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DRAMA

Sophocles (496–406 B.C.)

Translated by Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald

Antigone (c. 441 B.C.)

Characters

ANTIGONE } daughters of Oedipus
ISMENE }
EURYDICE, *wife of Creon*
CREON, *King of Thebes*
HAIMON, *son of Creon*
TEIRESIAS, *a blind seer*
A SENTRY
A MESSENGER
CHORUS

Scene: Before the palace of CREON, King of Thebes. A central double door, and two lateral doors. A platform extends the length of the façade, and from this platform three steps lead down into the "orchestra" or chorus-ground.

Time: Dawn of the day after the repulse of the Argive army from the assault on Thebes.

Prologue

(ANTIGONE and ISMENE enter from the central door of the Palace.)

Antigone: Ismene, dear sister,
You would think that we had already suffered enough
For the curse on Oedipus:¹
I cannot imagine any grief
That you and I have not gone through. And now—
Have they told you of the new decree of our King Creon?

Ismene: I have heard nothing; I know
That two sisters lost two brothers, a double death
In a single hour; and I know that the Argive army
Fled in the night; but beyond this, nothing.

Antigone: I thought so. And that is why I wanted you
To come out here with me. There is something we must do.

Ismene: Why do you speak so strangely?

Antigone: Listen, Ismene:

Creon buried our brother Eteocles
With military honors, gave him a soldier's funeral,
And it was right that he should; but Polyneices,
Who fought as bravely and died as miserably,—
They say that Creon has sworn
No one shall bury him, no one mourn for him,
But his body must lie in the fields, a sweet treasure
For carrion birds to find as they search for food.
That is what they say, and our good Creon is coming here
To announce it publicly; and the penalty—
Stoning to death in the public square!

There it is,

And now you can prove what you are:

A true sister, or a traitor to your family.

Ismene: Antigone, you are mad! What could I possibly do?

Antigone: You must decide whether you will help me or not.

Ismene: I do not understand you. Help you in what?

Antigone: Ismene, I am going to bury him. Will you come?

Ismene: Bury him! You have just said the new law forbids it.

Antigone: He is my brother. And he is your brother, too.

Ismene: But think of the danger! Think what Creon will do!

Antigone: Creon is not strong enough to stand in my way.

Ismene: Ah sister!

Oedipus died, everyone hating him
For what his own search brought to light, his eyes
Ripped out by his own hand; and Iocaste died,
His mother and wife at once: she twisted the cords
That strangled her life; and our two brothers died,

¹Oedipus: Oedipus, father of Antigone, Ismene, Polyneices, and Eteocles, was King of Thebes. Unknowingly, he killed his father and married his mother. Upon learning what he had done, he put out his eyes and went into exile. Heirs to the throne, Polyneices and Eteocles eventually quarreled. Eteocles drove out Polyneices, but Polyneices returned to attack Thebes, and both brothers died in battle. Creon became King and ordered that Polyneices's body be left unburied.

Each killed by the other's sword. And we are left:
 But oh, Antigone,
 Think how much more terrible than these 45
 Our own death would be if we should go against Creon
 And do what he has forbidden! We are only women,
 We cannot fight with men, Antigone!
 The law is strong, we must give in to the law
 In this thing, and in worse. I beg the Dead 50
 To forgive me, but I am helpless: I must yield
 To those in authority. And I think it is dangerous business
 To be always meddling.

Antigone: If that is what you think,
 I should not want you, even if you asked to come. 55
 You have made your choice, you can be what you want to be
 But I will bury him; and if I must die,
 I say that this crime is holy: I shall lie down
 With him in death, and I shall be as dear
 To him as he to me. 60

It is the dead,
 Not the living, who make the longest demands:
 We die for ever . . .

You may do as you like,
 Since apparently the laws of the gods mean nothing to you. 65

Ismene: They mean a great deal to me; but I have no strength
 To break laws that were made for the public good.

Antigone: That must be your excuse, I suppose. But as for me,
 I will bury the brother I love.

Ismene: Antigone, 70
 I am so afraid for you!

Antigone: You need not be:
 You have yourself to consider, after all.

Ismene: But no one must hear of this, you must tell no one!
 I will keep it a secret, I promise! 75

Antigone: Oh tell it! Tell everyone!
 Think how they'll hate you when it all comes out
 If they learn that you knew about it all the time!

Ismene: So fiery! You should be cold, with fear.

Antigone: Perhaps. But I am doing only what I must. 80

Ismene: But can you do it? I say that you cannot.

Antigone: Very well: when my strength gives out, I shall do no more.

Ismene: Impossible things should not be tried at all.

Antigone: Go away, Ismene:
 I shall be hating you soon, and the dead will too, 85
 For your words are hateful. Leave me my foolish plan:
 I am not afraid of the danger; if it means death,
 It will not be the worst of deaths—death without
 honor.

Ismene: Go then, if you feel that you must. 90

5

You are unwise,
But a loyal friend indeed to those who love you.
(Exit into the Palace. ANTIGONE goes off, left. Enter the CHORUS.)

PARODOS² I • Strophe³ 1

Chorus: Now the long blade of the sun, lying
Level east to west, touches with glory
Thebes of the Seven Gates. Open, unlidded
Eye of golden day! O marching light
Across the eddy and rush of Dirce's stream⁴ 5
Striking the white shields of the enemy
Thrown headlong backward from the blaze of morning!

Choragos:⁵ Polyneices their commander
Roused them with windy phrases,
He the wild eagle screaming 10
Insults above our land,
His wings their shields of snow,
His crest their marshalled helms.

*Antistrophe*⁶ 1

Chorus: Against our seven gates in a yawning ring
The famished spears came onward in the night; 15
But before his jaws were sated with our blood,
Or pinefire took the garland of our towers,
He was thrown back; and as he turned, great Thebes—
No tender victim for his noisy power—
Rose like a dragon behind him, shouting war. 20

Choragos: For God hates utterly

The bray of bragging tongues;
And when he beheld their smiling,
Their swagger of golden helms,
The frown of his thunder blasted 25
Their first man from our walls.

Strophe 2

Chorus: We heard his shout of triumph high in the air
Turn to a scream; far out in a flaming arc
He fell with his windy torch, and the earth struck him.
And others storming in fury no less than his 30
Found shock of death in the dusty joy of battle.

Choragos: Seven captains at seven gates
Yielded their clanging arms to the god

²Parodos: Sung by the Chorus upon entering. ³Strophe: Sung by the Chorus as they as they move from stage right to stage left. ⁴Dirce's stream: Near Thebes. ⁵Choragos: Leader of the Chorus.

⁶Antistrophe: Sung by the Chorus as they move from stage left to stage right.

That bends the battle-line and breaks it.
These two only, brothers in blood,
Face to face in matchless rage,
Mirroring each the other's death,
Clashed in long combat.

35

Antistrophe 2

Chorus: But now in the beautiful morning of victory
Let Thebes of the many chariots sing for joy!
With hearts for dancing we'll take leave of war:
Our temples shall be sweet with hymns of praise,
And the long night shall echo with our chorus.

40

Scene 1

Choragos: But now at last our new King is coming:
Creon of Thebes, Menoikeus' son.
In this auspicious dawn of his reign
What are the new complexities
That shifting Fate has woven for him?
What is his counsel? Why has he summoned
The old men to hear him?

5

(Enter CREON from the Palace, center. He addresses the CHORUS from the top step.)

Creon: Gentlemen: I have the honor to inform you that our Ship of State, which
recent storms have threatened to destroy, has come safely to harbor at last,
guided by the merciful wisdom of Heaven. I have summoned you here this
morning because I know that I can depend upon you: your devotion to
King Laios was absolute; you never hesitated in your duty to our late ruler
Oedipus; and when Oedipus died, your loyalty was transferred to his children.
Unfortunately, as you know, his two sons, the princes Eteocles and Polyneices,
have killed each other in battle; and I, as the next in blood, have succeeded to
the full power of the throne.

10

15

I am aware, of course, that no Ruler can expect complete loyalty from his
subjects until he has been tested in office. Nevertheless, I say to you at the very
outset that I have nothing but contempt for the kind of Governor who is afraid,
for whatever reason, to follow the course that he knows is best for the State; and
as for the man who sets private friendship above the public welfare,—I have
no use for him, either. I call God to witness that if I saw my country headed
for ruin, I should not be afraid to speak out plainly; and I need hardly remind
you that I would never have any dealings with an enemy of the people. No one
values friendship more highly than I; but we must remember that friends made
at the risk of wrecking our Ship are not real friends at all.

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These are my principles, at any rate, and that is why I have made the
following decision concerning the sons of Oedipus: Eteocles, who died as a man
should die, fighting for his country, is to be buried with full military honors,
with all the ceremony that is usual when the greatest heroes die; but his brother
Polyneices, who broke his exile to come back with fire and sword against his
native city and the shrines of his fathers' gods, whose one idea was to spill the
blood of his blood and sell his own people into slavery—Polyneices, I say, is to

30

have no burial: no man is to touch him or say the least prayer for him; he shall lie on the plain, unburied; and the birds and the scavenging dogs can do with him whatever they like. 35

This is my command, and you can see the wisdom behind it. As long as I am King, no traitor is going to be honored with the loyal man. But whoever shows by word and deed that he is on the side of the State,—he shall have my respect while he is living, and my reverence when he is dead. 40

Choragos: If that is your will, Creon son of Menoikeus,
You have the right to enforce it: we are yours.

Creon: That is my will. Take care that you do your part.

Choragos: We are old men: let the younger ones carry it out.

Creon: I do not mean that: the sentries have been appointed. 45

Choragos: Then what is it that you would have us do?

Creon: You will give no support to whoever breaks this law.

Choragos: Only a crazy man is in love with death!

Creon: And death it is; yet money talks, and the wisest
Have sometimes been known to count a few coins too many. 50

(Enter SENTRY from left.)

Sentry: I'll not say that I'm out of breath from running, King, because every time I stopped to think about what I have to tell you, I felt like going back. And all the time a voice kept saying, "You fool, don't you know you're walking straight into trouble?"; and then another voice: "Yes, but if you let somebody else get the news to Creon first, it will be even worse than that for you!" But good sense won out, at least I hope it was good sense, and here I am with a story that makes no sense at all; but I'll tell it anyhow, because, as they say, what's going to happen's going to happen, and— 55

Creon: Come to the point. What have you to say?

Sentry: I did not do it. I did not see who did it. You must not punish me for what someone else has done. 60

Creon: A comprehensive defense! More effective, perhaps,
If I knew its purpose. Come: what is it?

Sentry: A dreadful thing . . . I don't know how to put it—

Creon: Out with it! 65

Sentry: Well, then;
The dead man—
Polyneices—
(Pause. The SENTRY is overcome, fumbles for words. CREON waits impassively.)
out there—
someone,— 70

New dust on the slimy flesh!
(Pause. No sign from CREON.)
Someone has given it burial that way, and
Gone. . .
(Long pause. CREON finally speaks with deadly control:)

Creon: And the man who dared do this ?

Sentry: I swear I 75

Do not know! You must believe me!

Listen:

The ground was dry, not a sign of digging, no,
Not a wheeltrack in the dust, no trace of anyone.
It was when they relieved us this morning: and one of them,
The corporal, pointed to it.

80

There it was,

The strangest—

Look:

The body, just mounded over with light dust: you see?
Not buried really, but as if they'd covered it
Just enough for the ghost's peace. And no sign
Of dogs or any wild animal that had been there.

85

And then what a scene there was! Every man of us
Accusing the other: we all proved the other man did it,
We all had proof that we could not have done it.
We were ready to take hot iron in our hands,
Walk through fire, swear by all the gods,

90

It was not I

I do not know who it was, but it was not I!

95

(CREON's rage has been mounting steadily, but the SENTRY is too intent upon his story to notice it.)

And then, when this came to nothing, someone said
A thing that silenced us and made us stare
Down at the ground: you had to be told the news,
And one of us had to do it! We threw the dice,
And the bad luck fell to me. So here I am,
No happier to be here than you are to have me:
Nobody likes the man who brings bad news.

100

Choragos: I have been wondering, King: can it be that the gods have done this?

Creon: (*Furiously.*) Stop!

Must you doddering wrecks
Go out of your heads entirely? "The gods!"
Intolerable!

105

The gods favor this corpse? Why? How had he served them?
Tried to loot their temples, burn their images,
Yes, and the whole State, and its laws with it!
Is it your senile opinion that the gods love to honor bad men?
A pious thought!—

110

No, from the very beginning

There have been those who have whispered together,
Stiff-necked anarchists, putting their heads together,
Scheming against me in alleys. These are the men,
And they have bribed my own guard to do this thing.
(*Sententiously.*) Money!

115

There's nothing in the world so demoralizing as money,

Down go your cities, 120
Homes gone, men gone, honest hearts corrupted,
Crookedness of all kinds, and all for money!

(To SENTRY.) But you—!

I swear by God and by the throne of God,
The man who has done this thing shall pay for it! 125
Find that man, bring him here to me, or your death
Will be the least of your problems: I'll string you up
Alive, and there will be certain ways to make you
Discover your employer before you die;
And the process may teach you a lesson you seem to have missed: 130
The dearest profit is sometimes all too dear:
That depends on the source. Do you understand me?
A fortune won is often misfortune.

Sentry: King, may I speak?

Creon: Your very voice distresses me. 135

Sentry: Are you sure that it is my voice, and not your conscience?

Creon: By God, he wants to analyze me now!

Sentry: It is not what I say, but what has been done, that hurts you.

Creon: You talk too much.

Sentry: Maybe; but I've done nothing. 140

Creon: Sold your soul for some silver: that's all you've done.

Sentry: How dreadful it is when the right judge judges wrong!

Creon: Your figures of speech

May entertain you now; but unless you bring me the man,
You will get little profit from them in the end. 145

(Exit CREON into the Palace.)

Sentry: "Bring me the man"—!

I'd like nothing better than bringing him the man!

But bring him or not, you have seen the last of me here.

At any rate, I am safe!

(Exit SENTRY.)

ODE I • Strophe 1

Chorus: Numberless are the world's wonders, but none
More wonderful than man; the stormgray sea
Yields to his prow, the huge crests bear him high;
Earth, holy and inexhaustible, is graven
With shining furrows where his plows have gone 5
Year after year, the timeless labor of stallions.

Antistrophe 1

The lightboned birds and beasts that cling to cover,
The lithe fish lighting their reaches of dim water,
All are taken, tamed in the net of his mind;
The lion on the hill, the wild horse windy-maned, 10
Resign to him; and his blunt yoke has broken
The sultry shoulders of the mountain bull.

Strophe 2

Words also, and thought as rapid as air,
He fashions to his good use; statecraft is his,
And his the skill that deflects the arrows of snow,
The spears of winter rain: from every wind
He has made himself secure—from all but one:
In the late wind of death he cannot stand.

15

Antistrophe 2

O clear intelligence, force beyond all measure!
O fate of man, working both good and evil!
When the laws are kept, how proudly his city stands!
When the laws are broken, what of his city then?
Never may the anarchic man find rest at my hearth,
Never be it said that my thoughts are his thoughts.

20

Scene II

(Re-enter SENTRY leading ANTIGONE.)

Choragos: What does this mean? Surely this captive woman
Is the Princess, Antigone. Why should she be taken?

Sentry: Here is the one who did it! We caught her
In the very act of burying him.—Where is Creon?

Choragos: Just coming from the house.

5

(Enter CREON, center.)

Creon: What has happened?
Why have you come back so soon?

Sentry: *(Expansively.)*

O King,

A man should never be too sure of anything:
I would have sworn
That you'd not see me here again: your anger
Frightened me so, and the things you threatened me with;
But how could I tell then
That I'd be able to solve the case so soon?
No dice-throwing this time: I was only too glad to come!
Here is this woman. She is the guilty one:
We found her trying to bury him.
Take her, then; question her; judge her as you will.
I am through with the whole thing now, and glad of it.

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Creon: But this is Antigone! Why have you brought her here?

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Sentry: She was burying him, I tell you!

Creon: *(Severely.)*

Is this the truth?

Sentry: I saw her with my own eyes. Can I say more?

Creon: The details: come, tell me quickly!

Sentry: It was like this:

25

After those terrible threats of yours, King,
 We went back and brushed the dust away from the body.
 The flesh was soft by now, and stinking,
 So we sat on a hill to windward and kept guard.
 No napping this time! We kept each other awake. 30
 But nothing happened until the white round sun
 Whirled in the center of the round sky over us:
 Then, suddenly,
 A storm of dust roared up from the earth, and the sky
 Went out, the plain vanished with all its trees 35
 In the stinging dark. We closed our eyes and endured it.
 The whirlwind lasted a long time, but it passed;
 And then we looked, and there was Antigone!
 I have seen
 A mother bird come back to a stripped nest, heard 40
 Her crying bitterly a broken note or two
 For the young ones stolen. Just so, when this girl
 Found the bare corpse, and all her love's work wasted,
 She wept, and cried on heaven to damn the hands
 That had done this thing. 45
 And then she brought more dust
 And sprinkled wine three times for her brother's ghost.
 We ran and took her at once. She was not afraid,
 Not even when we charged her with what she had done.
 She denied nothing. 50
 And this was a comfort to me.
 And some uneasiness: for it is a good thing
 To escape from death, but it is no great pleasure
 To bring death to a friend.
 Yet I always say 55
 There is nothing so comfortable as your own safe skin!
Creon: (*Slowly, dangerously.*) And you, Antigone,
 You with your head hanging,—do you confess this thing?
Antigone: I do. I deny nothing.
Creon: (*To SENTRY.*) You may go. 60
 (*Exit SENTRY.*)
 (*To ANTIGONE.*) Tell me, tell me briefly:
 Had you heard my proclamation touching this matter?
Antigone: It was public. Could I help hearing it?
Creon: And yet you dared defy the law.
Antigone: I dared. 65
 It was not God's proclamation. That final Justice
 That rules the world below makes no such laws.
 Your edict, King, was strong,
 But all your strength is weakness itself against
 The immortal unrecorded laws of God. 70

They are not merely now: they were, and shall be,
Operative for ever, beyond man utterly.

I knew I must die, even without your decree:
I am only mortal. And if I must die
Now, before it is my time to die,
Surely this is no hardship: can anyone
Living, as I live, with evil all about me,
Think Death less than a friend? This death of mine
Is of no importance; but if I had left my brother
Lying in death unburied, I should have suffered.
Now I do not.

75

80

You smile at me. Ah Creon,
Think me a fool, if you like; but it may well be
That a fool convicts me of folly.

Choragos: Like father, like daughter: both headstrong, deaf to reason!
She has never learned to yield.

85

Creon: She has much to learn.

The inflexible heart breaks first, the toughest iron
Cracks first, and the wildest horses bend their necks
At the pull of the smallest curb.

90

Pride? In a slave?

This girl is guilty of a double insolence,
Breaking the given laws and boasting of it.
Who is the man here,
She or I, if this crime goes unpunished?
Sister's child, or more than sister's child,
Or closer yet in blood—she and her sister
Win bitter death for this!

95

(*To SERVANTS.*) Go, some of you,
Arrest Ismene. I accuse her equally.
Bring her: you will find her sniffing in the house there.

100

Her mind's a traitor: crimes kept in the dark
Cry for light, and the guardian brain shudders;
But how much worse than this
Is brazen boasting of barefaced anarchy!

105

Antigone: Creon, what more do you want than my death?

Creon: Nothing.
That gives me everything.

Antigone: Then I beg you: kill me.

This talking is a great weariness: your words
Are distasteful to me, and I am sure that mine
Seem so to you. And yet they should not seem so:
I should have praise and honor for what I have done.
All these men here would praise me
Were their lips not frozen shut with fear of you.
(*Bitterly.*) Ah the good fortune of kings,
Licensed to say and do whatever they please!

110

115

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Creon: You are alone here in that opinion.

Antigone: No, they are with me. But they keep their tongues in leash. 120

Creon: Maybe. But you are guilty, and they are not.

Antigone: There is no guilt in reverence for the dead.

Creon: But Eteocles—was he not your brother too?

Antigone: My brother too.

Creon: And you insult his memory? 125

Antigone: (*Softly.*) The dead man would not say that I insult it.

Creon: He would: for you honor a traitor as much as him.

Antigone: His own brother; traitor or not, and equal in blood.

Creon: He made war on his country. Eteocles defended it.

Antigone: Nevertheless, there are honors due all the dead.

Creon: But not the same for the wicked as for the just. 130

Antigone: Ah Creon, Creon,
Which of us can say what the gods hold wicked?

Creon: An enemy is an enemy, even dead.

Antigone: It is my nature to join in love, not hate.

Creon: (*Finally losing patience.*) Go join them, then; if you must have your love, 135
Find it in hell!

Choragos: But see, Ismene comes:
(*Enter ISMENE, guarded.*)

Those tears are sisterly, the cloud
That shadows her eyes rains down gentle sorrow.

Creon: You too, Ismene, 140
Snake in my ordered house, sucking my blood
Stealthily—and all the time I never knew
That these two sisters were aiming at my throne!

Ismene,

Do you confess your share in this crime, or deny it? 145
Answer me.

Ismene: Yes, if she will let me say so. I am guilty.

Antigone: (*Coldly.*) No, Ismene. You have no right to say so.
You would not help me, and I will not have you help me. 150

Ismene: But now I know what you meant; and I am here
To join you, to take my share of punishment.

Antigone: The dead man and the gods who rule the dead
Know whose act this was. Words are not friends.

Ismene: Do you refuse me, Antigone? I want to die with you:
I too have a duty that I must discharge to the dead. 155

Antigone: You shall not lessen my death by sharing it.

Ismene: What do I care for life when you are dead?

Antigone: Ask Creon. You're always hanging on his opinions.

Ismene: You are laughing at me. Why, Antigone?

Antigone: It's a joyless laughter, Ismene. 160

Ismene: But can I do nothing?

Antigone: Yes. Save yourself. I shall not envy you.

There are those who will praise you; I shall have honor, too.
Ismene: But we are equally guilty!
Antigone: No more, Ismene. 165
 You are alive, but I belong to Death.
Creon: (*To the CHORUS.*) Gentlemen, I beg you to observe these girls:
 One has just now lost her mind; the other,
 It seems, has never had a mind at all.
Ismene: Grief teaches the steadiest minds to waver, King. 170
Creon: Yours certainly did, when you assumed guilt with the guilty!
Ismene: But how could I go on living without her?
Creon: You are.
 She is already dead.
Ismene: But your own son's bride! 175
Creon: There are places enough for him to push his plow.
 I want no wicked women for my sons!
Ismene: O dearest Haimon, how your father wrongs you!
Creon: I've had enough of your childish talk of marriage!
Choragos: Do you really intend to steal this girl from your son? 180
Creon: No; Death will do that for me.
Choragos: Then she must die?
Creon: You dazzle me.
 —But enough of this talk!
 (*To GUARDS.*) You, there, take them away and guard them well:
 For they are but women, and even brave men run
 When they see Death coming.
 (*Exeunt ISMENE, ANTIGONE, and GUARDS.*)

ODE II • Strophe 1

Chorus: Fortunate is the man who has never tasted God's vengeance!
 Where once the anger of heaven has struck, that house is shaken
 For ever: damnation rises behind each child
 Like a wave cresting out of the black northeast,
 When the long darkness under sea roars up 5
 And bursts drumming death upon the windwhipped sand.
Antistrophe 1
 I have seen this gathering sorrow from time long past
 Loom upon Oedipus' children: generation from generation
 Takes the compulsive rage of the enemy god.
 So lately this last flower of Oedipus' line 10
 Drank the sunlight! but now a passionate word
 And a handful of dust have closed up all its beauty.
Strophe 2
 What mortal arrogance
 Transcends the wrath of Zeus?
 Sleep cannot lull him, nor the effortless long months 15

Of the timeless gods: but he is young forever,
And his house is the shining day of high Olympos.

All that is and shall be,

And all the past, is his.

No pride on earth is free of the curse of heaven.

20

Antistrophe 2

The straying dreams of men

May bring them ghosts of joy:

But as they drowse, the waking embers burn them;

Or they walk with fixed eyes, as blind men walk.

But the ancient wisdom speaks for our own time:

25

Fate works most for woe

With Folly's fairest show.

Man's little pleasure is the spring of sorrow.

Scene III

Choragos: But here is Haimon, King, the last of all your sons.

Is it grief for Antigone that brings him here,

And bitterness at being robbed of his bride?

(Enter HAIMON.)

Creon: We shall soon see, and no need of diviners.

—Son,

5

You have heard my final judgment on that girl:

Have you come here hating me, or have you come

With deference and with love, whatever I do?

Haimon: I am your son, father. You are my guide.

You make things clear for me, and I obey you.

10

No marriage means more to me than your continuing wisdom.

Creon: Good. That is the way to behave: subordinate

Everything else, my son, to your father's will.

This is what a man prays for, that he may get

15

Sons attentive and dutiful in his house,

Each one hating his father's enemies,

Honoring his father's friends. But if his sons

Fail him, if they turn out unprofitably,

What has he fathered but trouble for himself

20

And amusement for the malicious?

So you are right

Not to lose your head over this woman.

Your pleasure with her would soon grow cold, Haimon.

And then you'd have a hellcat in bed and elsewhere.

25

Let her find her husband in Hell!

Of all the people in this city, only she

Has had contempt for my law and broken it.

Do you want me to show myself weak before the people?

Or to break my sworn word? No, and I will not.

The woman dies.
I suppose she'll plead "family ties." Well, let her,
If I permit my own family to rebel,
How shall I earn the world's obedience?
Show me the man who keeps his house in hand,
He's fit for public authority.

30

I'll have no dealings
With law-breakers, critics of the government:
Whoever is chosen to govern should be obeyed—
Must be obeyed, in all things, great and small,
Just and unjust! O Haimon,
The man who knows how to obey, and that man only,
Knows how to give commands when the time comes.
You can depend on him, no matter how fast
The spears come: he's a good soldier, he'll stick it out.
Anarchy, anarchy! Show me a greater evil!
This is why cities tumble and the great houses rain down,
This is what scatters armies!
No, no: good lives are made so by discipline.
We keep the laws then, and the lawmakers,
And no woman shall seduce us. If we must lose,
Let's lose to a man, at least! Is a woman stronger than we?

35

40

45

50

Choragos: Unless time has rusted my wits,
What you say, King, is said with point and dignity.

Haimon: (*Boyishly earnest.*) Father:

Reason is God's crowning gift to man, and you are right.
To warn me against losing mine. I cannot say—
I hope that I shall never want to say!—that you
Have reasoned badly. Yet there are other men
Who can reason, too; and their opinions might be helpful.
You are not in a position to know everything
That people say or do, or what they feel:
Your temper terrifies them—everyone
Will tell you only what you like to hear.
But I, at any rate, can listen; and I have heard them
Muttering and whispering in the dark about this girl.
They say no woman has ever, so unreasonably,
Died so shameful a death for a generous act:
"She covered her brother's body. Is this indecent?
She kept him from dogs and vultures. Is this a crime?
Death?—She should have all the honor that we can give her!"

55

60

65

70

This is the way they talk out there in the city.

You must believe me:
Nothing is closer to me than your happiness.
What could be closer? Must not any son
Value his father's fortune as his father does his?

75

29

I beg you, do not be unchangeable:
 Do not believe that you alone can be right.
 The man who thinks that,
 The man who maintains that only he has the power
 To reason correctly, the gift to speak, the soul— 80
 A man like that, when you know him, turns out empty.
 It is not reason never to yield to reason!

In flood time you can see how some trees bend,
 And because they bend, even their twigs are safe,
 While stubborn trees are torn up, roots and all. 85
 And the same thing happens in sailing:
 Make your sheet fast, never slacken,—and over you go,
 Head over heels and under: and there's your voyage.
 Forget you are angry! Let yourself be moved!
 I know I am young; but please let me say this: 90
 The ideal condition
 Would be, I admit, that men should be right by instinct;
 But since we are all too likely to go astray,
 The reasonable thing is to learn from those who can teach. 95

Choragos: You will do well to listen to him. King,
 If what he says is sensible. And you, Haimon,
 Must listen to your father.—Both speak well.

Creon: You consider it right for a man of my years and experience to
 go to school to a boy? 100

Haimon: It is not right
 If I am wrong. But if I am young, and right.
 What does my age matter?

Creon: You think it right to stand up for an anarchist?

Haimon: Not at all. I pay no respect to criminals. 105

Creon: Then she is not a criminal?

Haimon: The City would deny it, to a man.

Creon: And the City proposes to teach me how to rule?

Haimon: Ah. Who is it that's talking like a boy now?

Creon: My voice is the one voice giving orders in this City! 110

Haimon: It is no City if it takes orders from one voice.

Creon: The State is the King!

Haimon: Yes, if the State is a desert.
 (Pause.)

Creon: This boy, it seems, has sold out to a woman.

Haimon: If you are a woman: my concern is only for you. 115

Creon: So? Your "concern"! In a public brawl with your father!

Haimon: How about you, in a public brawl with justice?

Creon: With justice, when all that I do is within my rights?

Haimon: You have no right to trample God's right.

Creon: (Completely out of control.) Fool, adolescent fool! Taken in by a woman!

Haimon: You'll never see me taken in by anything vile. 120

Creon: Every word you say is for her!

Of warm lights and all-night vigil
 In the soft face of a girl:
 Sea-wanderer, forest-visitor!
 Even the pure Immortals cannot escape you,
 And mortal man, in his one day's dusk,
 Trembles before your glory.

5

Antistrophe

Surely you swerve upon ruin
 The just man's consenting heart,
 As here you have made bright anger
 Strike between father and son—
 And none has conquered but Love!
 A girl's glance working the will of heaven:
 Pleasure to her alone who mocks us,
 Merciless Aphrodite.

10

15

Scene IV

Choragos: (As ANTIGONE enters guarded.)

But I can no longer stand in awe of this,
 Nor, seeing what I see, keep back my tears.
 Here is Antigone, passing to that chamber
 Where all find sleep at last.

Strophe 1

Antigone: Look upon me, friends, and pity me
 Turning back at the night's edge to say
 Good-by to the sun, that shines for me no longer;
 Now sleepy Death
 Summons me down to Acheron, that cold shore:
 There is no bridesong there, nor any music.

5

10

Chorus: Yet not unpraised, not without a kind of honor,
 You walk at last into the underworld;
 Untouched by sickness, broken by no sword.
 What woman has ever found your way to death?

Antistrophe 1

Antigone: How often I have heard the story of Niobe,
 Tantalos' wretched daughter, how the stone
 Clung fast about her, ivy-close: and they say
 The rain falls endlessly
 And sifting soft snow; her tears are never done.
 I feel the loneliness of her death in mine.

15

20

Chorus: But she was born of heaven, and you
 Are woman, woman-born. If her death is yours,
 A mortal woman's, is this not for you
 Glory in our world and in the world beyond?

Strophe 2

Antigone: You laugh at me. Ah, friends, friends, 25
Can you not wait until I am dead? O Thebes,
O men many-charioted, in love with Fortune,
Dear springs of Dirce, sacred Theban grove,
Be witnesses for me, denied all pity,
Unjustly judged! and think a word of love 30
For her whose path turns
Under dark earth, where there are no more tears.

Chorus: You have passed beyond human daring and come at last
Into a place of stone where Justice sits.
I cannot tell 35
What shape of your father's guilt appears in this.

Antistrophe 2

Antigone: You have touched it at last: that bridal bed
Unspeakable, horror of son and mother mingling:
Their crime, infection of all our family!
O Oedipus, father and brother! 40
Your marriage strikes from the grave to murder mine.
I have been a stranger here in my own land:
All my life
The blasphemy of my birth has followed me.

Chorus: Reverence is a virtue, but strength 45
Lives in established law: that must prevail.
You have made your choice,
Your death is the doing of your conscious hand.

Epode

Antigone: Then let me go, since all your words are bitter, 50
And the very light of the sun is cold to me.
Lead me to my vigil, where I must have
Neither love nor lamentation; no song, but silence.

(CREON interrupts impatiently.)

Creon: If dirges and planned lamentations could put off death,
Men would be singing for ever.
(To the SERVANTS.) Take her, go! 55
You know your orders: take her to the vault
And leave her alone there. And if she lives or dies,
That's her affair, not ours: our hands are clean.

Antigone: O tomb, vaulted bride-bed in eternal rock, 60
Soon I shall be with my own again
Where Persephone welcomes the thin ghosts underground:
And I shall see my father again, and you, mother,
And dearest Polyneices—

dearest indeed
To me, since it was my hand 65
That washed him clean and poured the ritual wine:
And my reward is death before my time!

And yet, as men's hearts know, I have done no wrong.
I have not sinned before God. Or if I have,
I shall know the truth in death. But if the guilt
Lies upon Creon who judged me, then, I pray,
May his punishment equal my own.

70

Choragos: O passionate heart,
Unyielding, tormented still by the same winds!

Creon: Her guards shall have good cause to regret their delaying.

75

Antigone: Ah! That voice is like the voice of death!

Creon: I can give you no reason to think you are mistaken.

Antigone: Thebes, and you my fathers' gods,

And rulers of Thebes, you see me now, the last

Unhappy daughter of a line of kings,

80

Your kings, led away to death. You will remember

What things I suffer, and at what men's hands,

Because I would not transgress the laws of heaven.

(*To the GUARDS, simply.*) Come: let us wait no longer.

(*Exit ANTIGONE, left, guarded.*)

ODE IV • Strophe 1

Chorus: All Danae's beauty was locked away
In a brazen cell where the sunlight could not come:
A small room, still as any grave, enclosed her.
Yet she was a princess too,
And Zeus in a rain of gold poured love upon her.
O child, child,
No power in wealth or war
Or tough sea-blackened ships
Can prevail against untiring Destiny!

5

Antistrophe 1

And Dryas' son¹ also, that furious king,
Bore the god's prisoning anger for his pride:
Sealed up by Dionysos in deaf stone,
His madness died among echoes.
So at the last he learned what dreadful power
His tongue had mocked:
For he had profaned the revels,
And fired the wrath of the nine
Implacable Sisters² that love the sound of the flute.

10

15

Strophe 2

And old men tell a half-remembered tale
Of horror done where a dark ledge splits the sea

20

¹Dryas' son: Lyeurgus, King of Thrace. ²Implacable Sisters: The nine Muses.

And a double surf beats on the gray shores:
 How a king's new woman,³ sick
 With hatred for the queen he had imprisoned,
 Ripped out his two sons' eyes with her bloody hands
 While grinning Ares watched the shuttle plunge
 Four times: four blind wounds crying for revenge,

25

Antistrophe 2

Crying, tears and blood mingled.—Piteously born.
 Those sons whose mother was of heavenly birth!
 Her father was the god of the North Wind
 And she was cradled by gales,
 She raced with young colts on the glittering hills
 And walked untrammelled in the open light:
 But in her marriage deathless Fate found means
 To build a tomb like yours for all her joy.

30

Scene V

(Enter blind TEIRESIAS, led by a boy. The opening speeches of TEIRESIAS should be in singsong contrast to the realistic CREON.)

Teiresias: This is the way the blind man comes, Princes, Princes,
 Lock-step, two heads lit by the eyes of one.

Creon: What new thing have you to tell us, Old Teiresias?

Teiresias: I have much to tell you: listen to the prophet, Creon.

Creon: I am not aware that I have ever failed to listen.

5

Teiresias: Then you have done wisely, King, and ruled well.

Creon: I admit my debt to you. But what have you to say?

Teiresias: This, Creon: you stand once more on the edge of fate.

Creon: What do you mean? Your words are a kind of dread.

Teiresias: Listen, Creon:

10

I was sitting in my chair of augury, at the place
 Where the birds gather about me. They were all a-chatter,
 As is their habit, when suddenly I heard
 A strange note in their jangling, a scream, a
 Whirring fury; I knew that they were fighting,
 Tearing each other, dying
 In a whirlwind of wings clashing. And I was afraid.
 I began the rites of burnt-offering at the altar,
 But Hephaistos failed me: instead of bright flame,
 There was only the sputtering slime of the fat thighflesh
 Melting: the entrails dissolved in gray smoke,
 The bare bone burst from the welter. And no blaze!

15

20

This was a sign from heaven. My boy described it,
 Seeing for me as I see for others.

³king's new woman: Reference to Eidothea, wife of King Phineas.

I tell you, Creon, you yourself have brought 25
 This new calamity upon us. Our hearths and altars
 Are stained with the corruption of dogs and carrion birds
 That glut themselves on the corpse of Oedipus' son.
 The gods are deaf when we pray to them, their fire
 Recoils from our offering, their birds of omen 30
 Have no cry of comfort, for they are gorged
 With the thick blood of the dead.

O my son,
 These are no trifles! Think: all men make mistakes,
 But a good man yields when he knows his course is wrong, 35
 And repairs the evil. The only crime is pride.

Give in to the dead man, then: do not fight with a corpse—
 What glory is it to kill a man who is dead?
 Think, I beg you:
 It is for your own good that I speak as I do. 40
 You should be able to yield for your own good.

Creon: It seems that prophets have made me their special province.
 All my life long
 I have been a kind of butt for the dull arrows
 Of doddering fortune-tellers! 45

No, Teiresias:
 If your birds—if the great eagles of God himself
 Should carry him stinking bit by bit to heaven,
 I would not yield. I am not afraid of pollution:
 No man can defile the gods. 50

Do what you will,
 Go into business, make money, speculate
 In India gold or that synthetic gold from Sardis,
 Get rich otherwise than by my consent to bury him.
 Teiresias, it is a sorry thing when a wise man 55
 Sells his wisdom, lets out his words for hire!

Teiresias: Ah Creon! Is there no man left in the world—
Creon: To do what?—Come, let's have the aphorism!
Teiresias: No man who knows that wisdom outweighs any wealth?
Creon: As surely as bribes are baser than any baseness. 60
Teiresias: You are sick, Creon! You are deathly sick!
Creon: As you say: it is not my place to challenge a prophet.
Teiresias: Yet you have said my prophecy is for sale.
Creon: The generation of prophets has always loved gold.
Teiresias: The generation of kings has always loved brass. 65
Creon: You forget yourself! You are speaking to your King.
Teiresias: I know it. You are a king because of me. ??
Creon: You have a certain skill; but you have sold out.
Teiresias: King, you will drive me to words that—
Creon: Say them, say them! 70
 Only remember: I will not pay you for them.

Teiresias: No, you will find them too costly.

Creon: No doubt. Speak:

Whatever you say, you will not change my will.

Teiresias: Then take this, and take it to heart!

The time is not far off when you shall pay back
Corpse for corpse, flesh of your own flesh.

You have thrust the child of this world into living night,
You have kept from the gods below the child that is theirs:

The one in a grave before her death, the other,

Dead, denied the grave. This is your crime:

And the Furies and the dark gods of Hell

Are swift with terrible punishment for you.

Do you want to buy me now, Creon?

Not many days,

And your house will be full of men and women weeping.

And curses will be hurled at you from far

Cities grieving for sons unburied, left to rot

Before the walls of Thebes.

These are my arrows, Creon: they are all for you.

(*To BOY.*) But come, child: lead me home.

Let him waste his fine anger upon younger men.

Maybe he will learn at last

To control a wiser tongue in a better head.

(*Exit TEIRESIAS.*)

Choragos: The old man has gone, King, but his words

Remain to plague us. I am old, too,

But I cannot remember that he was ever false.

Creon: That is true. . . . It troubles me.

Oh it is hard to give in! but it is worse

To risk everything for stubborn pride.

Choragos: Creon: take my advice.

Creon: What shall I do?

Choragos: Go quickly: free Antigone from her vault

And build a tomb for the body of Polyneices.

Creon: You would have me do this?

Choragos: Creon, yes!

And it must be done at once: God moves

Swiftly to cancel the folly of stubborn men.

Creon: It is hard to deny the heart! But I

Will do it: I will not fight with destiny.

Choragos: You must go yourself, you cannot leave it to others.

Creon: I will go.

—Bring axes, servants:

Come with me to the tomb. I buried her, I

Will set her free.

Oh quickly!
 My mind misgives—
 The laws of the gods are mighty, and a man must serve them
 To the last day of his life!
 (Exit CREON.)

PAEAN • Strophe 1

Choragos: God of many names

Chorus: O Iacchos
 son

of Kadmeian Semele

O born of the Thunder!
 Guardian of the West
 Regent

of Eleusis' plain

O Prince of maenad Thebes
 and the Dragon Field by rippling Ismenos:

Antistrophe 1

Choragos: God of many names

Chorus: the flame of torches
 flares on our hills

the nymphs of Iacchos
 dance at the spring of Castalia:
 From the vine-close mountain

come ah come in ivy:
*Evohe evohel*¹ sings through the streets of Thebes

Strophe 2

Choragos: God of many names

Chorus: Iacchos of Thebes
 heavenly Child

of Semele bride of the Thunderer!
 The shadow of plague is upon us:

come
 with clement feet

oh come from Parnasos
 down the long slopes

across the lamenting water

Antistrophe 2

Choragos: Io Fire! Chorister of the throbbing stars!

O purest among the voices of the night!
 Thou son of God, blaze for us!

Chorus: Come with choric rapture of circling Maenads

¹*Evohe evohel*: "Come forth; come forth!"

Who cry *Io Iacche!*
God of many names!

EXODUS

(Enter MESSENGER, left.)

Messenger: Men of the line of Kadmos, you who live
Near Amphion's citadel²

I cannot say
Of any condition of human life "This is fixed,
This is clearly good, or bad." Fate raises up,
And Fate casts down the happy and unhappy alike:
No man can foretell his Fate.

Take the case of Creon:
Creon was happy once, as I count happiness:
Victorious in battle, sole governor of the land,
Fortunate father of children nobly born.
And now it has all gone from him! Who can say
That a man is still alive when his life's joy fails?
He is a walking dead man. Grant him rich,
Let him live like a king in his great house:
If his pleasure is gone, I would not give
So much as the shadow of smoke for all he owns.

Choragos: Your words hint at sorrow: what is your news for us?

Messenger: They are dead. The living are guilty of their death.

Choragos: Who is guilty? Who is dead? Speak!

Messenger: Haimon.
Haimon is dead; and the hand that killed him
Is his own hand.

Choragos: His father's? or his own?

Messenger: His own, driven mad by the murder his father had done.

Choragos: Teiresias, Teiresias, how clearly you saw it all!

Messenger: This is my news: you must draw what conclusions you can from it.

Choragos: But look: Eurydice, our Queen:
Has she overheard us?

(Enter EURYDICE from the Palace, center.)

Eurydice: I have heard something, friends:
As I was unlocking the gate of Pallas' shrine,
For I needed her help today, I heard a voice
Telling of some new sorrow. And I fainted
There at the temple with all my maidens about me.
But speak again: whatever it is, I can bear it:
Grief and I are no strangers.

Messenger: Dearest Lady,
I will tell you plainly all that I have seen.

¹Exodos: Concluding scene. ²Amphion's citadel: Thebes.

I shall not try to comfort you: what is the use,
Since comfort could lie only in what is not true?
The truth is always best.

40

I went with Creon
To the outer plain where Polyneices was lying,
No friend to pity him, his body shredded by dogs.
We made our prayers in that place to Hecate
And Pluto, that they would be merciful. And we bathed
The corpse with holy water, and we brought
Fresh-broken branches to burn what was left of it,
And upon the urn we heaped up a towering barrow
Of the earth of his own land.

45

50

When we were done, we ran
To the vault where Antigone lay on her couch of stone.
One of the servants had gone ahead,
And while he was yet far off he heard a voice
Grieving within the chamber, and he came back
And told Creon. And as the King went closer,
The air was full of wailing, the words lost,
And he begged us to make all haste. "Am I a prophet?"
He said, weeping, "And must I walk this road,
The saddest of all that I have gone before?
My son's voice calls me on. Oh quickly, quickly!
Look through the crevice there, and tell me
If it is Haimon, or some deception of the gods!"

55

60

We obeyed; and in the cavern's farthest corner
We saw her lying:
She had made a noose of her fine linen veil
And hanged herself. Haimon lay beside her,
His arms about her waist, lamenting her,
His love lost under ground, crying out
That his father had stolen her away from him.

65

70

When Creon saw him the tears rushed to his eyes
And he called to him: "What have you done, child?"

Speak to me.

What are you thinking that makes your eyes so strange?
O my son, my son, I come to you on my knees!"
But Haimon spat in his face. He said not a word,
Staring—

75

And suddenly drew his sword
And lunged. Creon shrank back, the blade missed;
and the boy,
Desperate against himself, drove it half its length
into his own side, and fell. And as he died
He gathered Antigone close in his arms again,
Choking, his blood bright red on her white cheek.

80

And now he lies dead with the dead, and she is his
At last, his bride in the houses of the dead.

85

(Exit EURYDICE into the Palace.)

Choragos: She has left us without a word. What can this mean?

Messenger: It troubles me, too; yet she knows what is best,
Her grief is too great for public lamentation,
And doubtless she has gone to her chamber to weep
For her dead son, leading her maidens in his dirge.

90

(Pause.)

Choragos: It may be so: but I fear this deep silence.

Messenger: I will see what she is doing. I will go in.

*(Exit MESSENGER into the Palace. Enter CREON with attendants,
bearing HAIMON's body.)*

Choragos: But here is the King himself: oh look at him,
Bearing his own damnation in his arms.

95

Creon: Nothing you say can touch me any more.
My own blind heart has brought me
From darkness to final darkness. Here you see
The father murdering, the murdered son—
And all my civic wisdom!

100

Haimon my son, so young, so young to die,
I was the fool, not you; and you died for me.

Choragos: That is the truth; but you were late in learning it.

Creon: This truth is hard to bear. Surely a god
Has crushed me beneath the hugest weight of heaven,
And driven me headlong a barbaric way
To trample out the thing I held most dear.

105

The pains that men will take to come to pain!

(Enter MESSENGER from the Palace.)

Messenger: The burden you carry in your hands is heavy,
But it is not all: you will find more in your house.

110

Creon: What burden worse than this shall I find there?

Messenger: The Queen is dead.

Creon: O port of death, deaf world,
Is there no pity for me? And you, Angel of evil,
I was dead, and your words are death again.
Is it true, boy? Can it be true?

115

Is my wife dead? Has death bred death?

Messenger: You can see for yourself.

(The doors are opened, and the body of EURYDICE is disclosed within.)

Creon: Oh pity!

All true, all true, and more than I can bear!
O my wife, my son!

120

Messenger: She stood before the altar, and her heart
 Welcomed the knife her own hand guided,
 And a great cry burst from her lips for Megareus³ dead,
 And for Haimon dead, her sons; and her last breath
 Was a curse for their father, the murderer of her sons.
 And she fell, and the dark flowed in through her closing eyes. 125

Creon: O God, I am sick with fear.
 Are there no swords here? Has no one a blow for me?

Messenger: Her curse is upon you for the deaths of both. 130

Creon: It is right that it should be. I alone am guilty.
 I know it, and I say it. Lead me in,
 Quickly, friends.
 I have neither life nor substance. Lead me in.

Choragos: You are right, if there can be right in so much wrong. 135
 The briefest way is best in a world of sorrow.

Creon: Let it come,
 Let death come quickly, and be kind to me.
 I would not ever see the sun again.

Choragos: All that will come when it will; but we, meanwhile, 140
 Have much to do. Leave the future to itself.

Creon: All my heart was in that prayer!

Choragos: Then do not pray any more: the sky is deaf.

Creon: Lead me away. I have been rash and foolish.
 I have killed my son and my wife. 145
 I look for comfort; my comfort lies here dead.
 Whatever my hands have touched has come to nothing.
 Fate has brought all my pride to a thought of dust.
 (As CREON is being led into the house, the CHORAGOS advances and
 speaks directly to the audience.)

Choragos: There is no happiness where there is no wisdom;
 No wisdom but in submission to the gods. 150
 Big words are always punished,
 And proud men in old age learn to be wise.

Explorations of the Text

1. How did Eteocles and Polyneices die?
 Why is Eteocles buried with honor but Polyneices left to decompose in the open? Why does Antigone believe that they should both be buried? What is Ismene's position?
2. Who helps to convince Creon to free Antigone? Why might Sophocles have made Creon change his mind? What effect does this have on the play's message?
3. Why does Creon's son Haimon die?
 Give more than one answer—his death can be explained literally but also within the context of the play's deeper meaning. Who else dies?
4. What is the role of the chorus in this play? What is the role of Teiresias?
5. In Greek tragedy, a character often suffers for possessing a tragic flaw. One example of a tragic flaw is *hubris*, or excessive pride. In *Antigone*, who is

³Megareus: Son of Creon, killed in the attack on Thebes.