the man's blond head into pieces, breaking all the joints on his skull and bloodying his young cheeks, bursting with the first blush of beard. He won't be returning to his mother, Maenalus' daughter with the beautiful bow.

Your son, Eteocles, confident that these gates are secure, left them and went to attend to others. I followed him.

1180

I saw Tydeus and his marshalled men hurling their Aetolian spears into the gaps at the top of the turrets with such accuracy that our men began to flee from those high battlements. Your son though, like a hunter cheering his hounds, brought them all together again and roused them into returning to their posts. After that, after we corrected that danger, we ran off to other gates.

Ah, Capaneus and his madness! How could I ever describe such a rage?

There he was, charging at us with this huge, long-necked ladder, full of bluster, screaming that not even Zeus with his fierce bolts would stop him from razing the tallest towers of our city to the ground!

1190

A hail of stones were hurled at him but he, still shouting, crouched under his battered shield and began climbing one slippery rung after another but, just as he reached the top of the tower, Zeus delivered his lightning bolt! The earth shuddered and everyone became afraid. Capaneus rolled down from his ladder.

His body fell apart and his limbs were tossed in opposite directions. His hair was shot to Olympus, his blood into the ground, his arms and legs, like Ixion on his whirling wheel, rolled all about; and his scorched corpse fell to the earth!

1201

Adrastus then saw that Zeus was working against his army so he pulled his troops back, away from the trenches. Our troops, however, saw this sign from Zeus as an auspicious one and so we charged at the centre of Argive army all in one force, chariots, cavalry and foot soldiers all together.

A bloody chaos reigned with swords and spears clashing, dead soldiers thrown from their chariots and wheels and axles crashing upon each other and corpses piling up upon more corpses.

1210

So, at least for today, we have saved the city's walls, though only the gods know if the city will keep its good luck after today. After all, it was some god or other who has saved it today.

Chorus:

It is good to gain a victory but it would be even better if the gods continued with their kindness. That would make us very happy.

Jocasta:

Fate and the gods have been good to us. My sons are alive and our city has escaped destruction. Not so for poor Creon though who, it seems has reaped the bitter harvest of my marriage to Oedipus.

1220

The poor man has lost his son, a good turn for Thebes but a dreadful grief for him.

But, tell me, what will my sons do next?

Messenger: *Nervously. He is obviously holding back some dire news.*

No, don't ask me that, my lady. Don't ask me what next. Just accept that so far, so good!

Jocasta:

What? Why? Your answer frightens me. I can't leave this question unasked!

Messenger:

But your sons have escaped death, my lady. What more do you want?

Jocasta:

I want to hear if I am just as fortunate in all other matters.

Messenger:

Let me go, my lady. While I am here with you, your son is out there, alone and without my protection!

Jocasta:

You are hiding something dreadful from me. Concealing it in darkness!

Messenger:

Perhaps I am – but I will not add misery to your blessings!

1230

Jocasta: *She grabs him by his cloak*

Yes, you will!

Unless you can escape me by flying off into the heavens!

Messenger:

My lady!

My lady, why didn't you just let me deliver my good news and then leave? Why do you insist on my telling you news of misery?

Both your sons, both of them, have come up with this shameless, this reckless idea of fighting each other in single combat, away from the rest of the army.

Oh, how I wish they hadn't uttered their speeches to the Argives and the Theban men!

It was Eteocles who did that first. He climbed up to the highest tower, ordered the men to be silent and then, and then he spoke.

1240

“Generals of the Greek army! Noble sons of the Danaans who made their home here, and you, sons of Cadmus! Don't trade your lives for my sake or for the sake of Polyneices! I will settle this conflict by fighting my brother alone and if I kill him I shall keep the house for myself but if I lose, then I shall let him have it all to himself. You, Argives, leave the battleground and go home. Don't leave your lives here. Enough of the Sown Men have done so.”

1250

These were the words of Eteocles.

Then, your other son, Polyneices, stood out, in front of his army and praised him for those words.

Straightaway both armies, Argives and Thebans, roared together with their approval, thinking the words were just. Then, the two generals poured libations and, in the space between the two divided armies, they swore to keep to these terms.

Then, the two young sons of Oedipus began to cover their bodies with their bronze armour. They were helped each by his own men, Eteocles by the best of the Sown Men and, his brother, Polyneices by the best of his Danaans.

1260

And there they stood in their shimmering armour, neither flinching for a moment, each madly eager to shoot his spears at the other. Their friends came from their side to rouse their champion with words like this: “Polyneices, you can do it. You can raise a trophy of victory to Zeus and bring words of glory and fame to Argos.”

And to the other one, his friends would say, “You are now fighting for Thebes, Eteocles. Win and you

shall have the sceptre of the city!”

These are the words they used to urge their champions into the fight.

1270

In the meantime the seers sacrificed the sheep and examined the bursts of the flames and how the gall bladder burst, moisture and heat being enemies as well as the tips of the flames which foretold one of two things, victory or defeat.

Now, my lady, Jocasta, if you have any powers of persuasion over them, with words of wisdom or charm, go and stop your sons from this dreadful fight. The danger for them is great. The victory prize for you will be bitter tears, if the result is the loss of both your sons in the one day!.

Exit the messenger

From within we hear Antigone singing a gentle song

Jocasta goes to the gate of the palace, opens it partially and shouts.

Jocasta:

Antigone!

Antigone, my girl, come outside! Come!

1280

Come, my daughter! Such heaven-sent disasters are not for singing songs or dancing or amusing yourself with childish things.

Come, come! You and your mother must try and prevent your brave brothers from killing each other.

Come Antigone! Hurry!

Enter Antigone from the palace

Antigone:

Mother, darling, what new family disaster are you announcing here, in public, in front of our house?

Jocasta:

Your brothers, dear! Your brothers will lose their lives soon!

Antigone:

Why, what do you mean, mother?

Jocasta:

They are standing against each other ready for mortal dual.

Antigone:

Oh, no, mother!

Mother what are you telling me?

Jocasta:

Nothing pleasant, my daughter. Come, we must hurry!

Antigone:

But mother, where could I go? I can't leave my women's quarters!

Jocasta:

To the battlefield!

1290

Antigone:

No, mother. I'm too ashamed to be seen in public.

Jocasta:

Come, Antigone. This is no time for modesty!

Antigone:

But what could I do there?

Jocasta:

You could try and stop your brothers from killing each other.

Antigone:

Mother! How could I ever do that?

Jocasta:

By falling at their knees and begging them, darling. Come!

Antigone:

Lead the way, mother. Let's go to the battlefield.

Jocasta:

Hurry, darling, hurry!

If I can catch them before they start the fight, we shall all live but if we're too late and they die, then I too, will lie down next to them and take my own life!

Exit Jocasta and Antigone.

Chorus:

Ah!

Chorus:

Ah!

Chorus:

How my heart trembles with terror!

Chorus:

How my whole body trembles with terror!

1300

Chorus:

With pity for the mother!

Chorus:

Bitter pity for the poor mother!

Chorus:

Two brothers! Two brothers!

Chorus:

Oh, Zeus!

Chorus:

Oh, Earth, what pain is this!

Chorus:

Which brother will draw the blood of the other?

Chorus:

Which neck will be pierced by the murderous spear!

Chorus:

Pierce the shield!

Chorus:

A brother's life taken by a brother!

Chorus:

Ah!

Chorus:

For which of the two corpses?

Chorus:

For which death shall we wail?

Chorus:

Oh, Earth!

Chorus:

Oh, Earth!

Chorus:

Pain upon pain!

Chorus:

Twin the beasts!

Chorus:

Twin the murderous hearts!

1310

Chorus:

Two spears brandished for two souls!

Chorus:

Two murders for two murders!

Chorus:

Two bodies will fall!

Chorus:

Two bodies will fall!

Chorus:

A war prize dedicated to you, Thebes, the bloody corpses of two luckless men!

Chorus:

What thinking has brought them to this path?

Chorus:

To fight in single combat!

Chorus:

Poor men!

Chorus:

I shall wail in a foreigner's tongue!

Chorus:
I shall wail and I shall shed my tears of mourning for the dead!

Chorus:
The murderous Fate is almost done!

Chorus:
The slaughter is almost done!

Chorus:
The light of this day will see their future!

Chorus:
Oh, goddesses of Vengeance!

Chorus:
Oh, Erinyes!

Chorus:
What dreadful death!

Chorus:
What horrible slaughter you wrought upon these brothers!

1320

Chorus:
Ah, look!
Creon is coming here, to the palace!

Chorus:
What clouds cover his face! What sadness!

Chorus:
I'll stop my wailing.

Enter Creon

Creon:
Ah, what despair! Oh, what sadness!
Which of the two should I cry for, me or my city, a city covered by a cloud of despair big enough to drag it down to the waters of Acheron, the river of Death.
Yes, my son has gained glory for his name because he has died for his city but for me, for me, it is a deed of the darkest gloom!
I have just picked him up from Dragon's Cliff, self-slaughtered and brought him here, in my sad arms. My house groans with the pain and I, an old man, brought my lost son's corpse here for Jocasta to give it its burial wash and lay it out for the grave.

1331

The living must honour the dead and revere the god of the underworld.

Chorus:
Your sister, Jocasta, old man and her daughter, Antigone have gone out.

Creon:
Gone out? Where to? What's happened? Tell me!

Chorus:
She heard that her sons are about to enter into a single combat against each other for the throne of Thebes.

1340

Creon:
What? What do you mean? I was tending to my son's corpse and did not get to hear any of this.

Creon makes to leave but is stopped by the chorus

Chorus:
No, Creon, your sister has left a while ago now.

Chorus:
I think Oedipus' two sons have already finished the combat for their life.

Creon: *Sees the messenger approaching*

Ah!

And there I see the signs that tell the result!
That messenger's eyes, his sad face! They tell all!

Enter Messenger

Messenger:

Ah!

Where can I find the words? How can I speak my message?

Creon:

With what terror you begin your message!

Messenger:

Ah, how painful is this message that I must bring!

Oh, I say it again: How dreadful are these news!

1350

Creon:

More dreadful news upon the old ones?

Messenger:

Creon, your sister's sons no longer see the light of day!

Creon:

Dreadful indeed are the news you bring. Dreadful the pains for me and for the city!

Messenger:

Oh, palace! Oh, halls of this house, did you hear these words? Did you hear the news that both of Oedipus' sons have died of the same fate?

Chorus:

Yes, if these walls had a heart, they, too would weep!

Creon:

What bitter fate!

What heavy pain!

What agony!

Messenger:

And yet there are more dreadful news for you to learn, old man!

1360

Creon:

How can there possibly be any news sadder than this?

Messenger:

Your sister, too, died with her sons!

Chorus:

Oh, cry!

Chorus:

Raise your groans high!

Chorus:

Beat your heads with your white hands!

Creon:

Poor, Jocasta! What end has the Sphinx brought to your life and to your marriage!

Exit Creon

Chorus:

Tell us!

Tell us how the slaughter of the two men happened?

Chorus:

How did the combat, Oedipus' curse take place?

Chorus:

Tell us!

Messenger:

About our city's successes before our walls you already know. The surrounding walls are not too far away so you have heard about what went on there.

1370

Once the two young sons of Oedipus –generals and chiefs, both- had worn their bronze armour, they went and set themselves up between the two armies, ready for the duel of bronze spears.

Polyneices turned towards Argos prayed with these words: "Hera," he said, "Reverend Hera, I have married Adrastus' daughter and now live in Argos, so I belong to you! Help me, Hera, kill my brother and make this right hand of mine stained with his blood in victory, a victory over my enemy.

1380

This is an awesome crown I am asking from you, Hera, to kill my own brother!"

Many soldiers shed tears and exchanged glances at these words of his.

Eteocles had turned towards the temple of Pallas Athena and prayed with these words: "Daughter of Zeus, let my hand throw this spear of mine and grant that it pierces his chest and kill him. He has come to destroy my land."

1390

Then the Truscan trumpet burst, like a blazing torch, a signal of murderous battle, the two threw themselves wildly upon each other and clashed like two boars with their tusks sharpened for the kill and their beards soaked in the foam of frenzy.

They charged at one another with their spears, each crouching behind his own shield to let his opponent's steel slide off it inflicting no injury and if one of them raised his eyes above the circle of his shield, the other would try to plunge his spear into his face, trying to be the first to draw blood. But both were extremely careful to keep their eyes protected behind their shield so that the spears did no damage to either of them.

1400

The terror was more marked on the onlookers than on the combatants since the sweat flowed more freely from them.

Then, Eteocles tried to kick a stone away from his path and in this way exposed his leg outside the shield. This was an opportunity for Polyneices to thrust his Argive spear which he took, wounding Polyneices' thigh. The Danaans roared triumphantly.

Eteocles, however, saw that Polyneices, in thrusting his spear into his thigh, had exposed his shoulder and so, the wounded man plunged his own spear into the breast of Polyneices which gave the Cadmeans their turn in cheering.

1410

But the head of Eteocles' spear broke and so, the man totally helpless, retreated step by step until he found a rock which he picked up and hurled it at his brother, breaking his spear in half.

So now they have come to a point in the combat where they were even. Neither had a spear left to throw.

So, then it was the swords! Both men clutched their sword by the hilt and pounced at each other, clashing their shields together and raising high the clamour of war.

1420

Eteocles then employed a trick which he had learnt when he had visited Thessaly.

With his left foot he moves back from the tangle, all the while making sure his front is well protected by his shield. Then, he puts his right foot forward and plunges his sword into Polyneices' navel, right through until it hits his spine.

Polyneices falls, his ribs and his stomach crumbling into one agonizing, bloody mess. This, thought Eteocles was the end of his enemy. He thought himself the winner and master of the combat, so he threw down his sword and moved in on his brother, trying to strip him of his armour.

1430

But he was so engrossed in that task that he neglected to think about his own safety and that was his ruin: His fallen brother was still breathing faintly and still had his sword within his grasp so he made one last effort and managed to plunge it into Eteocles' liver.

And so, the both of them fell to the ground, next to one another, their mouths full of earth, the prize of victory equally divided between them.

Chorus:

Oh, Oedipus, how I pity you!

Chorus:

It seems some god has made true your curse to your sons, Oedipus!

1439

Messenger:

And now hear what more suffering has been heaped upon all this!

Just when the two men were breathing their last, their doomed mother comes rushing on the scene, with her young daughter Antigone close behind.

And then, when she saw that their wounds were fatal, she groaned in agony, "Oh, my sons, my sons! I have come too late to help you!"

Then she threw herself upon each of her sons in turn and groaned and wailed miserably for all the futile effort she put into suckling them.

Antigone, their sister, also fell beside them and cried in utter sadness. "Oh, my brothers!" she said.

"Men who would be taking care of your aged mother! My beloved brothers! Men who would be taking care of my marriage!"

1450

Just then, Lord Eteocles, hearing his mother's voice, let out his last, dying sigh, deep from within his chest and placed a moist hand on her. He didn't utter a word but, from the tears in his eyes, one could tell just how much he loved her.

The other brother, Polyneices, who was still alive, when he saw his sister and his old mother, said, "Mother, we are dying! I am said for you and for my sister and for my dead brother who, though I

loved him, we became enemies. Yes, mother, enemy or not, he was my brother and I still loved him! Mother and you, my dear sister, bury me here, in my native land and pacify the city. Let me have so much of my land that I need now, even though I have lost my share of the palace.”

1462

Then, Polyneices placed his mother’s hand onto his eyelids and said, “mother, you close my eyes and farewell. The darkness is already covering me.”

Then both brothers surrendered their sad lives at the same time.

But then, when their mother saw this, in a fit of unbearable grief, snatched a sword from one of the corpses and performed a deed most horrible: She plunged the sword deep into her throat and fell dead upon the corpses of her beloved sons, her arms embracing them both.

1472

Then the two armies sprang to their feet and began arguing about which of them was victorious. Our side was saying it was we who had won but Polyneices’ army claimed victory was theirs. The generals on both sides argued fiercely. As far as the other side was concerned, it was Polyneices, their man, who, with his spear had inflicted the first wound. Others again said that no one could claim victory since both men were dead.

At this, Antigone walked away from the battlefield and army of the enemy rushed once again for their spears.

But, by some lucky providence, the Theban army happen to be sitting next to their shields and so we quickly surprised the Argives before they got themselves fully protected.

1480

None of them stood up to meet our attack and the battlefield was overrun by the fugitives and the blood streamed out from the countless who fell under our spears.

When the war ended and we had won, a victory statue of Zeus was erected. Others snatched the shields of the Argives and brought them inside the walls as prizes of war.

Some men are helping Antigone bring her two dead brothers here for their friends to mourn.

And so, some of this city’s struggles had a happy ending whereas others a sad one.

Exit Messenger. A moment later enters Antigone, followed by soldiers who are carrying the corpses of her two brothers and of Jocasta.

1492

Chorus:

Ah! Look!

Chorus:

Ah! The dreadful catastrophe that fell upon this house is no longer words for the ear but a sight for the eyes!

Chorus:

Here they are! We can see the corpses of the three dead here, in front of the palace!

Chorus:

A shared death deprived them all of the light of day.

1498

Antigone:

I do not veil the delicate skin of my face but let my curls shade it.

I care not for the deep purple of my virginity under my eyelids.

I feel no shame for the blush of my face.

I come, I hurry, a wild bacchant of the dead.

I throw away the scarf from my hair.

I let loose my delicate saffron robe.

I usher the dead with the wails of grief.

Ah!

Ah!

Ah!

Oh, Polyneices! How well your name bears your deeds!

Oh, Thebes! Your wrath is no wrath but murder upon murder!

With grim murder upon dreadful murder and with grim bloodshed upon dreadful bloodshed your brought the House of Oedipus down!

1512

Ah!

Ah!

Ah!

Oh, palace! What singer, gifted in the groans of grief, shall I call to cry with me, to cry with me, my

palace, my home, to cry with me over these three corpses, a mother and her two sons, a sight that will please the hearts of the goddess of Vengeance?

It was Erinys, the goddess of Vengeance, who has destroyed the House of Oedipus, a long time ago, the very moment when Oedipus, in his wisdom had solved the song of riddles, sung by that savage singer, the Sphinx and killed her.

Ah!

Ah!

Ah!

1520

Oh, father!

What woman, Greek or foreign or any other woman of noble birth and mortal blood of ancient times has ever suffered so much, so much bitter, so much visible pain?

Ah!

Ah!

Ah!

How shall I sing my lament?

What bird will sing with me my lament? What bird that sits at the highest branches of the oak tree or a pine, will accompany me, me, a motherless maid? What bird will cry with me? A motherless maid who'll spend the rest of her life grieving a bitter grief, crying ever-flowing bitter tears, alone.

1530

Ah!

Ah!

Ah!

She tears some hair from her head

Which one? On whose body shall I scatter the first cuttings of my hair? Who shall I lament first? Shall it be my mother? Shall I scatter my hair on her two breasts from which I first sucked milk?

Or shall it be the black wounds of my two brothers?

Ah!

Ah!

Ah!

She throws it on the corpses of the brothers and then goes to the gate of the palace and calls Oedipus

Father! Poor, aged father! Poor blind father! Leave the house and come outside!

Come, father! Come and show the full misery of your life, Oedipus!

1540

You have spread upon your eyes a gloomy darkness and now drag your endless days within those walls.

Father! Do you hear me, father?

Are you dragging your aged feet into the courtyard or are you lying in your miserable bed?

Enter Oedipus, struggling blindly with a walking stick.

Oedipus:

Ah!

Antigone, why have you dragged my blind feet out here, into the light of the day?

I was inside, inside the bitter darkness of my room, inside my bed!

Ah, your heart-renting tears, my daughter!

Ah, this walking stick!

I walk about in the white air like an invisible phantom! Am I a dead man come from Hades or am I a dream with wings?

1551

Antigone:

Ah, my poor father!

A disaster, father! A message disaster for you!

Your sons, my father! Your sons and your wife, no longer see the light of day, father!

Your wife, father, who stood by your walking stick always, guiding your blind feet!

Ah, my poor father!

Oedipus:

Ah!

Suffering! Suffering to groan for! Suffering to cry for!

What fate! What fate, child, caused three souls to leave the light of life?

Tell me, daughter, what fate caused this?

1561

Antigone:

Oh, father!

I say this out of grief and not of a need to criticize you or to mock you, my father but it was the avenging spirit you sent to them, the curse you sent upon them with its heavy load of swords and fire, with horrible wars crashed upon your sons, my father!

Oh, my father!

Oh, my dear father!

Oedipus:

Ah!

Ah!

Ah!

Antigone:

Why these heavy sighs now father?

Oedipus:

Oh, my sons!

Antigone:

Yes, father, you are in agony now but what if you could look upon the sun god's four horse chariot and turned your sight upon these corpses, my father?

1570

Oedipus:

The suffering of my sons is clear but my wife! Daughter, tell me please, what fate was it that caused her death?

Antigone:

Her tears and wails were all there for everyone to witness!

She bared her breast, father! To her sons, she bared her mother's breast, bared it to them in supplication!

She rushed to them and found them by the Electran gate. There, by the valley where the lotus flowers bloom where they were fighting a duel like two lions locked inside a den. They thrust their spears at each other, eager to see wounds.

1580

Their bodies were already covered in gory wounds, in the crimson libation of blood, cold and crusted, a libation that Ares, the god of war would pour and Hades, the god of the underworld would accept.

She took a sword, one of beaten bronze, from the dead and plunged it deep into her body and then, the grief stricken mother fell onto the corpses of both her sons.

Ah, my father, my father! All this suffering! All in one single day! Whoever the god might be, father he has heaped upon us all this suffering today!

Enter Creon. He has heard part of Antigone's speech and the words of the chorus

Chorus:

So much suffering!

Chorus:

So much suffering fell upon the House of Oedipus today!

Chorus:

May our fortunes be better from now on.

1590

Creon:

Enough!

Enough of the tears now! It is time to think of the burial.

Now, hear my words, Oedipus.

Your son, Eteocles has given me the throne of this city as dowry to my son, Haemon, to marry your daughter, here, Antigone. So, now, I will not allow you to live here, in Thebes. The words of the seer, Teiresias are clear: "This city," he said, "will never prosper if you continue to live here."

So, I say to you, not out of arrogance or enmity but for the sake of the city, to prevent your avenging spirit from destroying it: Leave us! Leave this land!

1600

Oedipus:

Oh, Fate!

What misery you've made of my life, even from the very start! No other mortal has ever suffered such misery! Even before I left my mother's womb, before I saw the light of the sun, Apollo foretold my father, Laius, that I would be his murderer!

Oh, Fate!

Oh, misery!

Then, the moment I was born, my father orders my death, calling me his enemy, since Fate had declared that he would die by my hand. And, while my lips were still seeking out my mother's breast, he sent me, poor creature, out to Mount Citheron, to be a pitiful morsel for the wild beasts.

But from that, I was rescued.

1610

Ah, if only Citheron had sunk into the pits of Tartarus for having failed to end my miserable life! Instead, Fate made me Polybus' slave and I, poor man, killed my father and slept with my mother who gave birth to my sons who are my brothers!

Then I destroyed those sons of mine by passing on to them the curses that I had received from my father.

And no, it was not I and of my own free will who has destroyed my eyes and killed my sons. I am not that bereft of sense. No, behind it all, I see the hand of some god or other.

1620

But, so be it!

And now, who will come to guide my blind feet? *Indicating the dead Jocasta* This dead woman here? She would, if she were alive. Of that I am certain. *Indicating the dead sons.* My two lovely boys? No, not they either for they are not mine any longer.

Am I still young enough to make a living? Where?

Creon, why are you destroying me so utterly? Sending me away from my land is like death to me! Yet, no, I shall not fall at your knees to beg! Even though I am ruined, I shall not betray the nobility that I once had.

1630

Creon:

You've decided not to touch my knees and that is good. On my part, I have decided that you should not stay in Thebes.

Now, of these dead, take one of them, this, Eteocles, into the palace. The other, Polyneices, who has come with a foreign army to destroy his own country, throw him outside the borders of Thebes and leave him there unburied and to all the citizens of Thebes, to all the Cadmeans, I make this proclamation: Whoever is caught placing a wreath upon this man's corpse, or trying to give it a burial, that person's reward will be death. Let him lie there, unmourned, unburied, food for the carrion birds.

1640

As for you, Antigone. Stop crying over these corpses and take yourself indoors! You must live like a proper, unmarried girl, waiting for your day of marriage to my son, Haemon.

Antigone:

Father! What dreadful miseries must we endure!

Father I pity you more than I pity these dead because it is not that some of your pains are more bearable to you than others but that all of your pains are equally unbearable!

And as for you, new king, why insult my father by exiling him from his country and why make laws against this unfortunate dead man?

1652

Creon:

That was an order made by Eteocles himself, not me.

Antigone:

A foolish order and you are being foolish for pursuing it.

Creon:

What? Should we disobey orders?

Antigone:

No, we should not, if they are evil and made out of hatred.

Creon:

What? Is it evil to throw this man's corpse to the dogs?

Antigone:

Yes, because you're the punishment is not lawful.

Creon:

It is certainly lawful! He was an enemy to his country, though he was not born one.

Antigone:

Fate meted out his punishment.

Creon:

Let his burial be also a part of his fated punishment!

1660

Antigone:

What fault of his was it that he came seeking his share of the land?

Creon:

Let me speak to you in plain terms: This man will not be buried!

Antigone:

I will bury him myself, even though the city forbids it!

Creon:

Then bury yourself next to him!

Antigone:

What greater honour is there for two siblings to be buried together?

Creon: *To his men*

Take her! Take her into the house!

Antigone:

Never! I shall never let go of this body!

Creon:

This matter was decided by god, young woman, not by you!

Antigone:

God has also decided that the dead must not be insulted!

Creon:

No soft soil shall be scattered over this corpse!

1670

Antigone:

Yes, it will, Creon. Soil will be scattered over this corpse for the sake of his mother, here!

Creon:

Antigone, you're wasting your time. You will not get your way!

Antigone:

Let me at least wash the body, Creon!

Creon:

No, this is one thing that Thebans are also forbidden to do!

Antigone:

Look at his dreadful wounds! Let me wrap them in bandages!

Creon:

No, you will pay no honours to this corpse!

Antigone: *Falling to her knees by the side of Polyneices*

Oh, my darling brother!

Let me kiss your lips! *She does so*

Creon:

All this grieving! You are putting your marriage in jeopardy!

Antigone:

Marriage? Do you think I will marry your son while I'm alive?

Creon:

Of course you will. How do you think you will escape his bed?

1680

Antigone:

On that night I shall act like a true Danaid and kill my husband!

Creon: *To Creon*

Do you see, Creon? Do you witness the impudence, Creon? How your daughter insults me?

Antigone:

This sword, this steel is my witness!

Creon:

Why on earth do you not want to marry to my son?

Antigone:

I will join my poor father, here, in his exile.

Creon:

Ah! You might think that to be an act of bravery but it is one of stupidity.

Antigone:

I shall join my father in exile and I shall join him also in death!

Creon:

Go then! I will not let you stay here and kill my son!

Leave this land now!

Exit Creon and his men.

Oedipus:

My daughter, I praise your willingness to...

Antigone:

But father, how could I get married and let you leave the city all alone?

1690

Oedipus:

Daughter, you should stay here and enjoy your happiness. I'll look after my own problems.

Antigone:

But father, who is there to help you with your blindness?

Oedipus:

Fate will point out the place where I shall lie down and die.

Antigone:

Oh, where is that Oedipus who had the wisdom to solve riddles?

Oedipus:

Gone, darling!

I was blessed by one day and destroyed by another!

Antigone:

And I must share in your misfortunes, father!

Oedipus:

It would be shameful for a daughter to be wandering about with her blind father.

Antigone:

No, not shameful, father but an honour, father, if she is a wise woman.

Oedipus:

Let me now touch your mother's corpse.

Antigone: *Takes him to Jocasta's corpse and places his hand on it.*

There, father. Touch the dear old woman with your hand.

1700

Oedipus: *Does so.*

Oh!

Oh, my poor mother!

Oh, my poor wife!

Antigone:

There, the most heartbroken woman of them all!

There, all around her lies the cause of all her suffering!

Oedipus:

And the bodies of Eteocles and Polyneices? Where are they?

Antigone: *Guides him to them*

They are here, father. Here. They lie next to each other.

Oedipus:

Put my blind hand upon their unfortunate faces.

Antigone: *Does so*

Here, father. Touch the faces of your dead sons with your hand.

Oedipus:

Poor sons of mine! Such a miserable fall!

Poor darling sons of a miserable father!

Antigone:

Oh, Polyneices! The name dearest to my heart!

Oedipus:

And so, my daughter, now Apollo's prophesy has been fulfilled.

Antigone:

Which prophesy is this, father?

Are there even more misfortunes to hear, on top of all the others?

1710

Oedipus:

Yes, daughter.

I will die in Athens as a fugitive.

Antigone:

But where, father? What Attic tower will welcome you?

Oedipus:

Colonus, the sacred ground of Poseidon, the god of horses.

But come then my daughter, if you truly want to share in my exile, help me, help your blind father.

Antigone:

Ah, poor me! An exile!

Come then, father, stretch out your dear hand to me and let me guide you, like a wind guides a ship.

Oedipus stretches out his hand and Antigone places it on her shoulder.

Oedipus:

There! Guide me, my poor, unfortunate daughter. Let us go.

1720

Antigone:

Unfortunate, indeed, father!

Unfortunate, indeed! I have been more unfortunate than the most unfortunate of all the Theban women.

Oedipus:

Where should I place my aged foot, my dear girl?

Where should I place my walking stick?

Antigone:

This way, father!

Walk this way, father!

Walk with me, father!

You are as frail as a dream, father!

Oedipus:

Ah! I am an old man!

Ah! I am a miserable exile!

Ah! I have suffered pain after pain!

1730

Antigone:

You have suffered, poor man!

You have suffered because Justice is blind to the wicked and deaf to the fools!

Oedipus:

Ah! I am the man whose fame scaled the upper heavens!

Ah! I am the man whose name was passed into the songs of Victory!

Ah! I am the man who solved the unsolvable riddle of the Sphinx!

Antigone:

You are bringing up the old story of the Sphinx, father!

Forget the old glories, father!

Look at what misery is ahead of you, father!

You are exiled from your country!

You will die at some unknown place, father!

1740

And I, I leave behind, to my young girlfriends, my tears of longing!

I leave my land for some other distant place to live the life not fit for a young girl.

Oedipus:

Ah! What noble heart you have, my daughter!

Antigone:

Nobility, which will give me glory, thanks to my father's suffering!

Ah, father! The insults heaped upon you and upon my poor brother whose dead body will be thrown outside the walls of his city, unburied! But, even if I have to die for it, father, I will come and bury it in secret.

1750

Oedipus:

Go and see your girlfriends, darling!

Antigone:

They have heard enough of my wails and my troubles.

Oedipus:

Then go to the hallowed hills of Bacchus, to his women followers, the Maenads.

Antigone:

I did that once.

I wrapped a Cadmean fawnskin around me and led their dance to those sacred hills. This holy company of Semele. It was not a service for which I received any thanks.

1760

Oedipus: *Turns to the audience*

Men and women of my glorious city, look at me!

It is I, Oedipus, the man who solved the unsolvable riddle!

I am the man who once was among the greatest!

I am the man who cut short the horror of the murderous Sphinx!

Look now, upon Oedipus!

Look now upon an exile!

Look now upon a shamed man!

Look now upon a man in misery!

But why all this lament?

Why all these tears?

They serve no purpose!

I am a mortal and so I should endure whatever fate the gods deliver me!

Chorus:

Oh, Victory!

Chorus:

Oh, Victory, take charge of my life and never stop weaving your garlands for me!

Exit all

**The End of Euripides'
Phoenician Women**