Seven

A play

Part nine of

City of Wine

A cycle in three trilogies

by
Ned Dickens

The Grape Trilogy
HARMONIA
PENTHEUS
THEBE

The Vine Trilogy
CADMEA
ELIS
JOCASTA

The Wine Trilogy
OEDIPUS
CREON
SEVEN

Commissioned by Nightswimming
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"Thebes is famous everywhere, for wine and welcoming."
City of Wine is a nine-play cycle telling the story of the Greek city of Thebes—best known as the home of Oedipus. It begins with the founding of Thebes by Cadmus and Harmonia, and ends with the death of six of its last seven citizens on the battlefield of Troy.

The *City of Wine* cycle is a powerful portrayal of leadership and civic life. This contemporary epic breathes new life into these magnificent stories while portraying the citizens of Thebes as distinct yet familiar individuals, unique to playwright Ned Dickens' vision of this legendary city. Brian Quirt.

Playwright's Notes

The UnNamed
City of Wine features great names: Zeus, Athena, Harmonia, Laius, Jocasta, Oedipus, Dionysus, and Tiresias, to mention only a few. Such names are so powerful that I felt I could not introduce fictional ones into the mix. At the same time, I very much wanted to find a new approach to the idea of the Chorus. I wanted to show a diversity of interacting personalities which, taken together, would represent the ordinary people—the citizens—of the *City of Wine*.

The result is a group of seven personalities (often related from play to play but not always the same individuals) who, although distinct and real, are never named. Throughout *City of Wine* they are always present, reacting to and affecting the actions of the Named.

The UnNamed are "the aching, dancing body of my town." In order to keep them straight in the text I gave them "tags". The truth of my premise that names are powerful things is borne out by the fact that many people persist in thinking of these tags as names. You, of course, will not make that mistake.

Synopsis

The Grape Trilogy

Harmonia
This is the story of how Harmonia, daughter of the gods Ares and Aphrodite, and her mortal husband Cadmus, become the founders of the city that will become Thebes. In the kitchen of Ares' palace on Mount Olympus, surrounded by the desires and games of both gods and mortals, Cadmus wins the love of Harmonia but incites the fury of the gods. Harmonia gives up her immortality to pursue her love as she and her new husband are driven from Olympus. They vow to found a great city dedicated to equality and truth—and thus the city is born."Nothing begins in history." As I scratched around for a point of entry into the story of Thebes I tripped over the idea that two gods would give Harmonia, their goddess daughter, to marry an enslaved mortal who had not only offended them but had failed at everything he had tried to do so far. Equally intriguing was that she might fall in love with him. "There has to be a story behind that!" I told myself, and here it is.

Pentheus
The second play introduces us to Harmonia and Cadmus' grandson Pentheus, who finds himself chosen king just as the city is undergoing an unexpected transformation. Also brought to life are the magical characters of Tiresias, the seer whose prophecies play a pivotal role in city's story, and Dionysus, the god whose gift of wine brings both joy and chaos to Thebes. In this alternative

version of the events of The Bacchae, the tragedy of King Pentheus (and a hidden love story!) brings our city into a new era .

While HARMONIA can be said to deal with the conception of the city, this play looks at its adolescence. It swirls with sexual infatuation, questions of emerging identity, and a tragic loss of innocence. Robert Graves (poet and scholar) suggests that the real root of all the problems which beset Thebes (called Cadmea at this point in the story) is the institution of patrilineal monarchy, the idea that the crown must pass from father to son. He argues that this idea offends the powerful female energy in the ancient world and sets off "the war of the sexes" with a bang. I have tried to show how, in context, that idea, called here Pentheus' Law, might make sense to a young man who unexpectedly finds himself on a throne for which he feels completely unprepared.

Thebe

The character and story of Thebe have grown organically over the years. Exploring and unpacking both was a huge part of the impetus behind the last expansion of *City of Wine* from seven to nine plays. In HARMONIA, Poseidon, spurned by her, spits into Thebe's mouth (a particularly nasty assault that echoes the story of Apollo and Cassandra) and he decrees that her kiss will always give instant forgetfulness. The dynamic between memory and forgetfulness is central to our story, and storytelling. It also allows me to introduce narrative elements that have no basis in traditional versions, as long as I arrange to have them forgotten, such as Thebe's being the mother of Tiresias and, eventually, Laius.

The Vine Trilogy

Cadmea

The city has grown, but so has distrust and fear between the sexes. Lycus and Dirce rule in luxury while Laius waits impatiently to take the crown. Amphion and Zethus, the twin unacknowledged sons of Lycus, arrive. They use Laius to punish Lycus for his treatment of their mother, Antiope, unleashing assassination, riot, and massacre. Laius escapes into exile and the brothers arrange to be elected twin kings. Thebe fulfills the prophesy that she will be queen.

Fairly late in the 30+ year *City of Wine* writing process it occurred to me that the Theban plays of Sophocles et al. weren't Theban at all: they were created and celebrated in a city trying to be a democracy (Athens). They are stories about the horrifically dysfunctional monarchy, and military rival, next door. They are deeply political. The city of Cadmea/Thebes is the protagonist of *City of Wine*, and her challenges, growth, triumphs, disasters, and her journey from an intentional settlement to a city state, take centre stage in the Vine Trilogy. Here she becomes a place familiar to a modern audience, shaped by familiar characters: grifters, schemers, dreamers, and traditionalists.

Elis
Elis is a nearby city in the mountains, where Laius has sought refuge in exile. Wine has also arrived in town and a dis-used slaughterhouse is becoming a tavern, with help from Bowl. Laius festers in bitterness and self-pity, abusing the hospitality and the vulnerable son of his hosts until he, Laius, commits a crime that will haunt Thebes and its people for generations.
ELIS is the middle play of the cycle and, like the first and last, it doesn't take place in Cadmea/ Thebes. Elis is a mountain city based heavily on cattle farming. Their main festival celebrates the semi-annual slaughter. Dionysus is the god of wine, of course, but he is also god of the theatre. One theory suggests that public theatre emerged as a way to contain and control the rites of the riotous god. The need for that containment shows when bacchanalia meets slaughter festival.

Jocasta
This play illuminates the story of Jocasta, one of the great figures of ancient mythology, familiar to us largely for her death scene in the play Oedipus. The exiled Laius returns to Thebes, marries Jocasta and she bears him a son. The first act of Jocasta traces the descent of the city, under King Laius' rule, into dictatorship and despair. Act two brings with it a much-discussed moment in Greek mythology/legend: the magnetic first meeting between Jocasta and Oedipus. With no idea what their relationship portends (for themselves or Thebes) their happy marriage restores peace to the city.

Tragedy is often an architecture of unfortunate choices, many of which make sense in context, but which add up to disaster. The impulse to write this play (fourth in the cycle but the second written, after Oedipus) came from the realization that many of the critical choices which inform that story were made before it begins, by Jocasta and Laius, rather than by Oedipus. I wanted to find out why, and what those situations may have looked like. The more I explored and imagined my way backwards into hypothetical time, the more enthralled I became with this extraordinary woman. Wanting to understand her is the seed crystal around which the entire *City of Wine* has grown.

The Wine Trilogy

Oedipus
Oedipus attempts to relieve Thebes of a plague, and the curse that brought it to the city, and in doing so brings the famous story of Jocasta, Laius, and Oedipus to its disastrous and horrifying conclusion.

OEDIPUS was the first play written, and still marks the grand climax of the cycle. Much of the motivation for writing the larger project was rooted in a desire to fully contextualize what happens here. In the modern world we have tended to think of ourselves as moral singularities, responsible only for our own choices and actions. Seen through that frame, Oedipus becomes a victim of cruel and irrational fate, doomed to suffer despite his best efforts. I offer him rather as a point in a larger narrative curve, paying the cost of his father's crimes and his family's unfolding pattern of well-intentioned error.

Creon

On a pleasant evening, years after the events of Oedipus, a visiting stranger enters a peaceful tavern and acquaints himself with the Thebans savouring the local wine. His questions about their city and its history result in an impromptu and often comic reconstruction of the story of Antigone. Its controversial story about leadership is re-evaluated and the fate of Thebes is explored, disputed and reinvented. Once again, wine points the way, bringing both chaos and, finally, good cheer in its wake.

Throughout *City of Wine* the Unnamed are always present, responding to and influencing the actions of the Named, but in CREON they take over, and the cycle enters a new stage. Increasingly it is less about history and more about story. BOWL says "I have just listened to the stories that wounds tell." I wanted to look at how communities define, heal, and even re-create themselves through the sharing of narratives. I also wanted to introduce an element of suspense to an ancient tale. Since I have chosen to wander from the path of received mythology from time to time, in this play I decided to offer my characters the same opportunity, and then see where they would take the story.

Seven

During the siege of Troy, seven scruffy Theban citizens, all that remain of Thebes, sit drinking around a campfire in their makeshift outdoor tavern. After receiving orders to go on a futile and certainly fatal mission the next morning, the seven spend their last night trying to make sense of their lives, their place in history and in memory. Will wine offer insight or blindness? How will they meet the challenge that dawn brings? What will remain of Thebes after they are gone?
The Iliad is such a detailed account of the Trojan War that some scholars surmise that the author was actually present for the great events and not just passing on an oral tradition, thus marking a transition from myth to history. How stories, and through them societies, evolve and survive, or not, up to and then through such a massive transition fascinates me. Theatre itself, in a way, sits on the threshold between written and remembered narratives. Indeed, it pushes backwards from written into oral narrative. Beyond all that however, I could not resist the temptation to spend one last night with the UnNamed.

Characters

BLOOD –Sergeant of this crew. Unattached.
BOWL – The cook, and possibly the father of CLOTH.
BREAD –Server. Unattached.
CLOTH – Dishwasher. Child of FIREWOOD and maybe BOWL.
FIREWOOD – In charge of the fire.
GLASS –Server, daughter of WATER and FIREWOOD.
WATER – In charge of the wine and married to FIREWOOD.

Setting: An open air tavern or canteen in the camp of the Greek army at the siege of Troy. Rough as it is, it has been here for almost ten years. There is a fire. Scattered about are crude tables, seats, work areas, as well as the campsite of the crew of seven Thebans. All around, including the audience, are to be imagined, and might be suggested, the many fires, camps, and corpses of the army.

Seven

Act One

(All but BLOOD lounge around the fire. Loud laughter.)

BREAD
Wait, wait, my turn.

Alright.

Three Trojans walk into a bar—

FIREWOOD
Yes? And?

WATER
What happens next?

BREAD
Who knows?

It has been ten years now and they have not come out.

(Some laugh.)

CLOTH
I do not understand.

FIREWOOD
Yes, dear, we know.

CLOTH
They came out yesterday.

At least four hundred died on either side.

And every day I can recall

We've hurled fresh corpses at that bloody wall.

Troy will not fall,

But we may bury it in bones.

I do not see the joke.

BOWL
Yes, well.

If they are drinking over there, then I am too.

GLASS
Yes, yes, I think it must be time.

BREAD
Again.

BOWL
Always again.

FIREWOOD
You have been drinking steadily since first we met.

BOWL
The night that we left Thebes,

And many years before.

FIREWOOD
Such chaos then, after Tiresias spoke.

WATER
Yes.

That night:

A wagon full of wine,

A hungry baby,

Just a bag or two and you—

FIREWOOD
Lost in the night.

BOWL
And groping desperately.

FIREWOOD
To find my family.

WATER

Well, thanks to Dionysus that you did.

FIREWOOD

Yes, thanks.

(Pause.)

BOWL

Remembering is thirsty work.

And yet,

Each bottle is a new beginning still.

What shall it be?

(He rummages through the supplies and pulls out a bottle.)

This one, I think.

WATER

But that is Captain Leitos' private stock.

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.

WATER
Leave it alone.

GLASS
Oh, father, now, who really cares?

Both Leitos and the Sergeant have been gone for hours.

No doubt they're sitting, drunk, beside some other fire.

WATER
I care.

It is my job.

FIREWOOD
No. It would be a job, my love, if you were ever paid.

WATER
My duty, then.

Give it to me.

BREAD
How can abuse and ridicule command such loyalty?

BOWL
It works with dogs.

Sometimes it even works with me.

BREAD
You will do anything for wine.

BOWL
Or love,

Eventually.

WATER
Young Leitos is a fine Boecian officer.

FIREWOOD
We are the Theban mud, or worse, beneath his toes.

WATER
We are Boecians too.

BOWL
Tell that to him.

FIREWOOD
“Boecians” Ha!

It is a title no-one claims until there is a war.

You’d think he was Athenian, the way he carries on.

BREAD
Yes, well.

He’s not too proud to squeeze my thigh.

GLASS
Or lick my body with his eyes.

WATER
He does?

BOWL
That is because you are too tasty to resist.

WATER
Please try.

GLASS *(Bringing wine to BOWL)*
You say the sweetest things,

You must get sticky.

Wash yourself.

(She throws a dishrag in his face.)

FIREWOOD
Now that’s my girl.

He needs a bath.

BOWL
Yes, bathe me thoroughly, please, both of you.

GLASS
Not wise.

FIREWOOD
You would be boiled,

GLASS
And go all limp.

WATER
But, but, no-one is listening to me.

FIREWOOD
I would be, dear, if you were saying anything.

Open the wine.

Cheer up, my love.

Our trade is happiness,

And when, as now, our stock is low,

We find it where we can.

It is all fun.

WATER
Well, not for everyone.

FIREWOOD
That's true.

For all we know young Leitos may be dead.

We have not heard from him in days.

He may be out there, rotting with the rest.

BREAD
Oh, I hope so.

GLASS
And so do I.

FIREWOOD
So let us drink his memory with the best.

BOWL
Well said.

You always had a liquid tongue.

FIREWOOD
You ought to know.

WATER
Alright, enough.

Let me do that. *(Takes the bottle)*

If we must steal then let us do it right.

One bottle, then we clean up for the night.

BOWL *(Getting up)*
Agreed.

For now.

FIREWOOD
Let us do both at once.

BOWL
Let us do everything.

(To FIREWOOD, as they work.)

Is your fire hot enough to roast tomorrow's meat?

FIREWOOD
Now, you tell me.

(She lifts her hem suggestively.)

BOWL
Hmmm, hard to say,

It may need blowing on.

FIREWOOD
Perhaps,

The flames are low, but underneath it glows.

WATER *(Aside, to FIREWOOD)*
Must you speak so to him?

You are my wife.

FIREWOOD
I know.

WATER
It makes my spirit crawl.

FIREWOOD
Trust me a little, love.

WATER
Can I?

FIREWOOD
You must decide.

Once, long ago, I let you down, I know,

But much has passed between us since that day.

WATER
What difference does it make?

I am eternally obliged to him.

FIREWOOD
We owe him everything.

He saved our daughter's life.

WATER
So I must pay him with my wife?

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.

WATER

Word games perhaps,

But save the other sports for me.

FIREWOOD

Oh love, of course.

(She kisses him.)

Now, bring some wine,

Come in our tent and play with me

Until our breath is spent.

(FIREWOOD goes inside one of the shelters.)

WATER

But, now?

FIREWOOD

Yes dear.

Right now.

WATER

But, but… the wine?

GLASS

We all will watch it, father,

Go.

WATER

Alright.

Good night.

BOWL

A long good night for you, I think.

(WATER follows his wife.)

Now that the old and weary have retired,

Which one of you will watch some of that wine into my cup?

And which of you is in a gaming mood?

BREAD
Later, perhaps.

BOWL
Two words I hate.

BREAD
But first I should go gather up

The cups and dishes from the other fires,

Before the Sergeant comes and makes a fuss.

GLASS
I'll help.

I think I'd rather drag my skirts

Across a field of sweaty warriors

Than listen to my parents making love.

(Noises from the tent.)

BREAD
I know you would.

(They go out into the audience, gathering "empties". While specific text is indicated, they are generally engaging the audience members as soldiers and customers in the Greek army, and may speak as needed, eg. "Give that to me", "Careful", "Bowls and cups, bowls and cups" etc. Perhaps lighting suggests a scattering of campfires. BOWL sets about his work cheerfully, humming an old song. CLOTH watches him.)

BOWL (*Singing, perhaps half under his breath.*)
Athena is a virgin.

If you saw her you'd know why.

Old Zeus is such a bull

He'd give the crack of dawn a try.

Apollo dresses like a girl,

Hephaestus is a runt,

But mighty Aphrodite boasts

The most fantastic—

(Speaking, to CLOTH.)

What?

CLOTH
Nothing.

BOWL
Good.

Don’t stare at me.

CLOTH
Why not?

BOWL
Because…Just don’t.

CLOTH
Alright.

BOWL
Don’t you have work to do?

CLOTH
I’m done until the girls get back.

BOWL
Well, go to bed then.

(They both look at the tent where FIREWOOD and WATER are.)

BOWL *(Cont’d)*
Ah, I see.

CLOTH
So, shall we play?

BOWL
Play what?

CLOTH
A game.

BOWL
What?

Gambling?

CLOTH

Pretending.

BOWL

Fine. Go first.

CLOTH

I thought the one we used to play when I was young.

BOWL

So many hours have passed since then.

How does it go?

CLOTH

I would pretend to be some name from History

And you'd play all the rest.

I always liked that game the best.

But if you'd rather not…

BOWL

Later, perhaps.

I have much work to do.

CLOTH

Can I do some of it?

BOWL

Alright then, you can help me cook.

Pass me that knife.

No, handle first, unless you mean to fight.

And if you do then do not hesitate.

Move fast and make the first blow count.

(He demonstrates. A male voice, off, cries out in pain.)

GLASS *(In the audience)*

Sit on your paws or lose them,

My great lord.

BOWL

So.

Any questions?

CLOTH
Yes.

Why do you lick my sister with your eyes,

When you are more than twice her age,

And size?

BOWL
Now, that was Leitos I believe.

You do it too.

BOWL
But…. differently.

CLOTH
Not much.

BOWL
Look all around.

What do you see?

BREAD *(To an audience member.)*
What's that?

I'd rather choke on vomit, thanks.

BOWL
Smell then:

A hundred thousand men, dead drunk or dead.

The funeral and cooking smokes compete.

Ten years of blood, and sweat, and urine in the air.

And when the wind is there: *(Points)*

The steaming rot of Troy.

Are you surprised I taste what beauty I can find?

All this, the stench of pain, and cruelty, and death,

and the destruction of this place,

Is just for what? one pretty girl, no more.

Because there is no more.

CLOTH

About her possibly, not for.

GLASS

Let go of it, you pig.

What's that?

Well, if he's really dead

He does not need my bowl.

Let go.

BOWL

So, come.

We must prepare this joint to make a hearty sacrifice.

(Carving deftly.)

See, there?

That is the thighbone, so,

Cut everything that clings to it away

And put it over there.

Why do you hesitate?

I told you not to stare.

CLOTH

Are you my father?

BOWL

What?

(He continues to work throughout.)

Who told you that?

CLOTH

My sister.

BOWL

Did she now?

I see.

When you were small I guess she told you

That the world was a ball that bounced across the sky.

(CLOTH smiles.)

I see she did.

My sister did as well.

But we know better now.

Your sister tells you silly things to make you laugh, or cry.

All sisters do. It is their way.

So.

Did she say I was her father too?

CLOTH

Oh, no.

BOWL

Thank Zeus for that.

I mean, they sometimes tell the truth.

Make no mistake.

That man in there,

(Sounds from the tent.)

That good, hard working man.

He is your father, and you know,

We Thebans like to say

"Wisdom begins with knowing who your father is."

So, there, you have begun.

Some day you may be counsel to a king.

Now what is wrong?

CLOTH

Oh, nothing, I suppose.

BOWL

Now there's a healthy attitude.

(Musses CLOTH's hair with a bloody hand.)

And there's the roast prepared.

See how I wrapped the meat three times in fat

And laid it on the bone, which you so neatly cleaned?

Now we just rest it on these green logs, here,

And let the fire do its work.

Time for a drink, I think.

Where is your cup?

CLOTH

I am too young for wine.

BOWL

There, see?

You just proved to yourself that I am not your father.

Why, I went straight from sucking on my mother's breast to wine.

Here, drink with me and you will find

I make a better friend than father anyway.

(Enter BLOOD, un-noticed.)

Now, this wine here is very good.

CLOTH

The Theban one, from Leitos' private stock?

BOWL

That's right.

Notice how clear it is.

It dances in the firelight.

(BOWL sings.)

You'll not find a bottle that matches with these.

So, raise up your cup, and another one, please.

Keep raising cups 'til you're down on your knees,

For Thebes makes a hell of a wine.

Yes, Thebes makes a hell of a wine.

BLOOD
Give that to me.

BOWL *(Standing)*
Ah, Sergeant, yes.

I was, of course, just putting it away.

BLOOD
Well don't.

(He takes a long drink.)

And get another one.

This one is dead.

(BOWL fetches more wine.)

Dead as that meat, dead as this bloody plain,

Dead as….

Drink all you can.

BOWL
If you insist.

BLOOD *(To CLOTH)*
You too.

I order you to drink.

BOWL
You heard the Sergeant, drink.

You're in the army now.

BLOOD
Yes that you are.

Where have the others gone?

BOWL
Well…

(Noises from the tent.)

BLOOD
I do not care.

Let them do as they please.

BOWL
I think they do.

Alright, I will just—

(BOWL begins to rise.)

BLOOD
Sit, sit and drink with me.

BOWL
Yes, Sergeant, certainly.

BLOOD
And do not call me that.

I am a Theban, just like you.

That is the only rank I value now.

BOWL
If you say so.

BLOOD
I do.

(Pause.)

I've changed my mind.

(To CLOTH.)

Go, child, and call the others,

Now.

CLOTH *(Stumbling)*
Yes, Sergeant.

BLOOD
Go! Before I cut your throat.

(CLOTH stands and approaches the tent.)

And it would be a kindness if I did.

Tell me, old friend…

BOWL

Who? Me? Old friend?

BLOOD

We have seen much, done much together, have we not?

BOWL

Too much, perhaps.

BLOOD

Together we all listened to Tiresias,

Together, no, as one, we followed the old prophet,

And walked out of Thebes that night,

And found our footing by its fire's light.

BOWL

Not all of us would have survived

If your old father had his way.

BLOOD

My father, as you say, not me.

I have no taste for human sacrifice.

BOWL

Of course not, no.

Stop staring, child, before the Sergeant cuts your throat,

As he has said he would.

It is a common practice in his family.

CLOTH *(At the tent)*

Get up!

I mean, come out,

I mean, get dressed,

The Sergeant summons us.

BLOOD

I never said…

I'm glad you stopped my father's hand.

GLASS *(Still off)*

I'd rather kiss a seeping wound.

BOWL

Of course you are.

And such a charmer she is now.

I know your tastes.

BLOOD

Listen to me.

Together we enlisted in this mighty foolishness.

BOWL

Enlisted? Ha, your memory,

I still recall you trying to crawl inside

A barrel in the back room of that place in Elis

When the "recruiters" came for us.

BLOOD

Together we came here.

Tell me, is it enough?

BOWL

Enough for what?

BLOOD

For you, for me, for anything?

BOWL

Enough?

CLOTH *(Calling out to BREAD and GLASS)*

Hello?

Come to the fire,

The Sergeant says "fall in".

BLOOD

No matter. Drink.

This wine is excellent.

(Enter WATER and FIREWOOD.)

BOWL

It is.

Though I, of course, have never tasted it before.

BLOOD

Oh, stop.

No lies, no games,

No foolishness, unless it makes us laugh.

Those are my orders.

See that they are done, on pain of painful death,

(Enter CLOTH, BREAD, and GLASS.)

BLOOD *(Cont'd)*

Death, death, death…

FIREWOOD

What's this?

BOWL

Just drunk. I think.

But here, *(Pouring or passing)*

He ordered us to drink up Leitos' wine.

WATER

He did?

Alright.

Let's hope that he remembers doing so,

Or Leitos will—

BLOOD

Great Leitos, Ha, who cares?

(Rude noise) That to him.

BREAD

Come Sergeant, bed for you.

BLOOD

Oh, yes?

BREAD

To sleep.

This day for you is done.

Tomorrow we have much to do.

BLOOD

Not all that much.

I am not drunk, though I admit

I have had more to drink tonight than I have ever had.

I am as sober as a priest,

At least as sober as a priest pretends to be,

And so, perhaps, a little drunk.

We all should be.

BOWL

I quite agree.

BLOOD

Forget your chores, forget your beds,

Sit, friends, with me.

BREAD

Friends, are we now?

Well, this is new.

BLOOD *(To BREAD)*

I'd like to be your friend.

You are so beautiful.

You know, you sometimes brush past me,

I smell your hair and I can barely breathe.

BREAD *(Getting up and moving away)*

I wish he would not breathe.

BLOOD *(To WATER)*

And you, I envy you, you know.

You are the happiest man I know, or ought to be.

Your wife, so good, and faithful,

And your daughter, well, she is, you know, just look at her.

But no, you have so much to lose.

No, I should pity you.

Oh well, what does it matter anyway?

None of it matters.

It's no-one's fault.

It is our fate.

(Pause.)

FIREWOOD

So, that was fun.

I think I'll just go back to bed.

BLOOD

No. Stay.

I have something to say.

BOWL

What? More?

WATER

I've heard enough.

BLOOD

Sit down.

Stop talking, all of you.

Has everybody got a drink?

BREAD

I do not like the sound of this.

BLOOD

I have been at a meeting with some senior officers.

FIREWOOD

You have?

WATER

Why you?

BLOOD
I took them food and wine.

But then I stayed, just in the firelight's edge.

I did not mean to overhear.

GLASS
Of course not, no.

BLOOD
But Leitos came,

And I was curious to know what he would say.

FIREWOOD
Yes? And?

BLOOD
Well, first they boasted for an hour or two.

I swear, if they killed half the Trojans that they claimed

The city would be empty now.

BREAD
In such a company all enemies are slain,

All women satisfied.

BLOOD
But then Ulysses—

CLOTH
Who?

WATER
You know, all hairy,

Prince of Sparta.

BREAD
No, Ulysses is the King of Ithaca.

FIREWOOD
Yes, that's the one.

BLOOD
Well, anyway,

Ulysses puts them in their place so cleverly

They smile and think him wise.

He then points out that all their glorious victories

Have made no difference.

CLOTH

Troy stands,

And we camp in the mud and dust.

BREAD

We freeze in winter, fry in summer,

And we die all year around.

BOWL

All drink.

BLOOD

“There has to be a better way.” Young Leitos says.

They nod and stare into the fire.

“Somehow we need” he says “to draw them out,

Make a diversion if you like,

That will allow a hidden force to take them from behind.”

(All nod and stare into the fire.)

CLOTH

I do not understand.

GLASS

Oh, good. Neither do I.

Father, explain.

WATER

Oh, well, you see, I mean.

Tactics can be a little complex for a girl.

FIREWOOD

Let me.

(She stands up and snatches the drink from BOWL's hand, flashes her skirt provocatively at him and then swirls around the fire.BOWL stumbles after her. She nimbly completes the circle and sits in BOWL's place.)

WATER

What are you doing, dear?

FIREWOOD

Just taking Troy, as Leitos would.

(To BLOOD) You mentioned a diversion.

CLOTH

Yes.

BREAD

What of that?

BLOOD

I could see Ulysses gnawing on his thoughts,

Like some old toothless dog.

So could the others, most of them,

And for a little while the circle panted patiently.

But Leitos, drunk and young, and over eager to impress,

Jumped up, and like a pup, he snatched the old dog's bone

And… wagged his tail, and…

BOWL

Lifted his leg?

WATER

Forget about the dogs.

Tell us what Leitos said.

BLOOD

"I know".That's what he said.

"I know. Listen to me. I have a better plan."

Although no plan had been proposed.

He drew his knife and scribbled in the gravel as he spoke.

"We send" he said "some people we can do without."

BREAD
Oh dear.

BLOOD
“Up to the western gate.
We have them shout insults and threats up at the Trojans on the wall.
Oh, call them cowards, no, incestuous bastards, things like that.
Do anything,
Until they send an army out to silence them.
And then our people run away.
The furious Trojans hurry after them in disarray,
And we attack them from the rear”
Some Spartans smirked at that.

FIREWOOD
But did they take this madness seriously?

BLOOD
Of course not, no.
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”

BREAD
Again, oh dear.

BLOOD
“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?

BOWL

Yes, 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.

FIREWOOD

What did Ulysses say when Leitos went away?

BLOOD

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.”

BOWL

I would not want to gamble with that man.

FIREWOOD

We have, and lost.

CLOTH

What happened next?

GLASS

You need to ask?

BREAD
So we must be this lubricating sacrifice?

FIREWOOD
Always another sacrifice.

BLOOD
Well, not at first.

I followed Leitos quickly as I could

And heard him shouting for some prisoners,

The simple, and the mad,

As if he called a herd of animals into a slaughter pen.

And then he strode towards this fire

Intent, I think, on celebrating his own cleverness,

When, standing over there,

He watched you mocking him

And lapping up his favourite wine.

BREAD
Oh dear, oh dear.

BLOOD
He spun around, his face this red,

And walked right into me.

The rest, as they will someday say, is history.

WATER
How can this be?

FIREWOOD
It is, and this is how.

BLOOD
It is our fate.

WATER
But, but.

What? All of us?

BLOOD
Yes all, he was most clear on that.

FIREWOOD
My children too?

BLOOD
“The Thebans, all of them.”

Those were his words.

And he was loud.

At least a hundred heard.

Two dozen volunteered to see it done.

BREAD
Our friends and customers.

BLOOD
I pleaded, but…

BOWL
Well, I refuse.

WATER
Then you can die immediately.

This order has a King’s authority.

CLOTH
So either way we die?

GLASS
Apparently.

BREAD
What else is new?

Did you imagine you would never die?

GLASS
Just not tomorrow.

BREAD
Why?

Death watches every breath.

Smell that?

The newly killed.

Did they think yesterday that they would die so soon?

GLASS
Of course not, no.

BREAD
The only difference is, we know.

FIREWOOD
We do.

GLASS
Yes.

So, what do we do?

CLOTH
Drink?

BOWL
Yes, of course.

WATER
No.

FIREWOOD
Why not?

WATER
If I must die at dawn—

BOWL
Apparently you must.

WATER
Then I will stay awake, aware of every breath

And every thought and feeling until then.

I do not want something to dull my pain, or pleasure.

BOWL
This is wine.

WATER

I know.

BOWL

You speak of it as if it were a cold, damp fog,

Or some dark medicine.

If you want life then swim in this

And live forever, for a little while.

Each sip a smile and every swallow is a kiss.

Taste it and taste a lover's lips.

In every bottle is a year of sun and rain,

Of sweat and passion on the leafy hills.

Before young Leitos kills us all,

I say we kill his generous supply.

WATER

And be oblivious when we die?

Not me.

I want to die with dignity.

GLASS

As we have lived?

BOWL

I do not want to die at all.

BREAD

Then live and do it now.

You talk too much.

Stand up.

Come here, and kiss me beautifully.

WATER

I would not hesitate, if I were you.

BOWL

I won't.

(BOWL and BREAD begin a grand kiss.)

FIREWOOD
Oh no? What would you do?

WATER
When? Now? Today?

Or on some other day?

FIREWOOD
Today.

There are no other days.

WATER
Why, I would kiss the girl.

FIREWOOD
Good man.

And would you kiss like that?

WATER
No. More like this.

(FIREWOOD and WATER also begin to kiss. There is an awkward moment between BLOOD and GLASS.)

BLOOD
Do you-?

(GLASS kisses BLOOD vigorously.)

CLOTH
Gods, kill me now.

(Exit. Eventually BREAD, BOWL, FIREWOOD and WATER come up for air, but GLASS and BLOOD continue with awkward but increasing enthusiasm.When it appears they will go farther, WATER speaks.)

WATER
Sergeant.

BLOOD *(Breaking away from the eager girl.)*
What?

FIREWOOD
Our daughter, sir.

BLOOD
Yes. I apologize.

GLASS
Why? I kissed you.

FIREWOOD
Yes, that you did.

Was that your first?

GLASS
Almost.

BLOOD
Oh… Oh!

WATER
This is ridiculous, just look at us.

We act like children and our children act…

FIREWOOD
Like us: afraid, alive and facing death.

WATER
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.

BOWL
Play tent games with your wife.

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

Clean up, and put our things away.

BREAD
Whatever for?

WATER

I am not really sure.

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.

(Pause.)

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?

BREAD

No, not at all.

Think of a song,

Because we know when we approach the end,

We build it up with rousing choruses,

We sing more loudly and we make it finish gloriously,

I want to die like that.

FIREWOOD

Yes, I agree.

(Getting up.)

Sing, sing and dance with me.

Defy the gods, defy the dawn,

Drink and make music, noise, and love.

Sing songs to shake the stars above.

We are still Thebans after all

And Dionysus is still one of us.

Let us be one with him.

BOWL

An excellent idea.

Where is my drum?

(Perhaps he overturns a large pot. A song.)

So, let us drink, and sing, and dance.

We will not have another chance.

And let us sing, and dance, and drink,

And try our best to never think

That all our dance, and drink, and song,

Will count for nothing before long.

(The drumming continues. BREAD and GLASS, and then BLOOD, and FIREWOOD begin to dance.As a group at first. WATER watches. BLOOD and FIREWOOD begin to dance suggestively together. After a while WATER cannot contain his frustration and jealousy. He jumps up anddances at/with BREAD, demonstrating his wildness to FIREWOOD. Enter CLOTH, un-noticed. GLASS dances alone. FIREWOOD counters WATER by becoming increasingly lewd with BLOOD. WATER goes too far with BREAD, for FIREWOOD's benefit. BREAD pushes WATER away. WATER "cuts in" on BLOOD, pushing him roughly aside and dancing furiously with FIREWOOD. BREAD joins BOWL and the music increases in tempo and volume. BLOOD watches GLASS hungrily. WATER sees. BLOOD moves towards GLASS. WATER tackles BLOOD and they fight.)

WATER

You filthy pig.

BLOOD

Let go of me, you dog.

(The music stops. WATER pins BLOOD. Perhaps he is on the verge of striking him with something heavy.)

WATER

Pig.

BLOOD *(Spits)*

Dog.

FIREWOOD

No, men.

(WATER hesitates.)

FIREWOOD *(Cont'd)*

Just men, who, at the end, behave like animals.

(To WATER.)

Where is your quiet virtue now?

(Sulking, WATER gets up and walks away.BOWL gives a flourish on his drum.)

BOWL

So much for dancing.

What shall we do now?

CLOTH

Do anything, but do it quietly.

The night is full of listening

And all this drama is embarrassing.

FIREWOOD

Where have you been?

WATER

Your mother worries about you.

CLOTH

Yes, so I see.

I went down by the beach.

I spoke with the Athenians.

FIREWOOD

You did?

WATER

Were they not rude to you?

CLOTH

No, they are civilized.

Why were you fighting with the Sergeant?

FIREWOOD

No.

Your father wasn't fighting, dear,

They were just… wrestling.

GLASS

Oh, stop. Just stop.

Do you not understand?

None of this matters anymore.

BLOOD

Just as I said before.

GLASS

Before the dew is dry, we, all of us, will die.

Riddled with arrows or else hacked with swords,

These seven bodies will have poured their life,

Our lives, and blood out on the ground.

Who cares if I am virtuous, if you are faithful,

Or if you are proud, or vain enough to fight with him?

Do you not see?

WATER

Do you not see?

I love my family

and will defend it and our honour to the end.

GLASS

What honour, father?

What?

You are a slave by choice

and mother is a whore.

And me?

I am as old as I will ever be,

And all that matters now, to me,

Is that before the blood of dawn,

I rid myself of my virginity.

(To BLOOD.)

You, come with me.

BREAD
No, wait.

You are not me.

GLASS
What does that mean?

BREAD
Virginity is not a curse or burden,

No, it is… the eggshell of your first true self.

FIREWOOD
The eggshell?

WATER
What?

BREAD
Oh, you know what I mean.

Once broken, part of you is gone.

Do you not see?

CLOTH
None of us sees, apparently.

BLOOD
We are as blind as old Tiresias.

BOWL
Well, now we see what he could see, the end of all.

CLOTH
Is that what blinded him?

BLOOD
What do you mean?

GLASS
What about me and my virginity?

BOWL
We will get back to you.

BREAD
Men always do.

BLOOD
What did you mean “Is that what blinded him?”

CLOTH
Well, staring at the end of everything.
Imagine it, to look into each baby’s eyes
And always see just how it dies.

BREAD
Could sanity survive in such a state?
So great the load of misery and pain,
So great the loss and nothing gained.

FIREWOOD
Why nothing?

BREAD
Look at us,

BOWL
If you can see.

BREAD
We are the last of Thebes.

BLOOD
Our city is no more;
no two stones stand together where it was,
The vines are wild,
dead cattle now pollute the spring and Dirce’s stream.

BOWL
Ha.

WATER
What?

BOWL

Just that it all was started by a dying cow,

And so it ends.

GLASS

Is this the part that's so important, then?

I need—

BREAD

I never thought of that, about Tiresias.

I just assumed it would be nice to know,

You know, what lay ahead.

WATER

Well, now we do.

FIREWOOD

No, we do not.

We know what happens when the sun comes up,

But until then, the rest of our brief lives,

Is still a mystery.

BREAD

A very little mystery.

FIREWOOD

No, infinite, because it is all that we have.

GLASS

Exactly so.

We have been wasting time.

If you knew you would live another twenty years,

Would you spend three of them as we have spent

This last hour past?

FIREWOOD

Of course not, no.

GLASS

In seven hours we die.

FIREWOOD
Each person must decide what they will do.

WATER
This is a time for family.

BLOOD
I have no family.

BREAD
Nor I.

I do not want to die alone.

FIREWOOD
Community.

BOWL
No. History.

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.

I could go on and on.

GLASS

You have.

BOWL

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.

CLOTH

There is a man with the Athenians,

Though not a king or soldier,

Priest, or even armourer,

Is honoured and permitted anywhere.

He rarely speaks, but writes down everything he hears.

BOWL

You see?

What happens here will never be forgotten.

We, though we cannot write,

Can still, tonight, impress our city's history

Into the clay of time.

FIREWOOD

Listen to you, "the clay of time".

Are you the poet now?

BREAD

Writing itself, my mother said, was born in Thebes.

WATER

Oh, so was everything, to hear the old ones talk:

Wine, writing, music,

Dusk and dawn.

The list goes on and on.

BOWL
But Thebes does not, unless we do this thing.

CLOTH
But, do we have to sing?

BOWL
No, sing, or dance, or play a part and just pretend,

The way we often have.

As long as we can keep them listening.

GLASS
But they are tired.

BREAD
And drunk.

GLASS
We saw to that.

BREAD
We did.

Some wounded, stupid,

GLASS
Or they just don't care.

BOWL
Then we must make them care.

Somewhere out there is immortality,

Names like Achilles, Menelaus, Agamemnon and the rest.

BLOOD
And we must do our best to see that Cadmus and Pentheus,

Even Oedipus, stand next to them in history.

BREAD
Excuse me, boys, Harmonia?

Jocasta and Agave too?

GLASS
Antigone?

BLOOD
Yes, even them.

FIREWOOD
Only the royalty?

BLOOD
Oh, well, Tiresias, of course.

BREAD
And Manto too.

CLOTH
Who's that?

BOWL
You see?

The stories fade already.

FIREWOOD
Yes.

Manto was the seer's assistant.

WATER
No, she was Tiresias' sister.

FIREWOOD
No, his daughter.

WATER
Are you sure?

GLASS
Or was she both, like Oedipus and Antigone?

CLOTH
You are confusing me.

GLASS
What else is new?

WATER
Stop it you two.

FIREWOOD
He’s right.
This is important.
What we do tonight may be the only way
The truth of Thebes can stay alive and play its part in History.

BREAD
Why does that matter?

GLASS
Yes, who cares about some town that isn’t anymore
And all the suffering that happened there?
All I recall of Theban history is death and incest,
Death and plague, murder and massacre and shame.
Maybe the name of such a place and the disgrace attached to it
Should be forgotten after all.

BOWL
Maybe it will, but only time can say.
I say we do our best to make our city,
And through it our lives, mean something,
That is all.
But if you’d rather we can sit and drink
And feel sorry for ourselves,
And die ridiculously at dawn, and then
All be forgotten by the time the sun goes red again.

GLASS
Well…

FIREWOOD
What?

GLASS
My life cannot mean anything if I have never lived.
Do I, in this…this thing that you propose
Get to dispose of my virginity?

WATER

Oh, here she goes again.

GLASS

I know, I know it is my shell or something,

All the same.

I want to know the pleasures that a woman can before I die,

And I will die tomorrow.

BREAD

Yes, you will. And you are right.

But think of this, tonight,

Instead of grunting your virginity away

Under a sweaty servant whom you do not love,

BLOOD

Who? Me?

BREAD

You can be Aphrodite in the arms of…

Help me, who?

BLOOD

Hephaestus.

Oh, and Ares too.

BREAD

Yes, yes.

Or be Harmonia, great mother of our town,

As her you can lie down and play

With Cadmus on their wedding day.

GLASS

Who else?

BREAD

Well… Semele.

BLOOD

And feel the heat of Zeus.

GLASS

Alright, I may just like this game.

WATER

This is no game.

And there is more to Thebes than rolling on the ground with gods.

Besides, I thought this was to be our truthful History.

BOWL

It is.

WATER

Then it should only deal with things and people that are real,

And not include the gods at all.

BLOOD

The gods are real.

WATER

I know that you believe in them,

But I mean real like things that we can taste and feel.

BLOOD

I feel the gods in everything.

I touch and see them just as much as I see you.

If you do this without the gods

You do it without me.

GLASS

Oh, please, for me?

BLOOD

It would be blasphemy.

I will not die offending them.

FIREWOOD

Let us call it our story, then,

Instead of History.

GLASS

Oh, for the love of anything you want,

Come on!

We talk, and talk, and talk,

While time is running through our hands.

I don't care what it means,

I just need something now

That makes me feel alive somehow.

Stand up, sing, shout or run about,

Kiss me or kick me,

Lick my throat or pull my hair,

I do not care, just do it now.

FIREWOOD

She's right. It's time.

WATER

But how do we begin?

BOWL

As all things do, with passion.

Go, Sergeant, kiss the girl.

GLASS

At last.

BLOOD

I will.

(BLOOD stands and moves eagerly towards GLASS who reaches out to him.They resume their clinch, stumbling and falling awkwardly. BOWL leaps to his feet and addresses the audience.)

BOWL

Heroes of Greece, behold

The greatest story ever told:

Passion and glory, fury and lust,

CLOTH

Bodies entangled in the dust,

BOWL
Desperate struggles against all odds,

BLOOD
Beautiful women

GLASS
And lecherous gods.

FIREWOOD
Athena the virgin.

WATER
Enough, get up.

Wait for the story, my dear, at least.

(Reluctantly they do. During the following sequence WATER and FIREWOOD keep moving to stay between BLOOD and GLASS. What results is a strange kind of dance.)

BREAD
Come close and closer, fill your cups.

BOWL
The world is welcome at our feast.

BREAD
What's that? How much?

No charge tonight.

This great celebration and all this wine

BOWL
And trust me my friends it is very fine.

BREAD
Are provided for you by Captain Leitos,

Generous gentleman that he is.

BOWL
Drink with me, sirs, to Leitos' health,

Rather than glory, or fame, or wealth,

May the Luck of Laius kiss his brow,

FIREWOOD
And the Peace of Pentheus give him rest,

WATER
May Oedipus' Happiness find him now,

BOWL
To Leitos, our leader, we wish him the best.

All drink.

(They do. An awkward pause. BLOOD and GLASS relent, for now.)

CLOTH
And, what do we do now?

BLOOD
I know.

A prologue, by Tiresias.

(Begins to scribble lines on a scrap of paper.)

BREAD
That was our prologue.

No, a dance.

BOWL
That was dance.

WATER
Perhaps a glorious parade?

BREAD
A proper dance.

FIREWOOD
I think that we should sing.

CLOTH
I will not sing.

BLOOD *(Reading)*
I am Tiresias, ancient seer,

Open your eyes to me and hear—

GLASS *(Mocking him)*

Behold the Prince of Prophesy,

Open your ears to him and see.

(FIREWOOD throws something on the fire. It flares.)

BLOOD

I am, as I foretold, Tiresias, the ancient seer,

Open your *ears (Glances at GLASS)* to me and *hear*

the story of a town called Thebes.

(Not as Tiresias.)

This part, the very start, to me is really History,

But we agreed—

(BOWL beats the drum hard.)

BLOOD *(Cont'd)*

Tiresias, the ancient seer,

You may have hear-d of me.

I cannot see, you see, and yet I know all things.

(Pause.)

What happens next?

GLASS

Forget your text.

BLOOD

Trust me, I have.

GLASS

Then improvise.

BLOOD

Do what?

GLASS

Just make it up.

BLOOD
Oh, no.

The gods—

GLASS
Just do it, now.

We just woke up a mob of drunken killers, so…

Give them a show.

BLOOD
I cannot, no.

Not now.

GLASS
Oh, Men.

I'll do it then.

Follow that cow!

BLOOD
What? Who? Me?

FIREWOOD
Be Cadmus.

BLOOD
Me?

I am Tiresias.

BREAD
Brave Cadmus,

Prince of…

FIREWOOD
Tyre.

BLOOD
Who?

WATER
The song, the song, you know.

The one you always sing.

How does it go?

BOWL

"Athena is a virgin..?"

WATER

No, the other one.

BOWL *(begins to sing, some of the others join awkwardly)*

Cadmus left Athens and followed a cow.

It gave up the ghost where our city stands now.

We've lived and we've loved and we've died here, and how!

For Thebes makes a hell of a wine.

Yes, Thebes makes a hell of a wine.

The teeth of the serpent were cast on the ground.

And the Spartoi came out of the dirt with a bound.

And each of them fought with whomever they found,

For Thebes makes a hell of a wine.

Yes, Thebes makes a hell of a wine.

BREAD

Enough, enough, for now,

That is so much to show.

FIREWOOD

Back to Athena's cow.

BREAD

Yes.

Lo, these many years,

Cadmus, the youngest son of … somebody.

WATER

Of Agenor, I think.

GLASS

It doesn't matter.

CLOTH

Well, it would to him."Wisdom begins- "

WATER
Prince Cadmus wandered aimlessly.

FIREWOOD
Well, actually,

He searched the world to find his sister,

carried off by Zeus.

BREAD
A bull.

GLASS
What?

BREAD
Zeus in the form of bull.

A beautiful white bull.

With golden horns, and—

GLASS
Oh.

FIREWOOD
We should do it then.

BOWL
I'll be the bull.

I have the back for it.

FIREWOOD
And I will be Europa, wasn't that her name?

CLOTH
Be careful, mother, not to fall.

GLASS
Again.

BOWL
Some people claim Zeus took the girl against her will,

But others say she loved the glorious beast,

And mounted it most eagerly,

(FIREWOOD takes a running jump onto BOWL.)

As you can see.

FIREWOOD
She rode it passionately across the sea.

GLASS
And never did return.

WATER
But we return to Cadmus and the cow.

We do it now.

GLASS
I am Athena!

WATER
Thank you dear.

GLASS
Athena: goddess and, apparently, a virgin through eternity.

CLOTH
So far.

(GLASS has an idea and begins to undress.)

GLASS
But I appear to Cadmus in my glorious nakedness.

BREAD
Not yet.

GLASS
Why not?

BLOOD
I'm sure that's how it goes.

BREAD
No, no, she shows herself—

FIREWOOD *(Dismounting)*
No she is seen by young Tiresias.

BLOOD
Me.

CLOTH
Not yet blind?

FIREWOOD
Eventually.

But first the cow.

BOWL
I was a bull, and now, as if by magic,

I will be the cow.

Go on.

GLASS
Yes, please.

FIREWOOD
Athena, in her mysterious wisdom says…

GLASS
What? Now?Again?

FIREWOOD
Yes.

GLASS
Oh well then,

Follow that cow!

(BOWL lumbers about as a cow and BLOOD,trying to look princely, follows him.)

GLASS *(Cont'd)*
And where it dies.

And where it *dies*...

(BOWL's cow dies dramatically.)

Build Thebes.

CLOTH
Cadmea.

GLASS

Right.

It was Cadmea first.

There is so much to think of.

BLOOD

Yes, well.

So, mighty Ares, god of war enslaved him—

BREAD

No, not yet.

BLOOD

No? Oh.

BREAD

First Cadmus' men, the serpent, and the teeth,

Then, up from underneath that massacre,

the Spartoi spring,

And then most of them fall.

If we will do this thing, then let us do it all.

GLASS

I told you so.

So many massacres,

Speaking of which… (*Indicates the audience*)

Free wine will keep them happy for a while,

But after that they may amuse themselves,

And boys can play so roughly with their toys.

BREAD

Yes, yes, and so, the serpent…

You, and you, *(Directing)*

You, Cadmus, good.

He kills the horrid thing…

(BLOOD zealously mimes the killing of the serpent.)

BREAD *(Cont'd)*
Enough, trust me, the snake is dead.

CLOTH
What next?

BREAD
Ah, let me see.

The teeth, Ares, disgrace, and slavery.

BLOOD
Slow down, I love this part.

BREAD
Let me describe while you all do.

CLOTH
Do what?

BREAD
What I describe, of course.

Cadmus removed the serpent's teeth.

GLASS
Removed them, how?

CLOTH
He smashed its face against a rock.I guess.

FIREWOOD
Wait. We forgot something.

BREAD
We did?

FIREWOOD
This serpent, with its head cut off and teeth smashed out,

Was sacred, some say son, to Ares.

BLOOD
Yes.

CLOTH
Oh.

Why did he kill it then?

BLOOD
It killed his men.

Cadmus had sent his men for water from the stream—

GLASS
Come on, come on.

None of these details matters anymore.

Since then there have been wars and plagues, invasions,

BREAD
Lots of sex.

GLASS
Yes, yes, so let's get on with it.

BREAD
Alright.

So, quickly, everyone.

(The rest scramble to keep up.)

He—

GLASS
Cadmus

BREAD
Threw the seeds—

GLASS
No, teeth.

BREAD
Around.

And where they landed on the ground

A furious force of well armed warriors sprang up…

(It does, sort of.)

Good, good.

Cadmus….

Did something.

GLASS
Threw a stick?

BREAD
Alright.

And hit one of them.

(BLOOD throws a small stick, hitting BOWL.)

BOWL
Ow!

GLASS
Who turned and hit another one,

Who hits him back, and he hits someone else…

(Enactment quickly becomes reality. A fight begins and escalates until CLOTH gets pushed or throwninto the place where the wine is kept. Much glass breaks.)

FIREWOOD
Stop it, you idiots. What have you done?

(They lift CLOTH slowly, face covered in blood.)

End of Act One

Act Two

Setting: the same as Act I, a few minutes later. The women bandage CLOTH's face. The men sit guiltily to one side.

BLOOD
See?

This is what we get for rushing history.

WATER
It is like wine, too much too fast and we can lose ourselves.

(A nodding pause.)

BOWL *(A realization)*
Oh, no!

The wine.

(He rushes to inspect the damage.)

FIREWOOD
Do you care nothing for the youth?

BOWL
Of course I do.

FIREWOOD
Of course?

Which course is that?

Dessert?

You drink all wine, consume all flesh,

And think of no-one but yourself.

Look at this face.

BOWL
I do,

And I can see the wound is clean, though deep,

And you are doing all that can be done.

WATER
What of the wine?

BOWL

What?

Broken, most of it.

BLOOD

Dionysus forgive us.

BOWL

Well there is still the other stuff,

But Leitos' stock, the Theban wine, is—

Wait, here, yes, six, no, seven bottles still survive.

I will be fine,

The rest of you can drink the other wine.

FIREWOOD

Bring them to me and put them there.

I will take care of them.

BOWL

But—

FIREWOOD

Now.

You said, so fluidly, not long ago,

That wine is memory.

Well, here it is: the very last of Thebes.

These seven bottles, splattered with my child's blood,

My child.

WATER

That much at least is sure.

FIREWOOD

There is no more: not wine nor children from our town.

As we have seen, we cannot play at Theban history.

Nor can we afford to freely let it flow,

We need to know how it will go and how it ends.

WATER

Oh, it will end: at dawn.

FIREWOOD

I disagree.

BLOOD

I think it ended years ago,

That day—

FIREWOOD

That day when old Tiresias stood up

And, gathering the silence all around him like a shroud,

Spoke in that way of his,

Part thunder and part hiss,

Commanding us to leave our town.

BREAD

Yes, I remember well,

Though I was just a girl.

So sure was he, he spoke with such authority,

That we laid down our toys and tools,

Gathered a few small things,

And walked away, leaving the empty streets

To echo to the sound of other feet.

FIREWOOD

Yes, yes, those are the words, “command”, “authority”.

So sure there was no air to breathe a doubt.

WATER

So clear that I remember every word

as if they were my own.

CLOTH

So?

Say them then.

GLASS

We are not there.

BOWL

But we are here,

Remind us all, or better yet,

Unite our memories of why we left.

WATER

Alright.

But, as I say,

I feel as if these words are mine, somehow.

If you remember otherwise...

The day was hot.

Rumours and fears and flies buzzed hungrily.

Shepherds and travellers came down

To tell the town of thunderclouds of dust

That stained the sky two valleys north.

Birds circled high.

Hearts screamed but only whispers dared to say

The army of the Seven Sons was on its way.

Nothing was still.

GLASS

Do we need all of this?

What did he say?

FIREWOOD

It holds the memory.Go on.

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.

BLOOD

But why, after so many years,

So many lifetimes, actually,

Of seeing all and saying nothing,

Never giving real advice to anyone,

Why did he choose that day to lead?

FIREWOOD

To lead us all away from Thebes.

BREAD

To save our lives?

FIREWOOD

For this?

BOWL

Perhaps.

Perhaps not death at dawn but this, that we do now,

Or did, until the accident.

BLOOD
There are no accidents.

GLASS
Oh, here we go again.

WATER
What god requires the head wound of a child?

BLOOD
Perhaps you have been punished for your blasphemy.

WATER
This much is true, you are a punishment.

BREAD
Oh, stop, you two.

Who knows or, frankly, cares what happened then?

BOWL
No-one, unless we ask them to.

GLASS
Yes, yes, our story, come,

it is at least a thing to do.

Where were we when my brother (sister)

broke the bottles with his (her) face?

BLOOD
The curse.

GLASS
What curse?

BLOOD
The first great curse that Cadmus brought upon us all.

A curse that never leaves the town,

But travelled down through seven generations,

Until now.

WATER

That is ridiculous.

There is no curse.

BREAD

Oh no?

Are we the Lucky People then?

That happy race who always live in peace

And thrive on sweet fertility?

A dozen steps into our history

And one of us, a child,

Is bleeding on the ground.

And in the tale?

All Cadmus' men, most of the Spartoi, slain;

No city yet, and yet the bloody stain that marks its place

Is bigger than the town will ever be.

I do not want to play this game.

I will not celebrate that stain.

Tiresias, if what you say is true, was right.

It needs… the world needs it to end.

Let Thebes and all its pain be lost.

FIREWOOD

No, no.

We must go on,

If only so no other townWill do it all again.

BREAD

Then do it without me.

FIREWOOD

What will you do?

BREAD

You have your family and more,

But me?

I have no loving arms in which to die.

If I lie down

It will be so that I can live.

I am a woman not yet old,

And I yet hold some power over men.

There are a lot of them around just now,

I'm sure, somehow, that I can find somewhere,

not far from here,

Where I can disappear.

BOWL

No doubt you can.

And he who helps you is a lucky man,

But we have almost seven hours.

Why don't you show the men your powers

By playing with us for a few hours more?

FIREWOOD

Stop.

Can't you see?

Such talk requires some privacy.

The night is once again alive with hungry ears.

BOWL

It is,

And thirsty eyes.

So, let us give them drink.

(He strikes his drum.)

A dance, I think.

GLASS *(Jumping up)*

Yes, yes. *(To BREAD)* Please dance with me,

(Here begins a sequence where dance is used in several ways at once: to amuse and distract the "Audience" of Greek soldiers, to facilitate various private and semi-private conversations, to illustrate the ongoing revelation of Theban history, and to underline the relationships of the Seven. I trust you have an excellent choreographer.)

GLASS *(Cont'd)*

I want and need your company.

Please stay, for me?

You promised me that there was more to Thebes

Than blood and misery.

BREAD

There was.

Now it is just a bloodstain on a dead end trail,

Showing the way to suffer and to fail.

(GLASS raises her voice enough that the others hear.)

GLASS

A warning?

Is that really all we are?

Was there no moment in it all,

That anyone recalls,

When life was good?

BOWL

Yes,

Life itself is good.

(Sings.)

Harmonia taught the whole world how to read.

A queen such as she was, is all that we need.

For ever since her we've done nothing but bleed,

ALL *(Singing)*

For Thebes makes a hell of a wine.

Yes, Thebes makes a hell of a wine.

BOWL *(No longer singing)*

(He indicates BREAD and speaks to the larger audience.)

Then, Aphrodite, goddess of love,

Beauty made flesh, and flesh made more lovely

Than men ever dreamed it could be.

Alive, here before you, by this fire's light.

Oh, never, lads, never let go of this sight.

BREAD

Stop, please.

BOWL

Too beautiful, boys, for you or for me,

She took as her partner in passion no less

Than Ares the great god of war.

WATER

That's me.

FIREWOOD

Oh yes?

BREAD

Please, please.

Just let me be.

BOWL

You are, trust me.

Be Aphrodite once, before you die.

BLOOD

But I—

WATER

Am… are, so far, prince Cadmus, and Tiresias,

So, sit on your sword, sir,

I will be War.

(He takes BREAD in his arms.)

WATER *(Cont'd)*

Come, goddess, I would dance with you.

BREAD

But, but.

(She realizes that she cannot slip away.)

Alright.

(They dance.)

WATER

I would not stop you if you tried to leave,

Although I should.

I am a soldier, of a kind,

And duty is a sacred trust to me.

But you are not…

A soldier, not a sacred trust-

I mean that—

BREAD

No. I'm not.

(She breaks away and dances with BOWL.)

Why do you stand between me and escape?

BOWL

If you escape, if any of us does,

The rest will be so closely watched

That no-one else will get away.

BREAD

You selfish coward.

BOWL

Yes, frequently, but not today,

Today I am a father, possibly.

So help me, please.

If you will stay, a chance may come

For me to save my child.

Please, stay.

This may just be the only noble thing

that either of us ever does.

BREAD
I will.

(They both look at CLOTH who looks at each of the others and then them.)

I will not go away.

BOWL *(Aloud)*
I thank you, for the dance,

But history attends us all, what next?

BOWL
Harmonia, of course,

the secret product of this fiery love,

GLASS
That's me.

BREAD
And Aphrodite drinks.

(She does.)

BOWL
Harmonia sees Cadmus,

BLOOD
That's me.

BOWL
Humiliated, cow pursuing, serpent sowing, kitchen slave.

BLOOD
That's me?

BOWL
And, instantly, she falls in love.

FIREWOOD

This part I never understood.

BREAD
Who ever does?

GLASS
Unless, of course, Cadmus was very good at—

WATER
Well.

We have no time to understand.

Remember, friends, we planned to tell the whole of Theban history,

FIREWOOD
At least, to take it to its end.

WATER
Tiresias will get us there.

This all is still before it starts.

Harmonia and Cadmus fall in love,

Or so the story goes,

They wed.

GLASS
They went to bed.

FIREWOOD
They did.

GLASS
At last.

FIREWOOD
But first Olympus held a feast for them

Such as no man or god has witnessed,

Not before or since,

And I suggest we show it with another dance.

GLASS
Of course you do.

FIREWOOD

Be patient love, this is your only chance

To have a wedding, after all.

BOWL

Quite right, and so, tonight,

This is Olympus and we are the gods.

The feast, you see, has been prepared,

The meat, although a little rare, is excellent.

Come, eat, and dance, and drink, and sing,

And make the shining heavens ring!

(To CLOTH.)

You, sit with me and play some sort of melody.

(BOWL and CLOTH manage to have a private talk While the others enact the wedding party of CADMUS and HARMONIA. BREAD explores her options with various audience members.)

BOWL *(Cont'd)*

So, child, do you want to die?

CLOTH

No, sir.

BOWL

No, nor do I.

Are you afraid?

CLOTH

Yes, sir.

BOWL

Yes, so am I.

No-one is watching us just now.

What if, somehow, you slipped away down to the beach?

If you could reach your friend with the Athenians—

CLOTH

Just me?

And leave behind my family?

BOWL

But, don't you see?

It would be a kind of sacred trust.

You would, in your young head and heart,

Bear all the memory of Thebes.

CLOTH

But what about all this, and them? *(Audience)*

You said if we could share our story with the night

Then it just might survive.

BOWL

"Just might" is just not good enough.

Just look at them.

Would you entrust a recipe to them?

Why should we then believe

They will preserve our history?

No, you and only you can do this thing.

You are the bottle that contains our town.

Go find your friend and have him write it down.

Why do you hesitate?

CLOTH

If I go now that bottle barely holds a sip or two.

BOWL

That's true. That's true.

(Pause.)

Alright.

So, fill yourself with what we do and say,

But when the time is ripe,

You run away.

(To BREAD.)

And you, you stay with me. (*She does)*

(As the wedding of CADMUS and HARMONIA concludes with a kiss.)

FIREWOOD

Athena sent the happy couple on their way.

They came together, hand in hand,

To build the glorious city they had planned.

And, for a while, good fortune smiled on them, until—

BOWL *(Singing with a wild angry passion, he plays ZEUS to BREAD's SEMELE.)*

Zeus saw young Semele, gave her the eye

Then he gave her his seed, but she gave a try

To see him for herself, so her son's in his thigh,

For Thebes makes a hell of a wine.

Yes, Thebes makes a hell of a wine.

(Speaking.)

All drink, all drink,

Great Dionysus has arrived.

The time has come for some oblivion,

So I declare that we must share our greatest festival

And our most sacred, secret, ancient rite.

Behold, a Bacchanalia!

(BOWL picks up one of the seven Theban bottles.)

FIREWOOD

Not those.

BOWL

Why ever not?

FIREWOOD

You said yourself that they are memory,

They cannot help you find oblivion.

Choose one, as many as you like,

From all these other wines.

BLOOD

But, for a Dionysian festival

Should we not drink good Theban wine?

FIREWOOD

We will, in time.

Trust me, my friends, or if you can't do that,

Indulge me then.

I have, like king Ulysses, half a plan in mind,

I think that we will find some special purpose for this wine.

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?

GLASS
Not you.

BOWL
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.

WATER
Well, if he is.

FIREWOOD
He is.

Whether or not he ever breathed.

Ideas live, like lies, or fears, or promises,

They breed, they feed, they grow,

And they kill to protect themselves.

BOWL
But Dionysus is much more than that.

Think of his birth, grown in a wound,

BREAD
His mother, ashes in the air.

CLOTH
Half god, half man, not fully anywhere.

WATER
One foot in time, the other in eternity.

GLASS
Just like Harmonia.

WATER
A bit, but no, she chose.

BOWL
Exactly, yes,

Dionysus was hurled headfirst into this mess.

CLOTH
His father killed his mother.

BREAD
True.

BOWL
And so, what does he do?

He brings us wine.

WATER
Sweet wine.

BOWL
But why?

Because he loves us?

BREAD
No.

BOWL
To punish us?

For what, and how?

BREAD
He does not care about us any more than we care about fleas.

CLOTH
Then why?

BOWL
I think there is in wine a breath

Of what it is to be divine.

I think that Dionysus stole a spark from Zeus' great thunderbolt.

WATER
And hid it in a grape?

BOWL
How else could he escape with it?

BLOOD
But why?

GLASS
I do not see.

BOWL
For company.

WATER
What?

FIREWOOD
Yes, I see.

BOWL
Through wine we reach a kind of ecstasy
That makes us feel eternal, for an hour,
We feel the power, we taste the glorious delights,
The smells, the sights Harmonia left behind.
By drinking wine we find our way
Back to Olympus for a little while,
And on the path we meet young Dionysus, coming down.
This is the place and purpose of our town.

BREAD
Do you believe all that?

BOWL
Yes.
If I drink enough.

WATER
What about History?

FIREWOOD
Again, let me.

(She sets the seven bottles on the ground in a precise row.)

Each bottle is a Theban tragedy,

A wound in history.

(Indicating the first bottle.)

This is Pentheus.

BREAD
What, not Semele?

GLASS
She died, but happily.

CLOTH *(Standing)*
Pentheus, me.

FIREWOOD
What?

CLOTH
Let me be king for this.

You be Agave, mother.

FIREWOOD
Why?

CLOTH
Why not?

We all want life before we die,

And I have barely had enough of life

To get a taste for it.

Let me be many kings and die in many ways,

I will not live another day, but in this way—

FIREWOOD
Alright.

(To BOWL.)

So, you will have your Bacchanalia.

At least, let us all do our best

To represent that fiery feast,

Imagination must provide the rest.

(To WATER.)

Open that bottle *(The first of the seven)*

Drink and dance as if this were your only chance

For passion or for joy.

(To CLOTH.)

You, be the boy king hiding in his tree

And see… what you can see.

Come, husband, dance with me.

I may need you to be my anchor in reality.

Strike drum, and someone sing,

And let us do this awful thing.

(BOWL drums, others dance reluctantly.)

BREAD *(Chants repeatedly, slowly at first)*

Out of the fire, the womb, the birth.

Into the fire, the tomb, the earth.

(BREAD repeats the chant, gradually speeding up. The dance gains enthusiasm and momentum.BLOOD in particular dances wildly. He is unwelcome with BREAD and too rough for GLASS. CLOTH and FIREWOOD enact the tragedy of PENTHEUS and AGAVE in mime. As "AGAVE" realizes what she has done the music stops. BLOOD continues with frantic energy while all others are still.)

BLOOD

Don't stop.

BOWL

Enough.

BLOOD

Go on.

BREAD
No, stop.

BLOOD
I said go on,

I order you.

(They all look at him.)

GLASS
Apparently king Laius has arrived ahead of time.

CLOTH *(Looking at the horizon.)*
The darkness blushes, soon it will be blood.

WATER
So let us move more quickly through this part,

We still are barely finished with the start.

BREAD *(To GLASS)*
Our turn to rule.

GLASS
Oh, good.

BREAD
Be Zethus, I'll be Amphion.

GLASS
Be who?

BREAD
You know, the brother kings.

WATER
But Lycus first, and Dirce.

CLOTH
What? The stream?

FIREWOOD
His wife, he named it after her.

GLASS
He did? How nice.

BLOOD

Yes, yes, all very well.

So, as you said, we need to move along.

Laius killed Lycus,

(BLOOD pushes WATER down.)

There, you're dead.

WATER

Be careful, clod.

BLOOD

Or what?

BREAD

Perhaps you two should play the brothers.

GLASS

Why?

BREAD

You'll see.

(To BLOOD.)

You, go.

Prince Laius is exiled.

FIREWOOD

Not yet.

We first must drink another tragedy.

WATER

Who? Oedipus? Not yet.

FIREWOOD

Can we forget the Women's Massacre?

For seven days Cadmea's streets

were washed with women's blood.

BLOOD

Perhaps.

Some say the tale has grown with time,

While others claim that many good men also died.

Besides, blood is the cost of change.

No famous names were lost,

And History is names.

BREAD

And who are you again?

FIREWOOD

Open the bottle, please, and pause a moment to recall

A loss that we have almost lost again.

My mother's grandmother would show the scars

That she got as a girl back then.

BREAD

Forgetting comes so easily to men.

WATER

But Laius fought heroically to stop the massacre.

I know, I learned of it in school.

BOWL

Perhaps, but Laius was the king for twenty years

And kings write history.

BLOOD

Laius returned.

BOWL *(Drum and sings)*

Laius was strong but he wasn't much fun,

And the anger of Zeus kept him up on the run,

Until he ran over the toes of his son,

For Thebes makes a hell of a wine.

Yes, Thebes makes a hell of a wine.

BLOOD

Laius returned.

And with him came a curse so terrible that—

FIREWOOD
Do not say.

(To CLOTH.)

While Laius was away he did something…

BOWL
He raped and killed a boy.

(BOWL picks up the next bottle and begins to open it.)

What now? *(To FIREWOOD)*

Why do you glare?

Make up your mind.

You wanted me to care.

I do, enough to share the world.

Either we must protect our child with everything we are

Or tell the tale of Thebes.

FIREWOOD
I know, and yet, I'd hoped, somehow…

WATER
"Our child"?

FIREWOOD
Yes, all of ours, as is the wine.

WATER
But, but—

BREAD
Oh, stop.

I can't go on with this.

BOWL
We must.

BREAD
But why?

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.

GLASS

I had not thought of it that way.

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,

BREAD

But—

FIREWOOD

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

All drink.

(They do. Pause. They stare into the fire together.)

CLOTH

Tell me some more about Tiresias.

He saw the ends of everything?

WATER
Something like that, I think.

CLOTH
And that he never led until he said

That it was time to leave.

BOWL
The greatest wisdom: knowing when to leave.

CLOTH
Who was the king that let him take command

And order everyone to leave their land and city

And just walk away?

BLOOD
There was no king.

CLOTH
No royal family?

FIREWOOD
No, none.

Menaeceus, the only living son of Creon,

Had just killed himself.

GLASS
Oh? Why?

WATER
They say that he believed

That if he sacrificed himself,

As his grandfather did,

Being the last Sown Man,

GLASS
Descended from the Spartoi?

FIREWOOD
Yes.

WATER

It would release us from great Ares' curse.

BLOOD

I told you so.

WATER

And then the city would be saved.

So much for that.

CLOTH

Who gave him this bizarre advice?

BOWL

Tiresias.

And then he told us all to leave, and so we did.

WATER

The Seven Sons swept down

on a completely undefended town

And levelled it so thoroughly

That only those with knowledge of such things could see

That kings, or even houses, ever stood

Where hungry sheep now turn away

From grass that tastes like blood.

They know something is wrong.

BREAD

Great Thebes is now a song, a scar or two,

And we pathetic few

Who blow upon its feeble spark

To keep the creeping dark away.

Today it barely breathes.

Tomorrow it is last year's leaves.

CLOTH

Yes, but… Tiresias…

WATER

And what of him?

CLOTH

Thebes did not die: it was complete,

And so he finished it.

FIREWOOD

What do you mean?

CLOTH

Well, most of all of this is new to me.

I have not, before now,

Paid much attention to our history.

But, now, tonight,

Somewhere between the kissing and the fights,

And trying not to die too stupidly,

I glimpsed it all.

The sight of Thebes spread out

In wine and blood stains in the dust

Tells me the story is complete.

GLASS

Who are you now?

No, what have you become?

BLOOD

A prophet.

WATER

What?

BLOOD

The child is possessed by, let me see,

Apollo, no, Athena, I would say.

WATER

How rude.

Those bloody gods again.

How do we make them go away?

GLASS *(To BLOOD)*
That's it, I tried.
You are too much for me.
My lust for you has died
And I will do the same, apparently,
With my virginity intact.

BOWL
Perhaps.
In fact, the youth speaks mortal sense.
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?

WATER
I cannot guess.

BOWL
Exactly, yes.
And so, just so,
Tiresias has brought Thebes to accounts.
No life, or city, counts for anything Until it ends.
Thebes, *(To CLOTH)* 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.

GLASS
Or never lost.

BOWL

And we, at last, can weigh the gains and cost.

(To BREAD.)

If, as you say, it all is wrong,

Then so it is, and we must pay,

If, *(To FIREWOOD)* 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.

BREAD

That day is done,

And we, at dawn, will pay for all of it.

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.

FIREWOOD

Somehow the road will know that we have passed.

And if, eventually, it all adds up to nothing,

We can tell ourselves we gave more than we took.

GLASS

Why just ourselves?

What about them? *(The Army/Audience)*

Some of them still are listening.

(She sits, thinking, until she next speaks.)

BOWL

We are a story now and must be told.

BREAD

Perhaps.

We talk so much,

they've had so much to drink,

I think by now that, yes…

Hear that?

WATER

The surf?

CLOTH

The sea is calm tonight.

FIREWOOD

That gently surging roaring

Is the sound of thousands snoring.

BLOOD

They are asleep.

(They peer into the darkness and listen.)

BREAD

What do you think?

WATER

We could just creep into the dark and go,

No-one would ever know,

If we just slip away we may just—

BOWL

No.

If we do what you say our place in history is this,

That Thebans always ran away.

WATER

Oh, now.

BOWL

We fled Olympus, did we not?

WATER

Yes, but—

BOWL

And then, so recently that you and I were there,

The Thebans fled from Thebes itself.

Do you not see?

If we flee now Thebes will forever be

A name said with a hiss

To mock the worst extremes of cowardice.

BLOOD

He's right.

We cannot run, pursued by fear,

Across the scrolls of history.

I take back my command.

Thebans, prepare yourselves.

The sun is up.

We have a brief but busy day ahead of us.

(There is a noisy confusion of dissent and agreement until they realize that the opportunity for them all to slip away has been lost and they begin to prepare themselves.)

BOWL *(Aside to CLOTH)*

Go, now.

This is the moment, go.

CLOTH
Just me?

BOWL
Whatever gods there are attend you now.

CLOTH
But, go with what?

Some drunken dances and a song or two,

Half heard through wine,

half seen through bloody bandages?

BOWL
You have the names.

CLOTH
What if I get the story wrong?

BOWL
No-one will ever know.

You are the only truth we have.

You are all Thebes.

Now, go.

CLOTH
All Thebes?

BOWL
That's right.

Why do you hesitate?

CLOTH
I cannot go.

BOWL
You must.

CLOTH
For the same reason that you gave just now.

One, three, or seven makes no difference.

The last defining truth would be the same.

To save the story would disgrace the name of Thebes.

BOWL

Listen to me.

Wisdom begins with this

You are no warrior.

You are my wounded child.

And I command you now to GO.

Tell all you think you know.

In you Thebes throws her final stones

Against the odds of memory.

Do this for all of us.

Do it for me.

CLOTH

Father, I—

BOWL

Go!

(Exit CLOTH, through the audience.)

BLOOD

Alright then, Thebans, *(To GLASS)* girl,

We are Greek soldiers after all

And we must hear our Captain's call.

You know Ullysses' orders.

GLASS

Yes, we are told to go and make annoying noise

And draw attention to ourselves,

In short, put on a show.

We can do that.

We have a show, of sorts.

Who knows, if we can tell them well enough

Our stories may just make

The Trojans listen for a little while, before…

BOWL
Enough.

The day has come.

(Out) Wake up!

(FIREWOOD stands.)

FIREWOOD
Wake up!

BOWL
Wake up, so you can someday say,

You saw the Seven Thebans

on that glorious day

When they marched,

(One last shared look with CLOTH at a distance.)

Heads held high,

Into the Trojan dawn to die.

FIREWOOD
Step up!

BOWL
Step up, my Theban friends.

Our song is almost at its end.

The time has come for drums

GLASS
And seven singing voices

BREAD
To finish it with many glorious choruses.

WATER
And see our grand parade into eternity.

BLOOD
Come heroes, drink good Theban wine

Together this last time,

FIREWOOD
Let us consume our tragedies.

BOWL
All drink!

ALL
All drink!!

WATER
This is our greatest dawn.

BLOOD
Through us,

Thebes will live on.

BOWL
Our names, our seven famous names

Will blaze like planets in the sky.

And we will never truly die,

For all of History will recall

The Seven Thebans at the Wall!

(All cheer. Drums and any other music possible.)

ALL (*Sing, with as much elaboration and crescendo as you like.*)
Wherever you go on the dust or the brine,

They'll talk about Thebes, and they'll call her a sign,

Of how things can go wrong, but we like her just fine,

For Thebes makes a hell of a wine.

Yes, Thebes makes a hell of a wine.

We're farmers and shepherds and heroes and clods,

And we'll bet our lives freely, whatever the odds,

For we are the town that gave THAT to the gods!

(A rude gesture.)

For Thebes makes a hell of a wine.

Yes, Thebes makes a hell of a wine.

(Exit in parade. The song repeats, echoes, and fades to silence.The stage is empty. A dry wind blows.)

End of play