



# **THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

**AESCHYLUS**

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**THE SEVEN  
AGAINST THEBES**

**BY  
AESCHYLUS**

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*The Seven Against Thebes By Aeschylus.*

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**ETEOCLES**

Zeus, what a curse are women, wrought by thee!

**LEADER**

Weak wretches, even as men, when cities fall.  
What! clasping gods, yet voicing thy despair?

**LEADER**

In the sick heart, fear maketh prey of speech.

**ETEOCLES**

Light is the thing I ask thee-do my will!

**LEADER**

Ask swiftly: swiftly shall I know my power.

**ETEOCLES**

Silence, weak wretch! nor put thy friends in fear.

**LEADER**

I speak no more: the general fate be mine!

**ETEOCLES**

I take that word as wiser than the rest.  
Nay, more: these images possess thy will-  
Pray, in their strength, that Heaven be on our side!  
Then hear my prayers withal, and then ring out

The female triumph-note, thy privilege-  
 Yea, utter forth the usage Hellas knows,  
 The cry beside the altars, sounding clear  
 Encouragement to friends, alarm to foes.  
 But I unto all gods that guard our walls,  
 Lords of the plain or warders of the mart  
 And to Ismenus' stream and Dirce's rills,  
 I swear, if Fortune smiles and saves our town,  
 That we will make our altars reek with blood  
 Of sheep and kine, shed forth unto the gods,  
 And with victorious tokens front our fanes-  
 Corslets and casques that once our foemen wore,  
 Spear-shattered now-to deck these holy homes!  
 Be such thy vows to Heaven-away with sighs,  
 Away with outcry vain and barbarous,  
 That shall avail not, in a general doom!  
 But I will back, and, with six chosen men  
 Myself the seventh, to confront the foe  
 In this great aspect of a poised war,  
 Return and plant them at the sevenfold gates,  
 Or e'er the prompt and clamorous battle-scouts  
 Haste to inflame our counsel with the need.

*ETEOCLES and his retinue go out.*

**CHORUS** *singing*

*strophe 1*

I mark his words, yet, dark and deep,  
 My heart's alarm forbiddeth sleep!  
 Close-clinging cares around my soul  
 Enkindle fears beyond control,  
 Presageful of what doom may fall  
 From the great leaguer of the wall!  
 So a poor dove is faint with fear

For her weak nestlings, while anew  
 Glides on the snaky ravisher!  
 In troop and squadron, hand on hand,  
 They climb and throng, and hemmed we stand,  
 While on the warders of our town  
 The flinty shower comes hurtling down!  
 Gods born of Zeus! put forth your might  
 For Cadmus' city, realm, and right!

*antistrophe 1*

What nobler land shall e'er be yours,  
 If once ye give to hostile powers  
 The deep rich soil, and Dirce's wave,  
 The nursing stream, Poseidon gave  
 And Tethys' children? Up and save!  
 Cast on the ranks that hem us round  
 A deadly panic, make them fling  
 Their arms in terror on the ground,  
 And die in carnage! thence shall spring  
 High honour for our clan and king!  
 Come at our wailing cry, and stand  
 As throned sentries of our land!

*strophe 2*

For pity and sorrow it were that this immemorial town  
 Should sink to be slave of the spear, to dust and to ashes gone down,  
 By the gods of Achaean worship and arms of Achaean might  
 Sacked and defiled and dishonoured, its women the prize of the fight-  
 That, haled by the hair as a steed, their mantles dishevelled and torn,  
 The maiden and matron alike should pass to the wedlock of scorn!  
 I hear it arise from the city, the manifold wail of despair-  
 Woe, woe for the doom that shall be-as in grasp of the foeman they fare!



*antistrophe 2*

For a woe and a weeping it is, if the maiden inviolate flower  
 Is plucked by the foe in his might, not culled in the bridal bower!  
 Alas for the hate and the horror-how say it?-less hateful by far  
 Is the doom to be slain by the sword, hewn down in the carnage of war!  
 For wide, ah! wide is the woe when the foeman has mounted the wall;  
 There is havoc and terror and flame, and the dark smoke broods over all,  
 And wild is the war-god's breath, as in frenzy of conquest he springs,  
 And pollutes with the blast of his lips the glory of holiest things!

*strophe 3*

Up to the citadel rise clash and din,  
 The war-net closes in,  
 The spear is in the heart: with blood imbrued  
 Young mothers wail aloud,  
 For children at their breast who scream and die!  
 And boys and maidens fly,  
 Yet scape not the pursuer, in his greed  
 To thrust and grasp and feed!  
 Robber with robber joins, each calls his mate  
 Unto the feast of hate-  
 The banquet, lo! is spread-seize, rend, and tear!  
 No need to choose or share!

*antistrophe 3*

And all the wealth of earth to waste is poured-  
 A sight by all abhorred!  
 The grieving housewives eye it; heaped and blent,  
 Earth's boons are spoiled and spent,  
 And waste to nothingness; and O alas,  
 Young maids, forlorn ye pass-  
 Fresh horror at your hearts-beneath the power

Of those who crop the flower!  
 Ye own the ruffian ravisher for lord,  
 And night brings rites abhorred!  
 Woe, woe for you! upon your grief and pain  
 There comes a fouler stain.

*On one side the SPY enters; on the other, ETEOCLES and the SIX CHAMPIONS.*

### **LEADER OF THE FIRST SEMI-CHORUS**

Look, friends! methinks the scout, who parted hence  
 To spy upon the foemen, comes with news,  
 His feet as swift as wafting chariot-wheels.

### **LEADER OF THE SECOND SEMI-CHORUS**

Ay, and our king, the son of Oedipus,  
 Comes prompt to time, to learn the spy's report-  
 His heart is fainer than his foot is fast!

### **THE SPY**

Well have I scanned the foe, and well can say  
 Unto which chief, by lot, each gate is given.  
 Tydeus already with his onset-cry  
 Storms at the gate called Proetides; but him  
 The seer Amphiaraus holds at halt,  
 Nor wills that he should cross Ismenus' ford,  
 Until the sacrifices promise fair.  
 But Tydeus, mad with lust of blood and broil,  
 Like to a cockatrice at noontide hour,  
 Hisses out wrath and smites with scourge of tongue  
 The prophet-son of Oecleus-Wise thou art,  
 Faint against war, and holding back from death!  
 With such revilings loud upon his lips  
 He waves the triple plumes that o'er his helm

Float overshadowing, as a courser's mane;  
 And at his shield's rim, terror in their tone,  
 Clang and reverberate the brazen bells.  
 And this proud sign, wrought on his shield, he bears,-  
 The vault of heaven, inlaid with blazing stars;  
 And, for the boss, the bright moon glows at full,  
 The eye of night, the first and lordliest star.  
 Thus with high-vaunted armour, madly bold,  
 He clamours by the stream-bank, wild for war,  
 As a steed panting grimly on his bit,  
 Held in and chafing for the trumpet's bray!  
 Whom wilt thou set against him? when the gates  
 Of Proetus yield, who can his rush repel?

### **ETEOCLES**

To me, no blazon on a foeman's shield  
 Shall e'er present a fear! such pointed threats  
 Are powerless to wound; his plumes and bells,  
 Without a spear, are snakes without a sting.  
 Nay, more-that pageant of which thou tellest-  
 The nightly sky displayed, ablaze with stars,  
 Upon his shield, palter with double sense  
 One headstrong fool will find its truth anon!  
 For, if night fall upon his eyes in death,  
 Yon vaunting blazon will its own truth prove,  
 And he is prophet of his folly's fall.  
 Mine shall it be, to pit against his power  
 The loyal son of Astacus, as guard  
 To hold the gateways-a right valiant soul,  
 Who has in heed the throne of Modesty  
 And loathes the speech of Pride, and evermore  
 Shrinks from the base, but knows no other fear.  
 He springs by stock from those whom Ares spared,  
 The men called Sown, a right son of the soil,

And Melanippus styled. Now, what his arm  
 To-day shall do, rests with the dice of war,  
 And Ares shall ordain it; but his cause  
 Hath the true badge of Right, to urge him on  
 To guard, as son, his motherland from wrong.

*MELANIPPUS goes out.*

**CHORUS** *chanting*

Then may the gods give fortune fair  
 Unto our chief, sent forth to dare  
 War's terrible arbitrament!  
 But ah! when champions wend away,  
 I shudder, lest, from out the fray,  
 Only their blood-stained wrecks be sent!

**THE SPY**

Nay, let him pass, and the gods' help be his!  
 Next, Capaneus comes on, by lot to lead  
 The onset at the gates Electran styled:  
 A giant be, more huge than Tydeus' self,  
 And more than human in his arrogance-  
 May fate forefend his threat against our walls!  
 God willing, or unwilling-such his vaunt-  
 I will lay waste this city; Pallas' self,  
 Zeus's warrior maid, although she swoop to earth  
 And plant her in my path, shall stay me not.  
 And, for the flashes of the levin-bolt,  
 He holds them harmless as the noontide rays.  
 Mark, too, the symbol on his shield-a man  
 Scornfully weaponless but torch in hand,  
 And the flame glows witbin his grasp, prepared  
 For ravin: lo, the legend, wrought in words,  
 Fire for the city bring I, flares in gold!

Against such wight, send forth-yet whom? what man  
Will front that vaunting figure and not fear?

### **ETEOCLES**

Aha, this profits also, gain on gain!  
In sooth, for mortals, the tongue's utterance  
Bewrays unerringly a foolish pride!  
Hither stalks Capaneus, with vaunt and threat  
Defying god-like powers, equipt to act,  
And, mortal though he be, he strains his tongue  
In folly's ecstasy, and casts aloft  
High swelling words against the ears of Zeus.  
Right well I trust-if justice grants the word-  
That, by the might of Zeus, a bolt of flame  
In more than semblance shall descend on him.  
Against his vaunts, though reckless, I have set,  
To make assurance sure, a warrior stern-  
Strong Polyphontes, fervid for the fray;-  
A sturdy bulwark, he, by grace of Heaven  
And favour of his champion Artemis!  
Say on, who holdeth the next gate in ward?

*POLYPHONTES goes out.*

### **CHORUS** *chanting*

Perish the wretch whose vaunt affronts our home!  
On him the red bolt come,  
Ere to the maiden bowers his way he cleave,  
To ravage and bereave!

### **THE SPY**

I will say on. Eteoclus is third-  
To him it fell, what time the third lot sprang

O'er the inverted helmet's brazen rim,  
 To dash his stormers on Neistae gate.  
 He wheels his mares, who at their frontlets chafe  
 And yearn to charge upon the gates amain.  
 They snort the breath of pride, and, filled therewith,  
 Their nozzles whistle with barbaric sound.  
 High too and haughty is his shield's device-  
 An armed man who climbs, from rung to rung,  
 A scaling ladder, up a hostile wall,  
 Afire to sack and slay; and he too cries  
 (By letters, full of sound, upon the shield)  
 Not Ares' self shall cast me from the wall.  
 Look to it, send, against this man, a man  
 Strong to debar the slave's yoke from our town.

**ETEOCLES** *pointing to MEGAREUS*

Send will I-even this man, with luck to aid-

*MEGAREUS departs as soon as he has been marked out.*

By his worth sent already, not by pride  
 And vain pretence, is he. 'Tis Megareus,  
 The child of Creon, of the Earth-sprung born!  
 He will not shrink from guarding of the gates,  
 Nor fear the maddened charger's frenzied neigh,  
 But, if he dies, will nobly quit the score  
 For nurture to the land that gave him birth,  
 Or from the shield-side hew two warriors down-  
 Eteoclus and the figure that he lifts-  
 Ay, and the city pictured, all in one,  
 And deck with spoils the temple of his sire!  
 Announce the next pair, stint not of thy tongue!

**CHORUS** *chanting*

O thou, the warder of my home,  
 Grant, unto us, Fate's favouring tide,  
 Send on the foemen doom!  
 They fling forth taunts of frenzied pride,  
 On them may Zeus with glare of vengeance come

### **THE SPY**

Lo, next him stands a fourth and shouts amain,  
 By Pallas Onca's portal, and displays  
 A different challenge; 'tis Hippomedon!  
 Huge the device that starts up from his targe  
 In high relief; and, I deny it not,  
 I shuddered, seeing how, upon the rim,  
 It made a mighty circle round the shield-  
 No sorry craftsman he, who wrought that work  
 And clamped it all around the buckler's edge!  
 The form was Typhon: from his glowing throat  
 Rolled lurid smoke, spark-litten, kin of fire!  
 The flattened edge-work, circling round the whole,  
 Made strong support for coiling snakes that grew  
 Erect above the concave of the shield:  
 Loud rang the warrior's voice; inspired for war,  
 He raves to slay, as doth a Bacchanal,  
 His very glance a terror! of such wight  
 Beware the onset! closing on the gates,  
 He peals his vaunting and appalling cry!

### **ETEOCLES**

Yet first our Pallas Onca-wardress she,  
 Planting her foot hard by her gate-shall stand,  
 The Maid against the ruffian, and repel  
 His force, as from her brood the mother-bird  
 Beats back the wintered serpent's venom'd fang.

And next, by her, is Oenops' gallant son,  
 Hyperbius, chosen to confront this foe,  
 Ready to seek his fate at Fortune's shrine!  
 In form, in valour, and in skill of arms,  
 None shall gainsay him. See how wisely well  
 Hermes hath set the brave against the strong!  
 Confronted shall they stand, the shield of each  
 Bearing the image of opposing gods:  
 One holds aloft his Typhon breathing fire,  
 But, on the other's shield, in symbol sits  
 Zeus, calm and strong, and fans his bolt to flame-  
 Zeus, seen of all, yet seen of none to fail!  
 Howbeit, weak is trust reposed in Heaven-  
 Yet are we upon Zeus' victorious side,  
 The foe, with those he worsted-if in sooth  
 Zeus against Typhon held the upper hand,  
 And if Hyperbius (as well may hap  
 When two such foes such diverse emblems bear)  
 Have Zeus upon his shield, a saving sign.

*HYPERBIUS goes out.*

**CHORUS** *chanting*

High faith is mine that he whose shield  
 Bears, against Zeus, the thing of hate.  
 The giant Typhon, thus revealed,  
 A monster loathed of gods eterne  
 And mortal men-this doom shall earn  
 A shattered skull, before the gate!

**THE SPY**

Heaven send it so! A fifth assailant now  
 Is set against our fifth, the northern, gate,  
 Fronting the death-mound where Amphion lies



The child of Zeus. This foeman vows his faith,  
 Upon a mystic spear-head which he deems  
 More holy than a godhead and more sure  
 To find its mark than any glance of eye,  
 That, will they, nill they, he will storm and sack  
 The hold of the Cadmeans. Such his oath-  
 His, the bold warrior, yet of childish years,  
 A bud of beauty's foremost flower, the son  
 Of Zeus and of the mountain maid. I mark  
 How the soft down is waxing on his cheek,  
 Thick and close-growing in its tender prime-  
 In name, not mood, is he a maiden's child-  
 Parthenopaeus; large and bright his eyes  
 But fierce the wrath wherewith he fronts the gate:  
 Yet not unheralded he takes his stand  
 Before the portal; on his brazen shield,  
 The rounded screen and shelter of his form,  
 I saw him show the ravening Sphinx, the fiend  
 That shamed our city-how it glared and moved,  
 Clamped on the buckler, wrought in high relief!  
 And in its claws did a Cadmean bear-  
 Nor heretofore, for any single prey,  
 Sped she aloft, through such a storm of darts  
 As now awaits her. So our foe is here-  
 Like, as I deem, to ply no stinted trade  
 In blood and broil, but traffick as is meet  
 In fierce exchange for his long wayfaring!

### **ETEOCLES**

Ah, may they meet the doom they think to bring-  
 They and their impious vaunts-from those on high!  
 So should they sink, hurled down to deepest death!  
 This foe, at least, by thee Arcadian styled,  
 Is faced by one who bears no braggart sign,

But his hand sees to smite, where blows avail-  
 Actor, own brother to Hyperbius!  
 He will not let a boast without a blow  
 Stream through our gates and nourish our despair,  
 Nor give him way who on his hostile shield  
 Bears the brute image of the loathly Sphinx!  
 Blocked at the gate, she will rebuke the man  
 Who strives to thrust her forward, when she feels  
 Thick crash of blows, up to the city wall.  
 With Heaven's goodwill, my forecast shall be true.

*ACTOR goes out.*

**CHORUS** *chanting*

Home to my heart the vaunting goes,  
 And, quick with terror, on my head  
 Rises my hair, at sound of those  
 Who wildly, impiously rave!  
 If gods there be, to them I plead-  
 Give them to darkness and the grave.

**THE SPY**

Fronting the sixth gate stands another foe,  
 Wisest of warriors, bravest among seers-  
 Such must I name Amphiarus: he,  
 Set steadfast at the Homoloid gate,  
 Berates strong Tydeus with reviling words-  
 The man of blood, the bane of state and home  
 To Argos, arch-allurer to all ill,  
 Evoker of the Fury-fiend of hell,  
 Death's minister, and counsellor of wrong  
 Unto Adrastus in this fatal field.  
 Ay, and with eyes upturned and mien of scorn  
 He chides thy brother Polyneices to

At his desert, and once and yet again  
 Dwells hard and meaningly upon his name  
 Where it saith glory yet importeth feud.  
 Yea, such thou art in act, and such thy grace  
 In sight of Heaven, and such in aftertime  
 Thy fame, for lips and ears of mortal men!  
 "He strove to sack the city of his sires  
 And temples of her gods, and brought on her  
 An alien armament of foreign foes.  
 The fountain of maternal blood outpoured  
 What power can staunck? even so, thy fatherland  
 Once by thine ardent malice stormed and ta'en,  
 Shall ne'er join force with thee." For me, I know  
 It doth remain to let my blood enrich  
 The border of this land that loves me not-  
 Blood of a prophet, in a foreign grave!  
 Now, for the battle! I foreknow my doom,  
 Yet it shall be with honour. So he spake,  
 The prophet, holding up his targe of bronze  
 Wrought without blazon, to the ears of men  
 Who stood around and heeded not his word.  
 For on no bruit and rumour of great deeds,  
 But on their doing, is his spirit set,  
 And in his heart he reaps a furrow rich,  
 Wherefrom the foison of good counsel springs.  
 Against him, send brave heart and hand of might;  
 For the god-lover is man's fiercest foe.

### **ETEOCLES**

Out on the chance that couples mortal men,  
 Linking the just and impious in one!  
 In every issue, the one curse is this-  
 Companionship with men of evil heart!  
 A baneful harvest, let none gather it!

The field of sin is rank, and brings forth death  
 At whiles a righteous man who goes aboard  
 With reckless mates, a horde of villainy,  
 Dies by one death with that detested crew;  
 At whiles the just man, joined with citizens  
 Ruthless to strangers, recking nought of Heaven,  
 Trapped, against nature, in one net with them,  
 Dies by God's thrust and all-including blow.  
 So will this prophet die, even Oecleus' child,  
 Sage, just, and brave, and loyal towards Heaven,  
 Potent in prophecy, but mated here  
 With men of sin, too boastful to be wise!  
 Long is their road, and they return no more,  
 And, at their taking-off, by hand of Zeus,  
 The prophet too shall take the downward way.  
 He will not-so I deem-assail the gate-  
 Not as through cowardice or feeble will,  
 But as one knowing to what end shall be  
 Their struggle in the battle, if indeed  
 Fruit of fulfilment lie in Loxias' word.  
 He speaketh not, unless to speak avails!  
 Yet, for more surety, we will post a man,  
 Strong Lasthenes, as warder of the gate,  
 Stern to the foeman; he hath age's skill,  
 Mated with youthful vigour, and an eye  
 Forward, alert; swift too his hand, to catch  
 The fenceless interval 'twixt shield and spear!  
 Yet man's good fortune lies in hand of Heaven.

*LASTHENES goes out.*

**CHORUS** *chanting*

Unto our loyal cry, ye gods, give ear!  
 Save, save the city! turn away the spear,  
 Send on the foemen fear!

Outside the rampart fall they, rent and riven  
Beneath the bolt of heaven!

### THE SPY

Last, let me name yon seventh antagonist,  
Thy brother's self, at the seventh portal set-  
Hear with what wrath he imprecates our doom,  
Vowing to mount the wall, though banished hence,  
And peal aloud the wild exulting cry-  
The town is ta'en-then clash his sword with thine,  
Giving and taking death in close embrace,  
Or, if thou 'scapest, flinging upon thee,  
As robber of his honour and his home,  
The doom of exile such as he has borne.  
So clamours he and so invokes the gods  
Who guard his race and home, to hear and heed  
The curse that sounds in Polyneices' name!  
He bears a round shield, fresh from forge and fire,  
And wrought upon it is a twofold sign-  
For lo, a woman leads decorously  
The figure of a warrior wrought in gold;  
And thus the legend runs-I Justice am,  
And I will bring the hero home again,  
To hold once more his place within this town,  
Once more to pace his sire's ancestral hall.  
Such are the symbols, by our foemen shown-  
Now make thine own decision, whom to send  
Against this last opponent! I have said-  
Nor canst thou in my tidings find a flaw-  
Thine is it, now, to steer the course aright.

### ETEOCLES

Ah me, the madman, and the curse of Heaven  
 And woe for us, the lamentable line  
 Of Oedipus, and woe that in this house  
 Our father's curse must find accomplishment!  
 But now, a truce to tears and loud lament,  
 Lest they should breed a still more rueful wail!  
 As for this Polyneices, named too well,  
 Soon shall we know how this device shall end-  
 Whether the gold-wrought symbols on his shield,  
 In their mad vaunting and bewildered pride,  
 Shall guide him as a victor to his home!  
 For had but justice, maiden-child of Zeus,  
 Stood by his act and thought, it might have been!  
 Yet never, from the day he reached the light  
 Out of the darkness of his mother's womb,  
 Never in childhood, nor in youthful prime,  
 Nor when his chin was gathering its beard,  
 Hath justice hailed or claimed him as her own.  
 Therefore I deem not that she standeth now  
 To aid him in this outrage on his home!  
 Misnamed, in truth, were justice, utterly,  
 If to impiety she lent her hand.  
 Sure in this faith, I will myself go forth  
 And match me with him; who hath fairer claim?  
 Ruler, against one fain to snatch the rule,  
 Brother with brother matched, and foe with foe,  
 Will I confront the issue. To the wall!

#### **LEADER OF THE CHORUS**

O thou true heart, O child of Oedipus,  
 Be not, in wrath, too like the man whose name  
 Murmurs an evil omen! 'Tis enough  
 That Cadmus' clan should strive with Argos' host,  
 For blood there is that can atone that stain!

But-brother upon brother dealing death-  
Not time itself can expiate the sin!

**ETEOCLES**

If man find hurt, yet clasp his honour still,  
'Tis well; the dead have honour, nought beside.  
Hurt, with dishonour, wins no word of praise!

**CHORUS** *chanting*

Ah, what is thy desire?  
Let not the lust and ravin of the sword  
Bear thee adown the tide accursed, abhorred!  
Fling off thy passion's rage, thy spirit's prompting dire!

**ETEOCLES**

Nay-since the god is urgent for our doom,  
Let Laius' house, by Phoebus loathed and scorned,  
Follow the gale of destiny, and win  
Its great inheritance, the gulf of hell!

**CHORUS** *chanting*

Ruthless thy craving is-  
Craving for kindred and forbidden blood  
To be outpoured-a sacrifice imbrued  
With sin, a bitter fruit of murderous enmities!

**ETEOCLES**

Yea, my own father's fateful Curse proclaims-  
A ghastly presence, and her eyes are dry-  
Strike! honour is the prize, not life prolonged!

**CHORUS** *chanting*

Ah, be not urged of her! for none shall dare  
 To call thee coward, in thy throned estate!  
 Will not the Fury in her sable pal  
 Pass outward from these halls, what time the gods  
 Welcome a votive offering from our hands?

**ETEOCLES**

The gods! long since they hold us in contempt,  
 Scornful of gifts thus offered by the lost!  
 Why should we fawn and flinch away from doom?

**CHORUS** *chanting*

Now, when it stands beside thee! for its power  
 May, with a changing gust of milder mood,  
 Temper the blast that bloweth wild and rude  
 And frenzied, in this hour!

**ETEOCLES**

Ay, kindled by the curse of Oedipus-  
 All too prophetic, out of dreamland came  
 The vision, meting out our sire's estate!

**LEADER OF THE CHORUS**

Heed women's voices, though thou love them not!

**ETEOCLES**

Say aught that may avail, but stint thy words.



**LEADER**

Go not thou forth to guard the seventh gate!

**ETEOCLES**

Words shall not blunt the edge of my resolve.

**LEADER**

Yet the god loves to let the weak prevail.

**ETEOCLES**

That to a swordsman, is no welcome word!

**LEADER**

Shall thine own brother's blood be victory's palm?

**ETEOCLES**

Ill which the gods have sent thou canst no-shun!

*ETEOCLES goes out.*

**CHORUS** *singing*

*strophe 1*

I shudder in dread of the power, abhorred by the gods of high heaven,  
 The ruinous curse of the home till roof-tree and rafter be riven!  
 Too true are the visions of ill, too true the fulfilment they bring  
 To the curse that was spoken of old by the frenzy and wrath of the king!  
 Her will is the doom of the children, and Discord is kindled amain,

*antistrophe 1*

And strange is the Lord of Division, who cleaveth the birthright in twain,-  
 The edged thing, born of the north, the steel that is ruthless and keen,  
 Dividing in bitter division the lot of the children of teen!  
 Not the wide lowland around, the realm of their sire, shall they have,  
 Yet enough for the dead to inherit, the pitiful space of a grave!

*strophe 2*

Ah, but when kin meets kin, when sire and child,  
 Unknowing, are defiled  
 By shedding common blood, and when the pit  
 Of death devoureth it,  
 Drinking the clotted stain, the gory dye-  
 Who, who can purify?  
 Who cleanse pollution, where the ancient bane  
 Rises and reeks again?

*antistrophe 2*

Whilome in olden days the sin was wrought,  
 And swift requital brought-  
 Yea on the children of the child came still  
 New heritage of ill!  
 For thrice Apollo spoke this word divine,  
 From Delphi's central shrine,  
 To Laius-Die thou childless! thus alone  
 Can the land's weal be won!

*strophe 3*

But vainly with his wife's desire he strove,  
 And gave himself to love,

Begetting Oedipus, by whom he died,  
 The fateful parricide!  
 The sacred seed-plot, his own mother's womb,  
 He sowed, his house's doom,  
 A root of blood! by frenzy lured, they came  
 Unto their wedded shame.

*antistrophe 3*

And now the waxing surge, the wave of fate,  
 Rolls on them, triply great-  
 One billow sinks, the next towers, high and dark,  
 Above our city's bark-  
 Only the narrow barrier of the wal  
 Totters, as soon to fall;  
 And, if our chieftains in the storm go down,  
 What chance can save the town?

*strophe 4*

Curses, inherited from long ago,  
 Bring heavy freight of woe:  
 Rich stores of merchandise o'erload the deck,  
 Near, nearer comes the wreck-  
 And all is lost, cast out upon the wave,  
 Floating, with none to save!

*antistrophe 4*

Whom did the gods, whom did the chief of men,  
 Whom did each citizen  
 In crowded concourse, in such honour hold,  
 As Oedipus of old,  
 When the grim fiend, that fed on human prey,  
 He took from us away?

*strophe 5*

But when, in the fulness of days, he knew of his bridal unblest,  
 A twofold horror he wrought, in the frenzied despair of his breast-  
 Debarred from the grace of the banquet, the service of goblets of gold  
 He flung on his children a curse for the splendour they dared to withhold.

*antistrophe 5*

A curse prophetic and bitter-The glory of wealth and of pride,  
 With iron, not gold, in your hands, ye shall come, at the last, to divide!  
 Behold, how a shudder runs through me, lest now, in the fulness of time,  
 The house-fiend awake and return, to mete out the measure of crime!

*THE SPY enters.*

**THE SPY**

Take heart, ye daughters whom your mothers' milk  
 Made milky-hearted! lo, our city stands,  
 Saved from the yoke of servitude: the vaunts  
 Of overweening men are silent now,  
 And the State sails beneath a sky serene,  
 Nor in the manifold and battering waves  
 Hath shipped a single surge, and solid stands  
 The rampart, and the gates are made secure,  
 Each with a single champion's trusty guard.  
 So in the main and at six gates we hold  
 A victory assured; but, at the seventh,  
 The god that on the seventh day was born,  
 Royal Apollo, hath ta'en up his rest  
 To wreak upon the sons of Oedipus  
 Their grandsire's wilfulness of long ago.

**LEADER OF THE CHORUS**

What further woefulness besets our home?

**THE SPY**

The home stands safe-but ah, the princes twain-

**LEADER**

Who? what of them? I am distraught with fear.

**THE SPY**

Hear now, and mark! the sons of Oedipus-

**LEADER**

Ah, my prophetic soul! I feel their doom.

**THE SPY**

Have done with questions!-with I-with their lives crushed out-

**LEADER**

Lie they out yonder? the full horror speak!  
Did hands meet hands more close than brotherly?  
Came fate on each. and in the selfsame hour?

**THE SPY**

Yea, blotting out the lineage ill-starred!  
Now mix your exultation and your tears,  
Over a city saved, the while its lords,

Twin leaders of the fight, have parcelled out  
 With forged arbitrament of Scythian steel  
 The full division of their fatherland,  
 And, as their father's imprecation bade,  
 Shall have their due of land, a twofold grave.  
 So is the city saved; the earth has drunk  
 Blood of twin princes, by each other slain.

**CHORUS** *chanting*

O mighty Zeus and guardian powers,  
 The strength and stay of Cadmus' towers!  
 Shall I send forth a joyous cry,  
 Hail to the lord of weal renewed?  
 Or weep the misbegotten twain,  
 Born to a fatal destiny  
 Each numbered now among the slain,  
 Each dying in ill fortitude,  
 Each truly named, each child of feud?  
 O dark and all-prevailing ill,  
 That broods o'er Oedipus and all his line,  
 Numbing my heart with mortal chill!  
 Ah me, this song of mine,  
 Which, Thyad-like, I woke, now falleth still,  
 Or only tells of doom,  
 And echoes round a tomb!  
 Dead are they, dead! in their own blood they lie  
 Ill-omened the concert that hails our victory!  
 The curse a father on his children spake  
 Hath faltered not, nor failed!  
 Nought, Laius! thy stubborn choice availed-  
 First to beget, then, in the after day  
 And for the city's sake,  
 The child to slay!  
 For nought can blunt nor mar

The speech oracular!  
 Children of teen! by disbelief ye erred-  
 Yet in wild weeping came fulfilment of the word!

*ANTIGONE and ISMENE approach, with a train of mourners. bearing the bodies of ETEOCLES and POLYNEICES.*

Look up, look forth! the doom is plain,  
 Nor spake the messenger in vain!  
 A twofold sorrow, twofold strife-  
 Each brave against a brother's life!  
 In double doom hath sorrow come  
 How shall I speak it?-on the home!  
 Alas, my sisters! be your sighs the gale,  
 The smiting of your brows the splash of oars,  
 Wafting the boat, to Acheron's dim shores  
 That passeth ever, with its darkened sail,  
 On its uncharted voyage and sunless way,  
 Far from thy beams, Apollo, god of day-  
 The melancholy bark  
 Bound for the common bourn, the harbour of the dark!

Look up, look yonder! from the home  
 Antigone, Ismene come,  
 On the last, saddest errand bound,  
 To chant a dirge of doleful sound,  
 With agony of equal pain  
 Above their brethren slain!  
 Their sister-bosoms surely swell,  
 Heart with rent heart according well  
 In grief for those who fought and fell!  
 Yet-ere they utter forth their woe  
 We must awake the rueful strain  
 To vengeful powers, in realms below,  
 And mourn hell's triumph o'er the slain!

Alas! of all, the breast who bind,-  
 Yea, all the race of womankind-  
 O maidens, ye are most bereaved!  
 For you, for you the tear-drops start-  
 Deem that in truth, and undeceived,  
 Ye hear the sorrows of my heart!

*To the dead*

Children of bitterness, and sternly brave-  
 One, proud of heart against persuasion's voice,  
 One, against exile proof! ye win your choice-  
 Each in your fatherland, a separate grave!  
 Alack, on house and heritage  
 They brought a baneful doom, and death for wage!  
 One strove through tottering walls to force his way,  
 One claimed, in bitter arrogance, the sway,  
 And both alike, even now and here,  
 Have closed their suit, with steel for arbiter!  
 And lo, the Fury-fiend of Oedipus, their sire,  
 Hath brought his curse to consummation dire  
 Each in the left side smitten, see them laid-  
 The children of one womb,  
 Slain by a mutual doom!  
 Alas, their fate! the combat murderous,  
 The horror of the house,  
 The curse of ancient bloodshed, now repaid!  
 Yea, deep and to the heart the deathblow fell,  
 Edged by their feud ineffable-  
 By the grim curse, their sire did imprecate  
 Discord and deadly hate!  
 Hark, how the city and its towers make moan-  
 How the land mourns that held them for its own!  
 Fierce greed and fell division did they blend,  
 Till death made end!  
 They strove to part the heritage in twain,



Giving to each a gain-  
 Yet that which struck the balance in the strife,  
 The arbitrating sword,  
 By those who loved the twain is held abhorred-  
 Loathed is the god of death, who sundered each from life!  
 Here, by the stroke of steel, behold! they lie-  
 And rightly may we cry  
 Beside their fathers, let them here be laid-  
 Iron gave their doom, with iron their graves be made-  
 A lack, the slaying sword, alack, th' entombing spade!  
 Alas, a piercing shriek, a rending groan,  
 A cry unfeigned of sorrow felt at heart!  
 With shuddering of grief, with tears that start,  
 With wailful escort, let them hither come-  
 For one or other make divided moan!  
 No light lament of pity mixed with gladness,  
 But with true tears, poured from the soul of sadness,  
 Over the princes dead and their bereaved home  
 Say we, above these brethren dead,  
 On citizen, on foreign foe,  
 Brave was their rush, and stern their blow-  
 Now, lowly are they laid!  
 Beyond all women upon earth  
 Woe, woe for her who gave them birth!  
 Unknowingly, her son she wed-  
 The children of that marriage-bed,  
 Each in the self-same womb, were bred-  
 Each by a brother's hand lies dead!

Yea, from one seed they sprang, and by one fate  
 Their heritage is desolate,  
 The heart's division sundered claim from claim,  
 And, from their feud, death came!  
 Now is their hate allayed,  
 Now is their life-stream shed,

Ensanguining the earth with crimson dye-  
 Lo, from one blood they sprang, and in one blood they lie!  
 A grievous arbiter was given the twain-  
 The stranger from the northern main,  
 The sharp, dividing sword,  
 Fresh from the forge and fire  
 The War-god treacherous gave ill award  
 And brought their father's curse to a fulfilment dire!  
 They have their portion-each his lot and doom,  
 Given from the gods on high!  
 Yea, the piled wealth of fatherland, for tomb,  
 Shall underneath them lie!  
 Alas, alas! with flowers of fame and pride  
 Your home ye glorified;  
 But, in the end, the Furies gathered round  
 With chants of boding sound,  
 Shrieking, In wild defeat and disarray,  
 Behold, ye pass away!  
 The sign of Ruin standeth at the gate,  
 There, where they strove with Fate-  
 And the ill power beheld the brothers' fall,  
 And triumphed over all!

*ANTIGONE, ISMENE, and the CHORUS all take part in the following responsive dirge.*

Thou wert smitten, in smiting,  
 Thou didst slay, and wert slain-  
 By the spear of each other  
 Ye lie on the plain,  
 And ruthless the deed that ye wrought was, and ruthless the death of the  
 twain!

Take voice, O my sorrow!  
 Flow tear upon tear-  
 Lay the slain by the slayer,

Made one on the bier!  
 Our soul in distraction is lost, and we mourn o'er the prey of the spear!

Ah, woe for your ending,  
 Unbrotherly wrought!  
 And woe for the issue,  
 The fray that ye fought,  
 The doom of a mutual slaughter whereby to the grave ye are brought!

Ah, twofold the sorrow-  
 The heard and the seen!  
 And double the tide  
 Of our tears and our teen,  
 As we stand by our brothers in death and wail for the love that has been!

O grievous the fate  
 That attends upon wrong!  
 Stern ghost of our sire,  
 Thy vengeance is long!  
 Dark Fury of hell and of death, the hands of thy kingdom are strong!

O dark were the sorrows  
 That exile hath known!  
 He slew, but returned not  
 Alive to his own!  
 He struck down a brother, but fell, in the moment of triumph hewn down!

O lineage accurst,  
 O doom and despair!  
 Alas, for their quarrel,  
 The brothers that were!  
 And woe! for their pitiful end, who once were our love and our care!

O grievous the fate  
 That attends upon wrong)

Stern ghost of our sire,  
 Thy vengeance is long!  
 Dark Fury of hell and of death, the hands of thy kingdom are strong!

By proof have ye learnt it!  
 At once and as one,  
 O brothers beloved,  
 To death ye were, done!  
 Ye came to the strife of the sword, and behold! ye are both overthrown!

O grievous the tale is,  
 And grievous their fall,  
 To the house, to the land,  
 And to me above all!  
 Ah, God! for the curse that hath come, the sin and the ruin withal!

O children distraught,  
 Who in madness have died!  
 Shall ye rest with old kings  
 In the place of their pride?  
 Alas for the wrath of your sire if he findeth you laid by his side!

*A HERALD enters.*

### **HERALD**

I bear command to tell to one and all  
 What hath approved itself and now is law,  
 Ruled by the counsellors of Cadmus' town.  
 For this Eteocles, it is resolved  
 To lay him on his earth-bed, in this soil,  
 Not without care and kindly sepulture.  
 For why? he hated those who hated us,  
 And, with all duties blanielessly performed  
 Unto the sacred ritual of his sires,  
 He met such end as gains our city's grace,-

With auspices that do ennoble death.  
 Such words I have in charge to speak of him:  
 But of his brother Polyneices, this-  
 Be he cast out unburied, for the dogs  
 To rend and tear: for he presumed to waste  
 The land of the Cadmeans, had not Heaven-  
 Some god of those who aid our fatherland-  
 Opposed his onset, by his brother's spear,  
 To whom, tho' dead, shall consecration come!  
 Against him stood this wretch, and brought a horde  
 Of foreign foemen, to beset our town.  
 He therefore shall receive his recompense,  
 Buried ignobly in the maw of kites-  
 No women-wailers to escort his corpse  
 Nor pile his tomb nor shrill his dirge anew-  
 Unhouselled, unattended, cast away  
 So, for these brothers, doth our State ordain.

### **ANTIGONE**

And I-to those who make such claims of rule  
 In Cadmus' town-I, though no other help,

*Pointing to the body of POLYNEICES*

I, I will bury this my brother's corse  
 And risk your wrath and what may come of it!  
 It shames me not to face the State, and set  
 Will against power, rebellion resolute:  
 Deep in my heart is set my sisterhood,  
 My common birthright with my brothers, born  
 All of one womb, her children who, for woe,  
 Brought forth sad offspring to a sire ill-starred.  
 Therefore, my soul! take thou thy willing share,  
 In aid of him who now can will no more,  
 Against this outrage: be a sister true,

While yet thou livest, to a brother dead!  
 Him never shall the wolves with ravening maw  
 Rend and devour: I do forbid the thought!  
 I for him, I-albeit a woman weak-  
 In place of burial-pit, will give him rest  
 By this protecting handful of light dust  
 Which, in the lap of this poor linen robe,  
 I bear to hallow and bestrew his corpse  
 With the due covering. Let none gainsay!  
 Courage and craft shall arm me, this to do.

**HERALD**

I charge thee, not to flout the city's law!

**ANTIGONE**

I charge thee, use no useless heralding!

**HERALD**

Stern is a people newly 'scaped from death.

**ANTIGONE**

Whet thou their sternness! burial he shall have.

**HERALD**

How? grace of burial, to the city's foe?

**ANTIGONE**

God hath not judged him separate in guilt.

**HERALD**

True-till he put this land in jeopardy.

**ANTIGONE**

His rights usurped, he answered wrong with wrong.

**HERALD**

Nay-but for one man's sin he smote the State.

**ANTIGONE**

Contention doth out-talk all other gods!  
Prate thou no more-I will to bury him.

**HERALD**

Will, an thou wilt! but I forbid the deed.

*The HERALD goes out.*

**CHORUS** *singing*

Exulting Fates, who waste the line  
And whelm the house of Oedipus!  
Fiends, who have slain, in wrath condign,  
The father and the children thus!  
What now befits it that I do,  
What meditate, what undergo?  
Can I the funeral rite refrain,  
Nor weep for Polyneices slain?  
But yet, with fear I shrink and thrill,  
Presageful of the city's will!

Thou, O Eteocles, shalt have  
 Full rites, and mourners at thy grave,  
 But he, thy brother slain, shall he,  
 With none to weep or cry Alas,  
 To unbefriended burial pass?  
 Only one sister o'er his bier,  
 To raise the cry and pour the tear-  
 Who can obey such stern decree?

### **SEMI-CHORUS**

Let those who hold our city's sway  
 Wreak, or forbear to wreak, their will  
 On those who cry, Ah, well-a-day!  
 Lamenting Polyneices still!  
 We will go forth and, side by side  
 With her, due burial will provide!  
 Royal he was; to him be paid  
 Our grief, wherever he be laid!  
 The crowd may sway, and change, and still  
 Take its caprice for justice' will  
 But we this dead Eteocles,  
 As Justice wills and Right decrees,  
 Will bear unto his grave!  
 For-under those enthroned on high  
 And Zeus' eternal royalty-  
 He unto us salvation gave!  
 He saved us from a foreign yoke,-  
 A wild assault of outland folk,  
 A savage, alien wave!

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