67 Monologues from CITY OF WINE

I hope these speeches prove useful, whether as audition pieces or in acting classes. I have decided against providing contextualizing notes for each speech. My hope is that you will find enough within the text to support an interpretation. My other hope is that something here will lead you to a fuller exploration of City of Wine. Also available (or included) are a Synopsis, play by play, of the keys plot points; and a document listing and contextualizing all the characters in the cycle.

I have edited some of these speeches, to remove interruptions and comments, or smooth transitions

For a full and thoughtful description of the larger project please visit

nightswimming theatre online at

https://nightswimming.ca/performance/city-of-wine/

BOWL

We will not die alone, for all of Thebes will die with us.
Look at those men out there, asleep, or dead.
What makes us different from them?
Not that we die tomorrow,
For every day, for ten long years,
that has been true for some of them.
It is true now.
Not that we know, for when a soldier goes to war
Part of him always is prepared to die.
In fact, until tonight, we were alone in this great camp.
We never fought the Trojans
and we never faced our own mortality.
So, now we do, and we are one with them, no more.
What makes this fire a different colour from the rest,
What makes we seven here unique,
Is that we speak the last words of a noble state.
I will do now a thing most terrible,
A thing I never in my life have done before.
Stand back and hold your loved ones tight.
I will, tonight, spill wine.

(He does.)

I am not mad or feverish,
Though I admit I shake a bit just now.
See how the wine, once spilled, is lost into the thirsty dust,
Returned now, as it were, into the earth from which it came?
Thebes has, for us, a long time now,
enjoyed that other name“City of Wine”.
The great god Dionysus, so the story goes,
Gave wine to us and we have shared it with the world.

It fires and flavours everything we do:
Each meal and every ritual,
A royal wedding or an old friend's memory.
It feeds our stories and it sparks our fights.
It is our blood, our sweat, our tears, our breath.
It cools our days and warms our darkest nights.
It marks our birth and bathes us after death.
Wine is the memory of Thebes.
We seven are the cups and bottles and the bowls that hold it now.
Tomorrow we will all be shattered on the ground.
It is a loss of no significance to break a bottle,
But the wine, the wine is everything.
I say we sing the song of Thebes in seven voices,
loudly as we can,
No, more than sing,
Just like your game,
Relive the life of every famous name in dance and deed,
Pour out our city's story to the thirsty night,
And hope that, somehow, some of it just might
Be caught and saved in other cups,
And tasted then on other lips.
A hundred thousand men, a thousand ships,
The greatest gathering the world has ever seen surrounds us now,
Let us make them our audience
And give them Thebes.

THEBE (Looking around, bewildered by the attention and pressure.)

I know... I know...

I know exactly where this mighty river flows.

Both prophesy and destiny decree,

I will be the queen of Thebes.

(She scoops up a double handful of muddy water and goes to drink it, smearing filth on her face.)

But others first.

The bad, the worse, and worst.

Oh, sweet Tiresias, how can you think this did not drive you mad?

(She leaps downstage as if on stepping stones, stopping to peer into pools.)

A cataract of blood and mud and lust, *(Splashes LYCUS and DIRCE*)

A crime unthinkable,

A chariot broken in the dust.

Great love, of course.

A terrible mistake.

Another one.

Drought, fire, and plague.

Poor Oedipus, his eyes.

Tiresias, have you seen his eyes?

His sons, their slaughter, then his daughter's,

All flow down from this little boy

To wash up on the beach at Troy.

WATER

The whole town shook or shuffled,
Dashed about or shimmered in the heat,
Until Tiresias came and stood.
The stillness of the prophet made us stare
Slowly at first, in ones and threes,
Then groups and families,
We stopped and watched the blind man wait for us.
And when our silent circle filled the square
He spoke.
Those close enough to hear
Passed out his words like sacrificial offerings.
“Zeus kissed a girl and she kissed me,
And with that kiss I came to see,
This moment, all those years ago.
Pentheus and Menaeceus,
Laius, a little, Creon, Jocasta,
Even Oedipus have asked, demanded,
Even begged at times,
For me to guide them.
And I have refused,
Because I knew this hour would come.
No, we would come to it.
This hour has been my beacon
Throughout the bloody tempest that is Theban history.
It all, each death, betrayal, loss and grim discovery
Has always been the present truth to me.
And through it all the only thing
That I could cling to in the storm
Was knowing it would end.
It ends today.

Here. Now.
An army comes to conquer Thebes.
We could not stop them if we wanted to.
All this is good and as it ought to be.
Our city needs to die.
She needs to lie down in the sun and cease from suffering
As all that lives must do eventually.
But you, you want to live,
So leave.
Gather your families,
and what few things you need
And walk away with me.
Kick from your feet this bloody dust
And, just as Cadmus did,
Leave home behind and seek and find
Fresh unstained soil to seed and feed upon.
Enough, I will not argue or persuade
Because I know you will,
It is the gift of Zeus."
And then he turned and groped his way towards the sea.
And we…
We followed him, and here we are.

TIRESIAS

I was a witness to the birth,
If birth describes what I beheld.
Sweet Semele.
She was the last thing that my eyes embraced.
Since last the stars were seen,
Your sister gave her love to Zeus.
He took it, eagerly, and she conceived a son.
She begged of him a gift.
He, thinking, I suppose, that she was just a simple girl
Swore happily to give her anything,
But then she said she wished to see him as he really is.
He squirmed and blustered but she pressed her point
Until, frustrated, he agreed.
There was a flash so terrible my dead eyes caught its glow,
Then heat, as from Hephaestus' forge.
The girl began a scream and then...
A smell like... of... a funeral pyre,
And silence fell.
Zeus, muttering frustrated rage,
Next drew a blade and plunged it
Deep into his own broad thigh.
He then addressed the tiny life spark in his hand,
Which he had snatched out of the ashes in the air,
And, with some tears I think, he called it son
And set it in the wound, which he sewed up.
How long, for him, he bore it there, no-one can say,
But in my little life it was a breath or two at most
Before I heard a hearty baby cry
Its first, raw thirst out to the sky,
And Dionysus was on earth.

And Semele.

She has become a memory so full of beauty, joy, and love

That she is more alive than many who yet walk and breathe.

LAIUS

I have a strategy.
Each time I drink more wine
and make more room for air.

(He demonstrates. General laughter.)

I will be king of all of you,
I dream of making our Cadmea great,
The kind of state respected in the world.
I know our history, but more, I know my destiny.

(*getting out of the barrel with difficulty*.)

I have a simple plan, you see.
To follow the advice
that Cadmus gave to his own son,
And, so they say,
My father, his grandson,
King Labdacus,
Had sworn to give to me:
To be a king I first must be a man.
And to be fully, truly both,
I must restore the balance of the crowns
That Cadmus and Harmonia knew.
For that I need a worthy queen,
One wise and strong and capable enough in every way
To balance me.

(He begins to fall. BREAD catches him.)

Thank you.
And so, you see, it is my royal fate
To make myself available
To such a mate.

ELIS prologue

TIRESIAS (*Sitting in a gutter in Cadmea, drinking alone, throws small bones on the ground.)*

I like to say "Most things are true eventually."

Some people nod and buy me wine,

Others just laugh and say,

"There goes Tiresias again, poor thing.

He was a Prophet, once, you know."

Who knows?

I am as blind as mothers' love,

But still,

I glimpse a darkness coming

To devour the stars.

(Thunder, closer.)

If I could kill this truth,

If I could smother it as easily as murdering a child,

I would, but I cannot.

I cannot help or warn these people here:

The dancing, aching body of my town.

But like a ghost, can only frighten them.

And no one needs more fear,

So I sit here

And vainly hope I can forget what you have yet to see.

This landslide of disastrous necessity

Beginning,

Now.

BOWL

Who is a fool?

I am here now, with the wine.

No coin will kiss my tongue and throat.

It will not rock me gently from within

Or lift my ears to let the breezes in.

It will not spice my blood
Or make my singing beautiful.

It will not make all people wise.

It cannot take this half scrubbed slaughterhouse

And, with a little firelight, and some few friends,

Turn it into the temple of a lively god,

Where those of Elis who enjoy a taste

Of Dionysus' greatest gift

Are coming,

Soon.

So, if you love your coins so much

Keep mine, and give me wine.

BOWL

"Sir"?

What have I done now, that you call me names?

I am a priest, well, worshiper,

Of Dionysus,

Whom we celebrate with song, with laughter, and good company,

And with his glorious gift,

Richer than blood and hotter than fire,

Which can, without some care,

Unleash the worst of both.

His gift, great as it is, would fall

On a Slaughter Festival

Like rendered fat onto a cedar blaze.

And so, perhaps a few bones by the fire,

For decoration, but no blades,

Trust me, my gentle friends,

I know.

LAIUS (In disguise in the tavern)

Oh, yes.

Laius was waiting patiently until old Lycus saw-

Lycus was not his father though.

He was a distant relative who had been asked

To hold the crown—

Until Prince Laius was a man.

Which now he was.

But Amphion and Zethus

Had such skills, as I have not,

And nor did Laius have, at telling lies,

And blowing on the coals of half remembered grievances,

That even there they found a gang

Of cowards, thieves, and worse

To follow them.

For Laius led the many honest citizens

Who worshipped Dionysus in my town.

Those twin snakes feared the faith

And sought to put it down.

They hatched a plan

To kill the kind old man

And blame the prince, who was not even there,

But in the temple, worshipping.

He fought, alone, heroically, for seven days,

Until the bodies piled so high that he sank under them.

But, one by one, he was betrayed by everyone.

So he escaped, wet with his many wounds,

Into the hills.

He waits somewhere still patiently

Until the time is ripe.

THEBE

So this is growing old.
Just as a raindrop falls and flows
A mortal life goes down,
And disappears.
Ambition and forgetfulness
A little more, a little less,
Have brought me here.

(Splashes the water.)

Death is the only gift I get
From my hard won mortality.
I can at least, now drown.

(Wades into the water.)

And yet, I dare to ask for less,
And hope forgetfulness will let me rest.
If there is justice anywhere,
I ask that my name itself
be taken from the world.
Forget me, History,
And set sad Thebe free.

(She drowns herself)

CHRYSIPPUS. (To LAIUS.)

Let me.

I know now, just as surely as I see you there,

That Laius is a drunken, weak, pathetic,

Boastful coward, and a liar.

Shall I go on?

Perhaps he once was kindling,

But he is now a sodden stump

That might give smoke but never fire.

And if Menaeceus is like my father

Then I think he should rule Thebes.

I see my father better now, as kings should be seen,

Through these, his peoples' eyes.

While Thebes and Elis are at peace

With neighbours and the gods, as they are now,

They both deserve such gentle governors.

Ones wise enough to see,

And strong enough to say,

When someone else should take the crown.

Someday I will be king,

Your king,

So let me tell you now;

I study Laius carefully

And I intend to mold myself like clay

Around his character, so that,

In every way, I am what he is not.

Then will I be a king.

Now I must go, my father may have need of me.

Let me pay for the wine.

(To LAIUS.)

You have, I think, a long cold journey without friends
Ahead of you.
Good night to all.

(To BREAD.)

Goodbye.
The queen it seems has found a queen for me
I hope you find a love with simple loyalties.

TIRESIAS (Isolated visually)

Nothing begins or ends:

Roots, veins, and vines,

Lines of all kinds,

Suspend us from the past,

And hold us, dangling,

Above the future's hungry emptiness.

All ages have their tragedies,

But we who dare to peer below

See now, and know, what swings from here.

This thing done in the dark,

This is the knot that hangs us all.

Trust me, I will, eventually,

Cut free the rotting corpse of Thebes

And let her fall.

But first, we, of necessity,

Must touch and taste,

Smell and embrace it all.

LAIUS

Oh shame.

In that I hesitate to say.

The light, already strange,

Twisted the truth, drums thundered

And a monster came, in form a man, perhaps a god,

Who knows?

Leaped from the shadows, no,

Crawled from the deepest darkness of them all

And seized the helpless boy.

I watched, as if from high above,

I could not move.

Somehow my hands were not my own.

I had no hands.

All I could do was watch and shriek frustrated rage.

Right there, in front of me,

As close as he is now,

The beast took Chrysippus,

His body brutally, his innocence,

And then at last, his life.

The thing, I cannot ever call it man,

Then vanished and I held the boy

And brought him home to you.

Oh, father, please, what shall we do?

PELOPS

This day,

It is a crack across the bottom of the world

And everything has drained away.

My friend, such dreams an old man has.

Your beautiful Jocasta married here to him,

A palace full of giggling,

And two grandfathers, you and I,

Behaving foolishly.

It will not be.

My son is dead.

What can I do?

Laius, oh Laius, come.

You too Menaeceus.

Do this with me, we royal three,

Let us invoke the justice of the gods.

(They pray together.)

Oh Zeus,

May perfect punishment contain this crime,

Or it will pour its poisons across time.

We ask for justice only.19

A justice subtle, complex, and immense,

And matching every aspect of offence.

Rain suffering upon this murderer,

Whoever it may be,

And on his family,

Such as will scrub their lives from history.

19

SHEPHERD

Forgive me.

I do not mean to speak in mysteries.

I speak now for the first time, here, in days.

I spend my time with sheep.

Again I say forgive me.

You look to call this night a memorable feast,

And I come, damp with dew

That sets untimely on my skin, to chill your joy.

I sat by my own fire, contented with the company of sheep,

Who turned in folds around me like a heavy cloth.

We know and trust each other, night and day,

Such is the silent comfort of my trade.

Far down the valley, three or more slow slopes of land away,

Dim through the swirl of sparks that rode my breath,

My drifting eye began to see a light, or many lights,

In line, upon the coming road.

A little thing can hold a watcher in the night.

My flock, first one then many heads, then all,

Looked up and joined me in my gaze.

And then, though still the summer holds the ground,

A rattling cold ran through me,

As if my body were a draughty house.

The staring beasts drew back, then scattered to the hills.

My fire died as if struck down by force,

And I stood there an hour or more, alone.

Only in the moments when that string of distant lights

Dipped in a shallow of the earth could I unfix my eyes.

I fled from there and now am here,

But still the cold and fear attend me.

JOCASTA

Stand still yourselves,

I beg you,

And let me stand here, still, a while.

As you are still and always in my heart,

You need not always prove your presence

In my hair and ear and eye.

See how my father, honoured man of Thebes,

Stands back and turns his head

As if entangled in a spider's web

Or pressured by a cloud of angry bees.

Your loving hands and words do this,

And though no harm is meant by them,

I must say, I too cannot breathe or think or move.

Please dearest souls,

I beg you leave us for a breath or two.

I want your counsel, but I want his too.

Wait, hearts. Take no offence.

This is familiarity and easy love that speaks to you.

I always am that child you know so well.

Now, that fresh child desires a moment

With her father on her wedding day.

So much has changed so suddenly.

I need you now.

Be kind to me.

TIRESIAS

We are, my precious Butterfly,

Not helpless but not free.

Subtle but strong, necessity embraces and entangles all,

But more, the tangle tightens when we move.

Yes, I can see its lines,

But only when I am completely still.

I see a little farther, like a sailor on the mast,

But if I draw in breath to call out what I see

That breath becomes a breeze

That moves the waves and changes everything,

And in the end all that I really know

Is that I have already done and said too much.

You will know happiness, my child,

And all of history will speak your name.

But history must wait for you to make it.

So let us be alive and speak of here and now

And breathe the rich intoxication of our dreams.

What do you dream Jocasta?

LAIUS

Captain,

Stand back the guard.

Come closer, Thebes,

Within my voice's fall.

Come share my loss, there is enough for all.

I am, today, not king nor general.

I am a father -

No, I am not that.

The gods will not allow.

Are you a father? You?

Then you are richer men than I.

My son is dead.

Our prince is dead.

He breathed in once and never will exhale.

No angry army in retreat

Could ever cause such suffering.

Whatever I have done,

And every soldier has a wounded soul,

I know that I am punished now.

A month of public mourning I declare.

A month?

One teardrop on this tide of pain.

I am a man whose only son has died.

I hope, at least, the gods are satisfied.

Go quietly.

I must attend my wife.

Your queen most needs me now.

JOCASTA

Perverse and cruel strangler,

Beguiling, smiling monster of mad mockery,

Look down on me and laugh.

My city hates and fears you, then swears its love for me,

And never sees that you <u>are me</u>

Reflected in the furious eye of outraged motherhood,

Hera's most perfect punishment.

I know you, monster-woman-thing, as deeply as a mirror,

As surely as a mother knows her child.

You see?

You are not needed here.

I am my own exquisite torturer.

Pick up you heart, Jocasta.

When horror rules the waking world sleep holds less fear.

Who stands so near?

Oh Creon, watch with me.

CAPTAIN

He was an angry child,

and far more so when coming from the oracle.

He made his driver beat the horses bloody in his rage

and would not wait for us.

We found both bodies as I said.

The driver stabbed and Laius, tangled in his reins, broken and dead.

There was no battle, only dust and blood.

How could we bring his body home and we untouched?

Some would cry treason, others cowardice.

For two days in the groves of Cithaeron,

In ranks and then alone,

We faced each other, deadly games,

Until our wounds and losses matched the tale we had agreed to tell.

I have, myself, killed men in my command

to hide a lie to hide my failure.

So much is honour now.

JOCASTA

Laius is gone.

His bodyguard, who might have seized control,

Lie weak in arm and numbers.

The King’s Police, as usual, are drunk.

We must act now.

As I have said before,

No king nor queen alone is royalty.

As Cadmus and Harmonia taught, but few have learned,

The balance is the whole.

I have preserved, as best I could,

my portion of the trust

But now we must,

If Thebes is to be free,

Find her a king,

Frankly, to equal me.

JOCASTA

"You will know happiness, my child,

And all of history will speak your name" he said,

And turned away as if he saw and could not bear to see.

Now I have tasted happiness,

I felt it brush my heart, just once,

No twice, in all these years.

That first touch was so tiny in my hand.

The second, here *(Touches where OEDIPUS' armour had caught)*

Oh Oedipus,

Be what you seem to be.

Another day begins.

The town awakes and sighs, and finally the smoke is gone.

Thebes is so beautiful.

Despite her pain.

Despite her loss.

JOCASTA

I am so deeply set in sorrow nothing moves me.

Oh father,

What wreckage have you dragged down with your fall?

Girl, daughter, mother, monster, wife:

All women I have ever been lie broken with you now,

And only this remains.

More grief.

Prepare, again prepare a funeral,

Your funeral, my father's funeral pyre.

A brighter, warmer fire,

A sweeter smoke to tease some other eyes,

that still can weep..

My city comes to share my loss

and I must go to her.

In this, at least, I am still queen.

OEDIPUS

I am not one of you by birth or habit,
Rite or common memory,
But I have watched a good king rule
And known a good queen's strength.
As lately I informed the Sphinx,
I am a man,
and stand here firmly on my own two legs,
And I will stand and face you every day
And offer all the justice that I can.
And I will stand before you any day,
on any field,
To fight and die for Thebes,
if you will have me.
Am I your king?

JOCASTA

I will, most joyously.

(They kiss. Cheers ++!)

Hear me.

Oh Thebes,

your new queen speaks!

As our new king has said, the world is new.

This fire that, like the sun,

Illuminates the face of everyone,

Burns for us all.

My father, with his death, our peace has won.

At last, the circle of the curse is done.

Into his funeral pyre I throw

All secrets, curses, crimes, and mysteries.

(She feeds the fire.)

I lay them on the light for all to see.

They blaze, they are consumed,

And Thebes is free.

A king of Thebes once killed a boy,

And heaven raged.

To answer Zeus, he killed his only son,

And all of nature rose against this town.

That king is dead,

The Sphinx is dead.

And so, at last, the tragedy is done.

The hero enters and all hearts are won.

HIPPODAMIA

We have not met.
But when I heard my kitchen talk about the two
As if they were already in their wedding bed,
And learned a woman of your town
Had recently arrived and made herself
Most welcome by our fire
With wit and, I suspect, some wine,
And that she stirred this pot of talk,
With tales dressed in details that show
She had been welcome in your home as well.
I recognized a skillful mother's hand,
And felt I had an ally and a friend.

HIPPODAMIA

You have been spending time with Laius.

And does he treat you with respect?

Well, does he listen when you speak?

And when he disagrees with you,

Does he do so in privacy?

Does he trust you to understand his thoughts and fears?

And does he want your happiness

More dearly than he wants his own?

All this, I know, your father does.

Your father is a noble king, respected everywhere.

His people love him without fear.

His neighbours trust him without doubt.

His ways are modest, though his wealth is not.

And I love him as only he and I can know.

He is a king.

But Laius is a badly aging boy,

And you are just his latest toy.

BLOOD

Our history is blood.
Injustice, weakness and confusion mark a line
of unsuccessful kings into our past.
Pentheus, torn in fragments by the furious Bacchae;
Laius, butchered by his son
and dragged to wreckage on a lonely road;
And Oedipus, that son,
destroyed completely by the fist of fate
In retribution for what went before.
And then these two…
Be clear, be strong,
Fear nothing but the gods
And show us that we have a king deserving of the name.
Remember, Creon, action is strength.

STRANGER

Listen to me, Antigone.

Your brothers both are gone.

The war is over.

Thebes must start again.

I have been asked to rule her now.

To rule her well I need the law.

No, more, the law itself must rule.

And so it must be clear, and strong,

and firm against exception.

As I am uncle,

my whole self weeps for both the boys.

As I am king:

Eteocles is good, admired and honoured,

We should be like him if we can.

And Polynices represents the bad,

the wrong way to behave,
And his disgrace is warning to us all.
I tell you child, in truth,
so black with blood and dust and flies,
So mangled in their wounds,
So tangled in their gear were both of them that,
for myself,
I could not say which corpse was who.

BOWL

Oh, Captain Lietos, well.
Our brave Sub-Second-Officer?

That snot-for-moustache brat,

Who left his nurse's care to take command of us,

And all the other strays great Agamemnon's hounds

Could round up on Boecia's hills?

What does he know of wine?

It is all just potential piss to him.

And I bet anyone that he has no idea

These grapes were grown high up

On the steep southern slopes of Cithaeron.

Trust me, my friends.

From there, on a clear day,

You can look down,

And see the smiles of the women

In the square below.

I know.

This, friends, is Theban wine.

BOWL

Our brave Sub-Second-Officer?

That snot-for-moustache brat,

Who left his nurse's care to take command of us,

And all the other strays great Agamemnon's hounds

Could round up on Boecia's hills?

What does he know of wine?

It is all just potential piss to him.

And I bet anyone that he has no idea

These grapes were grown high up

On the steep southern slopes of Cithaeron.

Trust me, my friends.

From there, on a clear day,

You can look down,

And see the smiles of the women

In the square below.

I know.

This, friends, is Theban wine.

BLOOD

I will name him!

Thief! Infection! Wound!

The earth cries out against this town

with vermin, drought and plague.

The gods demand that Thebans make Thebes clean.

Strange people bring strange ways.

His clothing and his silence call him foreign,

Not of Cadmus' clan.

Their sewers crawled with sin and vice and crime.

Impure, unwanted,

We must assist the gods

And make this drowning city Thebes again.

Thebes must be purified.

Thebes must be purged.

The judgment of the gods is death!!

OEDIPUS

By Cadmus, common father of the town,
And Polybus my own most royal sire,
And by the very name of king,
Which burns above my brow,
I swear a king's commitment.
To know, to find, and solve
The deepest root of this perverse calamity.
This sickness of the flesh, earth, water, air,
and soul of Thebes.
And knowing sure,
not let the intake of a breath,
Nor yet the flicker of an eye,
Delay the swift dispatch of justice.
Go home, or join the efforts in the street.
Lend comfort where you can.
There will be no more gatherings,
These are not times for gentle kings.
On pain of death I say, go home!
(OEDIPUS threatens the crowd.)
The bloody business of the day is done.
I said go home, there is no more to see. *(Exeunt the crowd)*
Your eyes accuse me, youth, and rightly so.
Were I the king I seek to be you might yet live.
We might exchange our travellers' tales over a cup.
Instead I stand alone,
Assuring corpses of my kingly will.
Perhaps I am a fool.
A thing to do?
I will go seek my wife.

FIREWOOD

I have no knowledge of your case
and do not think to judge,
But in your swollen voice
I hear a thing to fear.
Fear more than plague or drought or armies,
Fear more, I think, than all the anger of the gods.
I hear despair.
I hear the last surrender of the soul.
Hope is the final strand
that saves the spider from the fire,
And when, as now, the light is strange,
We cannot see its line,
But it is there.
Somehow, together, something will be saved.
Have faith, if only in the thought of hope.

CREON

My guide, the priest, rich with the beauty of the world,
Led me along that path I never could have found.
We reached a grove of many different trees,
Diverse in colour, size, and form,
Twined with each other like a tapestry,And there,
Between two shining lips of mossy stone,
the torrent's spring.
The young priest stopped, and turned,
And beckoned me to come to him.
His mantle fell.
Silent and naked in that ringing dream,
We bathed each other in the icy pool.
Performed the ancient rites of purity
And sang in breathless murmurs to the gods.
Then he untied his mass of hair,
And, slowly as the tide at first
then violent as the surf,
Rode on the waves of light,
His cloud of hair like smoke about his head.
The trees, in awe, shrunk back and gave him room.
Another pool, of sunlight, on the ground,
Spread like spilled gold as the sky peered down,
And at its centre sprang a sycamore,
Which grew in moments to a mighty tree,
And then its roots tore upwards through the earth.
Naked and pale, thinly defiant of gravity,
They wormed across his form,
Then sought the branches of the tree.
Blindly the tendrils twined about the bark,
Gripped and grew hard.

The tangled knot convulsed,
The shriek that heralds death's descent
into a tortured prisoner's soul
Silenced the water's song,
The horrid thing tore open and collapsed,
No part remaining in the ground.
The young priest stood, the shattered tree lay dead,
And stillness filled the place,
Or sought to.
As we sometimes see things by their shadows,
I heard the truths that were not there.

I fear a thing unnamed.
The silence spoke.
The rottenness of Thebes will not subside
Until the man who slew old Laius king
Is hunted out, is named, and banished,
Blood and name, forever, from this city's soul.

ŒDIPUS

Laius must be avenged.

It falls from gods to kings to save the state.

I am the man to do this.

The king of Thebes was slain and I,

who bear that name,

Must close the circle of the crown.

By blood, by birth,

By all the names of justice and of truth,

I swear before you all,

This man is mine

and I will root him out

And like the cancerous pustule that he is,

Cut him away and wash his memory from Thebes.

Or, if I fail,

To never more accept the name of king.

WATER*(Carrying a corpse)*

A grave! A hole! A peaceful pipe!

Where I may lay this blistered burden that was love.

There was, I heard, a hungry blaze at work

To send a wealthy elder on his way.

I sought it out, following a greasy plume that lay along the ground.

It seemed as though the smoke laboured against its load,

As I did too, unable to lift it to the clouds,

Unwilling to lay it down.

But when I found the place there was no flame,

No mourners, and no sacred practice honouring the dead.

Only a crooked fissure in the rock,

And from it boiled forth a scalding stream I cannot name.

It reeked of blood, was thick and foul,

Smoldering, curdling, curling on the ground.

I saw myself, as if reflected, and I fled.

MANTO

The beasts, examined and prepared, stand ready.

I make the patterns as you taught me to.
The fire flares,

a beacon bright and clear, then falls away.

Both, neither, all.

It changed, it changes still.

At first a twist of colours in a cloud.

Like dancing revellers by torchlight.

Then it turned red, a bleeding red,

Like all the world at dawn.

And now, oh, now...

It climbs again.

Divides against itself like horns.

The offered wine is blood

and moves upon the altar like a snake,

Lashing the flames, which lick and bite and snarl.

A pool of greasy smoke, as from a pyre,

Labours across the ground,

No, climbs towards the king,

Not floating on the air but crawling up.

It clings to him as if to pull him down,

And coils around his head,

Sits heavy on his shoulders,

Hides his face.

I fear he cannot breathe or see or…

Oh Wisdom, tell us what this means.

The smoke,
It runs like sweat or blood along his limbs,

Is hot, and yet he shivers.

His whole frame quivers with the touch.

His breath uneven, sharp and deep.
The bull resists as if he knows.
He fears the light and turns his head away,
He sweats and struggles, cannot long be held.
The sword comes down.
Most of all this is from the heifer's wound,
Which spouts more still.
The bull is dry though pierced two dozen times.
No, wait,
His mouth and eyes compete with streams of gore.
Some light a moment shines.
The heifer has but one deep wound,
As if she threw herself against the blade.
The bull's own horn has torn this steaming hole in its flank.
The entrails move,
Not twitching into death but writhing, leaping,
Like beasts themselves in desperate agony.
No, here, this stone, by its connections, might be heart.
This crumbling swollen mass is liver,
If it is flesh at all.
What more?
The air declines to move.
It all, I know, is wrong.
What's this?
A heavy lump, deep buried in the mess.
Not so.
An unborn calf.
Not mated but with child.
The fetus fights for life, for air, for light,
It swims against the death that bore it.
They rise.

Help me!
They stand,
The heifer and the bull though butchered, disemboweled,
Lurch from the earth and howl.
The stones, the altar, and the fire all shriek and howl,
More men go down beneath the hooves and horns,
Slip in the putrid pool.
I cannot tell you more.
I cannot tell you more.

JOCASTA

Oh, what a tangled heap of chaos is my love.
And yet I am alone.
My husband, frantic master of the night,
is sleeping like a child.
He starts, cries out for safety in the dark,
Then, curled up like a stone,
falls far away.
My brother, hero of my childhood dreams,
Who held me, gave me comfort when I cried,
Against whose side
I found such rest so many years ago,
Whom I love more than life itself,
Is gone to death,
To see the man I dreamed was dead
A hundred thousand times before he fell.
That man,
who filled my womb with life
Then tore it from my heart,
Once more stands potent in his grave.
I have wed twice.
Five children have I borne.
And still I am alone.
Alone and queen.
More chaos day by day.
The gods themselves against my city rage,
The sun is up.
Bring on the business of the age.

CREON

I will begin and we approach the end.
There was a forest, dense and dark.
So thickly hung the vines and moss and weeds
That no light shone.
Only the rotting glow of woody earth
Gave shadows to the shapes around.
One shadow moved.
The ancient priest brought sounds
From somewhere in himself
but never human.
He dragged a heavy branch against the ground
And carved deep symbols in the dirt.
The naked topsoil smoked.
The forest wall began to shake.
Sheep, oxen, pigs, covered in bleeding scratches,
Forced their way into the narrow grove.
The priest heaved up the branch above his head,
It flared alight,
He struck it down upon the centre of design,
The ground itself then sighed and fell away.
The hungry hole sucked in the screaming animals.
Bouncing and rolling on their backs,
He leaped against the air and cried out
" I am heard",
Then landed flatly at the ragged lip,
his face within the hole.
A sound, a sense, a shifting of the air,
One half a breath of silence, and I saw.
A broken dam of dead, in panic beyond fear,

Tearing each other in the press,
Swept up and over me.
I fell upon my knees and held my head.
Corrupted limbs stumbled against me and collapsed.
Faces and fingers pried at me,
Many of Thebes, many of long ago.
Our father, yes, and mother too.
They wailed and whispered,
many knew my name.
Many, many, so many.
The history of death flowed by.
And then, just as my eyes and limbs lost sense,
I saw him come.
His robe and ornament declared his name,
His face was gone.
Black twisted shreds of flesh and shattered bone
Hung limply from the skull.
But he knew me, He knows me still.
Forgive me, sister,
Laius come.

(Possessed by LAIUS.)

OEDIPUS

NO.

I am the king and I say no.

Silence the crowd.

Silence the prince.

Silence the dead.

There is no truth in this.

No conjury.

Think of it Thebes.

How can this be?

I am accused, by vague report,

Behind the echo of a dancer's dream.

But what of truth?

My father lives,

King Polybus,

our wise and gentle neighbour,

Rests happy on the throne of Corinth.

Merope, my loving mother,

Most honoured of that name, sits by his side.

Their grey hands curled together all the day.

Unstained by blood or scandal.

Do the gods lie?

Can the prophet twist the truth?

Or, does a mortal man, a second prince,

Grow thirsty for the crown?Creon.

Who sings this song? Creon.

Who calls for my exile?

Creon.

Who seeks the throne of Thebes?

CREON

I went to death.

I saw the dead king.

Would I were dead if I have lied.

I have not even spoken.

The words, Laius himself,

Rode in me and they brought me here.

Evidence, logic, argument,

Are broken tools beneath our feet

When we stand naked in the presence of the truth.

And this is true.

The throne, the crown, the agony,

are more than I could bear.

My life is good, simple and sweet and safe.

I tend a gentle garden

full of love and art and music.

I know I never want the binding of the crown about my brow

As fully as I know that you, Oedipus, king of Thebes,

Must leave this place to save it.

BREAD

These arms.
These hands and arms once wrapped
a universe of love.
My babies squirmed and twisted here
Like leaping fish in an abundant net.
And then the plague.
And then the law.
I went to them.
I went to the theatre.
The doors hung open and the place was still.
Only the gritty murmur of the flies.
Together, in a corner of the stage,
Among the wooden swords and crowns of foil,
Across the fall of shadow,
Back and forth, my daughter rocked
her brother in her arms.
Without a word.
What words could serve?
I slipped myself around them both.
I drew them in.
I felt her fading breath respond to mine.
Eyes closed with blisters, features torn with pain,
She sighed, "His heart is still".
I held them for an hour.
Death spread its stain.
Her back grew cold.
My life is over,
What do I do now?

OEDIPUS *(coming below)*

My wife?

My wife my mother?

What am I?

Am I a thing of nature?

Can I exist and call it life,

Or am I all that life and truth despise

pressed in the form of man?

I am the man.

Cursed.

Hated. Hunted, and now found.

I am the answer.

What am I?

A city ruined,

more dead than still remain alive,

An age of children gone.

Thebes models horror to the underworld.

A punishment.

I beg the universe to give me perfect punishment.

Something consume me now,

Or fire or flood come snatch me from my skin

And hurl me into nothingness.

Where is the limy wrinkle of the earth

Where I may crawl and hide me from the scornful stars?

Who will twist and wrack my frame

Until the sun no longer knows me by my shade?

I grasp at death and yet I think

The desperate dead would shun my company.

The earth herself would gag

against the vileness of my flesh,

And spew me out upon the feast of life.

The living cannot see me now.
The light of day itself turns cold away.
Only the corpses hear my plea for punishment.
The Theatre attends.
My cue is said.
I bow before the judgment of the dead.

MANTO

Alone,
And grown, it seems, beyond my father's care,
I wandered Thebes and wept for her.
The bodies of those trampled in the sacrifice
led me into the theatre.
Seeking to still my heart with simple work,
Sorting the dead by name and family.
Collecting what I could for memory.
I thought that I had seen the tide of human pain
Mark out its highest limit in this world,
when staggered in the king.
Oedipus.
The man who vowed to solve it all.
He saw me not,
but stood upon the margin of the stage
And stared out at the steaming rows before.
"Receive me now."
He cried, then whispered "No."
"As I have vainly fled from fear,
death now will flee from me.
Mere death,
so common in the world, is not for me.
If I could die each death that you have done,
Know all your loss,
And stand for those who held you when you fell...
...still not enough.
I almost doubt there is enough of suffering
to fill my punishment,
Except I do you shame to circumscribe a limit to your pain.
A thing to do?

Have I not done enough?
I weep.
More tears than all my life has seen,
flow from me now.
Would I could weep a river rushing backwards
On the rocks and sands of time
To lift us all above, beyond,
before the fissure of my birth."
His hands explored his face,
As if he met himself in darkness.
"A thing to do. I see it now." He said.
And then.
And then.
His fingers wandered, each alone,
Across the landscape of his face.
First one, then others, stiffened,
As they knew what they would do.
They gathered like a mob upon his brow.
The knowledge flickered down his hands.
The message in the muscles of his arms
Ran up and down
until the whole strong body surged towards his eyes.
Under the lids, his nails forced their way,
Sliding across the glisten of the orbs.
His whole frame rattled.
Black sweat pulled at his clothes.
Two fingers.
Three.
Beyond the second knuckle, curled around.
His head turned up.
His elbows rose.

For one eternal instant all was still.
Then, with a shriek like birth,
his neck convulsed, his arms drove up,
and from behind his face
the ragged roots of sight tore full away.
He balanced there,
offering the wreckage to the sky,
and begged the mercy of the gods to rain on Thebes.
Another narrow blade of time
sunk deep into my memory
and then the blood.
The blood.
Release, collapse, or answer, it is not mine to say.
But blood,
as if the stream of all his line found surface there,
Broke from his shattered mask
and washed him to the ground.

JOCASTA

Who are we now?

My husband?

Baby?

King?

So much of love has flowed between us.

So much of horror floods upon us now.

How do I speak to what you have become?

How can I speak of what you always were?

Oedipus, it all was love.

We chose no wrong.

We saw what lay before us

And we sought in all things

that which led to good.

We loved each other well.

We led the people too, as well we could.

Something, above, beyond, the shallow scope

Of what we knew has chosen this.

Like birds who ride the rising hurricane,

We fight, heroic, but we go where nature goes.

You were a hero then.

You strove against the world to make it good.

To act was life itself.

You climbed from fear to thought to deed,

accepting all that came.

You were a name.

And now you are too small a thing to die.

Even to die, the common act of all that lives.

Do something.

Kill me now,

if you are shy to meet the thing yourself.

You cannot.
A child again.
Give me that blade that marks the hand of kings,
Your father's sword,
he raised it against you,
You turned it sharply,
swiftly brought him down,
And now it dangles like an infant's drool
against your quaking side.
Where shall it die?
This throat,
that twice has sworn its love for you?
This heart, which bore that love in double store?
No.
Backwards into time, here.

(JOCASTA stabs herself in the womb.)

FIREWOOD

Think where and what we are.
A raft of bottles on a sea of blood,
We drag in lads, half drowned in mud,
We, those of us who can,
Make them feel like the kind of man
The world will care about.
We offer them our arms and charms,
We take their money and we throw them out.
And I need stuff like this, with him,
To deal with what I have to do.
These silly games are just my way,
I live with you, with him I only play.
Now, bring some wine,
Come in our tent and play with me
Until our breath is spent.

Some laughed out loud.
A Captain of Athenian cavalry was just about
To show how many holes this fishnet of a plan contained,
When King Ulysses, with a grim light in his eye,
Said “Yes, I give you my authority.
Find, if you can, a group in your command
Without a prince to speak for them,
And do exactly as you say, without delay,
No later than tomorrow’s dawn.”
Then Leitos puffed up like a frog
And strode into the darkness,
Where I heard him trip and fall three times at least.
I stayed, amazed.
How could a king so known for clever strategies
Approve a thing so pointless?
The bastards will be silenced by the archers on the wall,
Or, at the most, a single troop of cavalry will cut them down
As easily as mowing hay.
Well, the Athenian and all the rest were quick to speak as you have done.
Ulysses nodded as they spoke and waited patiently,
And then he said,
“All this is true, they will all die, but not quite pointlessly.
If we do this.
If we behave so foolishly,
Then, when we try another strategy,
One I have half developed in my mind,
We may just find the Trojans make the fatal slip
Of underestimating us.
And when they do, the war is won.”

WATER

This is ridiculous, just look at us.

We act like children and our children act…

Like us: afraid, alive and facing death.

Is this the way?

I think, maybe,

That we should act as if tomorrow were a normal day,

Go on with all the little things

that make our lives make sense to us:

Wash dishes, cook.

Live life right to the end as best we can and then

Clean up, and put our things away.

It seems to me, somehow, that is the proper way.

Our lives are built of little things well done:

A little work, a little fun,

And in the end, a little silence comes.

Think of it friends, my love,

If when, no, now,

we know that our last hours have come,

We live them differently,

Then aren't we saying

that the way we lived our lives before was wrong?

BOWL

I never could say no to you and will not now.
All wine is Dionysus' blood
And so is good enough for anyone.
Pour out that thin Athenian muck
And when it's gone, for luck, move on
To that blood coloured Spartan stuff,
Let no-one cry "enough", for that,
As this no-more-a-sergeant here would say,
Is blasphemy to Dionysus' holy name.
All drink, all drink.

(To CLOTH.)

You too, especially.
Since your life must be short, let it be full.

(To FIREWOOD.)

Agave, feed the fire and feel its heat
Light up your heart and lift your feet.
Hurl pride and pain against the sky
Tonight, your child, the king, must die.

(BOWL Sings alone.)

Pentheus woke up one night in his bed,
"I'll go for a walk in the woods, now" he said,
And what he saw there had him losing his head,
For Thebes makes a hell of a wine.
Yes, Thebes makes a hell of a wine.
Come on, get up, Tear out your hair,
Tear off each other's clothes
And love like frightened animals.

(To GLASS.)

I'll bite your perfect neck,

(To BREAD.)

You claw my back until I bleed,
And we will grind our thighs
Until we scream our sighs
And our raw skins
Release the burning blood within
And throw it on the dust.
Live in your lust.
Throw everything: all bonds, all trust,
Tradition, rules, onto the blaze
And be amazed to see your naked passions all set free.
Be, be, come, be alive with me.

(The others shrink from him.)

What, am I suddenly alone?
Will no-one love our god with me?
If ever there was time for this,
This is it now.
This is the truth of Thebes.
What's wrong?
Why do you stare so stupidly?
What do you see?
I told you, I am Dionysus now.
What is a Bacchanalia if not this?
What?
Just a party with a bit more wine than usual?
If that is all, then Thebes deserves to die.
Think of what Dionysus is.

BREAD

Oh, stop.

I can’t go on with this.

We all know where it goes from here.

(During this speech she knocks over and, perhaps, breaks two or three bottles. She drinks desperately from one.)

That bottle there is Oedipus,

That one Antigone, no, that;

We first must have the drought and plague,

And then the Sphinx, and afterwards the Seven Kings,

Who all die horribly, their sons revenge,

But wait, Jocasta’s agony and Creon going mad,

And all the nameless thousands caught between

The grinding teeth of grim necessity.

And then, at last, the city ends

and we die here, tomorrow.

No good has come of it.

None ever will.

Our history is broken glass, not wine.

Nothing but guilt and cruelty and pain

Why must we choke it down again?

Unless it is your scheme

To make life seem so terrible

That death will look like peace

A cold release from suffering.

FIREWOOD

How can you say it all is suffering?

(She retrieves a bottle and shares it gently.)

How many nights around how many fires
Have we shared wine, enjoyed good company,
Shared songs and laughed our joy?
How many times has some sweet boy
Made you a goddess with a smile?
How many men have walked how many miles
To hear a kind word from your lips
Or take a cup of wine from your fine fingertips?
All that is part of history.
Even Jocasta fell in love,
She held five laughing babies in her arms,
Yes, they all died terribly, so what?
Most death is terrible.
They lived.
Thebes was a city stained with blood, that's true,
But it was also famous everywhere
For wine and welcoming.
Because Thebes was, the world is rich with travellers,
And every city has a place
Where they can find a friendly face,
A fire, a cup of wine,
Where people much like us
Will greet them, feed them, make them laugh.
And so on their behalf I say
Thank you, to Thebes.

BOWL

Tell me, my friends; what is the final cost
That must be paid for drinking which,
Although at times delayed,
Goes on forever and will never end?
What is the bill, my careful friend?.
And so, just so,
Tiresias has brought Thebes to accounts.
No life, or city, counts for anything
Until it ends.
Thebes, as you say,
Is now complete.
Thank you Tiresias,
For, like an artist with his signature,
He has declared it “done”.
What’s won is won, what’s lost is, for forever, lost.
And we, at last, can weigh the gains and cost.
If, as you say, it all is wrong,
Then so it is, and we must pay,
If, measured in another way,
It is a wealth of joys and smiling boys,
Of brilliant times and cool delicious wines,
Well then, so much for Thebes.
Whatever anyone believes, they now can say
Our city had its day.

WATER

It is a pretty thought, my friend,
But we, who now, must fit like rusty blades
Into the bloody end of it,
Might be forgiven if we do not see
How this helps us to die.
In truth?
I am just who I am.
I see what is in front of me.
We are a little group of ordinary people who,
Quite terrified, about to die,
Now try to see some way that we can say
To whom, I do not know,
That when we go, something will last.

CADMUS

Europa, my sister.

Abducted, so they say, by Zeus himself, shaped as a bull.

And carried on his back across the sea.

Forgive me, friend.

My father, crushed by helpless grief,

Called on my brothers and myself to bring her back

And never to return until we had.

We tried, no god or man can say we did not try.

But nowhere did we find Europa.

One by one my brothers stopped their search

And so could not go home.

I too almost despaired.

I did what people do who do not know what else to do.

I went o the oracle.

Of course you did.

I climbed the mountain and performed the rites.

I tell you, friends, I shook with awe and,

I suppose, with some small fear.

And when at last I raised my shaking gaze

And met that clear, unblinking eye that sees all things,

My dry voice dragged this question from my heart,

“What do I do?”

(FIREWOOD enters with HEPHAESTUS, disguised. They are carrying bundles of firewood.)

(CADMUS leans in close to the hushed group.)

A voice like burning leaves swirled down on me and said…

“Cadmus, prince,

Do this one thing and make your name ring through eternity.”

.

(CADMUS leaps up on a table or bench, imitating the oracle, and pronounces in a grand and terrible voice.)

Follow that cow!!

Just that.

I was to find a certain cow, and follow it, until it died.

No more.

On some impulse, perhaps my own,

I seized the head of Ares' serpent—.

And smashed its teeth out on a rock, and then

I scattered them across the field in which I stood.

Intending that the monster never would,

Alive or dead, bring harm to anyone,

The serpent's teeth fell on the ground

Where I had scattered them.

(He enacts the story as he tells it.)

Not for an instant were they ever still,

For each and every one of them gave forth a sprout

Then grew in moments to a full-grown man, of sorts, extravagantly armed and full of war.

Each glared at each in thoughtless, silent rage.

Caught in the middle of this awful throng,

As slowly as the dawn, I tried to slip away.

My foot came up against a little stone,

Which made a scratching sound.

All heads began to turn,

And so, catching the pebble on my toe,

I flicked it through the air, like that.

It hit one warrior behind the ear.

He roared and turned,

Striking at those around him with his sword.

I dropped onto my knees.

Before I touched the ground it shook with battle on all sides.
I crawled away
And watched behind a friendly rock.
Each man then fought with all,
Until the flying sweat and blood bore down the dust
And showed that only five still stood,
Deep mired in flesh, too tired to strike a blow,
And silence fell.

(ARES enters above, again unseen.)

And when they raised their weary eyes
I stood upon my rock and, one by one,
they bent their knees and bowed to me.

POSEIDON

You flooded gutter slut.

How dare you—

Thebe. Stop.

I will not hurt you, dear,

I wish to apologize.

Come here.

(She approaches hesitantly.)

Please, look into my eyes.

I feel the truth of what you say.

(Removes the blindfold. He caresses her hair.)

I will leave you alone.

But first, just one last little kiss?

(She hesitates. He grabs her head.)

No one defies me, ever, anywhere,

And now, you never did.

(He forces open her mouth, and spits into it.)

You will remember none of this:

And... yes, forgetfulness now licks your lips

And no-one ever will recall your kiss.

AMPHITRITE

I think I understand.

Once, far away in time, I too was loved as you are now.

A glorious god pursued my heart most passionately.

He sent to me a boiling sea of dolphins

Singing gloriously, and I was swept away.

Only the deepest waters of the world could keep

Our fire from consuming us entirely.

But now only the ash remains

To stain the wet sands of far distant shores.

Love knows no immortality, and all love will, eventually,

Grow old, and cold, and die.

Despite the sadness and the loss, I swear

That I would do it all again.

Just know that it will end.

Go, love your man,

And cherish every moment while you can.

HEPHAESTUS

I fear.

I am not shy to say.

Only a fool could see this day

And not fear what will come of it,

If we, together and as one,

Do not now crush this crime before it grows.

None of us knows the monster it would be.

I can, you know, make almost anything,

But even I cannot repair the fabric of the world,

When it has suffered such a tear.

My wife betrays me with another god

And you all nod and smile and laugh at me

And even I can see that only I am hurt by it.

But this, this is not sport or appetite,

If it were that, we might make light of it,

No, this, they say, is love.

A goddess and a man.

Their crimes are absolute I say,

His to presume, hers to betray.

APHRODITE

Great Zeus.

You have heard arguments,

All crafted skillfully by those who do that best.

You have with your immeasurable eye seen all the evidence.

Let me now offer you persuasions of my own,

Hear with your blood from Aphrodite's tongue

The joys of generosity.

Preserve my daughter's immortality,

Instead, take me.

I beg of you, a goddess on my knees.

Athena spoke of more.

I can do more, be more, give more.

Accept my gratitude in all its forms.

I eagerly will come, or crawl, to you.

I offer you the fullest feast of Aphrodite's fire –

AGAVE

When they came down together...

It was a time of beautiful ideas.

They were set free and left alone.

My parents had, the whole world knew,

The greatest love, and I was, am, we are,

The living fruit of it.

They all believed, with cause,

That love could build or conquer anything.

His mother was a dragon tooth.

He stands in my childhood memories as he does now,

On guard against the world.

And yet, in his way, he was a child too,

His birth was from the earth into the arms of war.

He killed before he learned to speak, or even ate.

He did not love or hate:

He simply fought his brothers and the world.

In our small hopeful camp there was my family,

The slaves, set free, Thebe, and those five broken blades of Are's wrath.

Somehow, together, we would find a common path

Toward the city we all hoped could be.

My parents thought that, for Cadmea to be truly free,

The Sown Men must, some how,

Be partners in the Beautiful Idea.

So I...

I thought it too.

Somewhere I want to hope that I still do.

ACTAEON (Appearing)

Silence, boy.

I hang in agony.

I have one chance to move beyond this moment of my death

By pushing you back into life.

Listen to me and learn.
I was so furious with you, and Cadmus too,
I drove my hounds into the hills, hungry to kill.
Blood thirst grew cold and real thirst took hold.
I heard a waterfall,
I found a grove, a cave.
I slipped, and stumbled on a stag, new slain;
The empty eyes, the fat full flies,
The golden arrow through the neck,
The long, well muscled thigh, spattered with blood,
And there stood Artemis,
As red and naked as the dawn,
Glaring at me.
I could not help but see, and seeing, stare.
"How dare you, dog?" she cried.
She raised her bloody hand
And something seized my heart.
In every part of me
I was …transformed.
I had become the stag,
My self was gone.
I staggered to my feet, and heard my hungry hounds
Approaching, all around.
Black Paw, my favourite, tore my throat,
While Faithful sank her fangs into my leg.
I went down with the weakness and the weight.
Pentheus, I beg of you,
Hear this and set me free.
Do not go to the fire,
For there you will, I know it, cousin,
Suffer as I do.

No one should ever know such pain.

Goddess, have mercy, here they come again!

Pentheus, flee the fire!

BLOOD

I went, to find my love.

I tried to follow her back to the fire,

But found myself entangled in the trees.

I could not move,

Lucky for me.
The fire was huge, I think.
Thick heat and bodies blurred the air.
The smoke was everywhere.
But still, I glimpsed the king.
Pentheus, up another tree.
I do not think he noticed me,
There was so much to see.
Limbs swam like serpents in the clinging soil,
And then, worthy of Zeus himself,
A slash of lightning.
Thunder slammed the flames,
And rain like surf rattled the trees
And licked the mud away.
And for one hard held breath
The women of Cadmea stood, shining,
And faced the sky together.
They were magnificent.
Then dance itself reached upward from the drumming ground.
The mud climbed with it, up around their flashing limbs,
Skin straining to contain the blood within.
Another flash, and through the trees,
I saw Agave come.
She climbed the living circle,
Which, with a furious gentleness,
Soon took her in.
But then the lightning fell like rain
And something changed.
Some new great energy arrived.
The crowd grew thick.
Both sounds and movements jarred,

And wild beasts, strange and un-natural,
Transformed the festival into a brutal sacrifice.
A shining bull, two eagles, and a bear
Snatched up a little girl and flung her in the fire.
Agave dived in after her.
She tore the blazing limbs apart
But could not find the girl.
The scattered fire,
The beasts, blood wild,
The murdered child,
And all that went before,
Compounded in her heart,
And with a cry like birth
She grasped a branch, crusted with coals,
And threw it at the stars.
It spun spectacular and then it fell
Into the cedar where Pentheus hid.
It flared, as summer cedars will.
He leaped, or fell, I could not tell,
But landed heavily before his mother's feet.
Agave first, then others, seized on him.
Your daughter took her son
And somehow found the strength
To pull his strong young body
Into strips and splinters each so small

TIRESIAS

Zeus sent to me,

In my last kiss from Semele,

This thing called prophesy.

A piece of himself perhaps.

Then, when Pentheus had been... killed.

I, pregnant, wandered from the town,

Lost, broken, and half mad.

I gave birth in a field in a thunderstorm, not far from here,

On the far slopes of Cithaeron.

I hoped to die,

And so I brought the child, a boy,

Back into town and left him in the care

Of the open family that warms the Barn.

I knew that he would never come to harm with them.

I wandered off again.

I found a cave, and built a wall,

And lay down on the boney ground to die.

I knew, somewhere,

How much more agony and joy still lay ahead.

But in that now, somehow,

My hope for death was all that I could see.

I was, just once, alone with my loneliness.

I opened to the emptiness, the silence, and the dark.

And then, faint as a spark across a valley in the rain,

I heard, or smelled, something: a butterfly,

Trying to find its way to me.

I felt a crack of moonlight on my face.

I tasted foods once eaten in that place,

And I chose, chose, to live, despite it all.

I fought my way, like birth, back to the world.

I broke my wall. it was a feeble thing,

And crawled towards ...

I thought at first it was the butterfly that brushed my cheek.

A young goatherd.

He carried me and bathed me,

Fed me broth and brushed my hair.

I slept safely without dreams.

And when I woke he would be carving by the hearth.

Each chip that flew into the fire sparked in his eyes.

One day I woke and knew how kind and good he was.

The morning after that I knew I loved the man.

We woke together after that.

I bore another child, a girl.

I was so fully in that happy now...

Somehow, I did not see...

A spark, a fire took him, and her, our home.

I was again alone.

But I had lived.

I had a son.

So I have come to visit family.

Is that enough?

THEBE

No, stay.

Water can flow by many ways to the same sea.

(She touches him.)

Your present longing and my loss,

Pull us together now.

I feel a future quickening.

Come here. *(He comes to her)*

Impress yourself on me.

I need to make some memories.

(She pulls away.)

Promise me this.

If I should have a child,

Because of all that we might be about to do,

That you will claim it as your own and train it for the throne.

Think of it, Labdacus, all this, here, now,

And then tomorrow: free, no guilt,

No wife, a single crown,

And yet a son of your own, but also part divine,

To whom you can pass down your throne

And found a line of glorious royalty.

ANTIOPE

Where to begin?

Nycteus was my father, yes.

A sort of country king.

A farmer, actually, although the work was done by slaves.

He and his friends, half uncles or half brothers, most of them,

Devoured the hours pretending to be warriors,

Playing with rites from times before the gods,

When people tried to prove they were not animals.

Each Spring they held one of their festivals,

A feast, of course, a fire and all of that.

The young men wrestled and the old men watched.

There was a boy, it sounds so silly now, I liked.

There is a spot behind the Hall, they call it that,

But I am sure it too was once a barn.

A spot, some say, where Zeus himself was born,

And in that place no shadows show.

And anyone who was found there...

Was taken to the woods and sacrificed.

Their body torn into such bits as fit into a fist.

One little piece was mixed with the meat inside.

Whoever ate it took the spirit of a wolf,

Something like that.

I went to see my boy—

TIRESIAS

So much hangs from my broken heart:

Each beat sets ripples ripping everything apart.

Apart.

If I hate anything, Pentheus love,

I hate that word.

(She takes a few small bones from the bag around her neck. She speaks to them.)

I feel your fingertips slip over mine.

I see so much,

Why can I not see you?

If only I could share

It all with you just as I planned.

To balance you as king and man,

And bring you, straight from Zeus,

Wise counsel built on perfect prophesy.

I tried, and you died trying to understand.

If I can hold my whole self still,

The billion bits of true things will,

I dare to hope, slowly begin

To swirl and settle on my skin

Like all the butterflies there ever were.

But then,

If I dare think, or blink, or sigh,

Chaos again.

So I stand still behind my empty eyes,

And wait for somebody to see,

Not me, but the butterflies.

THEBE (Throws)

I remember you… telling me about yourself. *(Throws)*

More than once. (Throws)

And about me. (Throws)

And who our mother was. (Throws)

How you have searched for me. (Throws)

(She looks at him.)

Like Cadmus. Huh.

(Throws and points.)

There, see that?

One pebble, on a pile of the rest,

Sits clear above the mud.

And so, hello Locrus.

This was a mountain stream,

A laughing dream of life and light.

One pebble thrown for every man who claims

A sweaty dream with me,

Makes that much change.

But you, you rearrange it all,

You and your brutal tools

Dig up the rock and stack up palaces for fools,

And now my stream is just a decorated ditch.