

Aeschylus *Seven Against Thebes*

Translated by Herbert Weir Smyth

Revised by the *Seven Against Thebes* Heroization team (Hélène Emeriaud, Kelly Lambert, Janet M. Oszolak, Sarah Scott, Keith Stone)

The Acropolis of Thebes, in which stand altars and images of various divinities.

A large gathering of citizens of Thebes. Enter Eteokles with attendants.

Eteokles

Men of Kadmos's city [*polis*], he who guards from the stern the concerns of the State and guides its helm with eyes untouched by sleep must speak to the point. For if we succeed, the responsibility is heaven's; [5] but if—may it not happen—disaster is our lot, Eteokles would be the one name shouted many times throughout the city [*polis*] in the citizens' resounding uproars and laments. From these evils may Zeus the Defender, upholding his name, shield the city [*polis*] of the Kadmeians!

[10] But now you—both he who is still short of his youthful prime, and he who, though past his prime, still strengthens the abundant growth of his body, and every man still in his prime, as is fitting—you must aid the state [*polis*] and [15] the altars of your homeland's gods so that their honors may never be obliterated. You must aid, too, your children, and Mother Earth, your beloved [*philtatē*] nurse. For welcoming all the distress of your childhood, when you were young and crept upon her kind soil, she raised you to inhabit her and bear the shield, [20] and to prove yourselves faithful in this time of need. And so, until today, the god has been favorably inclined, for though we have long been under siege, the war has gone well for the most part through the gods' will. But now, as the seer [*mantis*], the herdsman of birds, informs us, [25] using his ears and his mind to understand with unerring skill the prophetic birds unaided by sacrificial fire—he, master of such prophecy, declares that the greatest Argive attack is being planned in night assembly and that they will make plans to capture our city [*polis*]. [30] Hurry each of you to the battlements and the gates of our towered walls! Rush with all your armor! Fill the parapets and take your positions on the platforms of the towers. Stand your ground bravely where the gates open out, [35] and do not be afraid of this crowd of foreigners. The god will bring it to a good end.

I myself have dispatched scouts and men to observe their army, and I am confident that their going is not in vain. Once I have heard their report, I will not be taken by any trickery.

Enter a Scout.

Scout

Eteokles, mighty prince of the Kadmeians, [40] I have returned with a sure report of the army outside the walls; I myself am an eyewitness of their actions. Seven warriors, fierce regiment-commanders, slaughtered a bull over a black shield, and then touching the bull's gore with their hands they swore an oath [45] by Arēs, by Enyo,¹ and by Rout who delights in blood, that either they will level the city [*polis*] and sack the Kadmeians' town [*astu*] by force [*biā*], or will in death smear this soil with their blood. And on Adrastos' chariot they were placing remembrances of themselves [50] for their parents at home, and were shedding tears while so doing, but no piteous wailing escaped their lips. For their iron-hearted spirit heaved, blazing with courage, as of lions with war in their eyes. Your knowledge of these things was not delayed by fearfulness; [55] for I left them casting lots to decide how each commander, his post assigned by chance, would lead his regiment against the gates. Therefore, choose the best [*aristoi*] men of the city [*polis*] and station them quickly at the outlets of the gates. For nearby already the Argive army in full armor [60] is advancing in a flurry of dust, and glistening foam splatters the plain in drops from the horses' pantings. So you, like the careful helmsman of a ship, secure the city *polis*-and-environs before Arēs' blasts storm down upon it; for the wave of their army now crashes over the dry land. [65] Seize the first opportune moment for doing this. For all else, I, on my part, will keep a reliable eye on the lookout, and you, by learning from my certain report what happens beyond the gates, shall remain unharmed.

Exit.

Eteokles

[Zeus and Earth, and gods that guard our city, [70] and Curse,² potent agent of my father's vengeance, do not destroy my city [*polis*], ripping it up from its foundations, captive of the enemy, a city [*polis*] that speaks in Greece's tongue, and do not destroy our hearths and homes. [75] May they never hold the free land and city of Kadmos beneath the yoke of slavery! Be our protection! I am certain that what I ask is in our common interest; for a state [*polis*] that prospers pays honors to its gods [*daimones*].

Exit Eteokles, with citizens. The Chorus enters in fearful agitation.

Chorus

In terror I wail cries of great grief [*akhos*]. Their army is let loose! Leaving camp, [80] —look!—the mounted throng floods swiftly ahead. The dust whirling in the air tells me this is so—its message is speechless, yet clear and true. And now the plains of my native land under the blows of hooves send a roar to my ears; the sound flies [85]

¹ Enyo is a personification of war, and hence sometimes called the mother or the daughter of Arēs.

² The curse pronounced by Oedipus against his two sons (compare 785 ff.) is a daemonic power, here identified with the vengeance it calls into being.

and rumbles like a unstoppable torrent crashing down a mountainside.

Ah, ah, you gods and goddesses, raise your war cry over our walls to drive away the onrushing evil [*kakon*!]! The army of the white shield, [90] ready for battle, rushes at full speed against the city [*polis*]. Who then will rescue us, which of the gods or goddesses will help? Or shall I fall in supplication at the feet [95] of our ancestral gods' [*daimones*] statues?

Ah, blessed ones [*makares*], firmly enthroned, the time has come to hold fast to your statues. Why do we delay, who are much to be lamented? [100] Do you hear the clash of shields, or does it escape you? When, if not now, shall we place sacred robes and wreaths on the statues to accompany our prayers?

I see the clash—it is not the clatter of a single spear. What will you do? Will you betray [105] your own land, Arēs, where you have dwelt since long ago? God [*daimōn*] of the golden helmet, look, look upon the city [*polis*] that you once cherished!

Oh come all you gods who guard our city [*polis*] and its land [*khthonos*]! [110] See this suppliant band of maidens praying to be saved from slavery. A torrent of men, their helmet plumes tossing, crashes around the city [*polis*], [115] sped on by the blasts of Arēs. No! Father Zeus, all-accomplishing, fend from us altogether capture at the hands of the enemy.

[120] The Argives encircle the city [= *polis*-and-environs] of Kadmos. Terror of their weapons of war shakes us, as the bridles in the horse's jaws rattle the sound of death. Seven bold captains, conspicuous among the army [125] in spear-wielding harnesses, at the seven gates . . . take their stand each according to his lot.

Pallas, Zeus-born power delighting in battle, prove yourself the savior of the city! [130] And you, lord of steeds, ruler of the deep, Poseidon, with your fish-striking weapon grant us release from our fears, grant us release! [135] You too, Arēs—pity us!—guard the city [*polis*] named for Kadmos and make evident your closeness³ to us! [140] And Cypris, you who are the first mother of our race [*genos*], defend us who are sprung from your blood. We come to you, crying out in prayers for your divine ears. [145] And you, Apollo, lord of the Wolf,⁴ be a wolf to the enemy force and give them groan for groan! You too, child of Leto, maiden girl ready your bow, O Artemis near-and-dear one [*philē*]!

³ *kēdos* means both “kinship” and “care.” The wife of Kadmos was Harmonia, daughter of Arēs and Aphrodite.

⁴ See the note on Aeschylus *Suppliant Women* 686. [= ‘The epithet Lyceus, often applied to Apollo, was commonly connected with the belief that he was the destroyer and protector of wolves (λύκοι). As a destructive power he is invoked to ward off enemies (Aesch. Seven 145); as an averter of evil he protects herds, flocks, and the young. According to Pausanias (Paus. 2.19.3) Danaus established a sanctuary in honor of Lyceus at Argos, where, in later times, the most famous of all Apollo's temples was consecrated to him under the title of “Wolf-god.”, from Weir Smyth's translation of *Suppliant Women*, footnote to line 686.—Heroization Team]

Ah! Ah! [150] I hear the rattle of chariots encircling the city [*polis*]. O lady Hera! The hubs are creaking beneath the axles' load. Beloved [*philē*] Artemis! Ah! Ah! [155] The air rages at the shaking of spears! What is our city [*polis*] undergoing [*paskhein*]? What will the future bring? To what kind of end [*telos*] is the god taking us?

[Ah! Ah! A hail of stones strikes our battlements from afar. O beloved [*philos*] Apollo! [160] There is the clang of bronze-bound shields at the gates. O son of Zeus, in whom dwells the sacred power to decide in battle war's fulfillment [*telos*]! And you, blessed [*makar*] queen Onca⁵, on behalf of the city [*polis*], [165] defend your seven-gated home!

All-powerful divinities, you perfect [adjective of *telos*] gods and goddesses, guardians of the towers of [the palace of] this land, do not betray our city [*polis*] that now toils under the spear [170] to an alien-tongued army. Hear us, hear, as is right, the prayers we maidens offer with outstretched hands.

Beloved [*philoī*] superhuman forces [*daimones*], [175] encompass the city [*polis*] to deliver it from ruin and show that you love it. Consider the people's sacred offerings [*hiera*], and as you consider, help us. Remember, I beg, our city's [*polis*] worship, rich in sacrifice.

Eteokles

You intolerable things! I ask you, is this the best way to save the city [*polis*]? Does it hearten our army here besieged, [185] when you fall before the images of the gods that guard the city and shout and shriek—behavior that moderate [*sōphrōn*] people despise? May I never share my home with the female stock [*genos*], neither in time of evil [*kaka*] nor in *philē* prosperity! When things go well for her, her boldness is unbearable, [190] [190] but when she is afraid, she is an even greater evil [*kakon*] for home [*oikos*] and city [*polis*]. So now your cries as you rushed here and there in panicked flight have rattled the citizens into dispirited worthlessness [*kakē*]. The cause of the enemy outside our gates is excellently [adv. *aristos*] strengthened by your behavior, while we inside are ruined by our own people. [195] This is the sort of trouble you will have if you dwell with women. Now if anyone fails to obey my authority—whether man or woman or something in between—a sentence of death will be decreed for him and by no means whatsoever will he escape destruction by stoning at the people's [*dēmos*] hands. [200] It is for the man to take care of business outside the house; let no woman make decrees in those matters. Keep inside and do no harm! Do you hear me or not? Am I speaking to the deaf?

Chorus

Dear [*philos*] son of Oedipus, I grew afraid when I heard the clatter of the crashing chariots, [205] when the hubs screamed as they whirled around the wheel, and when I heard the sound of the steering gear, fire-forged bits, in the horses' mouths.

⁵ Onca, the name of a Phoenician goddess, is identified with Athena (compare 1.487).

Eteokles

Well, then, has a helmsman ever found a way to safety [*sōtēriā*] by fleeing from stern to prow, [210] when his ship is foundering in high seas?

Chorus

But trusting in the gods [*daimones*] I came in haste to their ancient statues, when the deadly blizzard of falling stones thundered against the gates. Just then I set out in fear to pray to the Blessed Ones [*makares*] [215] that they spread their protection over the city [*polis*].

Eteokles

Pray that the rampart withstand the enemy spear. Yes, the outcome is in the gods' hands—but then, it is said that the gods of a captured city [*polis*] abandon it.

Chorus

Never so long as I live may this divine assembly abandon us, [220] nor may I live to see the city [*polis*] overrun and the army seizing it with hostile fire!

Eteokles

When you invoke the gods, do not be badly [*kakos*, adv.] advised. For Subordination is [225] the mother of Success, wife of the Savior [*Sōtēr*⁶]—as the saying goes.

Chorus

So she is, but the power of god is supreme, and often in misfortunes [*kaka*] it raises the man without remedy [*amakhanos*] out of harsh misery even when stormclouds are lowering over his eyes.

Eteokles

[230] It is the man's duty to offer victims and sacrifices to the gods when they test their enemy; your duty is to be silent and to remain inside the house.

Chorus

By the will of the gods we inhabit an unconquered city, and the rampart withstands the enemy throng. [235] What wish for retribution [*nemesis*] makes you resent this?

Eteokles

I do not begrudge your honoring [vb. *tīmē*] the race [*genos*] of *daimones*; but lest you make the citizens cowardly, be calm and do not be overly fearful.

Chorus

When I heard the strange and jumbled clashes, [240] I came in trembling fear to this citadel, our seat of worship.

⁶ This title would be appropriate for a god, in this case unspecified. [Heroization Team]

Eteokles

If, then, you hear that men are dying or wounded, do not seize on the news with loud wailing. For this is the food of Arēs, human blood.

Chorus

[245] Oh, but I hear horses snorting!

Eteokles

Hear them, then, but not too clearly.

Chorus

The city [*polis*-and-environs] groans from deep in the earth, as though we are surrounded.

Eteokles

Surely it is enough that I am making plans for this?

Chorus

I am terrified—the crashing at the gates is increasing.

Eteokles

[250] Won't you be silent, and speak none of this throughout the city?

Chorus

Divine company, do not betray our fortifications!

Eteokles

Damn you! Will you not endure these events in silence?

Chorus

Gods of our city! Do not let my fate be slavery!

Eteokles

You would enslave both me and all the city [*polis*].

Chorus

[255] Almighty Zeus, turn your missile against the enemy [*ekhthros*]!

Eteokles

O Zeus, what a breed you have made for us in women!

Chorus

A breed steeped in misery, just like men whose city [*polis*] is captured.

Eteokles

Why are your words ill-omened, when you still grasp the gods' statues?

Chorus

In my weakness fear controls my tongue.

Eteokles

[260] If only you would grant me easy fulfillment [*telos*] for what I am pleading.

Chorus

Please state it as quickly as possible, and I will quickly know what to do.

Eteokles

Be silent, wretched woman; do not terrify your *philo*i men.

Chorus

I am silent. I will suffer [*paskhein*] what is destined together with the others.

Eteokles

I welcome this utterance [*epos*] of yours over what you said before. [265] And in addition, keep your distance from the gods' images and make a stronger prayer, that the gods fight on our side. And once you have heard my prayers, then sing the victory song, the sacred [*hieros*] 'ololu' cry of joy and goodwill, our Greek customary [*nomos*] ritual of shouting in tribute, that [270] brings courage to our friends [*philo*i] and dissolves fear of the enemy.

Here Eteokles makes his vow.

And now to the gods who guard our city's land, both those who dwell in the plain and those who watch over its meeting-place [*agorā*], to Dirke's springs and the waters of Ismenos, I vow that, if things go well and the city [*polis*] is saved [*sōzein*], [275] the citizens shall redden the gods' altars with the blood of sheep and sacrifice bulls to the gods—this is my vow—and offer trophies, while I will crown their holy temples with the spoil of the enemy's spear-pierced garments.

[280] Make this kind of prayer to the gods, without your previous lamentation, nor with wild and useless panting; for you will not escape your destiny any the more. As for me, I will go station six men, with me as the seventh, as champions to oppose the enemy [*ekhthroi*] in proud fashion [285] at the seven exits in the wall, even before speedy messengers or swift-rushing reports arrive and inflame us with urgent need.

Exit.

Chorus

I heed him, but through terror my heart finds no repose. [290] Anxieties border upon my heart and kindle my fear of the army surrounding our walls, as a trembling dove fears for her children in the nest because of snakes that are dangerous bed-fellows. [295] For against our fortifications some are advancing with all their men, all in formation. Ah, what will become of me? Others are hurling jagged boulders

[300] at the citizens on all sides. O gods born of Zeus, by every means rescue our city [polis] and people, sprung from Kadmos!

What more fertile plain will you find in place of ours, [305] if you abandon to the enemy [ekhthroi] this deep-soiled land and the water of Dirke which is the most nourishing of the streams that earth-encircling Poseidon [310] and Tethys' children pour forth? Therefore, divine guardians of the city [polis], [315] hurl murderous derangement [atē] on the men outside our walls and panic that makes them throw away their weapons, and so win glory for these citizens. Defend the city [polis] and remain in possession of your home and throne [320] in answer to our shrill, wailing prayers!

It is a great cause for grief to hurl a primeval city to Hādēs in this way, quarry and slave of the spear, ravaged shamefully in the dusty ashes by an Argive man through divine will. [325] And grief, too, to let the women be led away captive—ah me!—young and old, dragged by the hair, like horses, with their cloaks torn off them. [330] A city [polis], emptied, shouts out as the human booty perishes with mingled cries. A heavy fate, indeed, my fear anticipates.

It is a lamentable thing that modest girls should be plucked unripe, before the customary rites, and should make a [335] loathsome journey from their homes. What? I declare that the dead will do better than the captives; for when a city [polis] is subdued—ah, ah!—many and miserable are its sufferings. [340] Man drags off man, or kills, or sets fires; the whole city [= polis-and-environs] is defiled with smoke. Mad Arēs storms, subduing the people and polluting [miainein] reverence.

[345] Tumults swell through the town [astu], and against the polis a towering net is advancing. Man falls before man beneath the spear. Sobs and wails over gore-covered babes, just nursed at their mothers' breasts, [350] resound. Rape and pillage of those fleeing through the city are the deeds of one's own blood. Plunderer joins up with plunderer; the empty-handed calls to the empty-handed, wishing to have a partner, [355] each greedy for neither less nor equal share. Reason exists for imagining what will come after this.

The earth's varied fruits, fallen to the ground, give pain, a bitter sight for the maid-servants. [360] In jumbled confusion the abundant gifts of earth are carried away by reckless looting waves. Young women, enslaved, suffer a new evil: a bed of misery, prize of the conquering enemy's spear, as though of a prospering husband— [365] they can expect the coming of the nightly rite [telos], which gives aid to tears and anguish!⁷

The Scout is seen approaching from one side; Eteokles from the other.

⁷ In this highly condensed passage, contrasted with the note of the misery of an enforced union is an undertone of the happiness of a marriage of love. *andros* is at once "man" and "husband," *telos* "rite" and "consummation," *elpis* "expectation" of sorrow and joy.

Leader of the First Half-Chorus

The scout, I believe, [370] is bringing some fresh news of the army to us, my friends [*philai*], since the joints of his legs are hastily speeding as they carry him on his mission.

Leader of the Second Half-Chorus

And, indeed, here is our lord himself, the son of Oedipus, at the right moment to hear the messenger's report. Haste makes his stride uneven, too.

Scout

[375] It is with certain knowledge that I will give my account of the enemy's actions, how each man according to lot has been posted at the gates. Tydeus is already storming opposite the Proetid gates; but the seer [*mantis*] will not allow him to ford the Ismenos because the omens from the sacrifices are not favorable. [380] Yet Tydeus, raging and eager for battle, shouts like a serpent hissing at high noon, and lashes the skilled [*sophos*] *mantis* Oekles' son, with the taunt that he cringes in cowardice before death and battle. With such cries he shakes three overshadowing plumes, [385] his helmet's mane, while from under his shield, bells forged of bronze therein ring out a fearsome clang. He has this haughty symbol [*sēma*] on his shield: a well-crafted sky, ablaze with stars, and the brightness of the full moon shining in the center of the shield, [390] the moon that is the most revered of the stars, the eye of night. Raving so in his arrogant armor, he shouts beside the river-bank, craving battle, like some charger that champs at the bit with rage [= *menos*] as he waits in eagerness for the trumpet's war-cry. [395] Whom will you send against him? Who will be capable of standing as our champion at the Proetid gate when its bars are loosened?

Eteokles

I would not tremble before any mere adornment [*kosmos*] on a man. Nor can signs [*sēmata*] wound and kill—crests and bell have no bite without the spear. [400] And regarding this "night" which you describe on his shield, sparkling with heaven's stars—perhaps the folly of it might be a prophet [*mantis*]. For should night fall on this man's eyes as he dies, then to its bearer this arrogant symbol [*sēma*] [405] would prove rightly and justly named; and it is against himself that he will have prophesied [*manteuesthai*] this outrageous violence [*hubris*]. Now as for me, against Tydeus I will station the trusty son of Astakos as defender of this gate, since he is full noble and [410] reveres the throne of Honor and detests proud speech. He is slow to act disgracefully, and he has no ignoble [*kakos*] nature. His race springs from the men sown of the dragon's teeth, from one of those whom Arēs spared, and so Melanippos is truly born of our land. Arēs will decide [*krinein*] the outcome with a throw of the dice; [415] but Justice [*Dikē*], his kin by blood, indeed sends this man forth to keep the enemy spear from the mother that gave him birth.

Exit Melanippos.

Chorus

May the gods grant success to our champion, since he rises up in a just [*dikaïos*] cause, to battle for his city [*polis*]! But I shudder [420] to watch the bloody deaths of men cut down for the sake of their own people [*philoî*].

Scout

Yes, may the gods so grant success to this man. Kapaneus is stationed at the Electran gates, another giant of a man, greater than the one described before. [425] But his boast is too proud for a mere human, and he makes terrifying [*deinos*] threats against our battlements—which, I hope, chance will not fulfil! For he says he will utterly destroy the city [*polis*] with god’s will or without it, and that not even conflict [*eris*] with Zeus, though it should fall before him in the plain, will stand in his way. [430] The god’s lightning and thunderbolts he compares to midday heat. For his shield’s symbol [*sēma*] he has a man without armor bearing fire, and the torch, his weapon, blazes in his hands; and in golden letters he says “I will burn the city.” [435] Against such a man make your dispatch—who will meet him in combat, who will stand firm without trembling before his boasts?

Eteokles

Here too gain [*kerdos*] follows with interest from gain [*kerdos*].⁸ The tongue proves in the end to be a true [*alēthēs*] accuser of men’s wicked thoughts. [440] Kapaneus makes his threats, ready to act, irreverent toward the gods, and giving his tongue full exercise in wicked glee, he, though a mere mortal, sends a loud and swollen boast [*epos*] to Zeus in heaven. But I trust that the fire-bearing thunderbolt will justly [with *dikē*] come to him, [445] and when it comes it will not be anything like the sun’s mid-day heat. And against him, even though he is a big talker, a man of fiery spirit, mighty [*biā*] Polyphontes, is stationed, a dependable sentinel [450] with the good will of guardian Artemis and the other gods. Now tell me about another one allotted to other gates!

Exit Polyphontes.

Chorus

Death to him who exults so arrogantly over the city [*polis*]! May the thunderbolt stop him before he leaps into my home [455] and plunders me from my maiden chambers with his outrageous spear!

Scout

Now I will tell you about the man who next drew station at the gates. The third lot leaped out of the upturned bronze helmet for Eteoklos, [460] to hurl his band against the Neistan gates. He whirls his horses as they snort through their bridles, eager to fall against the gate. Their muzzles whistle in a barbarian way, filled with the breath of their haughty nostrils. [465] His shield is decorated in great style: an armored man climbs a ladder’s rungs to mount the tower of his enemies [*ekhthroi*] that he

⁸ Tydeus' insolence (l. 387) was “gain” to our cause; to it is now added that of Kapaneus, which is like money put out at interest [*tokos*].

wants to destroy. This one, too, shouts in syllables of written letters that even Arēs could not hurl him from the battlements. [470] Send a dependable opponent against this man, too, to keep the yoke of slavery from our city [*polis*].

Eteokles

I would send this man here, and with good fortune. [Exit Megareus.] Indeed, he has already been sent, his only boast in his hands, Megareus, Creon's seed, of the race [*genos*] of the sown-men. [475] He will not withdraw from the gate in fear of the thunder of the horses' furious snorting; but either he will die and pay the earth [*khthōn*] the full price of his nurture, or will capture two men and the city [= *polis*-and-environs] on the shield, and then adorn [*kosmein*] his father's house with the spoils. [480] Tell me about another's boasts and do not begrudge me the full tale!

Chorus

O champion of my home, I pray that this man will have good fortune, and that there will be bad fortune for his enemies. As they boast too much against the city [*polis*] in their frenzied [= like a *mainas*] mind [*phrēn*], [485] so, too, may Zeus the Requirer look on them in anger!

Scout

Another, the fourth, has the gate near Onca Athena and takes his stand with a shout, Hippomedon, tremendous in form and figure. I shuddered in fear as he spun a huge disk—the circle of his shield, I mean— [490] I cannot deny it. The maker of symbols [*sēmata*] who put the design on his shield was no lowly craftsman: the symbol is Typhon, spitting out of his fire-breathing mouth a dark, thick smoke, the darting sister of fire. [495] And the rim of the hollow-bellied shield is fastened all around with snaky braids. The warrior himself has raised the war-cry and, inspired by Arēs he raves for battle like a bacchant, with a look to inspire fear. We must put up a good defense against the assault of such a man, [500] for already Rout is boasting of victory at the gate.

Eteokles

First Onca Pallas, who dwells near the city [*polis*], close by the gate, and who loathes outrageousness [*hubris*] in a man, will fend him off like a dangerous snake away from nestlings. Moreover, Hyperbios, Oinops' trusty son, [505] is chosen to match him, man to man, as he is eager to search out his fate [*moira*] in the crisis that chance has wrought—neither in form, nor spirit nor in the wielding of his arms does he bear reproach. Hermes⁹ has appropriately pitted them against each other. For the man is hostile [*ekhthros*] to the man he faces in battle, [510] and the gods on their shields also meet as enemies. The one has fire-breathing Typhon, while father Zeus stands upright on Hyperbios' shield, his lightning bolt aflame in his hand. And no one yet has seen Zeus conquered. [515] Such then is the favor of the divine powers [*daimones*]: we are with the victors, they with the vanquished, if Zeus in fact proves stronger in battle than Typhon. And it is likely that the mortal adversaries will fare

⁹ Hermes presided over contests and lots.

as do their gods; and so, in accordance with the symbol [*sēma*], [520] Zeus will be a savior [*sōtēr*] for Hyperbios since he resides on his shield.

Exit Hyperbios.

Chorus

I am sure that Zeus' antagonist, since he has on his shield the unloved form of an earth-born [*khthonios*] deity [*daimōn*], an image hateful [*ekhthros*] to both mortals and the long-lived gods, [525] will drop his head in death before the gate.

Scout

Let it be so! Next I describe the fifth man who is stationed at the fifth, the Northern gate opposite the tomb [*tumbos*] of Amphion, Zeus's son. He swears by his spear which, in his confidence, he holds more to be revered than a god [530] and more precious than his eyes, that he will sack the town [*astu*] of the Kadmeians in spite of Zeus. He says this, the beautiful child of a mountain-bred mother—a warrior, half man, half boy, and his beard's first growth is just now advancing on his cheeks, [535] his youth in first bloom, thick, upspringing hair. But now he makes his advance with a savage heart [*phronēma*] and a terrifying look, not at all like the maidens he's named for.¹⁰ Nor does he take his stand at the gate unboasting, but wields our city's [*polis*] shame on his bronze-forged [540] shield, his body's circular defence, on which the Sphinx who eats men raw is cleverly fastened with bolts, her body embossed and gleaming. She carries under her a single Kadmeian, so that against this man chiefly our missiles will be hurled. [545] He does not seem to have come to do any petty trading in the battle, nor to shame the making of his long journey—he is Parthenopaios of Arcadia. Such is the man, and aiming to make full payment for the fine support given him in Argos, his adopted land, he now threatens our fortifications—may the god not fulfil his threats!

Eteokles

[550] If only they would get from the gods what they wish for, because of those unholy boasts of theirs, then surely they would perish in utter ruin and misery. There is a man for this one, too, whom you name an Arcadian, a man who does not boast, but who knows the thing to do— [555] Aktor, brother of him I named before. He will not allow words that lack deeds to overrun his gate and increase evils [*kaka*], nor will he let in a man who carries on his hostile shield the image of the ravenous, detested beast. [560] That beast outside his shield will blame the man who carries her into the gate, when she has taken a heavy beating beneath the city's [*polis*] walls. If the gods are willing, what I speak may prove true [*alētheuein*]!

Exit Aktor.

Chorus

His words penetrate to my heart, my hair stands on end [565] as I hear the loud

¹⁰ Parthenopaios "maiden-faced." His mother Atalanta dwelt on Mount Maenalos in Arcadia.

threats of these loud-boasting, impious men. May the gods destroy them here in our land!

Scout

The sixth man I will name is of the highest moderation [superlative of *sōphrōn*] and a seer [*mantis*] best [*aristos*] in combat, mighty [*biā*] Amphiaraos. [570] Stationed at the Homoloid gate, he repeatedly rebukes mighty [*biā*] Tydeus with evils [*kaka*] “Murderer, maker of unrest in the city, principal teacher of evils [*kaka*] to the Argives, summoner of vengeance’s Curse [*Erinys*], servant of Slaughter, [575] counselor to Adrastos in these evil [*kaka*] plans.” And next, with eyes looking upward, he addressed your own brother, mighty [*biā*] Polyneikes who shares your blood, and called him by name, dwelling twice upon its latter part.¹¹ These were his words [*epea*]: [580] “Will such a deed as this be pleasing to the gods, fine to hear of and to relate to those in the future—that you sacked the city [*polis*] of your ancestors and your native gods and launched a foreign army against them? What justice [*dikē*] is it to drain dry the font of your existence?¹² [585] And how shall your fatherland, captured by the spear for the sake of your ambition, be won over to your cause? As for me, I will enrich this earth [*kthōn*], a seer [*mantis*] interred beneath enemy soil [*kthōn*]. Let us fight! I anticipate no dishonorable [without *tīmē*] fate [*moira*].” [590] So the seer [*mantis*] spoke as untroubled he held his all-bronze shield. No symbol [*sēma*] was fixed to his shield’s circle. For he does not wish to seem the best [*aristos*], but to be the best, as he harvests the fruit of his mind’s [*phrēn*] deep furrow, where his careful resolutions grow. [595] I advise you to send wise [*sophoi*] and noble [*agathoi*] opponents against him. He who reveres the gods is to be dreaded [*deinos*].

Eteokles

Ah, the pity of fate’s omen when it makes a just [*dikaios*] man associate with the irreverent! In all things, nothing is more evil [*kakos*] [600] than evil [*kakos*] partnership. Its fruit should not be gathered in: the field of recklessness [*atē*] yields a harvest of death. For it may be that a pious man, embarked shipboard with sailors hot for some crime, perishes along with the kind [*genos*] of men hated by the gods; [605] or, a man, though upright [*dikaios*] himself, when among fellow-citizens who treat all strangers [*xenoi*] as enemies [*ekhthroi*] and neglect the gods, may fall undeserving into the same trap as they, and be subdued, struck by the scourge of the god that strikes all alike.

Just so the seer [*mantis*], Oekles’ son, [610] although a moderate [*sōphrōn*], just [*dikaios*], noble [*agathos*], reverent man and a great prophet, mixes with impious, rash-talking men in spite of his *phrenes*, men stretching out in a procession that is long to retrace,¹³ and, if it is Zeus’s will, he will be dragged down in ruin along

¹¹ Polyneikes “much-strife” [*polu neikos*], *endatoumenos*, literally “separating,” i.e. dwelling with emphasis on each separate part of the name.

¹² *mêtros pēgê* strictly means “source, which consists in a mother.” Having used this expression for “mother, who is the source of life,” the poet accommodates the verb to the literal sense of *pēgê* rather than use a verb of slaying which would have suited the personal object.

¹³ The march of the army from distant Argos is compared to a lengthened-out procession.

with them.

[615] So then, I expect that he will not even charge the gates: not because he lacks courage [without *thūmos*] or has a worthless [*kakon*] disposition, but because he knows that he must meet his end [*telos*] in battle, if the prophecies of Loxias are to come to fruition—the god usually either holds silent or speaks to the point. [620] Just the same, I will station a man against him, mighty [*biā*] Lasthenes, a gate-keeper who treats strangers [*xenoi*] as enemies [*ekhthroi*]. He has the mind [*noos*] of an old man, but his body is at its prime: his eyes are quick, and he does not let his hand delay for his spear to seize what is left exposed by the shield. [625] Still it is the god's gift when mortals succeed.

Exit Lasthenes.

Chorus

Gods, hear our just [*dikaias*] prayers and fulfil them, that the city [*polis*] may have good fortune! Turn aside the evils [*kaka*] suffered in war onto those who invade our land! May Zeus strike them [630] with his thunderbolt outside the walls and slay them!

Scout

Last I will tell of the seventh champion, him at the seventh gate,¹⁴ your own brother, and of what fate he prays for and calls down on the city [*polis*]. His prayer is that after he mounts the battlements and is proclaimed king in the land [*khthōn*], [635] and shouts the paian in triumph over its capture, he may then meet you in combat, and once he kills you, that he may perish at your side, or, if you survive, make you pay with banishment in the same way as you dishonored him with exile. [640] Mighty [*biā*] Polyneikes shouts such threats and invokes his native gods, the gods of his fatherland, to watch over his prayers in every way. He holds a shield, a perfect circle, newly-made, with a double symbol [*sēma*] cleverly fastened on it: [645] a woman modestly [*sōphrōn* adverb] walking in the fore leads a man in arms made, it appears, of hammered gold. She claims to be Justice [*Dikē*], as the lettering indicates, “I will bring this man back and he will have his city [*polis*] and move freely in his father's halls.”

Such are the inventions fixed to their shields. [650] [Quickly determine yourself whom you think it best to send.] Know that you will find no fault with me in the substance of my report, but you yourself determine on what course to pilot the city [*polis*].

Exit Scout.

Eteokles

O my family [*genos*] sired by Oedipus, steeped in tears, [655] driven to madness by

¹⁴ The ominous “seventh” is substituted for “the Highest” [*Hupsistai*].

the gods and by the gods detested! Ah, now indeed our father's curses are brought to fulfillment. But neither weeping nor wailing is proper for me now, lest a grief even harder to bear is brought to life. As for him whose name is so very fitting, Polyneikes, we shall know soon enough what the symbol [adjective from *sēma*] on his shield will accomplish, [660] whether the babbling letters shaped in gold on his shield, together with his wanderings of his thinking [verb from *phrēn*], will bring him back. If Justice [*Dikē*], Zeus's maiden daughter, were attending his actions and his thoughts [*phrenes*], this might be so. But as it is, neither when he escaped the darkness of his mother's womb, [665] nor in childhood, nor at any point in his early manhood, nor when the beard first thickened on his cheek, did Justice [*Dikē*] acknowledge him and consider him worthy. And even now I do not think that she is standing by his side to aid the devastation [= *kakon*] of the land [*khthōn*] of his ancestors. [670] Indeed, Justice [*Dikē*] would— to say with all justice [*pan-dikōs*] —be false to her name, if she should be with¹⁵ a man so utterly audacious in his *phrenes*. Trusting in this fact I will go and stand against him—I myself in person. Who else has a more just [*dikē*] claim? Commander against commander, brother against brother, [675] enemy [*ekhthros*] against enemy [*ekhthros*], I will take my stand. Quick, bring my greaves to protect against spears and stones!

Chorus

No, son of Oedipus, most dear [*philtatos*] of our men, do not be like in temperament to him who is called by such a most evil [*kakos*] name. It is enough that Kadmeians [680] are advancing to close combat with Argives. That bloodshed can be expiated. But when men of the same blood kill each other as you desire, the pollution [*miasma*] from this act never grows old.

Eteokles

If indeed a man should suffer evil [*kakon*], let it be without dishonor, since that is the only profit [*kerdos*] for the dead. [685] But you cannot speak of any glory [= good *kleos*] for happenings that are at once evil [*kaka*] and held in dishonor.

Chorus

For what are you so eager, child? Do not let battle-mad derangement [*atē*] fill your soul and carry you away. Reject this evil [*kakos*] passion while it is still young.

Eteokles

Since the god hastens the deed so urgently, [690] let the whole race [*genos*] of Laios, hated by Phoebus, be swept on the wind to Cocytus' destined flood!

Chorus

A savage desire eats away at you, drives you to murder, blood-sacrifice proscribed by divine law, whose only *telos* is bitter fruit.

Eteokles

¹⁵ The verb here, *suneînai*, can indicate being with someone in a personal or erotic sense. [Heroization Team]

[695] True, my own beloved [*philos*] father's hateful [*ekhthra*], ruinous curse hovers before my dry, unweeping eyes, and informs me of benefit [*kerdos*] preceding subsequent death.¹⁶

Chorus

No, do not let yourself be driven to it. You will not be called *kakos* if you retain life nobly. Will not the avenging Erinys in her dark aegis [700] leave your house, when the gods receive sacrifice from your hands?

Eteokles

The gods, it seems, have already banished us from their care, yet they admire the favor [*kharis*] we offer them when we perish. So then, why should we cringe and shy away from deadly fate [*moira*]?

Chorus

[705] It is only at this moment that death stands close by you, for the *daimōn* may change its purpose even after a long time and come on a gentler wind. But now it still seethes.

Eteokles

Yes, the curses of Oedipus have made it seethe in fury. [710] Too true [*alēthēs*] were the phantoms in my sleeping visions, predicting the division of our father's wealth!

Chorus

Obey us women, although you do not like to.

Eteokles

Recommend something that can be accomplished; your request need not be lengthy.

Chorus

Do not yourself take the road to the seventh gate!

Eteokles

[715] Let me assure you, you will not blunt my sharpened purpose with words.

Chorus

And yet any victory, even if *kakē*, is nonetheless held in honor [*tīmē*] by the god.

Eteokles

A soldier must not embrace that saying [*epos*].

Chorus

But are you willing to harvest the blood of your own brother?

¹⁶ Literally "gain coming before death that comes later." The curse whispers "slay him, then be slain yourself."

Eteokles

When it is the gods who give you evils [*kaka*], you cannot flee them.

Exit.

Chorus

[720] I shudder in terror at the goddess who lays ruin to homes, a goddess unlike other divinities, who is a totally true [*alēthēs*] prophet [*mantis*] of evil [*kakon*] to come. I shudder that the Erinyes invoked by the father's prayer will fulfil [verb of *telos*] the over-wrathful [725] curses that Oedipus spoke in madness. This strife [*eris*] that will destroy his sons drives the Erinyes to fulfillment.

A stranger [*xenos*] distributes their inheritance, a Khalybian immigrant from Scythia, a bitter divider of wealth, [730] savage-hearted iron that apportions land [*khthōn*] for them to dwell in, as much as they can occupy in death when they have lost their portion [*moira*] in these wide plains.

But when both have died, each killing [735] the other in mutual slaughter, and the earth's dust has swallowed the black streams of their blood, who could offer sacrifice that might make purification [*katharmoi*]? Who could cleanse them? [740] O, the new troubles [*ponoi*] of this house mixed with its evils [*kaka*] of before!

Indeed I speak of the ancient transgression, now swift in its retribution. It remains even into the third generation, [745] ever since Laios—in defiance of Apollo who, at his Pythian oracle at the earth's center, said three times that the king would save [*sōzein*] his city [*polis*] if he died without offspring— [750] ever since he, overcome by the thoughtlessness of his longing, fathered his own death, the parricide Oedipus, who sowed his mother's sacred field, where he was nurtured, [755] and endured a bloody crop. Madness united the frenzied [= distraught *phrenes*] bridal pair.

Now it is as if a sea of evils [*kaka*] pushes its swell onward. As one wave sinks, the sea raises up another, [760] triple-crested, which crashes around the city's [*polis*] stern. In between a narrow defense stretches— no wider than a wall. [765] I fear that the city [*polis*] will be overthrown along with its kings [*basileus*].

For the compensation is heavy when curses uttered long ago are fulfilled [bring to *telos*], and once the deadly curse has come into existence, it does not pass away. When the fortune [*olbos*] of seafaring merchants has grown too great, [770] it must be thrown overboard.

For whom have the gods and divinities that share the heart of the city [*polis*] and the thronging assembly [*agōn*] of men ever admired [775] so much as they honored Oedipus then, when he removed that deadly, man-seizing plague from our land?

But when, his sanity regained, he grew miserable in his wretched [780] marriage,

then carried away by his grief [*algos*] and with maddened [*mainesthai*] heart he accomplished [verb of *telos*] a double evil [*kaka*]. With the hand that killed his father he struck out his eyes, which were dearer to him than his children.

[785] Next he launched brutal, wrathful words against the sons he had bred—ah! curses from a bitter tongue—that wielding iron in their hands they would one day divide his property. [790] So now I tremble in fear that the swift-running Erinys will bring this to fulfillment [*telos*].

Enter Messenger.

Messenger

Take heart, you daughters who were nurtured by your mother. Our city [*polis*] has escaped the yoke of slavery; the boasts of the powerful men have fallen to the ground. [795] The city [*polis*] enjoys fair weather and has taken on no water even though it has been buffeted by many waves. The walls hold, and we have fortified the gates with champions fully capable in single-handed combat. For the most part all is well, at six of the gates. [800] But lord Apollo, the reverend leader of the seventh,¹⁷ took for himself the seventh gate, accomplishing upon the *genos* of Oedipus the ancient follies of Laios.

Chorus

What novel happening will further affect the city [*polis*]?

Messenger

The city [*polis*] is saved [*sōzein*], but the kings [*basileus*, pl.] born of the same seed—

Chorus¹⁸

[805] Who? What did you say? I am out of my mind with fear of your report.

Messenger

Control yourself now and listen. The sons of Oedipus—

Chorus

Ah, miserable me, I am prophet [*mantis*] of these evils [*kaka*].

Messenger

In truth, beyond all question, struck down in the dust—

Chorus

Are they lying out there? This is hard to bear, but say it just the same.

¹⁷ An obscure designation of Apollo, often referred to the tradition that he was born on the seventh day. The adjective looks like a military title, but divisions of seven were unknown.

¹⁸ Modern editions of the *Seven Against Thebes* differ with regard to the identification of speaking voices and even with regard to the internal order of the verses in lines 804–821. [Heroization Team]

Messenger

[810] The men are dead, murdered by their very own hands.

Chorus

Then with hands so fraternal did they each kill the other together?

Messenger

Thus was the *daimōn* at once impartial to both. All alone, in truth, it consumes the ill-fated family [*genos*]. We have cause in this for joy and tears— [815] the one because the city [*polis*] fares well, the other because the leaders, the two generals, have divided the whole of their property with hammered Scythian steel. They will possess only that land [*kthōn*] they take in burial, swept away as they were in accordance with their father's curses. [820] [The city [*polis*] is saved [*sōzein*], but through their mutual murder the earth has drunk the blood of the two kings [*basileus*, dual] born of the same seed.]

Exit.

Chorus

O great Zeus and *daimones* that guard our city [*polis*], you who indeed protect these walls of Kadmos, [825] should I rejoice and shout in triumph for the unharmed savior [*sōtēr*] of the city [*polis*], or should I lament our leaders in war, [830] now wretched, having a bad *daimōn* and childless? Indeed, in exact accordance with their name and as “men of much strife” [*poluneikeis*]¹⁹, they have perished through their impious intent.

O black curse on the family [*genos*], Oedipus' curse, now brought to fulfillment [*telos*]! A chill of evil [*kakon*] falls about my heart. [835] Frenzied as I am [*thuias*] I make my song for the grave [*tumbos*] as I hear of their corpses dripping with blood, how they died through the workings of cruel fate [*moira*]. This song of the spear, sung to the flute, is indeed born of an ill omen.²⁰

[840] The curseful utterance of their father has done its work and not fallen short. Laios' plans, made in disobedience, have kept their force. I have a troubled thought [*merimna*] for our city [*polis*]; divine decrees do not lose their edge.

[*The funeral procession with the bodies of the brothers comes into view.*]

[845] O bringers of immense grief, you have done in this a deed beyond belief, yet lamentable troubles [*pēmata*] have indeed come. The events are self-evident; the messenger's report is plain to see. Twofold are our troubled thoughts [*merimnai*] —

¹⁹ The name Polyneikes [*Poluneikēs*] means “man of much strife”; that of Eteokles [*Eteoklēs*] “man of true glory” [Heroization Team]

²⁰ This passage has also been taken to deprecate as inauspicious the previous ode (720 ff.) because it was sung during the combat of the brothers: “It was for a tomb I framed my song when, inspired by frenzy, I heard (prophetically) . . . ill-omened, indeed, the contest of the spear to such an accompaniment.”

double evils [*kaka*] [850] of kindred murder, this double suffering [*pathē*] has come to fulfillment [*telos*]. What shall I say? What else indeed than that pain [*ponos*] born of pain [*ponos*] surround this house's hearth?

But sail upon the wind of lamentation, my friends [*philai*], [855] and about your head row with your hands' rapid stroke in conveyance of the dead,²¹ that stroke which always causes the sacred slack-sailed, black-clothed ship to pass over Acheron to the unseen land where Apollo does not walk, [860] the sunless land that receives all men.

But here come Antigone and Ismene to do their bitter duty, the song of lamentation [*thrēnos*] over their brothers both. With all sincerity, I think, will they [865] pour forth their fitting grief [*algos*] from their lovely, deep-bosomed breasts. But it is right for us, before their singing, to cry out the awful hymn [*humnos*] of the Erinys and thereafter [870] sing the hated [*ekthros*] victory song of Hādēs.

Ah, sisters most unfortunate in your kin of all women who clasp their girdle about their robes, I weep, I groan, and there is no feigning in the shrill cries that come straight from my heart [*phrēn*].

[875] Ah, pity you men with insensitive *phrenes*, whom friends [*philoī*] could not persuade and evils [*kaka*] could not wear down! To your misery you have captured your father's house with the spear.

To their misery, indeed, [880] they found a miserable death in the outrage done their house.

Ah, you brothers who were poised to cast over the walls of your home and looked—to your sorrow—for sole rule, now you have been [885] reconciled by the iron sword.

The great Erinys of your father Oedipus has fulfilled it all truly [*alēthēs*]. Pierced through your left sides, pierced indeed— [890] through those sides that were born from one womb!

Ah, *daimones*! Ah, the curses that demand death for death! [895] Right through, as you say, were they struck, with blows to house and body by an unspeakable wrath [*menos*] and by the doom, called down by their father's curse, which they shared without discord.

[900] Groaning spreads throughout the city [*polis*], too: the walls groan; the field that loves fighting-men groans. But for those who come after them there remains their

²¹ As the souls of the brothers are now being conveyed across Acheron in Charon's boat, the Chorus in imagination aid their passage by the ritual of mourning. Their song of lamentation stands for the wind, the beating of their heads by their hands are the strokes of the oars. Contrasted with the grim vessel that transports all spirits to the sunless land of Hādēs, is the ship that goes to the festival at Delos, the "clearly-seen" island, the land of Apollo, god of light and health.

property, on which account [905] the strife [*neikos*] of those terrible-fated men came to fulfillment [*telos*] in death. In their haste to anger they apportioned their property so that each has an equal share. To their *philo*i their reconciler is not blameless, [910] nor is Arēs agreeable. Under strokes of iron they are come to this, and under strokes of iron there await them—what, one might perhaps ask—shares in their father’s tomb.²²

[915] Our shrill, heart-rending wail goes with them—product of lamentation [*goos*] and pain [*pēma*] felt of its own accord—a wail from a distressed mind [*phrēn*], joyless, pouring forth tears from a heart [*phrēn*] [920] that wastes away as I weep for these two princes.

Over these competing [adj. *āthlos*] men it can be said that they did much to harm our citizens and also the ranks of all the foreigners [*xenoi*] [925] who died in abundance in the fighting.

Ill-fated [having a bad *daimōn*] beyond all women who are called by the name of mother is she who bore them. After she made her own child her own husband, [930] she gave birth to these sons, who have thus ended-their-lives [verb of *telos*] with kindred hands giving death for death.

Of the same seed, in truth, they were utterly destroyed in not-*philo*i divisions, [935] in maddened [*mainesthai*] conflict [*eris*], in the ending [= *telos*] of their quarrel [*neikos*].

Their enmity [*ekthos*] has ceased. Their life has been mingled in the blood-soaked earth. Now truly their blood is one. [940] Ruthless is that which resolved their quarrels [*neikea*], the stranger [*xeinon*] from across the sea, sharpened iron rushed from the fire.

[940] Ruthless, too, was Arēs, the *kakos* divider of their property, who made their father’s curses come true [*alēthēs*]. They hold in misery their allotted portion [*moira*] of god-given sorrows. Beneath their corpses there will be boundless wealth of earth.

Ah, you have wreathed [950] your race [*genos*] with many troubles [*ponoi*]! In the final [adj. of *telos*] outcome the Curses have raised their piercing melody [*nomos*], now that the family [*genos*] is turned to flight in all directions. A trophy to Atē now stands at the gate where they struck each other and where, having conquered them both, the *daimōn* stayed its hand.

The following antiphonal dirge is sung by the two sisters—Antigone standing by the bier of Polyneikes, Ismene by that of Eteokles.

²² As the brothers were to divide the substance of their dead father, their equal inheritance was the tomb. *lakhai* means both “apportioning of possessions” and “digging.”

Antigone

You were struck as you struck.

Ismene

You died as you killed.

Antigone

By the spear you killed—

Ismene

By the spear you died—

Antigone

Your ordeal [*ponos*] made you wretched.

Ismene

Your suffering [*pathos*] made you wretched.

Antigone

Let the lament [*goos*] come.

Ismene

Let the tears [*dakrua*] come.

Antigone

You are laid out for mourning—

Ismene

[965] Though you did the killing.

Antigone

Ah me!

Ismene

Ah me!

Antigone

My heart [*phrēn*] is mad [*mainesthai*] with wailing [*gooi*].

Ismene

My heart groans within me.

Antigone

Ah, the grief, brother all-lamentable.

Ismene

[970] And you also, brother all-wretched.

Antigone

You perished at the hands of your *philos*.

Ismene

And you killed your *philos*.

Antigone

Twofold to tell of—

Ismene

Twofold to look upon—

Antigone

[975] Are these sorrows so close to those.

Ismene

Fraternal sorrows stand close by fraternal sorrows.

Chorus

O Fate [*Moirā*], giver of grievous troubles, and awful shade of Oedipus, black Erinys, you are indeed a mighty force.

Antigone

[980a] Ah, me

Ismene

[980b] Ah, me

Antigone

Sorrows [*pēmata*] hard to behold—

Ismene

He showed me when he returned from exile.

Antigone

But he made no return after he had killed.

Ismene

He was saved [*sōzein*], but lost his life.

Antigone

[985] He lost it, all too truly.

Ismene

And took this one's life away.

Antigone

Wretched family [*genos*]!

Ismene

Wretched suffering [*pathos*]!

Antigone

Kindred sorrows [*kēdea*] full of groans!

Ismene

[990] Steeped in threefold pains [*pēmata*].

Chorus

O Fate [*Moirā*], giver of grievous troubles, and awful shade of Oedipus, black Erinys, you are indeed a mighty force.

Antigone

Now you know of the Erinys by experience—

Ismene

[995] And you are made aware no later—

Antigone

When you came back to our city [*polis*].

Ismene

Yes, to face him with your spear.

Antigone

A tale of destruction!

Ismene

Destruction to look upon!

Antigone

[1000] Oh, the ordeal [*ponos*] —

Ismene

Oh, the evils [*kaka*] —

Antigone

For home and land [*khthōn*].

Ismene

Above all for me,

Antigone

And more also for me.

Ismene

[1005] Ah I pity your grievous sufferings [*kakoi*], my lord.

Antigone

Pity for you both, most lamentable of all men.

Ismene

In derangement [*atē*], you were possessed-by-a-*daimōn*.

Antigone

Where shall we lay them in the earth [*khthōn*]?

Ismene

Ah, where their *tīmē* is greatest.

Antigone

[1010] To lie beside their father, a cause for him of pain [*pēma*].

Enter a Herald.

Herald

It is my duty to announce the will and decrees of the council on behalf of the people [*dēmos*] of this our Kadmeian city [*polis*].

It is decreed, first, that Eteokles here, on account of his goodwill towards the native land [*khthōn*], is to be buried in a kindly [*philē*] grave in its earth; [1015] for hating the enemy [*ekthroī*] he chose death in the city [*polis*] and driven by piety towards his ancestral shrines [*hieroi*], he died without reproach where it is an honor for the young to die. This is how I was commanded to speak regarding him. But as for his brother, it is decreed that this corpse of Polyneikes [1020] is to be cast out unburied to be torn by dogs, since he would have been the destroyer of the land [*khthōn*] of the Kadmeians, if one of the gods had not used his brother's spear to prevent him. Even in death he will retain the stain of his guilt against his fathers' gods, whom he dishonored [from verb of *tīmē*] [1025] when he launched a foreign army against the city [*polis*] to take it. For this reason it is decreed that he will receive his reward [from adjective of *tīmē*] by being buried without honor [*tīmē*] beneath the winged birds; and that no labor of the hands shall attend him by building up a burial mound nor shall anyone offer him reverence in shrill-sung laments. [1030] He is to be refused the honor [*tīmē*] of being carried in funeral procession by his loved ones [*philoī*]. Such is the decree of the Kadmeian authority [*telos*].

Antigone

I at least will say something to the rulers of the Kadmeians: even if no one else is willing to share in burying him, I will bury him alone and risk the peril [1035] of burying my own brother. Nor am I ashamed to act in defiant opposition to the rulers of the city [*polis*]. A thing to be held in awe [*deinon*] is the common womb from which we were born, of a wretched mother and unfortunate father. Therefore, my soul [*psūkhē*], willingly share his evils [*kaka*], even though they are unwilling, [1040] and live [*zōein*] with kindred feeling [*phrēn*] with the dead. No hollow-bellied wolves will tear his flesh—let no one “decree” that! Even though I am a woman, I will myself find the means to give him burial and a grave [*taphos*], [1045] carrying the earth in the fold of my linen robe. With my own hands I will cover him over²³—let no one “decree” it otherwise. Take heart, I will have the means to do it.

Herald

I forbid you to act thus in violation of the city [*polis*].

Antigone

I forbid you to make useless proclamations to me.

Herald

[1050] And yet a citizenry [*dēmos*] that has escaped evil [*kaka*] can be harsh.

Antigone

Let it be harsh! This man will not be unburied [adjective of *taphos*].

Herald

What! Will you honor [verb from *tīmē*] with burial [*taphos*] a man whom the city [*polis*] detests?

Antigone

For a long time now the gods have ceased to hold him in honor [*tīmē*].

Herald

No, [he was honored] until he put this land in jeopardy.

Antigone

[1055] He suffered [*paskhein*] evil [*kakon*] and gave evil [*kaka*] in return.

Herald

But this act was against all the citizens, not only one man.

Antigone

Discord [*eris*] is the last of the gods to close a *mūthos*. I will bury [verb of *taphos*] him.

²³ *kaluptein* “This verb is traditionally used in ritual formulas of burial, and it conveys the idea of consigning the dead to concealment in the realm of darkness and death” (*H24H* 10§24). [Heroization Team]

Put an end to your big talk.

Herald

Well then, follow your own rash plan, but I forbid it.

Exit.

Chorus

Ah, misery! [1060] O Erinyes, far-famed destroyers of families, goddesses of death who have thus laid ruin to the family [*genos*] of Oedipus, digging it up from the roots! What will I undergo [*paskhein*]? What should I do? What plan shall I devise? How can I have the heart neither to weep for you [1065] nor escort you to your tomb [*tumbos*]? But I am afraid and turn away in terror of the citizens. You, at least, Eteokles, will have many mourners, while he, wretched man, departs without lament [*goos*] [1070] and has a song of lamentation [*thrēnos*] sung only by one sister. Now who could comply with that?

First Half-Chorus

Let the city [*polis*] take action or not take action against those who lament for Polyneikes. We, at all events, will go and bury him with her, following the funeral procession. For this grief [*akhos*] is shared by all our race [*genos*], and the city [*polis*] approves as just [*dikaia*] different things at different times.

Second Half-Chorus

We will go with this other corpse, as the city [*polis*] and justice [*dikaion*], too, approves. [1080] For after the blessed [*makares*] gods and powerful Zeus, he it was who prevented the city [*polis*] of the Kadmeians from being capsized and flooded by a wave of foreign men—he beyond all others.

Exeunt omnes.