

AESCHYLUS'

“SEVEN AGAINST THEBES”

467BC

(1st prize at the City Dionysia)

Translated
by
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© 2010

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Dramatis Personae

Eteocles

(Son of the late king Oedipus of Thebes)

A Spy

Antigone

(Sister to Eteocles)

Ismene

(Sister to Eteocles and Antigone)

Messenger

Chorus

(Of Theban Women)

Soldiers and armed guards

Various citizens

Thebes just before dawn.

In the distance may be discerned the fortified walls of the city.

Around the stage are statues of various gods, an altar.

A group of men (citizens of Thebes) are talking vigorously about war. They are waiting for Eteocles.

As Eteocles enters with his armed guard (SL) they respectfully stop talking and move to give him and space.

Eteocles is regally dressed.

Eteocles:

Citizens of Thebes, sons of Cadmus!

The words and deeds of the man who stands at the prow of the ship of State and steers its fortune must be timely. His eyes should defy sleep and stay wide open. Because, if things go well with the city, then we turn to the gods and think them to be the cause of that good fortune but if, on the other hand, the city is hit by some misfortune –may the gods forbid that!- then it will be I, Eteocles, to whom the city will turn and it would be my name alone, that will be whispered, along with curses and groans and will travel from the mouth of one citizen to that of the next.

May Zeus, the averter of evil, avert our city from this!

10

But now it is up to you, sons of Cadmus. All of you! Those of you who are still young and those of you whose youth has come and gone! All of you, call forth all your courage and might, watch every corner of the city and apply yourselves as well as you can upon what needs doing.

Protect our land, our gods, their altars and see that they are not dishonoured.

Protect your children.

Protect this earth, which is both, your mother and your nurse! Yes, your nurse because it was she who took the whole burden of nourishing you while you were still a baby, crawling all about her. It was her generous soil that raised you to become honest men; men to build a home, to carry a shield, men strong enough to show yourselves worthy of her in her hour of need.

22

So far, the gods have been with us and, thanks to them, throughout the whole siege, the war moved in our favour.

But now our seer says the worst is about to come. He says that the Achaians are planning to attack and capture of our city tonight. Our prophet examined the flight of birds, not by sacrificial fire but by his ears and by his soul only –unerring instruments with which he read the prophetic signs in their flight.

30

So, now you must all rush to the battlements and to the gates of our walls!

Pick up your armour and hurry!

Take control of all our parapets, all the Tower platforms, all our gates! Stand there with courage and bravery. The horde of the enemy is large but do not fear it!

God will see us through this!

I have already sent scouts and spies to check the enemy's strength. I'm sure they'll have something valuable to report to us soon and then the enemy will not take us by surprise.

Exit the original group of men rushing off to the battle (SL)

A few seconds later enter a Spy (SL)

39

Spy:

My Lord, noble King of the Cadmeans!

I bring you news from the enemy's army. I was there and saw with my own eyes what went on in their camp.

I saw seven of their captains. Fierce, war-loving men all of them! They slaughtered a bull over a black iron shield and dipping their hands into its blood swore an oath to Ares, the god of war, to Enyo, the very face of War and to the god Fear, lover of blood. The oath they uttered said that they will either destroy the city of the Cadmeans utterly and devastate the country or else they will soak our soil with their own blood.

Then, they took tokens of themselves over to Adrastus' chariot, mementos for their homes and parents and there shed some tears, though they never let out a groan of grief!

52

No, their iron hearts were beating with the fire of boldness, just like lions in the face of battle and they'll waste no time to deliver its proof. I left them as they were casting lots, letting Fate decide who will lead his troops to which of our gates.

So, hurry, my Lord!

Quickly, pick out our bravest men and send them to defend our gates. The whole Argive army, fully armed, is right now raising the dust of our land as they are advancing towards us at full speed. The white froth that drips from their horses' panting mouths has changed the colour of our meadow.

61

Come now, my Lord, act like the skilled captain of a ship and strengthen our towers before the tempest of war bursts upon them because the waves of a huge army roar above our land right now. You must seize what you can with what little time is left.

I'll stand watch day and night and send you reports about what goes on beyond our walls, reports that will keep you safe.

Exit Spy (SL)

69

Eteocles:

Zeus!

Earth!

Gods of our walls!

Curse of Oedipus!

Deliverer of curses!

Bearer of my father's interminable curse!

Don't let this city fall to the enemy!

Don't let the enemy destroy it, foundations and all!

This is a city whose lips utter Greek words!

Let not her homes, her hearths ever be yoked by slavery's bonds.

This is the land of Cadmus. Let her be free!

Come gods! Come, show us your strength! For your sake and ours, show your strength! A city that prospers honours her gods.

Exit Eteocles with his guard. (SL)

The light changes to reveal the passage of time. It is now day.

Sounds of battle raging within.

Enter the chorus of Theban women (SR)
They rush about the stage in confusion and panic.

Chorus:

Ah!

Ah!

The terror is unbearable!

Chorus:

Ah!

Ah!

The evil is insufferable!

80

Chorus:

The enemy is unleashed!

They have left their barracks!

Chorus: *Pointing into the distance within*

Look! Look there!

Ah!

Waves of them are surging this way!

Chorus:

The horses, look!

The dust, look!

Look how it's clogging the air!

A silent but true messenger!

The sounds of a riotous army approaching.

Chorus:

Ah!

Did you hear that?

The hoofs of horses, pummelling our land!

Chorus:

It's getting closer and closer!

Chorus:

They are flying!

Chorus:

The roar of a wild torrential river!

It crashes against the mountains!

They rush about clinging to the statues of the gods, kneeling, praying

Chorus:

Ah!

Ah!

Gods and goddesses!

Protect us!

Chorus:

Hold back this rushing horror!

Stand by our walls!

Cry out your war shouts!

90

Chorus:

The enemy!

White shields and frightful armour!

The enemy charges with all speed at the walls of our city!

Chorus:

Which of the gods and goddesses can protect us now?

Who can save us?

Chorus:

Ah!

Ah!

Look, gods!

Gods of our fathers, look!

Chorus:
I kneel before your holy statues!
How must my prayers go?
Chorus:
Blessed gods sitting on blessed thrones!
This is the hour to cling to their statues.
Chorus:
Yes, why wait?
Chorus:
And why wail so deeply?
A roar from the battlefield
100
Chorus:
Do you hear that?
Chorus:
Listen!
Chorus:
Listen!
A throng of shields clash!
Chorus:
Waste no time!
Bring the sacred cloths and the garlands!
Adorn the statues now!
Another roar from the battlefield
Chorus:
And that! Did you hear that?
Chorus:
I did!
A throng of spears clash!
Chorus:
God of war, Ares, will you betray your own city?
What now, god?
What now, god of the golden helmet?
Chorus:
Look here, god!
Look down here!
To your own city, the city you once loved!
Protect it!
Chorus:
Come all you gods who guard our city!
Hurry to our side!

110
Chorus:
See here this group of women praying to you!
Save us all from slavery!
Chorus:
Look there!
A wave of plumed helmets soars around the walls of Thebes!
Ares' furious breath churns it about.
Chorus: *Rushing to the statue of Zeus*
Zeus!
You, who guides all things to their end!
Save us all! Let us not be captured by our enemy!

120
Chorus:
The Argives have surrounded Cadmus' city!
The clashing of the armour is terrifying!
Chorus:
The horses!
Through the iron rods in their mouths, they shout out "murder!" "murder!"

Chorus:

There!

The seven giants in the ranks of the enemy!

Their armour brilliant above all others!

Chorus:

They have taken up their stand at our seven gates, each according to the lot he drew.

130

Chorus: *Rushing to the statue of Athena*

Daughter of Zeus!

Athena, Palas, powerful lover of the battle!

Be our city's saviour!

Chorus: *Rushing to the statue of Poseidon*

Poseidon!

Lord of the sea! Lover of horses!

Raise now your fish killing trident for us and release us from this terror!

Free us from this terror, Lord Poseidon!

Chorus: *Rushing to the statue of Ares*

Ares!

O, Ares, Ares!

This is your city! The city that took its name from Cadmus.

She is your city, Ares. Save her!

140

Chorus: *Rushing to the statue of Aphrodite*

Aphrodite! Cyprian goddess, mother of our race!

Fight off our enemy!

We are of the same blood yet we come to you!

We pray to your holy majesty with offerings and tears.

Chorus: *Rushing to the statue of Apollo*

Apollo!

Lord of the wolves!

Come down upon our enemy like a wolf and rush them away!

Make them feel our pain.

Chorus: *Rushing to the statue of Artemis*

Artemis!

Leto's virgin daughter!

Arm yourself with your unerring bow!

The loud sound of chariots approaching

Chorus:

Ah!

Listen!

Ah!

Chorus:

Ah!

Do you hear that?

150

Chorus:

The chariots!

The thunder of chariots circling about our city!

Chorus: *Rushing to the statue of Hera*

Hera! Our Lady!

The axles groan with the great load!

Chorus:

Ah!

Beloved Artemis!

Look!

The skies shiver with the hurled spears!

Frenzy in the skies!

Chorus:

Ah!

What now for our city?

Chorus:
What now?
Chorus:
What god will bring what end to this?
Chorus:
Ah!
Dear Apollo!
Chorus:
Ah!
The stones have reached to peaks of our battlements!

160
Chorus:
Do you hear that?
Shields clashing against our gates!
Chorus:
Athena, lover of the battle!
Your father, Zeus, has given you the judgement of every war.
You can decree its end.
Bring this one to our favour!
Chorus:
Goddess, save your city!
Our city of seven gates!
Chorus:
Athena!
Blessed Queen, Onca!
Your statue stands before the seven gates of our city!
Protect it, dear goddess!
Chorus:
Almighty gods!
Great gods and goddesses of this city!
Protectors of this land's towers!
Do not betray us to an army whose speech is alien to us.

170
Chorus:
Hear us!
Hear us, dear gods!
Hear justly these virgins!
We pray with our arms stretched out to you!
Chorus:
Dear gods!
Shield our walls with your presence!
Show that you are friends of this city, Thebes!
Think now of all the offerings this city has ever made to you!
Remember them and save it!
Chorus:
Remember its sacrifices!
Remember its holy rites!
Enter Eteocles with his guard (SL)

181
Eteocles: *Outraged at the chorus*
You!
Yes, I ask all of you!
Insufferable creatures, the lot of you!
Is all this praying, all this crying and wild shrieking, all this moaning at the statues of our guardian gods going to save our besieged city? Is it going to give courage to its soldiers?
No, this is the sort of thing that makes sensible folk despise you!
Women!
Neither in the depths of misery nor in the laps of the sweetest joy, do I want to be forced to live with a woman!
Women! When things go well for them, their arrogance is unrivalled and when they are touched by

fear, then they're an unbearable pain to both, their home as well as their city!

191

You, now! All this rushing back and forth, all this shrieking, has spread panic in the hearts of our own folk. And while we, inside the city, are destroying ourselves, the enemy, outside it, is getting great encouragement by your antics.

That's what it comes from having women inside your house.

Man, woman and whatever else in between! If they disobey my orders, there will be a death sentence waiting for them! They will not escape death by stoning, in the hands of the people!

200

Man should mind matters outside the house and women should worry about whatever goes on inside it.

Let no woman bother with matters outside her home. Let her sit inside and not cause any trouble.

Do you or do you not hear me, women?

Or am I talking to the deaf?

Chorus:

Dear son of Oedipus!

We were terrified!

Chorus:

The thunder of the chariots!

The loud roar of the axles!

Chorus:

The forged iron clanging in the mouths, around the jaws, of the horses!

Eteocles:

What of it?

Would a sailor save his ship in a hurricane by simply rushing back and forth from stern to prow?

211

Chorus:

No, he would not but when I first heard the murderous hail of war crashing against our gates, I rushed here, to the old statues of the gods, whom I trust.

Chorus:

It was that dreadful sound that made me panic!

Chorus:

I came here to pray to the blessed gods, to ask them to watch over our city and keep it safe.

Eteocles:

Pray that our towers stand strong against the enemy's spear.

That's what the gods would prefer. Don't they say that a city lost to the people is a city lost to the gods?

219

Chorus:

I hope that these gods will never abandon me while I'm alive!

Chorus:

Nor ever abandon our city to the destructive fire of the enemy!

Eteocles:

It's the wise prayer that brings about success.

Success: Her mother is Obedience, the saviour's wife.

Isn't that what the proverb says?

Chorus:

That might be true but the gods!

Chorus:

The gods are almighty!

And their might can raise the helpless from their despair and lift the heavy and hard clouds from their eyes.

230

Eteocles:

Sacrificing to the gods and consulting them before a battle is a man's job.

Yours is to stay inside the house and be silent.

Chorus:

It is to these very gods that we owe our freedom!

It is because of them that our city is not a conquered city!

It is because of them that our towers ward off the onslaught of the enemy.

Why would anyone get angry at us for praising them?

Eteocles:

I'm not angry at you for praising our gods but for turning our people into frightened cowards. By all means, pray but do so calmly and not with so much fear and panic.

239

Chorus:

We rushed here, to the holy sanctuary of our city, trembling with terror because a little while ago we heard this loud noise!

Chorus:

It was such a frightening confusion of sounds!

Eteocles:

So, if you now hear the sounds of wounded men or men dying don't start screeching and wailing.

That's the very stuff, the blood and groans of dying men, that Ares, the god of war feeds on!

The Sound of horses snorting

Chorus:

Listen!

Do you hear that?

Chorus:

It is the horses snorting!

Eteocles:

Your hearing is far too sharp! Don't listen so closely!

Chorus:

The city groans from within its earthly depths.

Chorus:

It's surrounded!

Eteocles:

That's why I am here!

I'm the one to worry about that!

The sound of crashing gates

Chorus:

Ah!

Our gates!

Chorus:

The battering is getting louder!

250

Eteocles:

Will you shut up? Say nothing about this to anyone!

Chorus:

Oh, gods of our city!

Oh, heavens!

Do not forsake the walls of our city!

Eteocles:

Pox upon you woman!

Silence! Put up with it!

Chorus:

Oh, gods of our city!

Oh, heavens!

Save me from slavery!

Eteocles:

It is you! You are the one whose throwing me and the whole city into slavery!

Chorus:

Zeus!

Chorus:

Zeus, send your thunderbolt into the ranks of the enemy!

Eteocles:

Oh, Zeus!

What a breed you have made for us in women!

Chorus: *Clinging to a statue*

A breed, as miserable as the men of a conquered city.

Eteocles:

Your mouth utters ill words while your hands touch upon a holy statue!

Chorus:

The courage has gone from my heart and the fear has taken my tongue.

260

Eteocles:

Let me ask a small favour from you.

Chorus:

Ask it quickly and I'll tell you if I can grant it.

Eteocles:

Will you be silent, woman?

Miserable wretch, will you stop terrifying the men who are defending you?

Chorus:

All right. I shall be silent!

I shall suffer our Fate like the rest.

Eteocles:

Now these last words of yours are far better than all those that preceded them!

Even better, let go of those statues, move away from them and make this simple prayer: "May the gods be our allies in this war!"

Now, let me first make a vow and then, raise the loud cheer of victory. The cheer we Greeks raise when we make our sacrifices. Make it loud and hearty, to raise our men's spirits and strip away from their hearts the fear of battle.

271

Now here, is my vow:

I swear this oath to the gods who guard our city's fields and her market place and to the waters of Dirce, our spring and those of Ismenus, our river.

I vow that if we win this day and Thebes and her people are saved from the hands of her enemies, the hearths of these gods shall be painted with the blood of sacrificed sheep and bulls and all the holy shrines shall be adorned with the battle vestments of the enemy, still stained with their own blood, blood drawn by our spears.

280

This is the sort of vows you, too, should be making and you should stop all your mournful wails and your useless, wild shrieks. Such behaviour won't release you from what Fate has in store for you. Now, I'm going to the seven gates of our city to place seven brave and able fighters, me included, as guards there, to face the enemy.

I don't want any rumours, spread by our battle Messengers to start off some unnecessary fire of urgency in the city.

Exit Eteocles (SL)

Chorus:

I know, I know what he means but the dread won't let my heart rest.

290

Chorus:

The dread of a dreadful enemy outside our walls kindles again and again the fire of fear, deep inside my soul.

Chorus:

Like the frightened dove dreads the snake that's reaching for her young in their nest.

Chorus:

The enemy rushes against our walls.

One wave after another!

What will happen to us?

Chorus:

And then the jagged stones!

One wave after another!

They hurl them at our besieged people!

300

Chorus:

Gods!

Children of Zeus!

Mighty gods in the Heavens!

Save our city with your unrivalled power!

Chorus:

Save our soldiers, the sons of Cadmus!

Chorus:
Where else will you go, gods, if you hand this land over to the enemy?
What other land is there, better than this?

Chorus:
With a soil more fertile and deep?

Chorus:
With the waters of Dirce?
More vital than all the others?

310

Chorus:
Waters, poured out by Poseidon himself, the god who surrounds the earth and by the children of
Tethys.

Chorus:
And so, gods!
Gods, defenders of Thebes!
Hurl madness upon our enemy!
Hurl disaster upon the men outside our walls!

Chorus:
Make them drop their shields!
Make them run away!
Let them taste their own slaughter!

Chorus:
Gain glory in the eyes of our citizens!
Gods, save our Thebes and strengthen your thrones inside her!
Answer our prayers and our loud groans!

321

Chorus:
What a pity it would be, if such an ancient city as this is sent to Hades!
Conquered by an Achaean spear!
Her people enslaved!
Her buildings turned to dust and ash.

Chorus:
Is this the will of the gods?
That we, the daughters of Thebes, young and old -
Be dragged by our hair like horses -
Our clothes torn from our bodies!

330

Chorus:
And the city is emptied!
And the loud groans and the pitiful wails of captives in chains rise.
They are taken to their Fate!

Chorus:
I can tell!
I can fear!
It's a dire Fate for the captives!

Chorus:
Tears fall as I think of innocent girls, their innocence torn from them, untimely, before their marriage
rites and dragged onto a bitter journey away from their homes.

Chorus:
Those girls...

Chorus:
Those girls... their Fate is more miserably than that of the dead!

Chorus:
Ah!
Ah!

Chorus:
In a conquered city the miseries abound!
Misery to us all!

340

Chorus:

Ah!

Ah!

Man slaughters man!

Man drags man away!

Chorus:

Man sets fire to the city and the city is blackened with smoke!

Ares, the god of war makes all men wild with frenzy!

Slaughter!

Sacrilege!

Chorus:

Mayhem and noise overtake the streets!

Ruin and upheaval overwhelm it!

Man falls by the spear of man.

350

Chorus:

The babies scream at their young mother's blood-stained breast.

The families are torn apart by roving enemy gangs.

Looting hand meets looting hand, heavy with loot.

The empty hand calls the empty hand to join him in the looting,

Neither hand satisfied to be the emptier nor the equal of the two.

Ah!

How will this battle end?

Chorus:

All the food is wildly strewn about the city streets falling where it may.

And the housewives grieve at such a bitter sight.

There!

There the rich fruits of the earth!

There they flow in waves of waste!

Chorus:

Young women, new to this Fate, their hearts clogged with misery.

Slaves now!

They await their new bed, a captive's bed!

Not the bed of a lover but that of a hateful enemy!

Death's dark night is their only hope to escape the new bed's anguish.

Chorus: *Indicating SL within.*

Ah!

Friends, look!

Our Spy, coming from the battlefield!

370

Chorus:

He's hurrying to us, with some news, no doubt, from the field, about the enemy.

He is running as fast as the wheels of a chariot.

Chorus: *Indicating SR within*

And there, look! Here comes our king, as well. Eteocles, the son of Oedipus.

Just in time to hear the news. He's also rushing here.

Enter Spy and Eteocles almost at the same time.

With Eteocles come the other six men who guarded the gates.

Spy: *To Eteocles*

My lord, I can tell you all about our enemy.

I can tell you which gate was drawn by which of their best fighters.

Eteocles nods his permission

There's Tydeus at the Proetid gate. He's already there, roaring like thunder but the prophet, Oecles' son, holds him back from crossing the Ismenus, because the offerings he had sacrificed did not augur well.

380

Tydeus, though, fuming with anger and with lust for battle-blood hissed, like a snake in the mid-day sun, he hurls abuses at the prophet, calling him a coward who slides away from death and battle. His anger made three of the tall feathers on his helmet shake violently and the bronze bells beneath his shield give out a terrifying clang!

On that proud shield of his, he has an expertly engraved emblem depicting a sky, sparkling with stars

and in its centre, in all her full glory, shines the eye of the night, the most revered of all the stars, the Moon herself.

391

And maddened with the lust for battle's blood, Tydeus wields his frightening shield about and yells as he roams round about the river's edge, like some wild horse, frothing furiously at the iron bit waiting to hear the trumpet's call.

My Lord, who will stand against that man?

Who can be relied upon to protect Proteus' Gate, once those barriers fall?

Eteocles:

I'm not the sort of man who gets terrified by the adornments of an armour. Adornments, feathers and bells, carry no spears themselves and make no wounds.

400

And as for this glorious Night you talk about, the one that shines on the man's shield, amongst all the stars of heaven, well, perhaps, they're an idiot's prophesy that will come true for him. Because if this Night falls upon this man's eyes when he's dead – this man who carries this arrogant adornment on his armour- then, perhaps he'll realize that he had prophesied his own death rites. It'll be a death justly deserved.

410

Indicates Melanthispus, one of the men accompanying him.

Astacus' noble son, here, Melanthispus will serve as this man's opponent. I'll post him at that gate. He is from a great family and he serves the throne of Honour. Hates arrogance. Reluctant to commit deeds of shame and he's certainly not a coward. Melanthispus is a descendant of heroes. Dragon's blood.

Sprung from the men that the god Ares himself has given permission to live.

As for the battle itself. That's up to Ares and the way his dice fall. But Justice herself sends this man to that gate. Justice, the protector of familial duty. She sends him to that gate to ward off the enemy spear, away from his motherland, the land that gave birth to him.

Melanthispus bows and exits SL

Chorus:

Let the gods give victory to our champion!

He heads off to face the enemy and to fight justly for his motherland.

420

Chorus:

But I shudder at the thought!

Will my eyes soon see the blood-stained corpses of men fallen for their own folk?

Spy:

Let the gods give him victory, yes.

Kapaneus drew the Electran Gate. He's there now. A giant of a man, even greater than the last. Worse than Tydeus. Arrogance beyond anyone's imagination. Shouts all sorts of vile threats at our towers, threats which I hope our Fate would never allow.

And he says that, whether the gods wants to or not, he'll still destroy our city and that even if Zeus himself were to crash a blazing thunder bolt at the soil before his feet, even that wouldn't stop him.

430

What's the difference, he asks mockingly, between Zeus' fire and the fire of the mid-day sun?

On his shield he has a man whose only armour is a blazing torch which he wields with both hands. The writing on this shield is with golden letters and they say, "I will set this town on fire."

Against a man like that, Eteocles – who will you send against this man? Where do we have a man who has the strength of heart to stand up to this man's boasts?

Eteocles:

Ha! Tydeus' arrogance works to our advantage and this man, Kapaneus, adds to that advantage. One advantage after another!

Men whose head and heart are filled with vaulting vanity, are brought to Justice by their own tongue and Kapaneus' tongue hurls wild insults to the gods in heaven, forgetting that he's a mortal and that they are gods. He won't stop with words but will take up action. His flood of untamed words will reach the ear of Zeus and then he, Kapaneus himself, will feel the fire of that torch; and Zeus' thunder bolt is nothing like the fire of the mid-day sun!

Indicating Polyphontes

Against this boasting loud mouth I've already declared Polyphontes. A warrior with a fiery heart – a brave and trusted guard. The goddess Artemis, our protectress and other gods love him.

Polyphontes bows and exits, SL

Go on! Who's next and which gate will he attack?

451

Chorus:

To Hades with the man who hurls such insults at our city!

Chorus:

Let Zeus' bolt destroy Kapaneus before he bursts into my home and with his battle spear defiles the haven of my virtue.

Spy:

Now let me speak about the next enemy warrior and of the gate he has drawn.

The third one to be picked by the lot was Eteoclus.

Out of the shiny bronze helmet jumped the token, and fell on his side. He is fated to stand against the Neistan Gate.

460

He wheels his steeds round and round that gate, their mouths straining against their muzzles, frothing with eagerness for the attack and the irons under their chins whistle with frenzy and in tune with their violent breath.

His shield also has a proud emblem carved upon it.

A man, in full armour rushing up the rungs of a ladder leaning against a tower which he's bent on destroying. He is shouting and the words are written there, on the shield: "Even Ares cannot throw me from the tower!" the writing says.

You need to send someone solid against that man, too, Eteocles. Someone who can save our city from the yoke of slavery.

472

Eteocles:

Megareus!

Megareus steps forward.

This is the very man to do that and I'm sending him immediately to the Neistan Gate.

A fortunate thing for us that he's on our side.

Megareus will go there and he will do his very own boasting with his very own arms!

Creon's son, of the race of the sown men. This is not a man to be frightened by the snorting of wild horses. He won't retreat one step from the Gate. More like it, he'll repay the debt he owes to the city that nurtured him either with his own life or with the life of two enemy soldiers and capture the city drawn upon his opponent's shield and with these spoils adorn his own father's house.

Megareus bows and exits SL

Now tell us about the next loud mouth, leave none of them out!

481

Chorus: *At Megareus' back as he exits*

You will be fighting for me and for my home!

Chorus:

Fortune be with you and against your enemy!

Chorus:

Their loud boastings against our city shoot out of a frenzied mind!

Let Zeus the Avenger look upon them in anger.

Spy:

The fourth man is stationed at the Gate of Onca Athena.

Hippomedon. A frightening man. A giant. Tall with a mighty body and voice. I saw him as he spun his great shield about and, I'll admit it right here and now, I trembled with fear at the sight of it.

490

The artist who did the work upon his shield was certainly not one of the common, unskilled craftsmen because the emblem he had carved upon it is magnificent.

It's a picture of a Typhon, spewing out of his fire-breathing mouth billows of smoke, fire's dark sister and the whole emblem is held upon the hollow-bellied shield with intertwined snakes that go all around its rim.

The warrior himself, was shouting out loud war cries, as if Ares himself had entered his heart. He's in a frenzy with the lust for battle. Like one of Bacchus' maenads, he is. Wild, flashing eyes that strike panic everywhere.

500

We've got to guard ourselves against the charge of such a man. The god Terror himself is roaming about that gate.

Eteocles:

But first it will be the goddess Onca Athena who'll send him off like a monstrous snake charging at her

nestlings. Her shrine is just outside that gate and she's appalled by that sort of insolence.

Hyperbius!

Hyperbius steps forward

I've chosen this man against Hippomedon. He is Oenops' trusty son.

He knows how to face his destiny when the need arises. There's no man who can match him in strength, in bravery in spirit or in armour.

510

It's right that the god of contests, Hermes, has chosen this pair. It will be enemy against enemy with these two and their shields will be two enemy gods. Hippomedon has fire-breathing Typhon on his shield while our Hyperbius has Father Zeus on his. *Indicating Hyperbius' shield* There he is, sitting calmly and ready with a blazing bolt in his hand. And I have never heard of Zeus having been defeated by anyone.

So these are the gods they take with them to battle. We are on the side of the victors and the enemy on the side of the vanquished, since Zeus is mightier than Typhon; and that will be the outcome with the men also. Hyperbius will be saved by Zeus since it is Zeus that Hyperbius carries on his shield.

Exit Hyperbius

521

Chorus:

There's no question in my mind: In a fight between Zeus and the man who bears the emblem of Typhon on his shield, that earth-born power, Typhon, whose image is hated by all mortals and all the eternal gods, it will be Typhoon whose head will roll before our gate!

Spy:

Yes, let it happen as you say!

Now let me tell you about the fifth man.

His lot was that he should stand at the Northern Gate, directly opposite the tomb of Amphion, Zeus' son. There he stands, waving his spear about and swearing an oath that he will destroy our city, the city of Cadmus, whether Zeus wills it or not!

530

He says he trusts that spear more than he trusts the gods and even more than he trusts his own eyes. Or so he boasts. He is the pretty little offspring of a mountain woman, barely a man, he is yet but he's a wild warrior, nevertheless. The down on his young cheeks is just beginning to spread. New, thick curls that come with the first youth. His name is Parthenopaeus but there's nothing about him that's girlish. He has a savage heart, a gruesome face and an insolent tongue.

540

He's out there, in front of our gate, wielding back and forth his even more insolent bronze shield which is round and covers his entire body.

The emblem embossed and burnished upon that shield is an affront to Thebes. It's an image, of the man eater, Sphinx, cleverly pinned on a pivot that can turn all about. Then, under her, the Sphinx carries a man and that man is one of ours, a Cadmean, obviously drawn there like that so as to make this warrior the target of all our arrows.

I daresay, he hasn't come all the way from Arcadia, this Parthenopaeus boy, just to play games with us. No, this warrior will try and get his money's worth for the journey to that battlefield.

That's the sort of man he is. A foreigner who's been living well in Argos as a guest of some nobles or other. Now he wants to pay his debt for that hospitality and so he hurls insults and threats at our walls. May the gods stop those threats from being realised.

550

Eteocles:

The gods!

May the gods show their hand with violence at all the insolent and arrogant emblems these warriors parade about the place!

Let the gods deliver them the ruin they so wish upon us!

Actor!

Actor approaches

But I have a man for this Arcadian you talk about. He's not one to boast with his tongue but to do a deed with his hands.

Actor here. Brother to the man that I had just named.

He won't allow an untamed tongue send a flood of disasters through our Towers. Nor will he let an enemy, depicting a wild and abhorrent monster on his shield, pass through our gates.

560

That beast he has embossed upon his shield will reproach him bitterly for bringing her beneath our

walls where she will get rammed and battered by our spears and arrows!
May the gods put deeds to my words!

Exit Actor.

Chorus:

The gods!

The words of that man stab at my heart!

Chorus:

They make my hair stand stiff with fear.

The loud insolence and the sacrilegious threats and boasts of these men call for punishment from the gods.

Chorus:

Let the gods destroy them, here, on our soil!

Spy:

Amphiaraus is their sixth man. A seer. A very wise and very brave man.

He stands in front of our Homoloid Gate.

570

He stands there and bellows abuses at the great Tydeus. He calls him “murderer” and says that he has turned Argos upside-down and was the greatest teacher of evil, that he was Death’s very Minister and the summoner of the Avenging Spirits. He calls him Adrastus’ counsellor in all this evilness.

Then he turns to your brave brother, Polyneices and, stressing the last syllable more than the first, the part that mentions strife, utters this sort of words:

580

“Is this what will please the gods and the future generations to hear? Will they be pleased to hear that you have brought a foreign army to invade and destroy your father’s kingdom? To raze it to the ground and turn its gods to dust? Is this the right thing to do, Poly-NEICES? Where is the justice in stopping the spring from which your very life has sprung? How can your very own soil raise up to stand beside you in your efforts when your covetous sword has beaten it into submission?

And me? This enemy soil will be all the richer for having buried me beneath it. Me, a prophet!

Well then, let us go and fight and may the gods see that I die with glory!”

590

Those were the seer’s words. He made his speech with his bronze shield resting by his side. He had no emblem on its centre. This is not a man who wants to look like he’s the bravest in the field, my Lord.

No, this is a man who wants to prove he is one.

His fertile mind gives forth a great harvest of wisdom for him. Deep furrows full of prudent advice.

I think, against this warrior, my Lord, you should send someone who’s wise and brave. A man who reveres the gods is a man to be truly feared.

Eteocles:

What Fate is this that brings together these two mortals, ey? One of them, just and righteous but the other, godless! In every affair of man, there’s nothing more evil than an evil partnership. No good fruit can be gathered from that tree.

600

The only harvest that can be gathered from the furrows of sin is death.

A man like that -a god fearing man like that- if he’s caught up sailing on the same boat with these sailors, sailors who are on their way to commit some evil deed, then he, too will drown along with them, along with those god-detested shipmates of his.

Or, if this man, this just and honest man, survives this terrible sea and then becomes a neighbour of these evil men -these men who hate strangers and gods- well then, he too, will be caught, unjustly, in the same snare that the gods have weaved for them and he, too, will be lashed by the same lash and applied by the same gods.

610

And that’s how it will be with this man, this son of Oecles. A wise man, a seer, an honest man, a brave man, a god fearing man; a man who interprets the will of the gods wisely. But a man who has gone against his own good reason and joined up with men who are godless and boastful. Men who are sailing back, back into a journey that is too long to retrace and which, by the will of Zeus, will see him, along with them, dragged down to destruction, by the very same snare.

So, I don’t believe at all that this man will make an attack against our gates. Not because he is afraid or lacks bravery but because he knows well that, if Apollo’s prophesies are to be trusted, his end will come in this battle. He knows how to act according to the needs of the moment: either to shut up or else to speak and say what is proper.

He signals Lasthenes who comes forward

620

In any case, I will place against him this man here, Lasthenes. He is a brave man who hates strangers at our gates. A man who has the wisdom of an old man and the body of a young warrior. His eyes are as quick as his feet. His arm wastes no time to send a spear to whatever the enemy shield leaves uncovered.

Still, a victory, nevertheless, is a gift granted by the gods.

Exit Lasthenes, SL.

Chorus:

Gods!

Chorus:

Heavens!

Chorus:

Give this city her victory!

Chorus:

Our prayers are just. Accept them and fulfil them!

Chorus:

Turn the wrath of this war against them!

It is they who have invaded this land.

Chorus:

Zeus!

Chorus:

Zeus, strike them dead while they're still outside our walls!

Chorus:

Send them your thunder bolt!

631

Spy:

The seventh man!

The seventh man who's outside our seventh gate, is your own brother, my king!

And listen to what curses and oaths your own brother hurls at our city:

Once he destroys our towers and sets his foot on our soil, once he shouts the shout of triumph and declares himself king, he prays that he comes face-to-face against you in an armed combat; and he will kill you, even if he dies by your side; or else, if you survive, he'll seek revenge for the dishonour you did him when you've sent him into exile by doing the same thing to you, banish you from this city.

640

These are the curses Polyneices shouts out and he calls all our ancestors' gods to see that all these curses of his eventuate.

He waves about a brand new, well wrought and rounded shield with a double emblem cleverly embossed upon it:

A fully armed warrior, all in gold, led by a modest woman who, as the writing indicates, is Justice. The writing says, "I am returning this man back to his own, rightful home, to regain his country and to live in his own chambers."

These are the emblems their warriors carry.

650

Now you must determine which man you should send against him. As for me, you'll find no fault with what I have reported to you. Now, you being the captain of our ship, it is up to you to do the steering.

Exit Spy SL

Eteocles:

Curse infested house!

God hated house of Oedipus! Drenched in tears! My house!

Ah!

Now all those curses are turning into deeds!

But should I weep? Should I groan now? Or should I wait for more and greater grief? Is there grief unbearable yet to come?

As for him—as for my brother whose name fits his deeds so well— as for Polyneices, the man of much strife, we shall soon see the worth of his emblem.

660

We shall soon see if the golden letters will bring him back. Those golden letters upon his shield that scream his heart's hatred.

If Zeus' virgin daughter, Justice, stands by him, in his thoughts and deeds, then all this might happen but Justice has never stood by him. Not since the days he emerged from the darkness of his mother's

womb, nor during the years when he was growing up, nor when he did grow up, nor when the hair was sprouting on his youthful chin. Justice has never stood by him. Never did she deign to consider him her own.

And she will certainly not stand by his side now! Not now that he is committing such vile acts against his fatherland. No, she will not be his protector here.

671

Justice would be falsely named if she were to take the side of such a man whose criminal impudence has no bounds.

I base my confidence in these thoughts and so I will go and stand against him myself.

It is the right and fitting thing to do, or else, who else should do it? A chief against a chief, a brother against a brother, an enemy against an enemy. Yes, I will stand against my brother, Polyneices.

Quick then, someone bring me my greaves, to protect me from spears and stones!

Chorus:

No!

Dear son of Oedipus, no!

Don't think like Polyneices does!

Chorus:

Don't think like the man who has uttered such dreadful words!

Chorus:

It is a grave enough thing for Cadmeans and Argives to stand against each other!

The shedding of such blood can be cleansed.

680

Chorus:

But not the blood shed by a brother by his brother's sword. Such crime can never be purified.

Eteocles:

If one must endure the worst, then let him endure it with no shame. It's the only thing that is praised by the dead.

But if the worst is accompanied by shame, the dead have nothing to praise.

Chorus:

What is it, my son? What is it that drives you so eagerly, so madly into battle?

Chorus:

Why fill your soul with this lust for war?

Chorus:

Snuff out this evil lust at its birth, my son!

689

Eteocles:

It is too late. The gods have declared that this event must take place. They are forcing its pace. Well then, let Laius' whole seed be doomed! It has earned Apollo's hate so let it sail headlong and driven by the wind, along the fated wave of Kokytus!

Chorus:

How blood thirsty your urge to commit this slaughter, Eteocles!

Chorus:

Its fruit will be bitter!

Chorus:

The slaughter of a brother is a sacrilege.

Eteocles:

Blood thirsty, indeed! But my father's black and bitter curse hangs about me and there, with dry eyes – eyes that cannot weep- this curse whispers to me, "Kill him! Kill him and then be killed yourself!" It urges me to grab the prize before I die!

Chorus:

But you, my lord! Stand firm against that urge! Who would dare call you a coward if you have managed to prosper in life?

700

Chorus:

Surely the black spirits of vengeance will leave your house if you make sacrifices to the gods!

Eteocles:

Ha! The gods!

The gods think little of us now and their only wish from us is that we disappear!

Why then grovel at Fate any longer?

Chorus:

Grovel now that you are so near to it!

Who knows? Perhaps this evil Spirit may yet change course and return later with gentler winds.

Chorus:

Right now, though, it's still enraged!

709

Eteocles:

A rage, set off by the curses of Oedipus.

The visions in my dreams are true. They come and they divide our inheritance between me and my brother.

Chorus:

I know you don't want to but, do listen to us women!

Eteocles:

Say what you want, woman but make it short.

Chorus:

Forget about the seventh gate, my lord. Go anywhere else but not there.

Eteocles:

Your words will not change my mind. It is set.

Chorus:

A victory, even one bereft of glory, is honoured by the Heavens.

Eteocles:

This is not a sentiment that a soldier can accept!

Chorus:

So, you want a harvest of your own brother's blood?

Eteocles:

There's no escape from the will of the gods!

Exit Eteocles SL

720

Chorus:

Ah!

I shudder, body and soul, at the power of this divinity!

Chorus:

She is like no other god or goddess!

Chorus:

She ruins homes!

Chorus:

Erinys! The Avenging Spirit!

Chorus:

Unerring messenger of doom!

Chorus:

The father shouts out dire curses, dreadful prayers sprung from a maddened mind and here she's comes, ready to fulfil them!

Chorus:

Erinys!

Chorus:

Oedipus!

Chorus:

This strife will kill the sons of Oedipus. Each by the hateful hand of the other!

Chorus:

It was Chalyb the stranger -

Chorus:

The Scythian -

Chorus:

The bitter distributor of wealth!

730

Chorus:

The heartless steel!

Chorus:

The sharp sword that had come from the distant North and settled here a long time ago.

Chorus:

It was that steel that tossed the dice and by their fall apportioned this land to this family.

Chorus:

It is the sword that rules the allotting of this land!

Chorus:

The sword gave as much land to each man as he will take when he's buried.

Chorus:

But no! None of the land in these wide meadows was given to them.

Chorus:

But when they fall dead, the one slaughtered by the hand of the other and the dark and thick blood is drunk by the dry soil of this earth, who will do the purifying? Who can wash away the evilness of the act?

740

Chorus:

House of pain!

Old pain meets and mingles with the new!

Chorus:

I'm thinking of the old sin.

That sin was quickly avenged and yet, here it is, three generations later!

Laius' sin, his disobedience to Apollo.

Apollo had warned him three times from deep within the Pythian shrine-

Chorus:

The earth's very centre!

Apollo had told him thrice:

"To save your kingdom, Laius, you should have no sons!

Die with no sons, Laius!"

750

Chorus:

But the king was overcome by the sweetness of love and so, he had a child.

A boy, a father killer, his own killer, Oedipus who dared to sow a bloody seed in his mother's sacred field –

Chorus:

Her womb!

And there he was nurtured and there he was raised!

And from there he harvested the pain of blood!

Chorus:

Madness had visited them!

Chorus:

Reason had escaped them!

Chorus:

Madness had brought the two together!

760

Chorus:

And now, like an ocean of misery, one pain follows another, a wave crashes upon us and from that, another, a three headed wave raises and seethes with anger all round our city's prow.

Chorus:

And so the tower between our life and our death is now thicker than a mere wall.

Chorus:

Ah!

I fear for Thebes!

Chorus:

Ah!

I fear for her kings!

Chorus:

Ah!

I fear they will all be vanquished!

Chorus:

The payment of an ancient curse is always heavy and its collector will not be sent away.

770

Chorus:

Then you will see the weighty wealth of rich men dragged out from the bottom of the ship's hold and thrown overboard to keep the ship afloat.

Chorus:

Oedipus!

What man was better honoured, better loved by the gods, by those who shared his hearth – a whole market place of them!- than was Oedipus, on the day that he saved our land from that grotesque beast, the Sphinx, that preyed on men?

780

Chorus:

Yet, when finally the black sin of his fateful marriage was revealed to him, the madness and the unbearable pain in his heart drove him to commit a double evil!

Chorus:

With the very hand that he had killed his father, he tore his eyes out!

Chorus:

His eyes! Things more precious to a man than his own children!

Chorus:

And then, at his two sons he hurled wild and bitter curses!

Maddened because it was he who had given life to them!

Chorus:

Ah! What wild and bitter curses!

They must claim their portion of their heritage with the sword!

790

Chorus:

Spirits of Vengeance!

I tremble at the thought that you shall rush to claim your payment now!

Enter Messenger SL

Messenger:

Good news, ladies, daughters of Theban mothers!

Our city is saved from the yoke of slavery and all the boasts of those proud warriors have fallen to the dusty ground.

The tempest has passed and the ship has borne the battering of the waves without taking water. Our towers still stand tall because we had barricaded our gates with solid warriors. Men who delivered on their pledge and fought back the enemy.

800

All is well – generally speaking.

It went well with the six gates – but the seventh!

There, Apollo, the ruler of all sevens, there the revered lord of light, had decided to take over the command of the battle and made Oedipus pay for his father's ancient sin.

Chorus:

What? What news is this? What new terror must this city bear?

Messenger:

No, no! The city is safe!

It's Oedipus' two sons...

Chorus:

His two sons?

Chorus:

What of them?

Chorus:

I'm too afraid to hear this!

Messenger:

Calm down now, ladies! Listen! Both sons of Oedipus...

Chorus:

Ah!

No!

Chorus:

I can guess the horror!

Messenger:

Both of them – believe the unbelievable- both of them are lying dead there, on the battlefield.

Chorus:

Are they truly dead? Are they truly lying there on the battlefield?

Chorus:

This is news too horrible to hear but tell us what exactly happened.

Messenger:

Yes, both of them are dead. Each killed by the hand of the other.

810

Chorus:

Ah!

In birth, in cruelty and in Fate the two were alike and so the two were slaughtered thus.

Messenger:

Yes, their Fate was the same: to be the last of their race, a race fated to end.

And so, here is the reason for us to shed tears of sadness as well as tears of joy!

Our city has won the war but both our lords, our generals have divided all their land and wealth with the forged Skythian sword of steel; and now they'll be given only as much land as their graves require, the graves in which the blast of their father's dire curse has delivered them.

Our city is saved but its soil has sucked the blood of our noble lords – brothers, each killed by the hand of the other.

Exit Messenger SL

822

Chorus:

Zeus!

Almighty Zeus!

Gods who protects our Thebes!

You have indeed saved our towers!

Tell us now what to do.

Chorus:

Should we be glad now?

Should we give out the loud shout of triumphant joy because Thebes is saved or should we shed bitter tears for the death of the two ill-fated, pitiful and childless champions?

831

Chorus:

Their name names their fortune: Eteocles, The Truly Glorious –

Chorus:

Polyneices, The Truly Warlike!

Chorus:

Both destroyed by their own ungodly mind!

Chorus:

Black curse!

Complete curse!

Curse of the house of Oedipus!

Chorus:

A dreadful fear freezes my heart and when I hear of the deaths of these men, their fates of misery, their corpses spattered with their own blood, I sing like a frenzied maenad, I sing the song of burials.

Chorus:

How pitiful the song of the battle-spear!

The bloodied corpses of the two brothers are brought to the stage on individual biers accompanied by a solemn procession.

840

Chorus:

Ah!

Here is the accomplishment of Laius' disobedience!

Chorus:

It wasted no time to reach its conclusion!

Chorus:

Here is the accomplishment of their father's curse!

Chorus:

And Thebes?

I feel a dread about our city. The wrath of such prophecies do not subside so easily.

Chorus: *Indicating the corpses*

Men of misery!

Have you done this?
Who can believe that you have done this?
Chorus:
Believe it!
Here is the proof of this black horror!
This are not mere words that pass before us!
Chorus:
We see it all here.
All that our ears have heard is now seen by our eyes.
Here it is. All of it!

850

Chorus:
Our twin fears, twin destructions, two brothers!
Each died by the hand of the other.
Twin deaths! Twin Fates fulfilled!
Chorus:
What am I to say to this?
Chorus:
What else but that I see hearths full of pain?
New pains added to the pains of old!
Chorus:
Come ladies!
Make a fair wind with your sighs!
Beat your heads with your hands as oars beat the ocean!
Chorus:
Send forth the heavy ship with the black sails as we always do for the dead.
Help it sail to Acheron's dark shores where Apollo never sets foot.
Help it sail to the murky shores that welcomes us all.
Enter Antigone and Ismene grief-stricken.

Chorus:
Hush! Here come their sisters, Antigone and Ismene!
Chorus:
What a bitter duty they have to perform!
They must sing the dirge for their two brothers.
Chorus:
And they will sing with grave earnestness the heavy and righteous sadness, deep in their fair breasts.
Chorus:
But, before we hear their lament, let us first cry out the dire hymn of the Avenging Spirits and Deaths' ode of triumph.
Chorus: *To the sisters Antigone and Ismene*

Ah!
Dear girls! Dear sisters!
You are more unhappy at the loss of your brothers than all the wealthy women who can pin girdles around their breasts.
Believe me, sisters, my groans and my wails come charging forth from deep inside my aching heart!

Chorus: *Turning to the corpses*
Ah!
Poor fools!
Your friends could not change your foolish minds!
Hungry for misfortune!
You and your pitiful bravery!
You have destroyed your ancestors' home!
Chorus:
Pitiful, yes!
They've destroyed their house and they've earned themselves a pitiful death!

881

Chorus:
Ah!
So, now you have resolved your differences with the sword.

Chorus: *To Polyneices*

It is the walls of your own house you have ruined!

Chorus: *To Eteocles:*

It is your own death you have earned, instead of the city's throne!

Chorus:

The mighty Avenging Spirit of your father, Oedipus, has delivered the curse in full.

Chorus: *Examines the corpse of Polyneices*

Look!

Look where he's been struck!

Chorus: *Looks at the corpse closely*

The left side!

Chorus: *Examining the corpse of Eteocles*

Look here, too!

The left side!

Both struck on the left side!

891

Chorus:

Sides that sprung from the same womb!

Sides cursed by the gods!

The curse of one death demanding another!

Chorus:

Struck both!

Struck at their home and their life!

Struck with unspeakable vengeance!

Struck by the doom sent upon them by their father's curse.

900

Chorus:

The groans of grief travel through the city!

The towers groan!

The soil that loves its men, groans!

And the Thebans who are to come –

Chorus:

Strangers to the house of Laius, will share its wealth!

A house brought down by this deadly war.

Chorus:

A house for whose sake this strife raged until the rage came its full end.

Chorus:

Bitter hearts divided their wealth and so the portions were equal.

But those who loved these brothers hate Ares, the arbiter of the feud.

911

Chorus:

There they are, brought to this by the stroke of the steel but what is next for them? What will the steel bring to them now, could not one ask?

Chorus:

Their inheritance is now the grave of their father's land.

Each will share an equal part, parted by the stroke of steel.

Chorus:

Our hearts scream with grief, torn with pain, a wail of farewell!

Chorus:

We scream our own scream, we feel our own pain!

Chorus:

We shed our own tears over the corpses of these two lords!

922

Chorus:

So now here we stand by the biers of these poor men and here we say that they have caused the many dreadful deaths of their own citizens and of the foreign enemy.

Chorus:

Of all the women who may justly call themselves mothers, the mother of these two men was destined to bear the heaviest burden.

Chorus:

She made a husband out of one of her own sons, Oedipus, and with him she gave birth to these two men. This now is their destiny.

Chorus:

Their hands have killed each other!

Both have sprouted from the same seed.

930

Chorus:

And so, now, this one single seed will be sown in the one single ground.

The seed, along with its whole race.

Chorus:

One seed divided its wealth with enmity's maddened sword and so here now, we see, that enmity's cruel ending.

Chorus:

The quarrel is over!

Their lives now mingle!

Their double murder is now one with the blood-drenched soil.

And thus, it's true: now the same blood flows through both lords.

940

Chorus:

The quarrel was resolved by the sharp and bitter conciliator who came from the distant seas.

It was the wetted steel, the gruesome sword, born in the forger's flames.

Chorus:

Bitter was the conciliator who apportioned their wealth.

It was Ares who saw to it that their father's curse came true.

Chorus:

And so the poor men have been given their due.

Their due of misery allotted to them by the gods.

But their wealth now lies beneath their belly.

The lifeless soil is now their wealth. Countless, endless wealth.

949

Chorus:

Ah!

How abundant the wreath of misery with which you've crowned your race!

Wreaths followed screams of Vengeance!

Curses in shrill voices sang their song of triumph!

A triumph over your race that's now gone.

Chorus:

Before the gates where they fought now stands Destruction's trophy!

But Fate held back until Destruction took them both.

Antigone now walks over to the body of Polyneices and Ismene over that of Eteocles.

Antigone:

You gave wounds and wounds you have received in turn.

Ismene:

You have killed and you have been killed yourself in turn.

Antigone:

You killed by the spear:

Ismene:

You were killed in turn, by the spear.

Antigone:

Evil the deed!

960

Ismene:

Evil the deed!

Antigone:

Ah, grief!

Ismene:

Ah, tears!

Antigone:

Grief for your death!

Ismene:

Tears for your death!

Antigone:

Ah!

Ismene:

Ah!

Antigone:

My mind is gone with the grief!

Ismene:

My heart groans with the grief!

Antigone:

Ah!

Ah!

To suffer so!

970

Ismene:

Ah!

Ah!

To have such Fate!

Antigone:

Your own brother has slaughtered you!

Ismene:

You have slaughtered your own brother!

Antigone:

A double horror for the lips to utter!

Ismene:

A double horror for the eyes to see!

Antigone:

Two sorrows side by side!

Ismene:

Two brothers, two sorrows!

Chorus:

Murderous Fate!

Misery is your gift!

Chorus:

And you, phantom of noble Oedipus!

Black Spirit of Vengeance!

How mighty is your power!

980

Antigone:

Ah!

Ah!

Ismene:

Ah!

Ah!

Antigone:

A sight impossible for the eyes!

Ismene:

Such a sight to place before my eyes when he returned from exile!

Antigone:

Yes, he killed but he had not returned so as...

Ismene:

...to lose a life

Antigone:

It's true, he lost his life...

Ismene:

...and the life of this man.

Antigone:

Ah!

Dire the Fate of this race!

Ismene:

Dire its suffering!

Antigone:

Shocking sorrows befell them both!

990

Ismene:

Shocking sorrows and the pain is threefold!

Chorus:

Murderous Fate!

Misery is your gift!

Chorus:

And you, phantom of noble Oedipus!

Black Spirit of Vengeance!

How mighty is your power!

Antigone:

You have tried and you have learnt...

Ismene:

And you have tried and you have learnt also, no later than him.

Antigone:

...when you have returned to our city!

Ismene:

Yes to stand against him with your spear.

Antigone:

A double horror for the lips to utter!

Ismene:

A double horror for the eyes to see!

1000

Antigone:

Ah!

Ah!

The pain!

Ismene:

Ah!

Ah!

The dread!

Antigone:

The dread upon our house and our land!

Ismene:

The dread upon our house and our land and more than that, upon me!

Antigone:

Upon you and more upon me!

Ismene:

Ah!

Ah!

My lord! Your insufferable pains!

Antigone:

Ah!

Ah!

More insufferable pains than the whole of mankind can suffer!

Ismene:

Ah!

Your own sin, your own evil spirit, my lord!

Antigone:

Ah!

What soil should cover them?

Ismene:

That soil that will receive them most honourably.

1010

Antigone:

Ah!

Ah!

Let them lie by their father's side.

Let their father feel their pain.

Enter the Messenger

Messenger:

I am sent here to announce the wishes and the decree of the Council of our city, the city of Cadmus. So far as this man here is concerned, Eteocles, because of the valour he has shown in defending this city, he shall be buried with all due honours under the soil of this, his own city. He has chosen to fight the hated enemy and by doing so, he has risked his life and has fallen on the battlefield of his country, without offending any of the gods of his father, acts, befitting honourable young men.

1020

But as for this dead man here, his brother, Polyneices, my message is that his body is to be cast away, to be left unburied and above the soil, for the dogs to eat at their pleasure. This was a man who would have destroyed Cadmus' land, if some god or other had not stood against him and had delivered him here, by the sword of his own brother who lies here, next to him.

Even in death, this man will carry the sin he committed against the gods of his father, whom he has dishonoured by hurling against them an enemy army and by trying to conquer our city.

His reward, then, shall be dishonour.

His tomb shall be the carrion birds.

There shall be no hand placing dirt upon his corpse.

There shall be no mourners chanting the shrill lament of burial for him.

There shall be no loving hands gracing his death with funeral rites.

This is what has been decreed for this man's death by the Cadmean Council.

1032

Antigone:

And this is my response to the Cadmean lords:

If there is no one else who will join me in burying my brother, then I will bury him myself and take what chances I must.

I feel no shame in disobeying the lords of the State and rebelling against the State.

The power of common birth is mighty and we four, are all children of a luckless mother and an ill-fated father.

1039

And so my heart!

Take your stand by him, like a true sister! Share in his misfortune!

You, my heart, in life, show him, the man who is now dead, all your sisterly love.

Let no one be in any doubt about this: no empty-bellied wolf shall tear at my brother's flesh.

Polyneices, I, a woman, will dig your grave!

Polyneices, I, a woman, will find a way to carry into the folds of my purple garment soil to cover your body.

Polyneices, I, a woman, will sprinkle the soil over you.

No decree will stand in my way!

Courage, brother, I shall find the way to accomplish what must be accomplished!

Messenger:

I warn you, woman! Do not force the city's hand!

Antigone:

And I warn you: Make no useless threats to me!

1050

Messenger:

A people that have just escaped disaster can be brutal!

Antigone:

Then let the people be brutal! My brother will not be left unburied!

Messenger:

The State detests this man. Will you honour him with a burial?

Antigone:

The gods have already decided about his honour, a long time ago.

Messenger:

No, not until he threw this State into mortal danger!

Antigone:

No. He was wronged and so he paid wrong for wrong!

Messenger:

But he wronged not only one but all of us.

Antigone:

The final word rests with the goddess Eris, the goddess of strife.

I will bury this man, so cut short your lengthy speeches!

Messenger:

In that case, do as you wish but I have warned you!

Exit Messenger

Chorus:

Ah!

Chorus:

Ah!

Chorus:

Ah!

1060

Chorus:

Spirits of Vengeance!

Chorus:

Erinyes!

Chorus:

Murderous spirits!

Chorus:

Arrogant, insolent spirits!

Chorus:

You have destroyed the house of Oedipus. Root and branches, the whole stock!

Chorus:

What next must I suffer?

What next must I do?

What next must I think?

Chorus:

How can I not cry for you?

Chorus:

How can I not accompany you to your grave?

Chorus:

But the folk of this city!

I am terrified of them!

Of their anger!

Chorus: *To Eteocles*

You, my lord, will have many who will sing your lament!

1070

Chorus: *To Polyneices*

But you, my lord, unhappy lord, will go unlamented.

Your sister's tears will be your only lament!

Chorus:

Who could believe that?

Chorus: *Indicating half the chorus*

Let the State do what it sees fit to do or not to do but we, here, will accompany Polyneices to his grave and we will help Antigone bury her brother.

Chorus:

This is a sadness that is carried by our whole race but the State might change its view of what is just and what is not, according to the changing times.

Chorus: *Indicating the other half*

And we, here, will accompany Eteocles to his grave since, in his case, the State agrees with Justice.

Chorus:

It was this man, Eteocles, along with the blessed gods and the almighty Zeus, who has saved the kingdom of Cadmus from being toppled and drowned by the hordes of the enemy's men.

The biers are lifted and carried away, each half of the chorus following their designated hero.

Exit all SL

**END OF AESCHYLUS'
"SEVEN AGAINST THEBES"**

