

# ‘Epigoni’ and the Law of Inheritance in Aeschylus’ *Septem*

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AESCHYLUS’ *Seven Against Thebes* is concerned with the division of an inheritance between two sons. The difficulty of reaching an equitable solution to the contested patrimony leads to the Argive attack against Thebes and the fratricidal duel between Eteocles and Polyneices. Behind the action and motivation of the whole play lies the question of the division of the estate. Presumably if the second part of the trilogy had survived,<sup>1</sup> this point would be even clearer than it is in the surviving play; but as it is we must piece together several important elements of the division from hints given in the *Seven*.

Oedipus has cursed Eteocles and Polyneices with an enigmatic curse. He foredoomed them to the necessity of submitting the division of their inheritance to a foreign arbiter sprung from fire and sea (727ff, 941ff).<sup>2</sup> When the full meaning of this riddling language is understood by the chorus after the brothers are dead, it turns out that the arbiter in question is the sword—foreign because iron is imported from the land of the Chalybians, sprung from the fire of the forge, and *from over* the sea, not as had been supposed, *out* of the sea. The play is full of references to the arbiter (*δατητήης*) and arbitration, to the equality of shares and to just division of property.<sup>3</sup> When the brothers die at each other’s hand, the chorus says with heavy irony (908) that they have at last got equal shares, each enough of their patrimonial land to be his grave. Oedipus’ curse is fulfilled, and the whole unhappy history of this family has been brought to a close in

<sup>1</sup> It is clear that the *Septem* was the final play of the trilogy from the *didaskalia* of the Medicean ms first published by Johannes Franz in *Die Didaskalie zu Aeschylus Septem Contra Thebas* (Berlin 1848). Prior to this it was thought to be the second play.

<sup>2</sup> T. G. Tucker in the introduction to his edition (Cambridge 1908) xxix, reconstructs the curse as *πικρὸς ἔσται χρηματοδαίτης ξένος πόντιος πυριγένης*.

<sup>3</sup> 355, 648, 711, 727ff, 789, 816f, 850, 907ff, 914, 944f, 947. G. R. Manton, *BICS* 8 (1961) 77f, suggests that in the *Oedipus* Jocasta dreamed of an arbiter clad in Scythian costume.

the third generation (758). Apollo is no longer angry (960). The race of Laius and Oedipus has come to an end (813). The brothers die childless (*ἀτέκνους* 828) and with their deaths the chain of misfortune begun with Apollo's anger for Laius' disobedience has at last been terminated.

This would seem to be a good way to end a trilogy, and it is what we should expect from analogy with the *Oresteia*, where all the themes and tensions developed in the first two plays are resolved in the third, with no loose ends or ragged edges. Unfortunately the text of the *Seven* as we have it does not resolve the elements of the trilogy in this way but instead introduces a totally *new* theme at the end. The sisters, Ismene and Antigone, whom we have not seen or heard of heretofore, are introduced into the choral dirges, and they join in mourning for the loss of their brothers. A herald comes in and forbids the burial of Polyneices. Antigone vows to bury her brother despite the order, and the play closes with foreboding of yet more trouble to come. If Polyneices is to remain unburied, he will not in fact receive an equal share of his patrimonial land, that is to say a grave, and the neat resolution outlined above falls apart.

The introduction of this new theme at the end of a trilogy which seemed already to have been brought to a proper close has long been suspect, and in fact the offending passages can be removed simply without doing violence to the rest of the play. Antigone and Ismene are introduced in lines 861–74, but after that passage they remain silent for a long time until line 933, which the codices assign to Ismene. But the line assignments to the sisters (at 933, 947, 951, 961ff) are haphazard and inconsistent in the manuscripts, so that editors usually ignore them and assign the lines as they choose. Furthermore, there is no line after 874 which, by reason of its content, must be spoken by the sisters, and all of them can well be assigned to a hemichorus. The presence of the two sisters in the text is suspect, and if the anapests 861–74, in which the chorus announces the arrival of the sisters, are removed, Antigone and Ismene are easily and neatly eliminated from the play. The other troublesome passage, which consists of the herald's injunction against burying Polyneices and Antigone's determination to defy it (1005–1078), can be eliminated just as easily. If that is done, the play ends at 1004 with the choral dirge, rather like the way the *Persae* ends.

Once it has been shown that the sisters and the reference to the

burial of Polyneices can be eliminated from the play without violence to the rest, it follows that it was just as easy for someone to insert these passages. Perhaps in a later period when repertory of revivals had replaced the creative originality of the fifth-century Attic theater, some entrepreneur adapted Aeschylus' play to be suitable for a double bill with the *Antigone* of Sophocles.

To show motive and opportunity is persuasive but not conclusive, and there have been numerous attempts to demonstrate that the two passages (861–74; 1005–1078) are spurious because of anachronisms, demonstrable dependence upon Sophocles, or non-Aeschylean characteristics of language and style. These discussions are complicated, labored, sometimes illuminating for other problems, but not really decisive—at least to the skeptic—for the problem of the ending. It seems to be possible to marshal as many such arguments on one side as on the other.

After Theodor Bergk (1884) and Wilamowitz (1903, 1914) had argued that the ending was spurious, the first really powerful attempt to defend the passages was made in 1959 by Professor Hugh Lloyd-Jones. He was answered in turn by Eduard Fraenkel (1964) primarily on linguistic grounds, and in 1967 by R. D. Dawe, who addressed himself to the literary arguments. Recent writers agree that the essential question is whether a new theme is likely to have been introduced at the end of a trilogy.<sup>4</sup> Those who defend the doubtful passages argue that Apollo's punishment of Laius does *not* come to an end with the death of the brothers, but that we are meant to have a sense of foreboding at the end of the *Seven* with hints of more trouble to come and of the eventual destruction of the city. If such is the case, then the introduction of the new problem of Polyneices' burial makes sense. To support this argument it is only necessary to show that there is

<sup>4</sup> The above brief summary of the problem admittedly leaves many points untouched, and is meant only to give some perspective to my interpretation of the apparent reference to the Epigoni in line 903. The whole question of the end of the play is fully discussed by Hugh Lloyd-Jones, "The End of the *Seven Against Thebes*," *CQ* n.s. 9 (1959) 80ff. For refutation of Lloyd-Jones see Eduard Fraenkel, "Zum Schluss der *Sieben Gegen Theben*," *MusHelv* 21 (1964) 58ff, and R. D. Dawe, "The End of *Seven Against Thebes*," *CQ* n.s. 17 (1967) 16ff. The bibliography provided by Lloyd-Jones is very nearly complete, but there should now be added, besides the two articles just cited, W. Potscher, "Zum Schluss der *Sieben Gegen Theben*," *Eranos* 66 (1958) 140ff, and Leon Golden, *In Praise of Prometheus* (Chapel Hill 1966) 56ff. The latter has a particularly clear and readable discussion of the problem. The question was first argued in full by Theodor Bergk, *Griechische Literaturgeschichte* III (Berlin 1884) 302ff, and again by Wilamowitz, "Drei Schlusscenen griechischer Dramen," *SB Berl* 1903, 436ff, and *Aischylos Interpretationen* (Berlin 1914) 88ff.

at least one other undoubted passage which looks forward to the destruction of the city. Is it not to be found in the references to the Epigoni, the sons of the seven Argive heroes who destroy Thebes in the next generation?

A reference to the Epigoni may lie concealed in a line of the second stasimon where the chorus tells the story of Laius' visit to Delphi. Some interpretations suppose that the original oracle of Apollo to Laius implies the ultimate destruction of the city.<sup>5</sup> The problem of interpretation is made more difficult because the oracle occurs in a lyric passage and in indirect discourse (749f): *θνάσκοντα γέννας ἄτερ σώζειν πόλιν*. Presumably Laius was ordered not to beget children or the city would be destroyed; and since he did in fact beget children, the city was surely doomed. From this beginning there developed by extension the peculiar *Opfertod* interpretation, according to which Eteocles understands that the city is not safe *until* the descendants of Laius *cease* to exist, and hence devotes himself and his brother to death, so that the city will at last be freed from this threat.<sup>6</sup> Solmsen in 1937<sup>7</sup> argued decisively against such an interpretation, and Patzer<sup>8</sup> and von Fritz<sup>9</sup> have firmly laid it to rest. There remains, however, the residual notion that the oracle still predicts the sure destruction of the city. But what it says is that *if* Laius dies without offspring, he will be the one to save the city. It certainly does *not* say that the city is doomed if he fails to die without offspring. That kind of argument is so patently false that it has a name in elementary logic: the fallacy of denying the antecedent.<sup>10</sup> It is conceivable that in this trilogy, where the true meaning of prophetic statement is understood only after the fact, the oracular statement "the man who dies without offspring saves the city" refers in fact not to Laius, as he himself supposed, but to Eteocles, who does die without offspring and does indeed save the city. In any case, simple logic makes it impossible to find in lines 749f a prediction of the city's destruction.

<sup>5</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.4) 84; Wilamowitz, *A. Interp.* (*supra* n.4) 95f.

<sup>6</sup> Carl Robert, *Oidipus I* (Berlin 1915) 264f; Oskar Klotz, "Zu Aischylos Thebanischer Tetralogie," *RhM* n.f. 72 (1917-18) 616ff.

<sup>7</sup> F. Solmsen, "The Erinys in Aischylos' *Septem*," *TAPA* 68 (1937) 205ff.

<sup>8</sup> H. Patzer, "Die Dramatische Handlung der *Sieben Gegen Theben*," *HSCP* 63 (1958) 97ff.

<sup>9</sup> K. von Fritz, *Antike und moderne Tragödie* (Berlin 1962) 193ff.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. I. M. Copi, *Introduction to Logic*<sup>2</sup> (New York 1961) 261. It is like saying, "If Pericles was king of Athens, then he spoke Greek. Pericles was not king of Athens, therefore he did not speak Greek."

If there is any reference to the Epigoni, it must be found in lines 902ff:

μένει  
κτέανα δ' ἐπιγόνους  
δι' ὧν αἰνομόροις  
δι' ὧν νεῖκος ἔβα  
καὶ θανάτου τέλος.

ἐμοιράσαντο δ' ὄξυκάρδιοι  
κτῆμαθ' ὥστ' ἴσον λαχεῖν.<sup>11</sup>

‘The property remains for the ἐπιγόνους the possessions through which—doomed to a sad end as they were—through which the strife came, and the consummation of death. In bitterness of heart they divided the possessions so as to get equal shares.’ It is made clear by line 905 that the whole trouble arose over the possessions. Most critics who cite this passage usually fail to include lines 907–8, which contain the key to understanding the first part. I have taken αἰνομόροις to be in apposition to ἐπιγόνους and in the translation set it off by dashes, which I take to be the effect of repeating δι' ὧν.

Professor Lloyd-Jones argues<sup>12</sup> that it would be hard for an audience not to think of the familiar story of the Epigoni when such a word is used, but there are grave difficulties in understanding it so. Eteocles and Polyneices die childless (ἄτεκνος 828) and it is explicitly stated that the god has utterly destroyed the family (813): αὐτὸς δ' ἀναλοῖ δῆτ' αὖ δύσποτμον γένος. If the sons of Oedipus die childless, then there can be no Epigoni at all, hence no reference to them in line 903.<sup>13</sup> Lloyd-Jones attempted to make ἄτεκνος mean ‘unfortunate in the filial relationship’, but he admits there is no parallel for such an interpretation.<sup>14</sup> Klotz<sup>15</sup> argued that *Septem* 902ff meant simply that the possessions remain for later generations, an interpretation which gets rid of the conflict but which cannot be considered particularly apposite. We should like an interpretation more closely connected with the themes and plot of the *Seven*.

<sup>11</sup> I have used Wilamowitz's text.

<sup>12</sup> *op.cit.* (*supra* n.4) 90.

<sup>13</sup> R. D. Dawe, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.4) 20f, lists six other passages which imply that the brothers are childless: 734–8, 742–5, 911–14, 955, 959–60, 1054–6.

<sup>14</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.3) 90; Golden, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.4) 59 n.25, says that Lloyd-Jones informed him by letter that he no longer holds this interpretation of ἄτεκνος.

<sup>15</sup> *op.cit.* (*supra* n.6) 617f. This position is also accepted by Golden, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.4) 59.

It is important to keep in mind that the version of the story so familiar from the handbooks, ancient and modern, according to which the brothers have agreed to rule in alternate years and Eteocles fails to keep his part of the bargain, is inconsistent with the *Seven* of Aeschylus, as Carl Robert saw in 1915.<sup>16</sup> Justice is without question solely on Eteocles' side. The chorus, which has ample opportunity to criticize Eteocles, never once says he has wronged his brother. The strongest evidence in Eteocles' behalf comes from the enemy: the respected seer Amphiaraus specifically lays all blame on Polyneices (576ff). Furthermore we may judge from an historical *exemplum* in Lysias' funeral oration (2.7–10) that the commonplace story laid all the blame on Polyneices. The point of Lysias' reference is lost unless we can suppose everybody knew Eteocles was right and Polyneices wrong.

Therefore, if Eteocles cannot have wronged his brother and if the alternation in rule has no place in the *Seven Against Thebes*, then the version Aeschylus relied upon will have been concerned with the division of the patrimony in such a way that Eteocles inherits the kingdom fairly and justly, and Polyneices migrates, perhaps voluntarily, to another country. The only other version of the story we have is precisely that. The scholiast on Euripides' *Phoenissae* 71, summarizes Hellanicus (*FGrHist* 4 F 98) as follows: 'Ἑλλάνικος δὲ ἱστορεῖ κατὰ συνθήκην αὐτὸν παραχωρῆσαι τὴν βασιλείαν Ἐτεοκλεῖ, λέγων αἴρεσιν αὐτῷ προθεῖναι τὸν Ἐτεοκλέα, εἰ βούλοιο τὴν βασιλείαν ἔχειν ἢ τὸ μέρος τῶν χρημάτων λαβεῖν καὶ ἑτέραν πόλιν οἰκεῖν, τὸν δὲ λαβόντα τὸν χιτῶνα καὶ τὸν ὄρμον Ἀρμονίας ἀναχωρῆσαι εἰς Ἄργος.' "Hellanicus relates that Polyneices conceded the kingdom to Eteocles by agreement, and further that Eteocles offered him a choice either to have the kingdom or to take a share of the movable property and dwell in another city. Polyneices took the chiton and necklace of Harmonia, and moved to Argos." This is the only version we have which is consistent with the *Seven*, and it is reasonable to assume that a similar version lies behind Aeschylus' play.

There is a parallel to this arrangement in the story which Strabo (8.7.1) tells of Hellen son of Deucalion, who gave his kingdom to his

<sup>16</sup> *op.cit.* (*supra* n.6) I.271. The point has been argued recently by Gerhard Mueller, "Textkritisches zu den Septem des Aischylos," *Hermes* 94 (1966) 265. The story of alternation in the kingship appears to be an invention of Euripides.

oldest son and directed the younger sons to settle in other places outside Phthia.<sup>17</sup>

We may rightly inquire how close to reality such a scheme of inheritance is, where one son inherits all the land and the other leaves the vicinity with some of the movable property. It is clearly quite different from the system of inheritance which prevailed in fourth-century Athens, when the first straightforward evidence becomes available. We know from Isaeus 6.25 that property was to be divided into equal shares: *ἀπάντας τοὺς γνησίους ἰσομοίρους εἶναι*. For earlier centuries there is no explicit evidence, but we must conclude that the system of equal division was impossible in early Greece because of the nature of land tenure. It is generally agreed that before the fifth century, and even into the fifth century, land was inalienable and indivisible.<sup>18</sup> W. J. Woodhouse<sup>19</sup> says, "At the root of this traditional inalienability of the original family lot was the desire to keep the number of households constituting the state at a constant figure as far as possible." A further purpose was to keep the lots undiminished in size. There is evidence that land was inalienable and indivisible at Sparta and Corinth (Arist. *Pol.* 2.6.1265b; Plut. *Agis* 5). The laws which Philolaus the Corinthian framed for Thebes included provisions for adoption designed to keep the number of family plots constant and undisturbed (Arist. *Pol.* 2.12.1274b; cf. 2.8.1266b). At Athens the reforms of Solon allowed a man to will his land to whomever he chose rather than necessarily to his son, which would permit the accumulation of large holdings. These reforms imply that before Solon land was inalienable and indivisible, and what is more, J. V. A. Fine points out that no sure evidence can be found that land could be mortgaged and sold in Athens prior to the Peloponnesian War.<sup>20</sup> If then the purpose of these provisions in Sparta, Corinth, Thebes and Athens was to keep the original allotment of land intact as an undiminished family holding, the equal division of land among several heirs would defeat that purpose and result in atomizing the parcel into smaller and smaller holdings. Therefore the nature of land tenure implies a

<sup>17</sup> Professor T. V. Buttrey pointed out to me the example from Strabo. For other examples of the succession of the firstborn to the kingship see Paus. 3.1.4; 7.2.1.

<sup>18</sup> See J. V. A. Fine, *Horoi* (*Hesperia* Suppl. 9, 1951) 179ff, and Glenn R. Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City* (Princeton 1960) 103ff, 110; P. Guiraud, *La propriété foncière en Grèce* (Paris 1893) 53ff.

<sup>19</sup> *Solon the Liberator* (London 1938) 79.

<sup>20</sup> Fine, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.18) 196.

system whereby one son—probably the eldest—inherits all the land.

Furthermore, the second element in the system found in the fragment of Hellanicus, that the sons who do not inherit emigrate to a foreign land, is also suggestive. Woodhouse says,<sup>21</sup> “It is not unlikely also that the burdens and restrictions entailed by this primitive system of land tenure in Greece generally were, in part at least, when reinforced by the pressure of over-population, responsible for the centrifugal movement which constituted the history of Greek colonization.”

The accumulation of examples from Greek legend in Hellanicus, Strabo and Pausanias, coupled with deductions from the nature of land tenure prior to the Peloponnesian War, lead to the conclusion that primogeniture characterized the system of inheritance in Greece until sometime in the fifth century, when alienability of land and the system of equal division attested by Isaeus replaced it.<sup>22</sup>

There is yet another description of such a pattern of inheritance which deserves attention because it is strikingly similar to the provisions in Hellanicus' story. Plato in the *Laws* considers it essential that land not be atomized by successive divisions among sons (740B; 929D),<sup>23</sup> so the whole parcel is to go to the one son whom the father chooses as his heir: ὁ λαχὼν τὸν κληῖρον καταλείπτω ἀεὶ ταύτης τῆς οἰκῆσεως ἓνα μόνον κληρονόμον τῶν ἑαυτοῦ παίδων, ὃν ἂν αὐτῷ μάλιστα ἦ φίλον (740B). This leaves the problem of providing for the remaining offspring. Generally the daughters are to be married off and the sons are to be adopted by childless citizens, once again with the aim of maintaining a constant number of κληῖροι. But if there are no citizens

<sup>21</sup> *op.cit.* (*supra* n.19) 84.

<sup>22</sup> Fustel de Coulanges, *La Cité antique* Bk. II ch. 7; Bk. IV ch. 5; Eng. transl. (Garden City n.d.) 83ff, 253ff, suggested that primogeniture was the rule at Athens before the reforms of Solon, but Ludovic Beauchet, *Histoire du droit privé de la république athénienne* III (Paris 1897) 450ff, and J. H. Lipsius, *Das attische Recht* (Leipzig 1905–1915) 542 n.12, argue against this claim. But none of them takes into account the nature of land tenure, nor do they dwell upon the change to a system of equal division. Their argument has to do with the privileges of an older son rather than with the possession of land. Guiraud, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.18) 233, indicates that there was a change from undivided inheritance (“originaiement, les biens se transmettaient dans son sein en bloc et à l'état d'indivision”) to a second stage where only “une partie du patrimoine” remained undivided, and then to the final stage “le partage égal des successions.” E. Caillemer, *Le droit de succession légitime à Athènes* (Paris 1879) 30ff, discusses certain privileges which the oldest son may have had, including succession to the monarchy. Cf. Paus. 2.3.4, 7.2.1, which were cited in n.17 above. In Ar. *Aves* 477f Pisthetaerus argues that the birds deserve sovereignty “by the right of the first-born.”

<sup>23</sup> A passage in the Gortynian Code (4.31), where some property could not be divided, may suggest that Plato had in mind a real Cretan constitution.



willing to adopt the younger sons, or if there are just too many of them, εἰάν δέ τιςιν ἐλλείπωσιν χάριτες, ἢ πλείους ἐπίγονοι γίνωνται (740c), then other expedients must be resorted to, such as sending out colonies. These provisions are treated in greater detail in Book II (923D). If a non-inheriting son is not adopted, he may take a share of the movable property with him to a colony (923D): εἰάν δὲ περιγίγνηται τις τῶν υἱῶν αὐτῷ μὴ ἐπὶ τινὶ κλήρῳ πεποιημένος, ὃν κατὰ νόμον ἐλπίς εἰς ἀποικίαν ἐκπεμφθήσεσθαι, τούτῳ τῶν ἄλλων χρημάτων ἐξέστω τῷ πατρὶ διδόναι ὅσα ἂν ἐθέλη, πλὴν τοῦ πατρῷου κλήρου καὶ τῆς περὶ τὸν κλῆρον κατασκευῆς πάσης. Finally, the provisions for a disinherited son (ἀπάτωρ) stipulate that he must emigrate, unless some other citizen is willing to adopt him. Failing adoption the disinherited son is to be put into the hands of those in charge of the non-inheriting sons who have been sent out to colonies (929D): τοὺς τῶν ἐπιγόνων ἐπιμελητὰς τῶν εἰς τὴν ἀποικίαν ἐπιμελεῖσθαι καὶ τούτων [i.e. τῶν ἀπατόρων], ὅπως ἂν μετᾴσχωσι τῆς αὐτῆς ἀποικίας ἐμμελῶς.

The interesting word for our purposes is of course ἐπίγονος. *LSJ* defines it in these passages as ‘born after or besides the presumptive heir’. The ‘after or besides’ seems to be an attempt to reconcile the etymological conclusion that the ἐπίγονος ought to be younger with Plato’s clear statement (740b, 923c) that the inheriting son need not be the oldest. Plato decrees that the patrimony should go to the son deemed most worthy (923c), a provision which has the earmarks of Platonic innovation. The fact that Plato uses a term which ought to mean ‘younger son’ would argue for the fact that ἐπίγονος was the traditional legal term for non-inheriting status under the early system of primogeniture.

The claim that line 903 of the *Seven* contains a reference to the Epigoni was possible only because there was no probable alternative. Klotz’ interpretation ‘later generations’ is not really pertinent to the *Seven* and its background. But in this play, which is fundamentally concerned with division of a patrimony between sons, such that one inherits all the land and the other moves to a foreign country, ἐπίγονος as a legal term is specifically appropriate. It is unlikely in the extreme that it is merely a vague reference to the sons of the Seven, for Polyneices is beyond question an ἐπίγονος in precisely the legal sense of a non-inheriting son who migrates to another country.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> While it is reasonable to assume that Aeschylus considered Eteocles the elder, it cannot be proved explicitly. Euripides made Eteocles the elder (schol. ad Eur. *Phoen.* 71),

The occurrence of the word at line 903 must have been arresting simply because it is the appropriate legal designation for Polyneices. The younger son, who was not expected to inherit, also gets a share of the patrimonial land, namely his grave, and the chorus proclaims it with gnomic irony when it says "possessions devolve upon secondary heirs." But the familiar ironies of consanguinity which beset the Labdacids give the plural ἐπιγόνους even more startling implications. For both Eteocles and Polyneices are younger brothers of Oedipus, and as such both count as ἐπίγονοι. Beyond a mere general observation, the chorus says that the patrimony has devolved upon these two particular brothers Eteocles and Polyneices. The whole play has stressed the disadvantages of Polyneices as an ἐπίγονος. The irony of getting equal shares is that Eteocles now shares the status of an ἐπίγονος, and when property comes to ἐπίγονοι their share is a grave.

The theme of dividing the inheritance is emphasized by the use of the adjective αἰνόμορος 'having a wretched lot' (904), which displaces the expected word in this context, viz. ἰσόμοιρος, the term used in the equal-division system. These choral lines recapitulate the historical legal development as it moves from primogeniture, inherent in ἐπιγόνους, to the division in strife (907), which disrupts the old laws, and finally to equal division, ὥστ' ἴσον λαχεῖν (908).

We can conclude that sometime between Solon and Isaeus, Athenian laws of inheritance changed from the system of primogeniture to one whereby all sons got an equal share. Just as the reform of the Areopagus made the institution a matter of current interest, and the *Oresteia* is concerned with the change in homicide law from the principle of private vengeance to that of public prosecution, so it is possible that a change, or proposed change, in the laws of inheritance lies behind the *Seven*. Eteocles champions the venerable system of primogeniture, Polyneices the innovation of equal division. Strife between the brothers is the result of Polyneices' attempt to institute the new system, so that the equal division of the land is represented ironically by their graves.<sup>25</sup>

but Sophocles made him the younger (*OC* 375). Verrall, in his introduction to his edition of the *Seven* (London 1887) x note, and Tucker, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.2) xxx, suggest that they were twins, but it is no more than a guess to explain equal division.

<sup>25</sup> We can only guess how Polyneices' greed develops beyond his desire for an equal share, but he will no longer settle for anything but the whole patrimony. He intends to seek out his brother to kill him or drive him into exile (635ff). Perhaps a hint is to be found in the first stasimon, where the rivalry among the looters of the city is pictured, and they are satisfied with neither a lesser nor an equal share: ξύννομον θέλων ἔχειν | οὔτε μείον οὔτ' ἴσον λελιμμένοι (354-5).

The word *ἐπίγονος* then, is a technical term drawn from the system of primogeniture, which is closely connected with the themes and plot of the *Seven*. Its occurrence at line 903 is not a hint of further trouble to come. Therefore arguments for the authenticity of the end of the *Seven* which rely on such a supposition cannot stand.<sup>26</sup>

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May, 1968

<sup>26</sup> I am grateful to my colleagues Professors Herbert C. Youtie and Theodore V. Buttrey for helpful criticisms, and to Professor Irving M. Copi for a lesson in logic.