

BC
THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES
by Aeschylus

Translated by E.D.A. Morshead

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

Aeschylus (525-456 BC) - Ranked with Sophocles and Euripides as one of the greatest Greek dramatists, he is often called the father of Greek tragic drama.

Aeschylus is distinguished for his grand imagination that dwelled habitually in the loftiest regions of theology and ancient mythology. *Seven Against Thebes* (467 BC) - A play, as Aristophanes expressed it, "full of war." It is the story of Oedipus' sons battle over who should become ruler of Thebes. It is the last and only extant part of a trilogy.

PAGE 2

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

CHARACTERS

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

ETEOCLES, son of Oedipus, King of Thebes

A SPY

CHORUS OF THEBAN WOMEN

Sisters of ETEOCLES

ANTIGONE

ISMENE

A HERALD

SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

PAGE 3**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

(SCENE:- Within the Citadel of Thebes. There is an altar with the statues of several gods visible. A crowd of citizens are present as ETEOCLES enters with his attendants.) ETEOCLES Clansmen of Cadmus, at the signal given By time and season must the ruler speak Who sets the course and steers the ship of State With hand upon the tiller, and with eye Watchful against the treachery of sleep.

For if all go aright, thank Heaven, men say, But if adversely- which may God forefend! One name on many lips, from street to street, Would bear the bruit and rumour of the time, Down with Eteocles!- a clamorous curse, A dirge of ruin. May averting Zeus Make good his title here, in Cadmus' hold!

You it beseems now- boys unripened yet To lusty manhood, men gone past the prime

PAGE 4**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

And increase of the full begetting seed, And those whom youth and
manhood well combined Array for action- all to rise in aid Of city,
shrines, and altars of all powers Who guard our land; that ne'er, to end of
time, Be blotted out the sacred service due To our sweet mother-land and
to her brood.

For she it was who to their guest-right called Your waxing youth, was
patient of the toil, And cherished you on the land's gracious lap, Alike to
plant the hearth and bear the shield In loyal service, for an hour like this.

Mark now! until to-day, luck rules our scale; For we, though long
beleaguered, in the main Have with our sallies struck the foemen hard.

But now the seer, the feeder of the birds (Whose art unerring and
prophetic skill Of ear and mind divines their utterance

PAGE 5**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

Without the lore of fire interpreted) Foretelleth, by the mastery of his art,
That now an onset of Achaea's host Is by a council of the night designed
To fall in double strength upon our walls.

Up and away, then, to the battlements, The gates, the bulwarks! don your
panoplies, Array you at the breast-work, take your stand On the floorings
of the towers, and with good heart Stand firm for sudden sallies at the
gates, Nor hold too heinous a respect for hordes Sent on you from afar:
some god will guard!

I too, for shrewd espial of their camp, Have sent forth scouts, and
confidence is mine They will not fail nor tremble at their task, And, with
their news, I fear no foeman's guile.

(A Spy enters.) THE SPY

PAGE 6**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

Eteocles, high king of Cadmus' folk, I stand here with news certified and sure
From Argos' camp, things by myself descried.

Seven warriors yonder, doughty chiefs of might, Into the crimsoned
concave of a shield Have shed a bull's blood, and, with hands immersed
Into the gore of sacrifice, have sworn By Ares, lord of fight, and by thy
name, Blood-lapping Terror, Let our oath be heard Either to raze the
walls, make void the hold Of Cadmus- strive his children as they may Or,
dying here, to make the foemen's land With blood impasted. Then, as
memory's gift Unto their parents at the far-off home, Chaplets they hung
upon Adrastus' car, With eyes tear-dropping, but no word of moan.

For their steeled spirit glowed with high resolve, As lions pant, with
battle in their eyes.

PAGE 7**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

For them, no weak alarm delays the clear Issues of death or life! I parted thence Even as they cast the lots, how each should lead, Against which gate, his serried company.

Rank then thy bravest, with what speed thou may'st, Hard by the gates, to dash on them, for now, Full-armed, the onward ranks of Argos come!

The dust whirls up, and from their panting steeds White foamy flakes like snow bedew the plain.

Thou therefore, chieftain! like a steersman skilled, Enshield the city's bulwarks, ere the blast Of war comes darting on them! hark, the roar Of the great landstorm with its waves of men!

Take Fortune by the forelock! for the rest, By yonder dawn-light will I scan the field Clear and aright, and surety of my word Shall keep thee scatheless of the coming storm.

ETEOCLES

PAGE 8**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

O Zeus and Earth and city-guarding gods, And thou, my father's Curse,
of baneful might, Spare ye at least this town, nor root it up, By violence of
the foemen, stock and stem!

For here, from home and hearth, rings Hellas' tongue.

***Forbid that e'er the yoke of slavery Should bow this land of freedom,
Cadmus' hold!***

Be ye her help! your cause I plead with mine
A city saved doth honour to
her gods!

(ETEOCLES, his attendants and most of the crowd go out. The CHORUS
OF THEBAN WOMEN enters. They appear terror-stricken.) CHORUS
(singing) I wail in the stress of my terror, and shrill is my cry of despair.

The foemen roll forth from their camp as a billow, and onward they bear!

Their horsemen are swift in the forefront, the dust rises up to the sky,

PAGE 9**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

A signal, though speechless, of doom, a herald more clear than a cry!
Hoof-trampled, the land of my love bears onward the din to mine ears.

As a torrent descending a mountain, it thunders and echoes and nears!

The doom is unloosened and cometh! O kings and O queens of high
Heaven, Prevail that it fall not upon us! the sign for their onset is
given They stream to the walls from without, white-shielded and keen for
the fray.

They storm to the citadel gates- what god or what goddess can stay
The rush of their feet? to what shrine shall I bow me in terror and pray? (They
rush to pray to the gods.)

PAGE 10**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

O gods high-throned in bliss, we must crouch at the shrines in your home!

Not here must we tarry and wail: shield clashes on shield as they come
And now, even now is the hour for the robes and the chaplets of prayer!

Mine eyes feel the flash of the sword, the clang is instinct with the spear!

Is thy hand set against us, O Ares, in ruin and wrath to o'erwhelm Thine
own immemorial land, O god of the golden helm? Look down upon us,
we beseech thee, on the land that thou lovest of old.

strophe 1 And ye, O protecting gods, in pity your people behold!

Yea, save us, the maidenly troop, from the doom and despair of the slave,
For the crests of the foemen come onward, their rush is the rush of a wave

PAGE 11**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

Rolled on by the War-god's breath! almighty one, hear us and save
From the grasp of the Argives' might! to the ramparts of Cadmus they crowd,
And, clenched in the teeth of the steeds, the bits clink horror aloud!

And seven high chieftains of war, with spear and with panoply bold, Are
set, by the law of the lot, to storm the seven gates of our hold!

antistrophe 1 Be near and befriend us, O Pallas, the Zeus-born maiden of
might!

O lord of the steed and the sea, be thy trident uplifted to smite In eager
desire of the fray, Poseidon! and Ares come down, In fatherly presence
revealed, to rescue Harmonia's town!

Thine too, Aphrodite, we are! thou art mother and queen of our race, To
thee we cry out in our need, from thee let thy children have grace!

PAGE 12**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

Ye too, to scare back the foe, be your cry as a wolf's howl wild, Thou, O the wolf-lord, and thou, of she-wolf Leto the child!

strophe 2 Woe and alack for the sound, for the rattle of cars to the wall,
And the creak of the griding axles! O Hera, to thee is our call!

Artemis, maiden beloved! the air is distraught with the spears, And
whither doth destiny drive us, and where is the goal of our fears?

antistrophe 2 The blast of the terrible stones on the ridge of our wall is not
stayed, At the gates is the brazen clash of the bucklers- Apollo to aid!

Thou too, O daughter of Zeus, who guidest the wavering fray To the holy
decision of fate, Athena! be with us to-day!

Come down to the sevenfold gates and harry the foemen away!

strophe 3 O gods and O sisters of gods, our bulwark and guard! we
beseech

PAGE 13**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

That ye give not our war-worn hold to a rabble of alien speech!

List to the call of the maidens, the hands held up for the right, antistrophe
3 Be near us, protect us, and show that the city is dear in your sight!

Have heed for her sacrifice holy, and thought of her offerings take, Forget
not her love and her worship, be near her and smite for her sake!

(ETEOCLES and his retinue re-enter.) ETEOCLES (addressing the
CHORUS) Hark to my question, things detestable!

Is this aright and for the city's weal, And helpful to our army thus beset,
That ye before the statues of our gods Should fling yourselves, and
scream and shriek your fears? Immodest, uncontrolled! Be this my
lot Never in troublous nor in peaceful days

PAGE 14**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES*****To dwell with aught that wears a female form!***

Where womankind has power, no man can house, Where womankind
 feeds panic, ruin rules Alike in house and city! Look you now
 Your flying
 feet, and rumour of your fears, Have spread a soulless panic on our walls,
 And they without do go from strength to strength, And we within make
 breach upon ourselves!

Such fate it brings, to house with womankind.

Therefore if any shall resist my rule
 Or man, or woman, or some sexless
 thing
 The vote of sentence shall decide their doom, And stones of
 execution, past escape, Shall finish all. Let not a woman's voice
 Be loud in
 council! for the things without, A man must care; let women keep
 within
 Even then is mischief all too probable!

Hear ye? or speak I to unheeding ears?

PAGE 15**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

CHORUS (chanting) Ah, but I shudder, child of Oedipus!

I heard the clash and clang!

The axles rolled and rumbled; woe to us, Fire-welded bridles rang!

ETEOCLES Say- when a ship is strained and deep in brine, Did e'er a seaman mend his chance, who left The helm, t' invoke the image at the prow? CHORUS (chanting) Ah, but I fled to the shrines, I called to our helpers on high, When the stone-shower roared at the portals!

I sped to the temples aloft, and loud was my call and my cry, Look down and deliver, Immortals!

ETEOCLES

PAGE 16**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

Ay, pray amain that stone may vanquish steel!

Where not that grace of gods? ay, ay- methinks, When cities fall, the gods go forth from them!

CHORUS (chanting) Ah, let me die, or ever I behold The gods go forth, in conflagration dire!

The foemen's rush and raid, and all our hold Wrapt in the burning fire!

ETEOCLES Cry not on Heaven, in impotent debate!

What saith the saw?- Good saving Strength, in verity, Out of Obedience breeds the babe Prosperity.

CHORUS (chanting) 'Tis true: yet stronger is the power divine, And oft, when man's estate is overbowed With bitter pangs, disperses from his eyne The heavy, hanging cloud!

PAGE 17**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

ETEOCLES Let men with sacrifice and augury Approach the gods, when comes the tug of war:

Maids must be silent and abide within.

CHORUS (chanting) By grace of the gods we hold it, a city untamed of the spear, And the battlement wards from the wall the foe and his aspect of fear!

What need of displeasure herein? ETEOCLES Ay, pay thy vows to Heaven; I grudge them not, But- so thou strike no fear into our men Have calm at heart, nor be too much afraid.

CHORUS Alack, it is fresh in mine ears, the clamour and crash of the fray, And up to our holiest height I sped on my timorous way,

PAGE 18

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

Bewildered, beset by the din!

ETEOCLES Now, if ye hear the bruit of death or wounds, Give not yourselves o'ermuch to shriek and scream, For Ares ravins upon human flesh.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS Ah, but the snorting of the steeds I hear!

ETEOCLES Then, if thou hearest, hear them not too well!

LEADER Hark, the earth rumbles, as they close us round!

ETEOCLES Enough if I am here, with plans prepared.

LEADER Alack, the battering at the gates is loud!

EETOCLES

PAGE 19

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

Peace! stay your tongue, or else the town may hear!

LEADER O warders of the walls, betray them not!

ETEOCLES Beshrew your cries! in silence face your fate.

LEADER Gods of our city, see me not enslaved!

ETEOCLES On me, on all, thy cries bring slavery.

LEADER Zeus, strong to smite, turn upon foes thy blow!

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

LEADER Weak wretches, even as men, when cities fall.

ETEOCLES

PAGE 20**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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

PAGE 21**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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

PAGE 22**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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,

PAGE 23**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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!

PAGE 24**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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

PAGE 25

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

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

PAGE 26***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.

PAGE 27

(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!

PAGE 28**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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.

PAGE 29**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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, palters with double sense-

PAGE 30

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

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.)

PAGE 31**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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 he, 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.

PAGE 32**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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 within 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.

PAGE 33**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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

PAGE 34**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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,
A fire 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

PAGE 35**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

Strong to debar the slave's yoke from our town.

EOCLES (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,

PAGE 36**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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

PAGE 37**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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!

PAGE 38**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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,

PAGE 39**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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 oathHis, 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-

PAGE 40**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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
ravens 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-

PAGE 41**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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

PAGE 42**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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 Amphiaras: 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 too At his desert, and once and yet again

PAGE 43**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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 staunch? 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

PAGE 44**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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;

PAGE 45**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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
hard 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,

PAGE 46**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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 setHear with what wrath he imprecates our doom, Vowing to mount the wall, though banished hence,

PAGE 47**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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-

PAGE 48**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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!

PAGE 49**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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

PAGE 50**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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

PAGE 51

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

Its great inheritance, the gulf of hell!

PAGE 52**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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 pall
 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,

PAGE 53**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES*****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!

PAGE 54**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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 not 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!

PAGE 55**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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 a main,
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,

PAGE 56**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

Unknowing, are defiled By shedding common blood, and when the pit Of
 death devoureth it, Drinking the

clotted stain, the gory dyeWho, 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 broughtYea 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

PAGE 57**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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 wall Totters, as soon to fall; And,
 if our chieftains in the storm go down, What chance can save the town?

PAGE 58**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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

PAGE 59**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

breastDebarred 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

PAGE 60**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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 twainLEADER

PAGE 61**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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 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

PAGE 62**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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 fortune, 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!

PAGE 63**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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,

PAGE 64**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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
plash 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,

PAGE 65**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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)

PAGE 66**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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!

PAGE 67**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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-

PAGE 68**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

Iron gave their doom, with iron their graves be made
Alack, 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,

PAGE 69

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

***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 dyeLo, from one blood they sprang, and in one blood
they lie!

A grievous arbiter was given the twainThe 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!

PAGE 70

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

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,

PAGE 71**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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,

PAGE 72**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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!

PAGE 73**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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!

PAGE 74

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

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 blamelessly
performed

PAGE 75**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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!

PAGE 76**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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 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,

PAGE 77

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

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

PAGE 78**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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.

PAGE 79

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

(The HERALD goes out.)

PAGE 80**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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-

PAGE 81**THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

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!

PAGE 82

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

He saved us from a foreign yoke, A wild assault of outland folk, A savage,
alien wave!

THE END