

***Antigone* (ca. 441 B.C.E.)**

By Sophocles (city-state of Athens, present-day Greece)

Translated from the Greek by Robert Fagles

CHARACTERS

ANTIGONE

daughter of Oedipus and Jocasta

ISMENE

sister of Antigone

A CHORUS

of old Theban citizens and their LEADER

CREON

king of Thebes, uncle of Antigone and Ismene

A SENTRY

HAEMON

son of Creon and Eurydice

TIRESIAS

a blind prophet

A MESSENGER

EURYDICE

wife of Creon

Guards, attendants, and a boy

TIME AND SCENE: The royal house of Thebes. It is still night, and the invading armies of Argos have just been driven from the city. Fighting on opposite sides, the sons of Oedipus, Eteocles and Polynices, have killed each other in combat. Their uncle, CREON, is now king of Thebes.

Enter ANTIGONE, slipping through the central doors of the palace. She motions to her sister, ISMENE, who follows her cautiously toward an altar at the center of the stage.

ANTIGONE:

My own flesh and blood—dear sister, dear Ismene,
how many griefs our father Oedipus handed down!
Do you know one, I ask you, one grief
that Zeus will not perfect for the two of us¹

¹ *the two of us*: the intimate bond between the two sisters (and the two brothers) is emphasized in the original Greek by an untranslatable linguistic usage—the dual, a set of endings for verbs, nouns and adjectives that is used only when two subjects are concerned (there is a different set of endings—the plural—for more than two). Significantly, Antigone no longer uses these forms to speak of herself and her sister after Ismene refuses to help her bury their brother. [all footnotes are from the translator]

while we still live and breathe? There's nothing, 5
no pain—our lives are pain²—no private shame,
no public disgrace, nothing I haven't seen
in your griefs and mine. And now this:
an emergency decree, they say, the Commander
has just now declared for all of Thebes. 10
What, haven't you heard? Don't you see?
The doom reserved for enemies³
marches on the ones we love the most.

ISMENE:

Not I, I haven't heard a word, Antigone.
Nothing of loved ones, 15
no joy or pain has come my way, not since
the two of us were robbed of our two brothers,
both gone in a day, a double blow—
not since the armies of Argos vanished,
just this very night. I know nothing more, 20
whether our luck's improved or ruin's still to come.

ANTIGONE:

I thought so. That's why I brought you out here,
past the gates, so you could hear in private.

ISMENE:

What's the matter? Trouble, clearly ...
you sound so dark, so grim. 25

ANTIGONE:

Why not? Our own brothers' burial!
Hasn't Creon graced one with all the rites,
disgraced the other? Eteocles, they say,
has been given full military honors,
rightly so—Creon has laid him in the earth 30
and he goes with glory down among the dead.
But the body of Polynices, who died miserably—
why, a city-wide proclamation, rumor has it,
forbids anyone to bury him, even mourn him.
He's to be left unwept, unburied, a lovely treasure 35
for birds that scan the field and feast to their heart's content.
Such, I hear, is the martial law our good Creon

² *our lives are pain*: the translation here is dictated rather by the logic of the passage than the actual Greek words. The phrase in Greek to which these words correspond is clearly corrupt (it seems to interrupt a culminating series of negatives with a positive), and no satisfactory emendation or explanation has ever been offered.

³ *The doom reserved for enemies*: this seems to refer to the fact that Creon had also exposed the corpses of the other six (non-Theban) attackers of the city; they are foreign "enemies," whereas Polynices, for Antigone, is still a "friend," since he was a blood relative. The exposure of the other bodies was part of the legend as we find it elsewhere (in Euripides' play *The Suppliants*, for example) and is referred to in Tiresias' speech to Creon later in our play (1202-5). Some scholars interpret the Greek differently, to mean "evils planned by enemies," i.e., by Creon.

lays down for you and me—yes, me, I tell you—
and he's coming here to alert the uninformed
in no uncertain terms, 40
and he won't treat the matter lightly. Whoever
disobeys in the least will die, his doom is sealed:
stoning to death⁴ inside the city walls!
There you have it. You'll soon show what you are,
worth your breeding, Ismene, or a coward— 45
for all your royal blood.

ISMENE:

My poor sister, if things have come to this,
who am I to make or mend them, tell me,
what good am I to you?

ANTIGONE:

Decide.
Will you share the labor, share the work? 50

ISMENE:

What work, what's the risk? What do you mean?

ANTIGONE:

Will you lift up his body⁵ with these bare hands
and lower it with me? *Raising her hands.*

ISMENE:

What? You'd bury him—
when a law forbids the city?

ANTIGONE:

Yes!
He is my brother and—deny it as you will— 55
your brother too.
No one will ever convict me for a traitor.

ISMENE:

So desperate, and Creon has expressly—

ANTIGONE:

No,

⁴ *stoning to death*: a penalty which involves the community in the execution; it is therefore particularly appropriate in cases of treason, where the criminal has acted against the whole citizen body. It depends, of course, on the willingness of the citizens to carry it out, and it is noticeable that though Creon later refuses to accept Haemon's assertion that public opinion favors Antigone (776-82), he changes his mind about the penalty and substitutes one which does not require citizen participation.

⁵ *Will you lift up his body . . . ?* If she is to bury the body (and she speaks of "lifting" it), Antigone obviously needs Ismene's help; without it all she can do is perform a symbolic ritual—sprinkling the corpse with dust and pouring libations.

he has no right to keep me from my own.

ISMENE:

Oh my sister, think— 60
think how our own father died, hated,
his reputation in ruins, driven on
by the crimes he brought to light himself
to gouge out his eyes with his own hands—
then mother ... his mother and wife, both in one, 65
mutilating her life in the twisted noose—
and last, our two brothers dead in a single day,
both shedding their own blood, poor suffering boys,
battling out their common destiny hand-to-hand.

Now look at the two of us, left so alone ... 70
think what a death we'll die, the worst of all
if we violate the laws and override
the fixed decree of the throne, its power—
we must be sensible. Remember we are women,
we're not born to contend with men. Then too, 75
we're underlings, ruled by much stronger hands,
so we must submit in this, and things still worse.

I, for one, I'll beg the dead to forgive me—
I'm forced, I have no choice—I must obey
the ones who stand in power. Why rush to extremes? 80
It's madness, madness.

ANTIGONE:

I won't insist,
no, even if you should have a change of heart,
I'd never welcome you in the labor, not with me.
So, do as you like, whatever suits you best—
I will bury him myself. 85
And even if I die in the act, that death will be a glory.
I will lie with the one I love and loved by him—
an outrage sacred to the gods!⁶ I have longer
to please the dead than please the living here:
in the kingdom down below I'll lie forever. 90
Do as you like, dishonor the laws
the gods hold in honor.

ISMENE:

I'd do them no dishonor ...
but defy the city? I have no strength for that.

ANTIGONE:

You have your excuses. I am on my way,
I will raise a mound for him, for my dear brother. 95

⁶ *an outrage sacred to the gods*: literally, "committing a holy crime." What is criminal in the eyes of Creon is holy in the eyes of the gods Antigone champions.

ISMENE:

Oh Antigone, you're so rash—I'm so afraid for you!

ANTIGONE:

Don't fear for me. Set your own life in order.

ISMENE:

Then don't, at least, blurt this out to anyone.
Keep it a secret. I'll join you in that, I promise.

ANTIGONE:

Dear god, shout it from the rooftops. I'll hate you
all the more for silence—tell the world!

100

ISMENE:

So fiery—and it ought to chill your heart.

ANTIGONE:

I know I please where I must please the most.

ISMENE:

Yes, if you can, but you're in love with impossibility.

ANTIGONE:

Very well then, once my strength gives out
I will be done at last.

105

ISMENE:

You're wrong from the start,
you're off on a hopeless quest.

ANTIGONE:

If you say so, you will make me hate you,
and the hatred of the dead, by all rights,
will haunt you night and day.
But leave me to my own absurdity, leave me
to suffer this—dreadful thing. I will suffer
nothing as great as death without glory.

110

Exit to the side.⁷

ISMENE:

⁷ EXIT ANTIGONE. There is of course no stage direction in our text. We suggest that Antigone leaves the stage here not only because after her speech she obviously has nothing more to say to Ismene, but also because the effect of her harsh dismissal of her sister would be weakened if she then stood silent while Ismene had the last word. We suggest that she starts out toward the side exit and Ismene speaks to her retreating figure before she herself goes off stage, but through the door into the palace.

Then go if you must, but rest assured,
wild, irrational as you are, my sister, 115
you are truly dear to the ones who love you.

Withdrawing to the palace.

*Enter a CHORUS, the old citizens of Thebes, chanting
as the sun begins to rise.*

CHORUS:⁸

Glory!—great beam of the sun, brightest of all
that ever rose on the seven gates of Thebes,
you burn through night at last!

Great eye of the golden day, 120
mounting the Dirce's banks you throw him back—
the enemy out of Argos, the white shield, the man of bronze—
he's flying headlong now
the bridle of fate stampeding him with pain!

And he had driven against our borders, 125
launched by the warring claims of Polynices—
like an eagle screaming, winging havoc

over the land, wings of armor
shielded white as snow, 130
a huge army massing,
crested helmets bristling for assault.

He hovered above our roofs, his vast maw gaping
closing down around our seven gates,
his spears thirsting for the kill

but now he's gone, look, 135
before he could glut his jaws with Theban blood
or the god of fire put our crown of towers to the torch.
He grappled the Dragon none can master—Thebes—
the clang of our arms like thunder at his back!

Zeus hates with a vengeance all bravado, 140

⁸ lines 117-179: The *parados* (literally, "the way past") is the name of the space between the end of the stage building and the end of the spectators' benches (see Introduction, pp. 19, 258). Through these two passageways the chorus made its entrance, proceeding to the *orchestra*, the circular dancing-floor in front of the stage building. The word *parados* is also used to denote the first choral song, the lines which the chorus chants as it marches in.

This song is a victory ode, a celebration of the city's escape from capture, sack and destruction. The chorus imagines the enemy running in panic before the rising sun; their shields are white (122) perhaps because the name Argos suggests the adjective *argos*, which means "shining." The enemy assault of the previous day they compare to an eagle descending on its prey, but it was met and routed by a dragon (138); the Thebans believed that they were descended from dragons' teeth, which, sown in the soil by Cadmus, their first king, turned into armored men. Of all the seven chieftains who attacked the gates, Capaneus was the most violent and boastful; high on a scaling ladder he reached the top of the wall but was struck down by a lightning bolt of Zeus (147). The defeat of the other attackers is the work of Ares (154), the war god, who is also one of the patron deities of Thebes. The seven chieftains were all killed; all seven were stripped of their armor, which was then arranged on wooden frames in the likeness of a warrior. This is what the Greeks called a *tropaion* (our word "trophy"); the Greek word suggests "turning point," and in fact the trophy was set up at the point where the losing side first turned and ran. The god who engineered such reversals was Zeus Tropaios—"god of the breaking rout of battle" (159). In the last stanza the dancers address Victory, who is always represented in Greek art as a winged female figure; they look forward to the joys of peace, the revelry associated with the god Dionysus, born of a Theban mother.

the mighty boasts of men. He watched them
coming on in a rising flood, the pride
of their golden armor ringing shrill—
and brandishing his lightning
blasted the fighter just at the goal, 145
rushing to shout his triumph from our walls.

Down from the heights he crashed, pounding down on the earth!
And a moment ago, blazing torch in hand—
mad for attack, ecstatic
he breathed his rage, the storm 150
of his fury hurling at our heads!

But now his high hopes have laid him low
and down the enemy ranks the iron god of war
deals his rewards, his stunning blows—Ares
rapture of battle, our right arm in the crisis. 155

Seven captains marshaled at seven gates
seven against their equals, gave
their brazen trophies up to Zeus,
god of the breaking rout of battle,
all but two: those blood brothers, 160
one father, one mother—matched in rage,
spears matched for the twin conquest—,
clashed and won the common prize of death.

But now for Victory! Glorious in the morning,
joy in her eyes to meet our joy 165
she is winging down to Thebes,
our fleets of chariots wheeling in her wake—

Now let us win oblivion from the wars,
thronging the temples of the gods
in singing, dancing choirs through the night! 170
Lord Dionysus, god of the dance
that shakes the land of Thebes, now lead the way!

Enter CREON from the palace, attended by his guard.

But look, the king of the realm is coming,
Creon, the new man for the new day,
whatever the gods are sending now ... 175
what new plan will he launch?
Why this, this special session?
Why this sudden call to the old men
summoned at one command?

CREON:

My countrymen,
the ship of state is safe. The gods who rocked her, 180
after a long, merciless pounding in the storm,
have righted her once more.

Out of the whole city
I have called you here alone. Well I know,

first, your undeviating respect
 for the throne and royal power of King Laius. 185
 Next, while Oedipus steered the land of Thebes,
 and even after he died, your loyalty was unshakable,
 you still stood by their children⁹. Now then,
 since the two sons are dead—two blows of fate
 in the same day, cut down by each other's hands, 190
 both killers, both brothers stained with blood—
 as I am next in kin to the dead,
 I now possess the throne and all its powers.

Of course you cannot know a man completely,
 his character, his principles, sense of judgment, 195
 not till he's shown his colors, ruling the people,
 making laws. Experience, there's the test.
 As I see it, whoever assumes the task,
 the awesome task of setting the city's course,
 and refuses to adopt the soundest policies 200
 but fearing someone, keeps his lips locked tight,
 he's utterly worthless. So I rate him now,
 I always have. And whoever places a friend
 above the good of his own country, he is nothing:
 I have no use for him. Zeus my witness, 205
 Zeus who sees all things, always—

I could never stand by silent, watching destruction
 march against our city, putting safety to rout,
 nor could I ever make that man a friend of mine
 who menaces our country. Remember this: 210
 our country *is* our safety.
 Only while she voyages true on course
 can we establish friendships, truer than blood itself.¹⁰
 Such are my standards. They make our city great.

Closely akin¹¹ to them I have proclaimed, 215
 just now, the following decree to our people
 concerning the two sons of Oedipus.
 Eteocles, who died fighting for Thebes,
 excelling all in arms: he shall be buried,
 crowned with a hero's honors, the cups we pour 220
 to soak the earth and reach the famous dead.

But as for his blood brother, Polynices,
 who returned from exile, home to his father-city
 and the gods of his race, consumed with one desire—
 to burn them roof to roots—who thirsted to drink 225
 his kinsmen's blood and sell the rest to slavery:
 that man—a proclamation has forbidden the city

⁹ *their children*: i.e., the children of Oedipus and Jocasta.

¹⁰ *truer than blood itself*: this is an attempt to bring out in English the double meaning of the word translated "friendships"; the Greek word *philous* means both "friends" and "close relations."

¹¹ *closely akin*: the Greek word means literally "brother to." But Creon is in fact disregarding the claims of kinship.

to dignify him with burial, mourn him at all.
No, he must be left unburied, his corpse
carrion for the birds and dogs to tear, 230
an obscenity for the citizens to behold!

These are my principles. Never at my hands
will the traitor be honored above the patriot.
But whoever proves his loyalty to the state— 235
I'll prize that man in death as well as life.

LEADER:

If this is your pleasure, Creon, treating
our city's enemy and our friend this way ...
The power is yours, I suppose, to enforce it
with the laws, both for the dead and all of us,
the living.

CREON:

Follow my orders closely then, 240
be on your guard.

LEADER:

We are too old.
Lay that burden on younger shoulders.

CREON:

No, no,
I don't mean the body—I've posted guards already.

LEADER:

What commands for us then? What other service?

CREON:

See that you never side with those who break my orders. 245

LEADER:

Never. Only a fool could be in love with death.

CREON:

Death is the price—you're right. But all too often
the mere hope of money has ruined many men.

A SENTRY enters from the side.

SENTRY:

My lord,
I can't say I'm winded from running, or set out
with any spring in my legs either—no sir, 250
I was lost in thought, and it made me stop, often,
dead in my tracks, wheeling, turning back,

and all the time a voice inside me muttering,
"Idiot, why? You're going straight to your death."
Then muttering, "Stopped again, poor fool?" 255
If somebody gets the news to Creon first,
what's to save your neck?"

And so,
mulling it over, on I trudged, dragging my feet,
you can make a short road take forever ...
but at last, look, common sense won out, 260
I'm here, and I'm all yours,
and even though I come empty-handed
I'll tell my story just the same, because
I've come with a good grip on one hope,
what will come will come, whatever fate— 265

CREON:

Come to the point!
What's wrong—why so afraid?

SENTRY:

First, myself, I've got to tell you,
I didn't do it, didn't see who did—
Be fair, don't take it out on me. 270

CREON:

You're playing it safe, soldier,
barricading yourself from any trouble.
It's obvious, you've something strange to tell.

SENTRY:

Dangerous too, and danger makes you delay
for all you're worth. 275

CREON:

Out with it—then dismiss!

SENTRY:

All right, here it comes. The body—
someone's just buried it,¹² then run off...
sprinkled some dry dust on the flesh,
given it proper rites.

CREON:

What? 280
What man alive would dare—

SENTRY:

¹² *someone's just buried it*: this is a token burial; it is defined in the lines that follow (289-92). The sprinkling of dust and the pouring of a libation were considered the equivalent of burial where nothing more could be done and so were a direct defiance of Creon's order.

I've no idea, I swear it.
 There was no mark of a spade, no pickaxe there,
 no earth turned up, the ground packed hard and dry,
 unbroken, no tracks, no wheelruts, nothing,
 the workman left no trace. Just at sunup 285
 the first watch of the day points it out—
 it was a wonder! We were stunned ...
 a terrific burden too, for all of us, listen:
 you can't see the corpse, not that it's buried,
 really, just a light cover of road-dust on it, 290
 as if someone meant to lay the dead to rest
 and keep from getting cursed.
 Not a sign in sight that dogs or wild beasts
 had worried the body, even torn the skin.

But what came next! Rough talk flew thick and fast, 295
 guard grilling guard—we'd have come to blows
 at last, nothing to stop it; each man for himself
 and each the culprit, no one caught red-handed,
 all of us pleading ignorance, dodging the charges,
 ready to take up red-hot iron in our fists, 300
 go through fire,¹³ swear oaths to the gods—
 "I didn't do it, I had no hand in it either,
 not in the plotting, not the work itself!"

Finally, after all this wrangling came to nothing,
 one man spoke out and made us stare at the ground, 305
 hanging our heads in fear. No way to counter him,
 no way to take his advice and come through
 safe and sound. Here's what he said:
 "Look, we've got to report the facts to Creon,
 we can't keep this hidden." Well, that won out, 310
 and the lot fell to me, condemned me,
 unlucky as ever, I got the prize. So here I am,
 against my will and yours too, well I know—
 no one wants the man who brings bad news.

LEADER:

My king,
 ever since he began I've been debating in my mind, 315
 could this possibly be the work of the gods?

CREON:

Stop—
 before you make me choke with anger—the gods!
 You, you're senile, must you be insane?
 You say—why it's intolerable—say the gods
 could have the slightest concern for that corpse? 320
 Tell me, was it for meritorious service

¹³ *red-hot iron . . . , go through fire*: traditional (and hyperbolic) assertions of truthfulness; the reference is to some form of trial by ordeal in which only the liar would get burned.

they proceeded to bury him, prized him so? The hero
who came to burn their temples ringed with pillars,
their golden treasures—scorch their hallowed earth
and fling their laws to the winds. 325
Exactly when did you last see the gods
celebrating traitors? Inconceivable!

No, from the first there were certain citizens
who could hardly stand the spirit of my regime,
grumbling against me in the dark, heads together, 330
tossing wildly, never keeping their necks beneath
the yoke, loyally submitting to their king.
These are the instigators, I'm convinced—
they've perverted my own guard, bribed them
to do their work.

Money! Nothing worse 335
in our lives, so current, rampant, so corrupting.
Money—you demolish cities, root men from their homes,
you train and twist good minds and set them on
to the most atrocious schemes. No limit,
you make them adept at every kind of outrage, 340
every godless crime—money!

Everyone—
the whole crew bribed to commit this crime,
they've made one thing sure at least:
sooner or later they will pay the price.

Wheeling on the SENTRY.

You—
I swear to Zeus as I still believe in Zeus, 345
if you don't find the man who buried that corpse,
the very man, and produce him before my eyes,
simple death won't be enough for you,
not till we string you up alive
and wring the immorality out of you. 350

Then you can steal the rest of your days,
better informed about where to make a killing.
You'll have learned, at last, it doesn't pay
to itch for rewards from every hand that beckons.
Filthy profits wreck most men, you'll see— 355
they'll never save your life.

SENTRY:

Please,
may I say a word or two, or just turn and go?

CREON:

Can't you tell? Everything you say offends me.

SENTRY:

Where does it hurt you, in the ears or in the heart?

CREON:

And who are you to pinpoint my displeasure?

360

SENTRY:

The culprit grates on your feelings,
I just annoy your ears.

CREON:

Still talking?
You talk too much! A born nuisance—

SENTRY:

Maybe so,
but I never did this thing, so help me!

CREON:

Yes you did—
what's more, you squandered your life for silver!

365

SENTRY:

Oh it's terrible when the one who does the judging
judges things all wrong.

CREON:

Well now,
you just be clever about your judgments—
if you fail to produce the criminals for me,
you'll swear your dirty money brought you pain.

370

Turning sharply, reentering the palace.

SENTRY:

I hope he's found. Best thing by far.
But caught or not, that's in the lap of fortune:
I'll never come back, you've seen the last of me.
I'm saved, even now, and I never thought,
I never hoped—
dear gods, I owe you all my thanks!

375

Rushing out.

CHORUS:¹⁴

¹⁴ lines 376-416 The chorus entered the orchestra to the strains of the *parados*; it now, with the stage area empty of actors, sings the first *stasimon*. The word means something like "stationary"; it distinguishes the songs the chorus sings once it has reached the orchestra (where it will, normally, remain until the end of the play) from the *parados*, which it sings while marching in. But of course the chorus is not actually stationary; its members dance in formation as they sing.

This famous hymn to the inventiveness and creativeness of man has important thematic significance for the play, in which a ruler, in the name of man's creation, the state, defies age-old laws: the ode ends with a warning

but the city casts out
that man who weds himself to inhumanity
thanks to reckless daring. Never share my hearth
never think my thoughts, whoever does such things. 415

*Enter ANTIGONE from the side, accompanied by the
SENTRY.*

Here is a dark sign from the gods —
what to make of this? I know her,
how can I deny it? That young girl's Antigone!
Wretched, child of a wretched father, 420
Oedipus. Look, is it possible?
They bring you in like a prisoner —
why? did you break the king's laws?
Did they take you in some act of mad defiance?¹⁷

SENTRY:

She's the one, she did it single-handed — 425
we caught her burying the body. Where's Creon?

Enter CREON from the palace.

LEADER:

Back again, just in time when you need him.

CREON:

In time for what? What is it?

SENTRY:

My king,
there's nothing you can swear you'll never do—
second thoughts make liars of us all. 430

I could have sworn I wouldn't hurry back
(what with your threats, the buffeting I just took),
but a stroke of luck beyond our wildest hopes,
what a joy, there's nothing like it. So,
back I've come, breaking my oath, who cares? 435

I'm bringing in our prisoner—this young girl—
we took her giving the dead the last rites.
But no casting lots this time; this is my luck,
my prize, no one else's.

Now, my lord,
here she is. Take her, question her, 440
cross-examine her to your heart's content.
But set me free, it's only right—
I'm rid of this dreadful business once for all.

¹⁷ *act of mad defiance*: the chorus here and later (677, "fury at the heart") can explain Antigone's defiance of power only as mental aberration; Creon speaks in similar terms of the two sisters when Ismene wishes to join her sister in death ("They're both mad, I tell you . . ." 632).

CREON:

Prisoner! Her? You took her—where, doing what?

SENTRY:

Burying the man. That's the whole story.

CREON:

What?

445

You mean what you say, you're telling me the truth?

SENTRY:

She's the one. With my own eyes I saw her
bury the body, just what you've forbidden.
There. Is that plain and clear?

CREON:

What did you see? Did you catch her in the act?

450

SENTRY:

Here's what happened. We went back to our post,
those threats of yours breathing down our necks—
we brushed the corpse clean of the dust that covered it,
stripped it bare ... it was slimy, going soft,
and we took to high ground, backs to the wind
so the stink of him couldn't hit us;

455

jostling, baiting each other to keep awake,
shouting back and forth—no napping on the job,
not this time. And so the hours dragged by
until the sun stood dead above our heads,
a huge white ball in the noon sky, beating,
blazing down, and then it happened—
suddenly, a whirlwind!

460

Twisting a great dust-storm up from the earth,
a black plague of the heavens, filling the plain,
ripping the leaves off every tree in sight,
choking the air and sky. We squinted hard
and took our whipping from the gods.

465

And after the storm passed—it seemed endless—
there, we saw the girl!

470

And she cried out a sharp, piercing cry,
like a bird come back to an empty nest,
peering into its bed, and all the babies gone ...

Just so, when she sees the corpse bare
she bursts into a long, shattering wail
and calls down withering curses on the heads
of all who did the work. And she scoops up dry dust,
handfuls, quickly, and lifting a fine bronze urn,
lifting it high and pouring, she crowns the dead

475

they live forever, from the first of time,
and no one knows when they first saw the light.

These laws—I was not about to break them,
not out of fear of some man's wounded pride, 510
and face the retribution of the gods.

Die I must, I've known it all my life—
how could I keep from knowing?—even without
your death-sentence ringing in my ears. 515
And if I am to die before my time

I consider that a gain. Who on earth,
alive in the midst of so much grief as I,
could fail to find his death a rich reward?

So for me, at least, to meet this doom of yours
is precious little pain. But if I had allowed 520

my own mother's son to rot, an unburied corpse—
that would have been an agony! This is nothing.
And if my present actions strike you as foolish,
let's just say I've been accused of folly
by a fool.

LEADER:

Like father like daughter, 525
passionate, wild . . .
she hasn't learned to bend before adversity.

CREON:

No? Believe me, the stiffest stubborn wills
fall the hardest; the toughest iron,
tempered strong in the white-hot fire, 530
you'll see it crack and shatter first of all.

And I've known spirited horses you can break
with a light bit—proud, rebellious horses.
There's no room for pride, not in a slave,
not with the lord and master standing by. 535

This girl was an old hand at insolence
when she overrode the edicts we made public.
But once she had done it—the insolence,
twice over—to glory in it, laughing,
mocking us to our face with what she'd done. 540
I am not the man, not now: she is the man
if this victory goes to her and she goes free.

Never! Sister's child or closer in blood
than all my family clustered at my altar
worshiping Guardian Zeus—she'll never escape, 545
she and her blood sister, the most barbaric death.
Yes, I accuse her sister of an equal part
in scheming this, this burial.

To his attendants.

Bring her here!
I just saw her inside, hysterical, gone to pieces.
It never fails: the mind convicts itself
in advance, when scoundrels are up to no good,
plotting in the dark. Oh but I hate it more
when a traitor, caught red-handed,
tries to glorify his crimes. 550

ANTIGONE:

Creon, what more do you want
than my arrest and execution? 555

CREON:

Nothing. Then I have it all.

ANTIGONE:

Then why delay? Your moralizing repels me,
every word you say—pray god it always will.
So naturally all I say repels you too.
Enough. 560
Give me glory! What greater glory could I win
than to give my own brother decent burial?
These citizens here would all agree,

To the CHORUS.

they would praise me too
if their lips weren't locked in fear. 565

Pointing to CREON.

Lucky tyrants—the perquisites of power!
Ruthless power to do and say whatever pleases *them*.

CREON:

You alone, of all the people in Thebes,
see things that way.

ANTIGONE:

They see it just that way
but defer to you and keep their tongues in leash. 570

CREON:

And you, aren't you ashamed to differ so from them?
So disloyal!

ANTIGONE:

Not ashamed for a moment,
not to honor my brother, my own flesh and blood.

CREON:

Wasn't Eteocles a brother too—cut down, facing him?

ANTIGONE:

Brother, yes, by the same mother, the same father.

575

CREON:

Then how can you render his enemy such honors,
such impieties in his eyes?

ANTIGONE:

He will never testify to that,
Eteocles dead and buried.

CREON:

He will—
if you honor the traitor just as much as him.

580

ANTIGONE:

But it was his brother, not some slave that died—

CREON:

Ravaging our country!—
but Eteocles died fighting in our behalf.

ANTIGONE:

No matter—Death longs for the same rites for all.

CREON:

Never the same for the patriot and the traitor.

585

ANTIGONE:

Who, Creon, who on earth can say the ones below
don't find this pure and uncorrupt?

CREON:

Never. Once an enemy, never a friend,
not even after death,

ANTIGONE:

I was born to join in love, not hate—¹⁹
that is my nature.

590

¹⁹ The verbs used in this famous line, *syncchthcin* and *symphilein*, appear nowhere else in Greek literature and may have been expressly coined by Sophocles to express the distinction Antigone is making: that she is incapable of taking sides in her brothers' political hatred for each other but shares in the blood relationship which, she believes, unites them in love in the world below.

CREON:

Go down below and love,
if love you must—love the dead! While I'm alive,
no woman is going to lord it over me.

Enter ISMENE from the palace, under guard.

CHORUS:

Look,
Ismene's coming, weeping a sister's tears,
loving sister, under a cloud ... 595
her face is flushed, her cheeks streaming.
Sorrow puts her lovely radiance in the dark.

CREON:

You—
in my own house, you viper, slinking undetected,
sucking my life-blood! I never knew 600
I was breeding twin disasters, the two of you
rising up against my throne. Come, tell me,
will you confess your part in the crime or not?
Answer me. Swear to me.

ISMENE:

I did it, yes—
if only she consents—I share the guilt,
the consequences too.

ANTIGONE:

No, 605
Justice will never suffer that—not you,
you were unwilling. I never brought you in.

ISMENE:

But now you face such dangers . . . I'm not ashamed
to sail through trouble with you,
make your troubles mine.

ANTIGONE:

Who did the work? 610
Let the dead and the god of death bear witness!
I have no love for a friend who loves in words alone.

ISMENE:

Oh no, my sister, don't reject me, please,
let me die beside you, consecrating
the dead together.

ANTIGONE:

Never share my dying, 615

don't lay claim to what you never touched.
My death will be enough.

ISMENE:

What do I care for life, cut off from you?

ANTIGONE:

Ask Creon. Your concern is all for him.

ISMENE:

Why abuse me so? It doesn't help you now.

ANTIGONE:

if I mock you, I get no pleasure from it,
only pain.

You're right—

620

ISMENE:

Tell me, dear one,
what can I do to help you, even now?

ANTIGONE:

Save yourself. I don't grudge you your survival.

ISMENE:

Oh no, no, denied my portion in your death?

625

ANTIGONE:

You chose to live, I chose to die.

ISMENE:

Not, at least,
without every kind of caution I could voice.

ANTIGONE:

Your wisdom appealed to one world—mine, another.

ISMENE:

But look, we're both guilty, both condemned to death.

ANTIGONE:

Courage! Live your life. I gave myself to death,
long ago, so I might serve the dead.

630

CREON:

They're both mad, I tell you, the two of them.
One's just shown it, the other's been that way
since she was born.

ISMENE:

True, my king,
the sense we were born with cannot last forever ...
commit cruelty on a person long enough
and the mind begins to go.

635

CREON:

Yours did,
when you chose to commit your crimes with her.

ISMENE:

How can I live alone, without her?

CREON:

Her?
Don't even mention her—she no longer exists.

640

ISMENE:

What? You'd kill your own son's bride?

CREON:

Absolutely:
there are other fields for him to plow.

ISMENE:

Perhaps,
but never as true, as close a bond as theirs.

CREON:

A worthless woman for my son? It repels me.

ISMENE:

Dearest Haemon, your father wrongs you so!

645

CREON:

Enough, enough—you and your talk of marriage!

ISMENE:

Creon—you're really going to rob your son of Antigone?

CREON:

Death will do it for me—break their marriage off.

LEADER:

So, it's settled then? Antigone must die?²⁰

CREON:

Settled, yes—we both know that.

650

To the guards.

Stop wasting time. Take them in.
From now on they'll act like women.
Tie them up, no more running loose;
even the bravest will cut and run,
once they see Death coming for their lives.

655

The guards escort ANTIGONE and ISMENE into the palace, CREON remains while the old citizens form their CHORUS.

CHORUS:²¹

Blest, they are the truly blest who all their lives
have never tasted devastation. For others, once

²⁰ ISMENE. *Dearest Haetnon . . .* (lines 645-649): All the manuscripts give this line to Ismene. But manuscript attributions are very often wrong (see pp. 389-90) and many editors give the line to Antigone. (The phrase in Creon's line that follows, translated "your talk of marriage," could equally well mean "your marriage" and so refer to Antigone, who has not been talking about marriage, instead of Ismene, who has.) If the line is Ismene's, however, Sophocles has given us an Antigone who never mentions Haemon, though we learn later that he loves her more than his own life. But there is a technical reason (apart from any question of interpretation) against giving the line to Antigone: Ismene must have the next reply to Creon (647, "Creon—you're really going to rob your son of Antigone?"), and this would present us with a phenomenon for which we have no parallel—a long exchange of single lines between two actors interrupted for one line by a third. Dawe has recently proposed a solution to this difficulty: to give all three lines (including line 649, the one here assigned to the leader) to Antigone. This is linguistically unassailable (line 647 would then mean: "Creon—you're really going to rob your son of me?"); her next line would mean: "It's decided then? I'm going to die?"; and Creon's reply would mean: "Decided, yes. By you and me." This reading has its very attractive aspects but gives us an Antigone whose second line sounds a completely uncharacteristic note of self-pity and is in effect a plea for her life—also uncharacteristic. We have assigned 645 and 647 to Ismene, 649 to the leader of the chorus.

²¹ lines 656-700: The chorus sees an explanation for the death which now threatens the two last remaining members of the house of Oedipus: it is the working of a hereditary doom. The reason for it is not given (though legends known to some of the audience traced it back to the wrongdoing of Laius, father of Oedipus) but it is thought of as the work of the gods. In the opening speech of the play Antigone spoke in similar terms and attributed the sorrows of her line to Zeus. And in the second unit of this *stasimon* the chorus sings of the power of Zeus and man's inability to override it. So far, clearly, they have been meditating on the fate of Antigone, but their reflections proceed along a line which does not seem relevant to her case. The law of Zeus is that

no towering form of greatness enters
into the lives of mortals
free and clear of ruin.

(687-89)

As they develop this theme along lines thoroughly familiar to the audience, which shared this instinctive feeling that greatness is dangerous, it must have become clear that their words express anxiety not for Antigone, the helpless and condemned, but for Creon, the man who holds and wields supreme power in the state. **667-69** *Sorrows of the house . . . piling on the sorrows of the dead.* This could be read as "sorrows of the dead . . . fall on the sorrows of the living." Both interpretations come to much the same thing. **676** *Bloody knife: kopis* is the Greek word. The manuscripts all read *konis*, which means "dust." It is true that the dust she has thrown on Polynices' corpse has brought her to her death, but the metaphor seems too violent and most editors print *kopis*, a conjecture made by Jortin, an English scholar of the eighteenth century. **711-12** *Than you, / whatever good direction . . .* The Greek is ambiguous and could mean "than your good leadership" or "than you, if you give proper leadership."

the gods have rocked a house to its foundations
the ruin will never cease, cresting on and on
from one generation on throughout the race— 660
like a great mounting tide
driven on by savage northern gales,
surging over the dead black depths
roiling up from the bottom dark heavens of sand
and the headlands, taking the storm's onslaught full-force, 665
roar, and the low moaning
echoes on and on
and now
as in ancient times I see the sorrows of the house,
the living heirs of the old ancestral kings,
piling on the sorrows of the dead
and one generation cannot free the next— 670
some god will bring them crashing down,
the race finds no release.
And now the light, the hope
springing up from the late last root
in the house of Oedipus, that hope's cut down in turn 675
by the long, bloody knife swung by the gods of death
by a senseless word
by fury at the heart.
Zeus,
yours is the power, Zeus, what man on earth
can override it, who can hold it back?
Power that neither Sleep, the all-ensnaring 680
no, nor the tireless months of heaven
can ever overmaster—young through all time,
mighty lord of power, you hold fast
the dazzling crystal mansions of Olympus.
And throughout the future, late and soon 685
as through the past, your law prevails:
no towering form of greatness
enters into the lives of mortals
free and clear of ruin.
True,
our dreams, our high hopes voyaging far and wide 690
bring sheer delight to many, to many others
delusion, blithe, mindless lusts
and the fraud steals on one slowly ... unaware
till he trips and puts his foot into the fire.
He was a wise old man who coined 695
the famous saying: "Sooner or later
foul is fair, fair is foul
to the man the gods will ruin"—
He goes his way for a moment only
free of blinding ruin. 700

Enter HAEMON from the palace.

Here's Haemon now, the last of all your sons.
Does he come in tears for his bride,

his doomed bride, Antigone—
bitter at being cheated of their marriage?

CREON:

We'll soon know, better than seers could tell us. 705

Turning to HAEMON.

Son, you've heard the final verdict on your bride?
Are you coming now, raving against your father?
Or do you love me, no matter what I do?

HAEMON:

Father, I'm your son ... you in your wisdom
set my bearings for me—I obey you. 710
No marriage could ever mean more to me than you,
whatever good direction you may offer.

CREON:

Fine, Haemon.

That's how you ought to feel within your heart,
subordinate to your father's will in every way.
That's what a man prays for: to produce good sons— 715
a household full of them, dutiful and attentive,
so they can pay his enemy back with interest
and match the respect their father shows his friend.

But the man who rears a brood of useless children,
what has he brought into the world, I ask you? 720
Nothing but trouble for himself, and mockery
from his enemies laughing in his face.

Oh Haemon,

never lose your sense of judgment over a woman.
The warmth, the rush of pleasure, it all goes cold
in your arms, I warn you ... a worthless woman 725
in your house, a misery in your bed.

What wound cuts deeper than a loved one
turned against you? Spit her out,
like a mortal enemy—let the girl go.
Let her find a husband down among the dead. 730

Imagine it: I caught her in naked rebellion,
the traitor, the only one in the whole city.
I'm not about to prove myself a liar,
not to my people, no, I'm going to kill her!
That's right—so let her cry for mercy, sing her hymns 735
to Zeus who defends all bonds of kindred blood.²²
Why, if I bring up my own kin to be rebels,

²² *Zeus . . . kindred blood*: Zeus *Homaimos*; Zeus is the supreme ruler of the gods and father of many of them. He is referred to under many different titles. As *Chthonios*, he is an underworld divinity; as *Herkeios*, the protector of the hearth and family; as *Homaimos*, the god of blood relationships; as *Morios*, the protector of the olive trees of Attica; and as *Tropaios*, the god who presides over the decisive moment in battle when one side turns to flee.

think what I'd suffer from the world at large.
Show me the man who rules his household well:
I'll show you someone fit to rule the state. 740

That good man, my son,
I have every confidence he and he alone
can give commands and take them too. Staunch
in the storm of spears he'll stand his ground,
a loyal, unflinching comrade at your side. 745

But whoever steps out of line, violates the laws
or presumes to hand out orders to his superiors,
he'll win no praise from me. But that man
the city places in authority, his orders
must be obeyed, large and small,
right and wrong. 750

Anarchy—

show me a greater crime in all the earth!
She, she destroys cities, rips up houses,
breaks the ranks of spearmen into headlong rout.
But the ones who last it out, the great mass of them 755
owe their lives to discipline. Therefore
we must defend the men who live by law,
never let some woman triumph over us.
Better to fall from power, if fall we must,
at the hands of a man—never be rated 760
inferior to a woman, never.

LEADER:

To us,
unless old age has robbed us of our wits,
you seem to say what you have to say with sense.

HAEMON:

Father, only the gods endow a man with reason,
the finest of all their gifts, a treasure. 765
far be it from me—I haven't the skill,
and certainly no desire, to tell you when,
if ever, you make a slip in speech ... though
someone else might have a good suggestion.

Of course it's not for you, 770
in the normal run of things, to watch
whatever men say or do, or find to criticize.

The man in the street, you know, dreads your glance,
he'd never say anything displeasing to your face.
But it's for me to catch the murmurs in the dark, 775
the way the city mourns for this young girl.

"No woman," they say, "ever deserved death less,
and such a brutal death for such a glorious action.
She, with her own dear brother lying in his blood—
she couldn't bear to leave him dead, unburied, 780
food for the wild dogs or wheeling vultures.

Death? She deserves a glowing crown of gold!"
So they say, and the rumor spreads in secret,
darkly ...

I rejoice in your success, father—
nothing more precious to me in the world. 785

What medal of honor brighter to his children
than a father's growing glory? Or a child's
to his proud father? Now don't, please,
be quite so single-minded, self-involved,
or assume the world is wrong and you are right. 790

Whoever thinks that he alone possesses intelligence,
the gift of eloquence, he and no one else,
and character too ... such men, I tell you,
spread them open—you will find them empty.²³

No,
it's no disgrace for a man, even a wise man,
to learn many things and not to be too rigid. 795

You've seen trees by a raging winter torrent,
how many sway with the flood and salvage every twig,
but not the stubborn—they're ripped out, roots and all.
Bend or break. The same when a man is sailing: 800
haul your sheets too taut, never give an inch,
you'll capsize, and go the rest of the voyage
keel up and the rowing-benches under.

Oh give way. Relax your anger—change!
I'm young, I know, but let me offer this: 805
it would be best by far, I admit,
if a man were born infallible, right by nature.
If not—and things don't often go that way,
it's best to learn from those with good advice.

LEADER:

You'd do well, my lord, if he's speaking to the point,
to learn from him, 810

Turning to HAEMON.

and you, my boy, from him.
You both are talking sense.

CREON:

So,
men our age, we're to be lectured, are we?—
schooled by a boy his age?

HAEMON:

Only in what is right. But if I seem young, 815

²³ *Spread them . . . empty.* A metaphor from writing tablets, two slats of wood covered with wax, on which the message was inscribed. It would be delivered closed and sealed; the recipient would open it and read—in this case to find the tablet blank.

look less to my years and more to what I do.

CREON:

Do? Is admiring rebels an achievement?

HAEMON:

I'd never suggest that you admire treason.

CREON:

Oh?—
isn't that just the sickness that's attacked her?

HAEMON:

The whole city of Thebes denies it, to a man. 820

CREON:

And is Thebes about to tell me how to rule?

HAEMON:

Now, you see? Who's talking like a child?

CREON:

Am I to rule this land for others—or myself?

HAEMON:

It's no city at all, owned by one man alone.

CREON:

What? The city is the king's—that's the law! 825

HAEMON:

What a splendid king you'd make of a desert island—
you and you alone.

CREON:

To the CHORUS.

This boy, I do believe,
is fighting on her side, the woman's side.

HAEMON:

If you are a woman, yes —
my concern is all for you. 830

CREON:

Why, you degenerate — bandying accusations,
threatening me with justice, your own father!

HAEMON:

I see my father offending justice — wrong.

CREON:

To protect my royal rights? Wrong?

HAEMON:

Protect your rights?
When you trample down the honors of the gods?

835

CREON:

You, you soul of corruption, rotten through —
woman's accomplice!

HAEMON:

That may be,
but you will never find me accomplice to a criminal.

CREON:

That's what *she* is,
and every word you say is a blatant appeal for her —

840

HAEMON:

And you, and me, and the gods beneath the earth.

CREON:

You will never marry her, not while she's alive.

HAEMON:

Then she will die ... but her death will kill another.

CREON:

What, brazen threats? You go too far!

HAEMON:

What threat?
Combating your empty, mindless judgments with a word?

845

CREON:

You'll suffer for your sermons, you and your empty wisdom!

HAEMON:

If you weren't my father, I'd say you were insane.

CREON:

Don't flatter me with Father — you woman's slave!

HAEMON:

You really expect to fling abuse at me
and not receive the same?

CREON:

Is that so!
Now, by heaven, I promise you, you'll pay —
taunting, insulting me! Bring her out,
that hateful — she'll die now, here,
in front of his eyes, beside her groom!

850

HAEMON:

No, no, she will never die beside me —
don't delude yourself. And you will never
see me, never set eyes on my face again.
Rage your heart out, rage with friends
who can stand the sight of you.

855

Rushing out.

LEADER:

Gone, my king, in a burst of anger.
A temper young as his ... hurt him once,
he may do something violent.

860

CREON:

Let him do—
dream up something desperate, past all human limit!
Good riddance. Rest assured,
he'll never save those two young girls from death.

865

LEADER:

Both of them, you really intend to kill them both?

CREON:

No, not her, the one whose hands are clean—
you're quite right.

LEADER:

But Antigone—
what sort of death do you have in mind for her?

CREON:

I will take her down some wild, desolate path
never trod by men, and wall her up alive
in a rocky vault, and set out short rations,

870

just the measure piety demands²⁴
to keep the entire city free of defilement.
There let her pray to the one god she worships: 875
Death—who knows?—may just relieve her from death.
Or she may learn at last, better late than never,
what a waste of breath it is to worship Death.

Exit to the palace.

CHORUS:²⁵

Love, never conquered in battle
Love the plunderer laying waste the rich! 880
Love standing the night-watch
 guarding a girl's soft cheek,
you range the seas, the shepherds' steadings off in the wilds—
not even the deathless gods can flee your onset,
nothing human born for a day— 885
whoever feels your grip is driven mad.

 Love!—
you wrench the minds of the righteous into outrage,
swerve them to their ruin—you have ignited this,
this kindred strife,²⁶ father and son at war
 and Love alone the victor— 890
warm glance of the bride triumphant, burning with desire!
Throned in power, side-by-side with the mighty laws!
Irresistible Aphrodite, never conquered—
Love, you mock us for your sport.

ANTIGONE is brought from the palace under guard.

²⁷But now, even I would rebel against the king, 895
I would break all bounds when I see this—
I fill with tears, I cannot hold them back, not any more ...
I see Antigone make her way

²⁴ *short rations . . . piety demands . . .* The city would be kept "free of defilement" not only because (contrary to Creon's first decision) the citizens would not be involved in stoning Antigone to death but also because, if Antigone were to starve to death (or commit suicide), there would literally be no blood on anyone's hands. Greek superstitious belief thought of responsibility for killing in terms of pollution by the blood of the victim, which called for blood in return. We know of no parallels to Creon's sentence, except the similar punishment inflicted in Rome on Vestal Virgins who broke their vows of chastity.

²⁵ *Love . . .* (lines 879-894): The Greek world *eras* has a narrower field of meaning than its English equivalent; it denotes the passionate aspect of sexual attraction, an irresistible force which brings its victims close to madness. The immediate occasion of this hymn to Eros is of course the chorus' fear that Haemon, infuriated by the prospect of losing Antigone, may "do something violent" (862). But the song also reminds the audience that Creon has now offended not only the gods who preside over the lower world and those who sustain the bonds of family friendship, but also Eros and Aphrodite who, as the concluding lines of the ode emphasize, are great powers in the universe—"Throned in power, side-by-side with the mighty laws!" (892).

²⁶ *this kindred strife*: the Greek adjective *xynaimon* (literally, "common-blood") recalls Haemon's name.

²⁷ lines 895-969: The first half of the scene which follows the choral ode is a lyric dialogue known as a *kommos*: actor and chorus sing in responsion. At first the chorus addresses Antigone in a march-type rhythm (anapests) that was probably chanted rather than sung; she replies in song, in fully lyric meters. At line 943, as emotion rises to a high pitch, the chorus, too, breaks into full song. Creon's harsh intervention (969) is couched in iambic spoken verse, and Antigone uses the same medium for her farewell speech (978-1021). But the scene ends in the chanted rhythm of marching anapests as Antigone is led off to her tomb (1027-34).

to the bridal vault where all are laid to rest.

ANTIGONE:

Look at me, men of my fatherland, 900
 setting out on the last road
looking into the last light of day
the last I will ever see ...
the god of death who puts us all to bed
takes me down to the banks of Acheron alive— 905
 denied my part in the wedding-songs,
no wedding-song in the dusk has crowned my marriage—
I go to wed the lord of the dark waters.

CHORUS:

Not crowned with glory²⁸ or with a dirge,
you leave for the deep pit of the dead. 910
No withering illness laid you low,
no strokes of the sword—a law to yourself,
alone, no mortal like you, ever, you go down
to the halls of Death alive and breathing.

ANTIGONE:

But think of Niobe²⁹—well I know her story— 915
 think what a living death she died,
Tantalus' daughter, stranger queen from the east:
there on the mountain heights, growing stone
binding as ivy, slowly walled her round
and the rains will never cease, the legends say 920
the snows will never leave her ...
 wasting away, under her brows the tears
showering down her breasting ridge and slopes—
a rocky death like hers puts me to sleep.

CHORUS:

But she was a god,³⁰ born of gods, 925
and we are only mortals born to die.
And yet, of course, it's a great thing
for a dying girl to hear, even to hear
she shares a destiny equal to the gods,

²⁸ *not crowned with glory* . . . The usual version of this line is: "crowned with glory . . ." The Greek word *oukoun* can be negative or positive, depending on the accent, which determines the pronunciation; since these written accents were not yet in use in Sophocles' time, no one will ever know for sure which meaning he intended. We take the view that the chorus is expressing pity for Antigone's ignominious and abnormal death; she has no funeral at which her fame and) praise are recited, she will not die by either of the usual causes—/ violence or disease—but by a living death. It is, as they say, her own choice; she is "a law to [herself]" (912).

²⁹ Niobe boasted that her children were more beautiful than Apollo and Artemis, the children of Leto by Zeus. Apollo and Artemis killed Niobe's twelve (or fourteen) children with bow and arrow; Niobe herself, inconsolably weeping, turned to stone. On Mount Sipylus, in Asia Minor, there was a cliff face which from a distance looked like a weeping woman; it was identified with Niobe.

³⁰ *But she was a god* . . . The chorus reproves Antigone for comparing her own death to that of Niobe, who was not strictly a god, but moved on terms of equality with the gods. The chorus' condescending tone accounts for Antigone's indignant outburst in the next few lines.

during life and later, once she's dead.

ANTIGONE:

O you mock me! 930

Why, in the name of all my fathers' gods
why can't you wait till I am gone—

 must you abuse me to my face?

O my city, all your fine rich sons!

And you, you springs of the Dirce,

935

holy grove of Thebes where the chariots gather,

 you at least, you'll bear me witness, look,

unmourned by friends and forced by such crude laws

I go to my rockbound prison, strange new tomb—

 always a stranger, O dear god,

940

I have no home on earth and none below,

 not with the living, not with the breathless dead.

CHORUS:

You went too far, the last limits of daring—
smashing against the high throne of Justice!³¹

 Your life's in ruins, child—I wonder . . .

945

do you pay for your father's terrible ordeal?

ANTIGONE:

There—at last you've touched it, the worst pain
the worst anguish! Raking up the grief for father

 three times over, for all the doom

that's struck us down, the brilliant house of Laius.

950

O mother, your marriage-bed

the coiling horrors, the coupling there—

 you with your own son, my father—doomstruck mother!

Such, such were my parents, and I their wretched child.

I go to them now, cursed, unwed, to share their home—

955

 I am a stranger! O dear brother, doomed

 in your marriage—your marriage murders mine,³²

 your dying drags me down to death alive!

Enter Creon.

CHORUS:

Reverence asks some reverence in return—

but attacks on power never go unchecked,

960

not by the man who holds the reins of power.

Your own blind will, your passion has destroyed you.

ANTIGONE:

No one to weep for me, my friends,

³¹ *smashing against the high throne of Justice!* The text is very disturbed here. Different readings would add the detail "with your foot" (or "feet") and a radically different sense: "falling in supplication before the high throne . . ."

³² *your marriage murders mine*: Polynices had married the daughter of Adrastus of Argos, to seal the alliance which enabled him to march against Thebes.

no wedding-song—they take me away
in all my pain ... the road lies open, waiting. 965
Never again, the law forbids me to see
the sacred eye of day. I am agony!
No tears for the destiny that's mine,
no loved one mourns my death.

CREON:

Can't you see?
If a man could wail his own dirge before he dies, 970
he'd never finish.

To the guards.

Take her away, quickly!
Wall her up in the tomb, you have your orders.
Abandon her there, alone, and let her choose—
death or a buried life with a good roof for shelter.
As for myself, my hands are clean. This young girl— 975
dead or alive, she will be stripped of her rights,
her stranger's rights,³³ here in the world above.

ANTIGONE:

O tomb, my bridal-bed—my house, my prison
cut in the hollow rock, my everlasting watch!
I'll soon be there, soon embrace my own, 980
the great growing family of our dead
Persephone has received among her ghosts.

I,
the last of them all, the most reviled by far,
go down before my destined time's run out.
But still I go, cherishing one good hope: 985
my arrival may be dear to father,
dear to you, my mother,
dear to you, my loving brother, Eteocles—³⁴

³⁵When you died I washed you with my hands,
I dressed you all, I poured the sacred cups 990
across your tombs. But now, Polynices,
because I laid your body out as well,
this, this is my reward. Nevertheless
I honored you—the decent will admit it—
well and wisely too.

³³ The Greek word translated "stranger's rights," *metoikias*, had a precise technical sense in Athens; it described the status of a resident alien who was not a full citizen. Creon speaks as if Antigone had already forfeited her citizenship by her action and become a *trnetoikos*, a resident alien; he will now deprive her of even that status, by burying her alive. Similarly at lines 940 and 956 Antigone speaks of herself as an alien, *metoikos*, both in the world of the living and that of the dead.

³⁴ *my loving brother, Eteocles* . . . The name Eteocles does not appear in the Greek but has been added by the translator to remove a possible ambiguity.

³⁵ *When you died* . . . Antigone's speech has been judged adversely by many critics, who suspect its authenticity; some would go so far as to suppress the whole passage from this point on; others content themselves with removing lines 993 to 1012 (904-5 through 920 in the Greek). We believe the whole of the speech is genuine.

| | |
|--|------|
| <p>Never, I tell you. if I had been the mother of children or if my husband died, exposed and rotting— I'd never have taken this ordeal upon myself, never defied our people's will. What law, you ask, do I satisfy with what I say? A husband dead, there might have been another. A child by another too, if I had lost the first. But mother and father both lost in the halls of Death, no brother could ever spring to light again.</p> | 995 |
| <p>For this law alone I held you first in honor. For this, Creon, the king, judges me a criminal guilty of dreadful outrage, my dear brother! And now he leads me off, a captive in his hands, with no part in the bridal-song, the bridal-bed, denied all joy of marriage, raising children— deserted so by loved ones, struck by fate, I descend alive to the caverns of the dead.</p> | 1000 |
| <p>What law of the mighty gods have I transgressed? Why look to the heavens any more, tormented as I am? Whom to call, what comrades now? Just think, my reverence only brands me for irreverence! Very well: if this is the pleasure of the gods, once I suffer I will know that I was wrong. But if these men are wrong, let them suffer nothing worse than they mete out to me— these masters of injustice!</p> | 1005 |
| <p>LEADER: Still the same rough winds, the wild passion raging through the girl.</p> | 1010 |
| <p>CREON: <i>To the guards.</i> Take her away. You're wasting time—you'll pay for it too.</p> | 1015 |
| <p>ANTIGONE: Oh god, the voice of death. It's come, it's here.</p> | 1020 |
| <p>CREON: True. Not a word of hope—your doom is sealed.</p> | 1025 |
| <p>ANTIGONE: Land of Thebes, city of all my fathers—</p> | |

O you gods, the first gods of the race!³⁶
They drag me away, now, no more delay.
Look on me, you noble sons of Thebes—
the last of a great line of kings,
I alone, see what I suffer now
at the hands of what breed of men—
all for reverence, my reverence for the gods!

1030

She leaves under guard: the CHORUS gathers.

CHORUS:³⁷

Danaë, Danaë —
even she endured a fate like yours,

1035

³⁶ *first gods of the race*: the Theban royal house was descended from Cadmus, whose wife Harmonia was the daughter of Aphrodite and Ares. Dionysus was the son of Zeus and Semele, a daughter of Cadmus.

³⁷ *Danaë, Danaë*. . . (lines 1035-1090): The dramatic relevance of the mythological material exploited in this choral ode is not as clear to us as it must have been to the original audience; the second half of the ode, in particular, alludes to stories of which we have only fragmentary, late and conflicting accounts.

The chorus, which reprimanded Antigone for comparing herself to Niobe, now tries to find some satisfactory parallels. Acrisius, king of Argos, was told by an oracle that his grandson would be the cause of his death. He had only one child, Danaë, and, to prevent her from bearing a child, he shut her up in a bronze prison (a tower in some accounts, or, as here, a sort of underground vault). But Zeus, in the form of golden sunlight, reached her and she gave birth to the hero Perseus, who, many years later, after killing the Gorgon Medusa and rescuing the princess Andromeda from the sea monster, accidentally killed his grandfather Acrisius at an athletic contest. The point of comparison with Antigone is clearly the imprisonment in an underground room, and the fact that the room was for Danaë a place to which a forbidden bridegroom forced an entrance will not be lost on the audience when, later on, it hears of Haemon's entry into the tomb of Antigone, and its tragic sequel. But, the parallel once established, the chorus goes on to sing of the power of fate, which no human power (wealth, military strength, fortifications, fleets—the powers of the state) can defy. Acrisius could not escape what was predicted; but what has this to do with Antigone? The resources of power are Creon's, not hers, and he, like Acrisius, tried to prevent the consummation of a marriage. In these lines the chorus is made to express, even if it may not, as a character, understand fully the implication of its, own words, its fear for Creon, the beginning of its disenchantment with his course of action.

The next parallel with Antigone, Lycurgus, king of the barbarous Thracians, also has imprisonment as its base. Lycurgus (like Pentheus in Euripides' *Bacchae*) attempted to suppress the worship of Dionysus; he pursued the wild women devotees on the hills, laid hands on the god, mocked and insulted him. Dionysus confined him in a rock—a rocky cave or a miraculous stone envelope—and he went mad. (In one version of the legend, not hinted at here but probably known to the audience, he killed his son in his mad fit.) Here imprisonment, the connection with Antigone, is overshadowed by the ominous resemblances to Creon: he is the one who uses force against a woman, against the gods of the underworld; his is the angry, taunting voice, the frenzied rage. And he will be responsible in the end for the death of his son.

For the last two stanzas of the ode there is no sure line of interpretation. The myth to which it refers (but so cryptically that only two of the people involved are named in the text) told the story of Cleopatra, daughter of an Athenian princess and Boreas, the North Wind. She was married to the Thracian king Phineus, by whom she had two sons. They were blinded by Phineus' second wife; in some versions Cleopatra was already dead, in others she was imprisoned by the new wife and later released. (In some versions, the sons were imprisoned too—like Antigone, in a tomb.) Sophocles could rely on the audience's familiarity with this material (he wrote two plays dealing with Phineus) but we are left to grasp at straws. The last lines of the ode, an address to Antigone which echoes the chorus' similar address at the beginning ("my child," 1042 and 1090) suggests strongly that Antigone is compared to Cleopatra here, as she is to Danaë in the opening lines. In that case Sophocles is almost certainly referring to a version (perhaps that of one of his own plays) in which Cleopatra, like Danaë and Antigone, was imprisoned. We have therefore taken the liberty, in order to produce a translation which makes some kind of sense, of putting this crucial detail into the text. But the reader is warned that lines 1080-81—"their mother doomed to chains, / walled off in a tomb of stone"—have no equivalent in the Greek text.

in all her lovely strength she traded
 the light of day for the bolted brazen vault—
 buried within her tomb, her bridal-chamber,
 wed to the yoke and broken. 1040
 But she was of glorious birth
 my child, my child
 and treasured the seed of Zeus within her womb,
 the cloudburst streaming gold!
 The power of fate is a wonder, 1045
 dark, terrible wonder—
 neither wealth nor armies
 towered walls nor ships
 black hulls lashed by the salt
 can save us from that force. 1050

The yoke tamed him too
 young Lycurgus flaming in anger
 king of Edonia, all for his mad taunts
 Dionysus clamped him down, encased
 in the chain-mail of rock 1055
 and there his rage
 his terrible flowering rage burst—
 sobbing, dying away ... at last that madman
 came to know his god—
 the power he mocked, the power 1060
 he taunted in all his frenzy
 trying to stamp out
 the women strong with the god—
 the torch, the raving sacred cries—
 enraging the Muses who adore the flute. 1065

And far north where the Black Rocks
 cut the sea in half
 and murderous straits
 split the coast of Thrace
 a forbidding city stands 1070
 where once, hard by the walls
 the savage Ares thrilled to watch
 a king's new queen, a Fury rearing in rage
 against his two royal sons—
 her bloody hands, her dagger-shuttle 1075
 stabbing out their eyes—cursed, blinding wounds—
 their eyes blind sockets screaming for revenge!

They wailed in agony, cries echoing cries
 the princes doomed at birth ...
 and their mother doomed to chains, 1080
 walled up in a tomb of stone—
 but she traced her own birth back
 to a proud Athenian line and the high gods
 and off in caverns half the world away,
 born of the wild North Wind 1085
 she sprang on her father's gales,

racing stallions up the leaping cliffs—
child of the heavens. But even on her the Fates
the gray everlasting Fates rode hard
my child, my child.

Enter TIRESIAS, the blind prophet, led by a boy.

TIRESIAS:

 Lords of Thebes,
I and the boy have come together,
hand in hand. Two see with the eyes of one ...
so the blind must go, with a guide to lead the way.

1090

CREON:

What is it, old Tiresias? What news now?

TIRESIAS:

I will teach you. And you obey the seer.

CREON:

 I will.
I've never wavered from your advice before.³⁸

1095

TIRESIAS:

And so you kept the city straight on course.

CREON:

I owe you a great deal, I swear to that.

TIRESIAS:

Then reflect, my son: you are poised,
once more, on the razor-edge of fate.

1100

CREON:

What is it? I shudder to hear you.

TIRESIAS:

 You will learn
when you listen to the warnings of my craft.³⁹

³⁸ *never wavered from your advice before*: this may be just an acknowledgment of the omnipresence of Tiresias in Theban affairs over many generations. On the other hand it may refer to a legend that Tiresias advised Creon, during the attack by the Seven, that Thebes could only be saved by the sacrifice of his son Megareus (who did in fact give his life for his fellow-citizens). Anyone in the audience who remembered this might see bitter irony in Creon's line (1098) "I owe you a great deal, I swear to that." The death of Megareus will later (1428-31) be blamed on Creon by his wife Eurydice.

³⁹ *warnings of my craft*: in this speech Tiresias describes the results of two different techniques of foretelling the future: interpretation, first, of the movements and voices of birds; next, of the behavior of the animal flesh burnt in sacrifice to the gods. The birds, as Tiresias tells us later (1125-26), have been eating the flesh of the corpse exposed by Creon's order; their voices, normally intelligible to the prophet, now convey nothing but their fury as they fight each other. Tiresias turns to the other method of divination, but the fire will not blaze up; it is quenched by the

As I sat on the ancient seat of augury,
in the sanctuary where every bird I know
will hover at my hands—suddenly I heard it, 1105
a strange voice in the wingbeats, unintelligible,
barbaric, a mad scream! Talons flashing, ripping,
they were killing each other—that much I knew—
the murderous fury whirring in those wings
made that much clear!

I was afraid, 1110

I turned quickly, tested the burnt-sacrifice,
ignited the altar at all points—but no fire,
the god in the fire never blazed.
Not from those offerings ... over the embers
slid a heavy ooze from the long thighbones, 1115
smoking, sputtering out, and the bladder
puffed and burst—spraying gall into the air—
and the fat wrapping the bones slithered off
and left them glistening white. No fire!
The rites failed that might have blazed the future 1120
with a sign. So I learned from the boy here:
he is my guide, as I am guide to others.

And it is you—

your high resolve that sets this plague on Thebes.
The public altars and sacred hearths are fouled,
one and all, by the birds and dogs with carrion 1125
torn from the corpse, the doomstruck son of Oedipus!
And so the gods are deaf to our prayers, they spurn
the offerings in our hands, the flame of holy flesh.
No birds cry out an omen clear and true—
they're gorged with the murdered victim's blood and fat. 1130

Take these things to heart, my son, I warn you.
All men make mistakes, it is only human.
But once the wrong is done, a man
can turn his back on folly, misfortune too,
if he tries to make amends, however low he's fallen, 1135
and stops his bullnecked ways. Stubbornness
brands you for stupidity—pride is a crime.
No, yield to the dead!
Never stab the fighter when he's down.
Where's the glory, killing the dead twice over? 1140

I mean you well. I give you sound advice.
It's best to learn from a good adviser
when he speaks for your own good:
it's pure gain.

abnormal ooze from the long thighbones. These are all signs that the gods are "deaf to our prayers," as the prophet soon tells Creon (1127). 1150 *Silver-gold of Sardis*: electrum, a natural mixture of silver and gold ("white gold") found in the river near Sardis in Asia Minor. 1192-93 *Violence / you have forced upon the heavens*: by leaving a corpse exposed Creon has not only deprived the lower gods of their rights, he has also polluted with death the province of the Olympian gods of the upper air. The Furies, avenging spirits of both lower and upper gods, lie in wait for him now. 1200 *Cries for men and women break / throughout your halls*: Tiresias prophesies the deaths of Haemon and Eurydice.

CREON:

Old man—all of you! So,
you shoot your arrows at my head like archers at the target— 1145
I even have *him* loosed on me, this fortune-teller.

Oh his ilk has tried to sell me short
and ship me off for years. Well,
drive your bargains, traffic—much as you like—
in the gold of India, silver-gold of Sardis. 1150

You'll never bury that body in the grave,
not even if Zeus's eagles rip the corpse
and wing their rotten pickings off to the throne of god!
Never, not even in fear of such defilement
will I tolerate his burial, that traitor. 1155
Well I know, we can't defile the gods—
no mortal has the power.

No,
reverend old Tiresias, all men fall,
it's only human, but the wisest fall obscenely
when they glorify obscene advice with rhetoric— 1160
all for their own gain.

TIRESIAS:

Oh god, is there a man alive
who knows, who actually believes . . .

CREON:

What now?
What earth-shattering truth are you about to utter?

TIRESIAS:

... just how much a sense of judgment, wisdom 1165
is the greatest gift we have?

CREON:

Just as much, I'd say,
as a twisted mind is the worst affliction known.

TIRESIAS:

You are the one who's sick, Creon, sick to death.

CREON:

I am in no mood to trade insults with a seer.

TIRESIAS:

You have already, calling my prophecies a lie.

CREON:

Why not? 1170
You and the whole breed of seers are mad for money!

throughout your halls. Great hatred rises against you—
cities in tumult,⁴⁰ all whose mutilated sons
the dogs have graced with burial, or the wild beasts
or a wheeling crow that wings the ungodly stench of carrion
back to each city, each warrior's hearth and home. 1205

These arrows for your heart! Since you've raked me
I loose them like an archer in my anger,
arrows deadly true. You'll never escape
their burning, searing force.

Motioning to his escort.

Come, boy, take me home. 1210
So he can vent his rage on younger men,
and learn to keep a gentler tongue in his head
and better sense than what he carries now.

Exit to the side.

LEADER:

The old man's gone, my king —
terrible prophecies. Well I know, 1215
since the hair on this old head went gray,
he's never lied to Thebes.

CREON:

I know it myself — I'm shaken, torn.
It's a dreadful thing to yield ... but resist now?
Lay my pride bare to the blows of ruin? 1220
That's dreadful too.

LEADER:

But good advice,
Creon, take it now, you must.

CREON:

What should I do? Tell me ... I'll obey.

LEADER:

Go! Free the girl from the rocky vault
and raise a mound for the body you exposed. 1225

CREON:

That's your advice? You think I should give in?

⁴⁰ *Great hatred . . . cities in tumult*: Creon was eventually forced to bury the bodies of the other champions, so Athenian legend ran, by an Athenian army under the leadership of Theseus (this is the theme of Euripides' *Suppliants*). But in the next generation, the sons of the Seven, the *Epigonoï*, attacked Thebes again and this time succeeded in taking the city.

LEADER:

Yes, my king, quickly. Disasters sent by the gods
cut short our follies in a flash.

CREON:

Oh it's hard,
giving up the heart's desire ... but I will do it—
no more fighting a losing battle with necessity.

1230

LEADER:

Do it now, go, don't leave it to others.

CREON:

Now—I'm on my way! Come, each of you,
take up axes, make for the high ground,
over there, quickly! I and my better judgment
have come round to this—I shackled her,
I'll set her free myself. I am afraid ...
it's best to keep the established laws
to the very day we die.

1235

*Rushing out, followed by his entourage. The CHORUS
clusters around the altar.*

CHORUS:⁴¹

God of a hundred names!

Great Dionysus—

Son and glory of Semele! Pride of Thebes—

Child of Zeus whose thunder rocks the clouds—

Lord of the famous lands of evening—

King of the Mysteries!

King of Eleusis, Demeter's plain

her breasting hills that welcome in the world—

Great Dionysus!

Bacchus, living in Thebes

the mother-city of all your frenzied women—

Bacchus

living along the Ismenus' rippling waters

1240

1245

⁴¹ *God of a hundred names!* . . . (lines 1239-1272): The tone of this choral song is one of exultation; the old men rejoice that Creon has seen the error of his ways and call on the Theban god Dionysus to appear, to come dancing, and as a healer to lead the joyous celebration. The hopes expressed in the song are quickly belied by the tragic events announced by the messenger; a similar ironic sequence is to be found in *Oedipus the King* (1195-1310). The hymn to Dionysus is constructed along the lines of real religious hymns: first the invocation of the god under his (or her) many titles, then a reference to the god's place of origin (Thebes), an enumeration of the most important places of his worship (Delphi, Nysa), an appeal to the god to come to the aid of the worshiper, and finally an invocation of the god by new names and titles. 1243 *King of Eleusis*: Iacchus (1271), the young god associated with Demeter and Persephone in the mystery religion centered at Eleusis in Attica, was often identified with Dionysus (*Bakchos*). Dionysus was supposed to be present, in the winter season, at Apollo's site, Delphi on Mount Parnassus, where the "twin peaks" of the cliffs (1250) towered above the sanctuary and the Castalian spring flowed below (1253). *Nysa* (1254) is a name given to many mountains in the ancient world, but the reference here is probably to the one on the long island of Euboea, opposite Theban territory, and separated from it by the Euripus ("the moaning straits," 1265).

standing over the field sown with the Dragon's teeth!

You—we have seen you through the flaring smoky fires,
your torches blazing over the twin peaks 1250
where nymphs of the hallowed cave climb onward

fired with you. your sacred rage—
we have seen you at Castalia's running spring
and down from the heights of Nysa crowned with ivy
the greening shore rioting vines and grapes 1255
down you come in your storm of wild women
ecstatic, mystic cries—

Dionysus—
down to watch and ward the roads of Thebes!

First of all cities, Thebes you honor first
you and your mother, bride of the lightning— 1260
come, Dionysus! now your people lie
in the iron grip of plague,
come in your racing, healing stride
down Parnassus' slopes

or across the moaning straits.
Lord of the dancing— 1265

dance, dance the constellations breathing fire!
Great master of the voices of the night!
Child of Zeus, God's offspring, come, come forth!
Lord, king, dance with your nymphs, swirling, raving
arm-in-arm in frenzy through the night 1270
they dance you, Iacchus—

Dance, Dionysus
giver of all good things!

Enter a MESSENGER from the side.

MESSENGER:

Neighbors,
friends of the house of Cadmus and the kings,
there's not a thing in this mortal life of ours
I'd praise or blame as settled once for all. 1275

Fortune lifts and Fortune fells the lucky
and unlucky every day. No prophet on earth
can tell a man his fate. Take Creon:
there was a man to rouse your envy once,
as I see it. He saved the realm from enemies, 1280
taking power, he alone, the lord of the fatherland,
he set us true on course—he flourished like a tree
with the noble line of sons he bred and reared ...
and now it's lost, all gone.

Believe me,
when a man has squandered his true joys, 1285
he's good as dead, I tell you, a living corpse.
Pile up riches in your house, as much as you like—
live like a king with a huge show of pomp,
but if real delight is missing from the lot,

I wouldn't give you a wisp of smoke for it,
not compared with joy.

1290

LEADER:

What now?
What new grief do you bring the house of kings?

MESSENGER:

Dead, dead—and the living are guilty of their death!

LEADER:

Who's the murderer? Who is dead? Tell us.

MESSENGER:

Haemon's gone, his blood spilled by the very hand—

1295

LEADER:

His father's or his own?

MESSENGER:

His own ...
raging mad with his father for the death—

LEADER:

Oh great seer,
you saw it all, you brought your word to birth!

MESSENGER:

Those are the facts. Deal with them as you will.

As he turns to go, EURYDICE enters from the palace.

LEADER:

Look, Eurydice. Poor woman, Creon's wife,
so close at hand. By chance perhaps,
unless she's heard the news about her son.

1300

EURYDICE:

My countrymen,
all of you—I caught the sound of your words
as I was leaving to do my part,
to appeal to queen Athena with my prayers.
I was just loosing the bolts, opening the doors,
when a voice filled with sorrow, family sorrow,
struck my ears, and I fell back, terrified,
into the women's arms—everything went black.
Tell me the news, again, whatever it is ...
sorrow and I are hardly strangers.
I can bear the worst.

1305

1310

MESSENGER:

I—dear lady,
I'll speak as an eye-witness. I was there.
And I won't pass over one word of the truth.
Why should I try to soothe you with a story, 1315
only to prove a liar in a moment?
Truth is always best.

So,
I escorted your lord, I guided him
to the edge of the plain where the body lay,
Polynices, torn by the dogs and still unmourned. 1320
And saying a prayer to Hecate of the Crossroads,⁴²
Pluto too, to hold their anger and be kind,
we washed the dead in a bath of holy water
and plucking some fresh branches, gathering . . .
what was left of him, we burned them all together 1325
and raised a high mound of native earth, and then
We turned and made for that rocky vault of hers,
the hollow, empty bed of the bride of Death.

And far off, one of us heard a voice,
a long wail rising, echoing 1330
out of that unhallowed wedding-chamber,
he ran to alert the master and Creon pressed on,
closer—the strange, inscrutable cry came sharper,
throbbing around him now, and he let loose
a cry of his own, enough to wrench the heart, 1335
"Oh god, am I the prophet now? going down
the darkest road I've ever gone? My son—
it's his dear voice, he greets me! Go, men,
closer, quickly! Go through the gap,
the rocks are dragged back— 1340
right to the tomb's very mouth⁴³—and look,
see if it's Haemon's voice I think I hear,
or the gods have robbed me of my senses."

The king was shattered. We took his orders,
went and searched, and there in the deepest, 1345
dark recesses of the tomb we found her . . .
hanged by the neck in a fine linen noose,⁴⁴

⁴² *Hecate of the Crossroads*: a goddess associated with burial grounds and the darkness of the night; offerings to her were left at crossroads. Here she is thought of as associated with Pluto (another name of Hades), as one whose privileges have been curtailed by Creon's action.

⁴³ *the tomb's very mouth*: Sophocles evidently imagined Antigone's prison on the model of the great domed Mycenaean tombs, built of stone and then covered with earth. Haemon has pried loose some of the stones to effect an entrance; once inside this, Creon's men go along a passage to the "mouth" (i.e., the doorway) of the main chamber.

⁴⁴ *We found her . . . I hanged by the neck . . .* The details are not clear. These words seem to mean that the speaker saw Antigone still hanging. At the end of his speech he describes Haemon as embracing Antigone—"there he lies, body enfolding body" (1369)—in terms which clearly imply that her body has been lowered to the ground. Sophocles does not tell us how or when this happened, but we probably are meant to imagine that

strangled in her veils—and the boy,
his arms flung around her waist,
clinging to her, wailing for his bride, 1350
dead and down below, for his father's crimes
and the bed of his marriage blighted by misfortune.

When Creon saw him, he gave a deep sob,
he ran in, shouting, crying out to him,
"Oh my child—what have you done? what seized you, 1355
what insanity? what disaster drove you mad?
Come out, my son! I beg you on my knees!"

But the boy gave him a wild burning glance,
spat in his face, not a word in reply,
he drew his sword—his father rushed out, 1360
running as Haemon lunged and missed!—
and then, doomed, desperate with himself,
suddenly leaning his full weight on the blade,
he buried it in his body, halfway to the hilt.

And still in his senses, pouring his arms around her, 1365
he embraced the girl and breathing hard,
released a quick rush of blood,
bright red on her cheek glistening white.
And there he lies, body enfolding body ...
he has won his bride at last, poor boy, 1370
not here but in the houses of the dead.

Creon shows the world that of all the ills
afflicting men the worst is lack of judgment.

EURYDICE turns and reenters the palace.

LEADER:

What do you make of that? The lady's gone,
without a word, good or bad.

MESSENGER:

I'm alarmed too 1375
but here's my hope—faced with her son's death
she finds it unbecoming to mourn in public.
Inside, under her roof, she'll set her women
to the task and wail the sorrow of the house.
She's too discreet. She won't do something rash. 1380

LEADER:

I'm not so sure. To me, at least,
a long heavy silence promises danger,
just as much as a lot of empty outcries.

MESSENGER:

Haemon cut the rope with his sword— which would be the normal, instinctive reaction to the sight of a hanging body.

We'll see if she's holding something back,
hiding some passion in her heart. 1385
I'm going in. You may be right—who knows?
Even too much silence has its dangers.

*Exit to the palace. Enter CREON from the side,
escorted by attendants carrying HAEMON'S body on a
bier.*

LEADER:

The king himself! Coming toward us,
look, holding the boy's head in his hands.
Clear, damning proof, if it's right to say so— 1390
proof of his own madness, no one else's,
no, his own blind wrongs.

CREON:

Ohhh, my crimes,
so senseless, so insane .
my stubborn, deadly—
Look at us, the killer, the killed, 1395
father and son, the same blood—the misery!
My plans, my mad fanatic heart,
my son, cut off so young!
Ai, dead, lost to the world,
not through your stupidity, no, my own.

LEADER:

Too late, 1400
too late, you see what justice means.

CREON:

Oh I've learned
through blood and tears! Then, it was then,
when the god came down and struck me—a great weight
shattering, driving me down that wild savage path,
ruining, trampling down my joy. Oh the agony, 1405
the heartbreaking agonies of our lives.

Enter the MESSENGER from the palace.

MESSENGER:

Master,
what a hoard of grief you have, and you'll have more.
The grief that lies to hand you've brought yourself—

Pointing to HAEMON's body.

the rest, in the house, you'll see it all too soon.

CREON:

What now? What's worse than this?

MESSENGER:

The queen is dead. 1410
The mother of this dead boy ... mother to the end—
poor thing, her wounds are fresh.

CREON:

No, no,
harbor of Death, so choked, so hard to cleanse!—
why me? why are you killing me?
Herald of pain, more words, more grief? 1415
I died once, you kill me again and again!
What's the report, boy ... some news for me?
My wife dead? O dear god!
Slaughter heaped on slaughter?

*The doors open; the body of EURYDICE is brought out
on her bier.*

MESSENGER:

See for yourself:
now they bring her body from the palace.

CREON:

Oh no, 1420
another, a second loss to break the heart.
What next, what fate still waits for me?
I just held my son in my arms and now,
look, a new corpse rising before my eyes—
wretched, helpless mother—O my son! 1425

MESSENGER:

She stabbed herself at the altar,
then her eyes went dark, after she'd raised
a cry for the noble fate of Megareus, the hero
killed in the first assault, then for Haemon,
then with her dying breath she called down 1430
torments on your head—you killed her sons.

CREON:

Oh the dread,
I shudder with dread! Why not kill me too?—
run me through with a good sharp sword?
Oh god, the misery, anguish—
I, I'm churning with it, going under. 1435

MESSENGER:

Yes, and the dead, the woman lying there,
piles the guilt of all their deaths on you.

CREON:

How did she end her life, what bloody stroke?

MESSENGER:

She drove home to the heart with her own hand,
once she learned her son was dead ... that agony.

1440

CREON:

And the guilt is all mine—
can never be fixed on another man,
no escape for me. I killed you,
I, god help me, I admit it all!

To his attendants.

Take me away, quickly, out of sight.
I don't even exist—I'm no one. Nothing.

1445

LEADER:

Good advice, if there's any good in suffering.
Quickest is best when troubles block the way.

CREON:

Kneeling in prayer.

Come, let it come!—that best of fates for me
that brings the final day, best fate of all.
Oh quickly, now—
so I never have to see another sunrise.

1450

LEADER:

That will come when it comes;
we must deal with all that lies before us.
The future rests with the ones who tend the future.

1455

CREON:

That prayer—I poured my heart into that prayer!

LEADER:

No more prayers now. For mortal men
there is no escape from the doom we must endure.

CREON:

Take me away, I beg you, out of sight.
A rash, indiscriminate fool!
I murdered you, my son, against my will—
you too, my wife ...

1460

Wailing wreck of a man,
whom to look to? where to lean for support?

Desperately turning from HAEMON to EURYDICE on their biers.

Whatever I touch goes wrong—once more
a crushing fate's come down upon my head!

1465

The MESSENGER and attendants lead CREON into the palace.

CHORUS:

Wisdom is by far the greatest part of joy,
and reverence toward the gods must be safeguarded.
The mighty words of the proud are paid in full
with mighty blows of fate, and at long last
those blows will teach us wisdom.

1470

The old citizens exit to the side.