

CHARACTERS

ANTIGONE daughter of Oedipus and Jocasta
 ISMENE sister of Antigone
 KREON king of Thebes; brother of Jocasta
 HAIMON son of Kreon and Eurydice, fiancé of Antigone
 TEIRESIAS the prophet
 EURYDICE wife of Kreon
 SENTRY
 MESSENGER
 KORYPHAIOS chorus leader
 CHORUS of elderly Theban nobles

Attendants, armed slaves, boy

Line numbers in the right-hand margin of the text refer to the English translation only, and the Notes at p. 75 are keyed to these lines. The bracketed line numbers in the running headlines refer to the Greek text.

A square in front of the Theban palace: The palace faces south. In the foreground is an altar. This is the hour of dawn. As the action proceeds, the area gradually brightens. ANTIGONE waits on the audience's side of the altar. ISMENE comes forward from the palace and approaches hesitantly.

ANTIGONE Ismene?

Let me see your face:
 my own, only sister,
 can you see
 because we are the survivors
 today Zeus is completing in us the ceremony
 of pain and dishonor and disaster and shame
 that began with Oedipus?
 And today, again:
 the proclamation, under the rule of war
 but binding, they say, on every citizen.
 Haven't you heard? Don't you see
 hatred marches on love
 when friends, our own people, our family
 are treated as enemies?

10

ISMENE No, Antigone,
 since the day we lost our brothers,
 both in one day, both to each other,
 I haven't thought of love—happy or painful, either.
 Last night the enemy army left.
 I know nothing further.
 Nothing makes me happy, nothing hurts me any more.

20

ANTIGONE I know. But I called you here for a reason:
 to talk alone.

ISMENE I can see there's something important. Tell me.

ANTIGONE It's the burial. It's our brothers:
 Kreon, honoring one and casting the other out.
 They say he has buried Eteokles
 with full and just and lawful honors due the dead;
 but Polyneices, who died as pitifully—
 Kreon has proclaimed that his body will stay unburied;
 no mourners, no tomb, no tears,
 a tasty meal for vultures.
 That's what they say this man of good will.
 Kreon has proclaimed, for you, yes and for me;
 and he is coming here to announce it
 clearly, so that everyone will know.
 And they say he intends to enforce it:
 "Whoever shall perform any prohibited act,
 shall be liable to the penalty of death by stoning
 in the presence of the assembled citizens."
 You can see that you'll have to act quickly
 to prove you are as brave today
 as you were born to be.

ISMENE What can I accomplish? There's nothing left.
 What can I do or undo?

ANTIGONE Will you join with me? Will you help?
 Ask yourself that.

ISMENE Help with what?

ANTIGONE The body. Give me your hand. Help me.

ISMENE You mean to bury him? In spite of the edict?

ANTIGONE He's my brother and yours too;
 and whether you will or not, I'll stand by him.

ISMENE Do you dare, despite Kreon?

ANTIGONE He cannot keep me from my own.

ISMENE Your own?
 Think of Oedipus, our own father,
 hated, infamous, destroyed;
 found his crimes, broke his eyes,
 that hand that murdered,
 two in one—
 and Mother, remember,
 his mother and wife,
 two in one,
 her braids of rope that twisted life away—
 then our brothers,
 two in one day,
 the hands that murdered
 shared twin doom—
 now us, sisters, two alone,
 and all the easier destroyed
 if we spite the law and the power of the king.

No, we should be sensible:
 we are women, born unfit to battle men;
 and we are subjects, while Kreon is king.
 No, we must obey, even in this,
 even if something could hurt more.
 But because I will obey,
 I beg forgiveness of the dead;
 my plea is that I am forced;
 to intervene would be senseless.

ANTIGONE Then I won't urge you. No,
 Even if you were willing to "be senseless"
 I wouldn't want the help you could give.
 It's too late.
 You must be as you believe.
 I will bury him myself.
 If I die for doing that, good.
 I will stay with him, my brother;
 and my crime will be devotion.
 The living are here,

but I must please those longer
who are below; for with the dead
I will stay forever.
If you believe you must,
cast out these principles which the gods themselves honor.

ISMENE I won't dishonor anything; but I cannot help,
not when the whole country refuses to help.

ANTIGONE Then weakness will be your plea.
I am different. I love my brother
and I'm going to bury him, now.

100

ISMENE Antigone, I'm so afraid for you.

ANTIGONE Don't be afraid yet, not for me.
Steer your own fate. It's a long way.

ISMENE Promise not to say anything.
Keep this secret. I'll join you in secrecy.

ANTIGONE No, shout it, proclaim it.
I'll hate you the more for keeping silence.

ISMENE Hate me?
This ardor of yours is spent on ashes.
Will is not enough.
There is no way, without power.

110

ANTIGONE When my strength is spent, I will be done.
I know I am pleasing those whom I must.

ISMENE With no hope, even to start is wrong.

ANTIGONE Talk like that, and you'll make me hate you;
and he, dead, will hate you,
and rightly, as an enemy.

Leave me alone, with my hopeless scheme;
I'm ready to suffer for it and to die.
Let me. No suffering could be so terrible
as to die for nothing.

120

ISMENE Since you believe you must, go on.
You are wrong. But we who love you
are right in loving you.

ANTIGONE and ISMENE part, ANTIGONE to the left, the west,
ISMENE to the right. Bright daylight now pours from the
right where the CHORUS enters, fifteen white-bearded gentle-
men, whose courtiers' garb, spangled with golden dragons
and sunbursts, reflects the color of new day. They about-face
toward the sun. They pray:

CHORUS Sun-blaze, shining at last,
you are the most beautiful light
ever shown Thebes
over her seven gates;

and now, higher,
widening gaze of gold day,
you come,
over the course of our west river.

130

In whole armor,
come out of Argos
(his shield shone white)
you have expelled the man,
exiled in unbridled and blinding flight.

Out of the crisis of a dubious quarrel
Polyneices had roused him against our country
As shrill as an eagle on wings white as snow
he flew onto the country,
feathered in armor,

140

many men full-armed
and plumes on their helmets.

Stood there, over our roofs;
circled our gates, Thebes' seven faces;
spears, set for the kill,
snarling about the wall;

a gullet gaping,
dry for a fill of our blood;
fires
ready to catch our wreath of towers;

but then nothing.
Now he was gone,
fled the war god's crash,
snared in flight by the war god.
Futile to have struggled with dragon Thebes.

Zeus hates the noise of a bragging tongue.
When he saw them come against us
in a great gush, grandiose with splashing gold,
he whirled fire;
and the man who was rushing like a racer to the goal
on the heights of our battlements
and was signaling victory,
Zeus hurled him down with that fire.

Swung and then fell,
with the torch in his hand still,
on our land;
struck, and the land returned the shock,

He who had raved drunk, raged to attack,
who had howled with sweeps of the wind of hatred,
fell baffled;
and the grand war god allotted the rest their own dooms,
pressed as they failed,
gained us the contest.

Our seven gates were their seven stations,
and standing against our own, their seven captains,
who were turned by Zeus and ran
and to Zeus abandoned their bronze squadrons.
But on either side, one man remained, out of hatred,
seed of one father, birth from one mother,
planted spears against each other,
and both of them conquered,
sharing a twin death.

Victory comes
bringing glory to Thebes,
answers a smile
to our many chariots that cheer her.
Now that the war is over, forget war.
We'll visit every god's temples,
for a whole night, dancing and chanting praise.
Dionysos leads us,
rules Thebes,
makes the land tremble.

KORYPHAIOS But look, the new king of the country,
Kreon, is coming:
a new kind of man for new conditions.
I wonder what program he intends to launch,
that he should call the elders into special conference.

*From the palace KREON enters, in armor, with a military
retinue*

KREON Gentlemen, the state!
The gods have quaked her in heavy weather.
Now they have righted her.
The state rides steady once again.

Out of all the citizens, I have summoned you,
remembering that you blessed King Laios' reign;
when Oedipus ruled, you stood by him;

and after his destruction stood by his sons,
always with firm counsel.
Both sons died in one day, struck and stricken,
paired in doom and a twin pollution.
Now I rule, as next of kin.
They are dead; I am king.

210

It is impossible to know a man's soul,
both the wit and will,
before he writes laws and enforces them.
I believe that he who rules in a state
and fails to embrace the best men's counsels,
but stays locked in silence and vague fear,
is the worst man there.
I have long believed so.
And he who cherishes an individual beyond his homeland,
he, I say, is nothing.
Zeus who sees all will see I shall not stay silent
if I see disaster marching against our citizens,
and I shall not befriend the enemy of this land.
For the state is safety.
When she is steady, then we can steer.
Then we can love.

220

Those are my principles. The state will thrive through them.
Today I have proclaimed more laws akin to those.
These concern the sons of Oedipus:
Eteokles, who fought in defense of the nation
and fell in action,
will be given holy burial,
a funeral suited to greatness and nobility.
But his brother, Polyneices, the exile,
who descended with fire to destroy his fatherland and family
gods,
to drink our blood and drive us off slaves,
will have no ritual, no mourners,
will be left unburied so men may see him
ripped for food by dogs and vultures.

230

240

This is an example of my thinking.
I shall never let criminals excel good men in honor.
I shall honor the friends of the state
while they live, and when they die.

KORYPHAIOS These opinions, sir,
concerning enemies and friends of the state,
are as you please.
Law and usage, as I see it,
are totally at your disposal
to apply both to the dead and to us survivors.

250

KREON Think of yourselves, therefore,
as the guardians of my pronouncements.

KORYPHAIOS You have young men you can put on duty.

KREON No, no! Not the corpse. I have guards posted.

KORYPHAIOS Then what are your orders?

KREON Not to side with rebels.

KORYPHAIOS No one is such a fool. No one loves death.

KREON That's right, death is the price.
All the same, time after time,
greed has destroyed good men.

260

A SENTRY runs in from the left.

SENTRY King Kreon,
I'm going to
explain about
why I made it
down here all out of wind,
which for one thing
is not on account of going
fast,
because even when I started out

270

it wasn't light-footed.
 No, and I kept stopping to think,
 and all the way I was going in circles
 about turning right back.
 Yes, and my soul keeps telling me things.
 Says: What are you going to go there for,
 when as soon as you get there you're sure to pay for it?
 And then: What are you standing here for?
 If Kreon finds out about this from somebody else first
 you'll be the one that suffers:
 I kept rolling that over in my mind,
 and moved along slow,
 like on my own time:
 you can go a long way, walking a short distance.
 In the end the thought
 that actually did win out
 was to go right ahead to you, sir.
 And even if what I'm about to explain
 really isn't anything,
 I'm going to say it anyhow,
 because here I am,
 yes, and with a handful of hope
 that nothing more will happen to me
 but what the future has in store already.

280

290

KREON What's the matter with you? What are you afraid of?

SENTRY Well, first I want to tell you about me,
 because I didn't do it, and don't know who did,
 so it wouldn't be right either way
 if I fell into some kind of trouble.

300

KREON You aim well before you shoot.
 You virtually encircle the business, you build a blockade.
 Clearly your news is extraordinary.

SENTRY Sir, it's awful; it was so strange
 I can hardly bring myself to say it.

KREON Tell me now,
 then I'll dismiss you,
 and you'll go.

SENTRY Well, I am telling you:
 somebody up and buried the corpse and went off:
 sprinkled dust over it
 and did the ceremonies you're supposed to.

310

KREON Who? Who dared?

SENTRY I don't know.
 There wasn't any cut from a pickax or scoop of a hoe.
 The soil is hard and dry,
 no breaks in it from wagon wheels.
 No, whoever the one who did it was,
 there's no sign of him now. Nothing at all.
 When the first daytime sentry showed us
 we all thought it was a miracle.
 We couldn't see the body; and he wasn't really buried;
 it was like someone tried to drive the curse out:
 a fine dust on it.
 No game tracks or dog tracks,
 no sign of being tugged at.

320

Next thing there's a flurry of harsh words,
 with one sentry cross-examining the other;
 and we'd have wound up fighting,
 with nobody there to stop us, either,
 because everybody did it, and no one saw him do it,
 and everyone testified he knew nothing about it.
 We were ready to hold hot iron, walk through fire,
 swearing by the gods we didn't do it
 and never knew who did or planned it, either one.

330

But in the end, when we'd tried everything,
 one man speaks up
 and sets us all hanging our heads

looking at the ground afraid,
 because we couldn't say a thing against it
 and couldn't expect good to come of doing it.
 He said we couldn't hide what happened,
 we had to tell you.
 And that idea won out.
 With my bad luck, the lot fell on me,
 and I'm the winner, and here I am,
 and I don't want to be
 and I know you don't want me here
 because no one who hates what you say loves you.

340

KORYPHAIOS My lord, we have been considering
 whether a god might not have done this.

350

KREON Stop, before you say too much.
 You're an old man. Are you senile?
 Intolerable talk,
 as if gods had any concern for that corpse,
 covering him up,
 honoring him presumably as a public benefactor,
 when he was the one who came to burn their temples,
 the circles of pillars and the holy treasures
 and the country that is theirs,
 smashing the laws.
 Is that your idea?
 Can you see gods honoring criminals?
 Impossible.

360

No. For a long while now
 certain men in this city, as they would have it,
 have scarcely been able to stand up under my commands.
 They mutter about me, they hide, shake their heads
 instead of properly shouldering the yoke and working with
 the team,
 which is the one way of showing love to me.
 Those are the men that did this, I'm positive.
 They were seduced with money.

370

Money: nothing worse for people
 ever has sprouted up and grown current.
 That's what ravages nations and drives men from their homes,
 perverts the best human principles,
 teaches men to turn to crime,
 makes everything they do and think unholy.

Everyone they hired to do this will pay for it.
 As Zeus accepts my prayers,
 understand this well, I'm talking on oath,
 to you (to SENTRY)
 unless you find me the perpetrator of this burial
 death won't be enough,
 you'll hang alive till you tell me who did it,
 just so you'll, all of you, know from then on
 not to take bribes, and learn that your love
 of getting what you can where you can is wrong.
 You'll see: When you have it, shame makes you hide it;
 that kind of money wrecks men,
 and few escape alive.

380

390

SENTRY Will you give me a chance to answer,
 or should I just go?

KREON Don't you know yet your talk irritates me?

SENTRY Does it hurt in your ears, sir, or in your soul?

KREON What is this? Anatomy?

SENTRY The man who did it irritates your mind.
 I just bother your ears.

KREON You can't stop talking, can you?
 You must have been born this way.

400

SENTRY Anyway, I never did what you said I did.

KREON Yes you did! For money! You sold your soul.

SENTRY Sir, it's terrible; you make your mind up
when even what's wrong looks right.

KREON I'll leave the subtleties to you. I make decisions.
But unless you show me the responsible parties in this case
you will learn that easy money buys suffering.

Re-enters the palace.

SENTRY I hope they find him.
But if he's caught or if he's not,
which is something luck will decide,
you won't ever see me come back here.
No, because I never thought or hoped even,
but, thanks to the gods and praise them, I'm alive.

Exit, to the east.

CHORUS Many marvels walk through the world,
terrible, wonderful,
but none more than humanity,
which makes a way under winter rain,
over the gray deep of the sea,
proceeds where it swells and swallows;
that grinds at the Earth—
undwinding, unwearied, first of the gods—
to its own purpose,
as the plow is driven, turning year into year,
through generations as colt follows mare.

Weaves and braids the meshes to hurl—
circumspect man—
and to drive lightheaded tribes of birds his prisoners,
and the animals,
nations in fields, race of the salty ocean;
and fools and conquers the monsters
whose roads and houses are hills,

the shaggy-necked horse that he holds subject,
and the mountain oxen that he yokes under beams,
bowing their heads,
his unwearying team.

The breath of his life he has taught to be
language, be the spirit of thought;
griefs, to give laws to nations;
fears, to dodge weapons
of rains and winds and the homeless cold—
always clever,
he never fails to find ways
for whatever future;
manages cures for the hardest maladies;
from death alone he has secured no refuge.

With learning and with ingenuity
over his horizon of faith
mankind crawls
now to failure, now to worth.
And when he has bound the laws of this earth
beside Justice pledged to the gods,
he rules his homeland;
but he has no home
who recklessly marries an illegitimate cause.
Fend this stranger from my mind's and home's hearth.

KORYPHAIOS An unholy miracle. Am I right or mistaken?
How can I say no,
this is not the girl that I know,
Antigone?

From the right, the SENTRY leads ANTIGONE forward.

Daughter of Oedipus,
not you? Where is he taking you?
You haven't broken the laws of the king,

have you? That would be senseless.
Why have they arrested you?

SENTRY This girl here is the one who buried him.
We caught her at it. Where's Kreon?

KORYPHAIOS There he is, leaving the palace.
He's coming back just when we need him.

KREON returns. *He is now in regalia, and has a retinue of
armed slaves.*

KREON To come forward just in time
seems to be my fate.
How do you need me?

470

SENTRY King Kreon,
there's nothing a man can swear won't happen.
What you think later makes you wrong before.
I could have sworn I'd never come here again.
The way you threatened me shook me like a storm.
But happiness you never hope for
makes every other joy look smaller.
Here I am, though I swore an oath I'd never come,
bringing this girl we caught tidying the grave up.
This time I wasn't picked by lot,
no, this is a lucky find that's mine and nobody else's.
Yes, and here she is, she's yours:
take her and cross-examine her and judge her, just as you
please.
And as for me, I'm free now, and rightly so,
and rid of this trouble.

480

KREON This girl? Where did you find her? And how?

SENTRY She's the one that buried that man.
Now you know all I know.

KREON Are you sure you're saying what you mean?

SENTRY This is the girl I saw
bury that dead man you said not to.
That's what I'm telling you, plain and clear.

490

KREON How did you spot her? How did you stop her and arrest her?

SENTRY It was like this.
When we got back from you with those terrible threats on us,
we swept off all the dust that covered the corpse up,
stripped it naked;
the body was oozing,
and we sat down on a hilltop between the wind and it
to dodge the smell,
one man busy shaking the next man, with harsh words
rushing
so nobody could be lazy on the job this time.

500

This went on all the while:
till the sun was a glittering circle
that stood in the middle of the air
and warmed and then seared.
And suddenly a whirlwind, like a smudge fire,
raised a squall off the soil and trouble in heaven;
and it filled the plain,
and tortured the leaves of the woods in the level places,
and forced the mighty air full.
We squinted and suffered out this holy misery:
After a long time, it was sent away.
Then we saw the girl.

510

She wailed out loud:
that sharp sound out of bitterness
a bird makes when she looks in her nest and it's empty,
it's a widow's bed and the baby chicks are gone.
And this girl,

when she saw the corpse was bare,
 she cried that same way and groaned and mourned for it,
 and she prayed hard curses on the one who did that to it.
 Right away she brings dust, handful by handful,
 then pours offerings three times,
 holding a beautiful urn up high
 like for giving a crown.

520

We watched that,
 then quick as a shot hunted her down,
 and right off got her, not a bit afraid.
 We accused her of doing it before and this time, both,
 and she didn't deny a thing,
 which made me glad and sad at the same time.
 I've cleared myself and arrested her:
 When you go free, nothing makes you happier;
 and when you hurt someone you care about,
 nothing can hurt more.
 But I'm naturally the kind of man
 that puts everything second to his own safety.

530

KREON (to ANTIGONE) You now,
 you hanging your head, looking at the ground,
 do you admit or deny you did this?

540

ANTIGONE I did it. I deny nothing.

KREON (to SENTRY) As for you,
 you may convey your person wherever you wish.
 This is a grave charge; and you are free of it.

Exit SENTRY.

(To ANTIGONE) Now tell me, briefly and concisely:
 were you aware of the proclamation prohibiting those acts?

ANTIGONE I was.
 I couldn't avoid it when it was made public.

KREON You still dared break this law?

ANTIGONE Yes, because I did not believe
 that Zeus was the one who had proclaimed it;
 neither did Justice,
 or the gods of the dead whom Justice lives among.
 The laws they have made for men are well marked out.
 I didn't suppose your decree had strength enough,
 or you, who are human,
 to violate the lawful traditions
 the gods have not written merely, but made infallible.
 These laws are not for now or for yesterday,
 they are alive forever;
 and no one knows when they were shown to us first.
 I did not intend to pay, before the gods,
 for breaking these laws
 because of my fear of one man and his principles.
 I was thoroughly aware I would die
 before you proclaimed it;
 of course I would die, even if you hadn't.
 Since I will die, and early, I call this profit.
 Anyone who lives the troubled life I do
 must benefit from death.

550

560

570

No, I do not suffer from the fact of death.
 But if I had let my own brother stay unburied
 I would have suffered all the pain I do not feel now.
 And if you decide what I did was foolish,
 you may be fool enough to convict me too.

KORYPHAIOS Clearly she's her father's child, hard and raw.
 He never learned to yield, for all his troubles.

KREON Yes, but these stiff minds are the first to collapse.
 Fire-tempered iron, the strongest and toughest,
 that's the kind you most often see snapped and shattered.
 I know horses:
 slim reins discipline even the spirited ones.

580

You can't be brave and free with your master near by.

Laws were made. She broke them.
 Rebellion to think of it,
 then to do it and do it again,
 now more defiance, bragging about it,
 she did it and she's laughing.
 I'm no man—
 she is a man, she's the king—
 if she gets away with this.
 My niece, or let her be
 closer than any who pray at my home hearth,
 she and her kin cannot prevent their doom.
 Yes, the other girl, I hold her
 equally responsible for plotting the burial.
 Summon her immediately.

590

An armed slave goes to the palace.

Just now I saw her at home, hysterical,
 out of her wits. A thieving mind
 scheming crooked plans in its own darkness
 loves to be caught before it can act.
 But what I really hate is the one
 that, once it's caught, wants to beautify its guilt.

600

ANTIGONE You have caught me. What more do you want?
 Isn't killing me enough?

KREON I want? No. With that I have everything.

ANTIGONE Then why are you waiting?
 There is nothing you can say I would like to hear,
 and there never could be.
 And obviously there is nothing about me
 that could please you either.

610

Still, where was there a way for me
 to win greater fame or glory

than by simply taking my own brother to his grave?
 There should be a voice among these gentlemen
 to say I have pleased them too;
 but all have been locked in silence by fear.
 A king may do and say what he wishes.
 This is his greatest good fortune.

KREON You're the only citizen who holds that view.
 The rest are with me. Aren't you ashamed
 to dissent from these good men?

620

ANTIGONE No, they keep silent to please you.
 Why should I be ashamed of loyalty to my brother?

KREON Wasn't his enemy your brother?
 Why do you honor Polyneices only?
 Isn't that the same as rejecting Eteokles?

ANTIGONE Yes, they were brothers, one blood,
 father and mother, the same as mine.
 Eteokles is dead: he will not say I have rejected him.

630

KREON He will if you honor him no more than Polyneices,
 who died ravaging this land, while he defended it.

ANTIGONE He's not his slave, but his brother;
 and he's dead. And Death is a god
 who wants his laws obeyed.

KREON Not that good and bad be treated
 equally under those laws.

ANTIGONE Does anyone know?
 Maybe, down there, all this is pure.

KREON Enemies and friends are two different things,
 and dying doesn't reconcile them.

640

ANTIGONE And I wasn't born to hate one with the other,
but to love both together.

KREON If you must love somebody
go down there and love the dead.
I'm alive though, and no woman will rule me.

ISMENE enters from the palace, under arrest.

CHORUS (*severally*) Here, Antigone, is your sister. . . . She loves
you. . . .

She is weeping. . . . She blushes . . . a lovely face . . .

when clouds on its brow wet a mountain's cheek
which the sky has painted with blood. . . .

650

KREON (*to ISMENE*) You, in my own home,
slunk like a viper, sneaking, sucked my blood,
and I never learned I was nursing a pair of traitors:
but now, tell me,
say you shared in this burial
or swear you knew nothing about it.

ISMENE I did it. If she is with me now,
I share the blame with her and will bear it also.

ANTIGONE No, you have no right. You weren't willing to,
and even if you had been I wouldn't have taken you with me. 660

ISMENE Now that you're in trouble
I'm not afraid to weather suffering with you.
I have made myself ready.

ANTIGONE The god of death and the dead are my witnesses
to who did what. I do not want love
from anyone who lives with speeches.

ISMENE Please don't, you're my sister;
don't take away from me the honor of dying with you,
and of joining with you in service to the dead.

ANTIGONE You will not die, not with me you won't. 670
You had nothing to do with this; don't try to claim you had.
I will die, and the dead be served well.

ISMENE What is life when I've lost you?
What is there to love in life?

ANTIGONE Ask your uncle Kreon.
You have so much in common.

ISMENE Why should you hurt me? It doesn't help.

ANTIGONE Hurt you? Maybe I am laughing at you.
If I am laughing, it's out of sorrow.

ISMENE Then what can I still do to help you? 680

ANTIGONE Save yourself. I want you to escape.

ISMENE No, please, don't make me let you die alone.

ANTIGONE You chose to live. I chose to die.

ISMENE I tried: I argued.

ANTIGONE You argued well, and I did;
and to those who agree with each,
each of us was right.

ISMENE But now we both share the blame, right or wrong.

ANTIGONE Be happy. You are living;
but my soul died long ago, to be useful among the dead. 690

KREON (to ISMENE) Two girls: one born that way,
and now you turn out to be a fool too.

ISMENE A mind does not just grow and then stand.
When our lives founder reason deserts us.

KREON Yes, minds like yours and hers;
when you commit crimes you wreck your lives.

ISMENE What is there left for me alone?
Without her how can I live?

KREON Forget her. She no longer exists.

700

ISMENE Do you mean you will kill the girl
you promised your own son would marry?

KREON There are other fields for him to furrow.

ISMENE But for him and her no other match like this.

KREON There is no match when the wife is worthless.

ISMENE It's Haimon you cast aside when you say that.
Don't you love your son? Can you deprive him?

KREON No. Death will stop that wedding.
And this is the end:
I'm sick of you and this marriage business.

710

KORYPHAIOS It has been determined, then,
that Antigone shall die?

KREON Yes, and you as well as I have determined it.
Stop wasting time. Hurry,
take them both inside.
Now they'll have to be women and know their place.

Even men, rash men, run
when they see how close death is to life.

ANTIGONE and ISMENE are led into the palace. KREON
follows.

CHORUS Lucky those whose lifetime knows no taste of trouble.
The house quaked by the gods
lacks no form of disaster
creeping after all the clan;
like swellings of ocean,
when evil north winds breathe,
that run on the abyss of brine
and roll black sand up from the chasm—
and headlands beat them back
but bellow, wailing, wind-worn.

720

I can see the ancient griefs of dead men striking
this house, ripped by some god,
no relief, generation after generation,
no release.
But the spreading last light,
the last root, stock of Oedipus,
is now hacked down,
with blood-red dust up from the nether gods,
madness made of logic,
principle turned frenzy.

730

KREON returns.

Could man pass,
and could man keep the force down that is yours, Zeus?
Which not sleep which traps all,
nor the months, as undwinding as gods, can stop?
Within time, but without age,
through force you keep
the twinkle and blaze of Olympus yours.
And for next, and for soon as for then,
this one law will hold man in:

740

that no greatness creeps down
into the life destined to death
without bringing disaster.

750

Though stray hope
out of light-headed longing is a help many need,
others find hope a disastrous deception
that creeps on fools
who step into the blaze.
It was someone wise
who made the illustrious dictum known:—
When a god drives him, and deceives,
a man will decide
what is bad is good,
and lives only a brief while
outside disaster.

760

HAIMON enters, from the palace.

KORYPHAIOS But here is Haimon: you have no other son.
Has he come out of grief, Kreon,
for the fate of Antigone,
or in the pain of his own loss?

KREON We'll soon see; and seeing is better than prophecy.
Son, have you heard the final verdict?
Are you angry at your father,
or do you love me regardless,
whatever I do and how?

770

HAIMON I am your son.
You direct a course for me with good intentions,
and I follow it.
I don't believe marriage is more important to me
than you and your good leadership.

KREON Son, you should hold that to your heart.
Everything is second to a father's will.

That's the reason men pray for children,
to have them growing up at home,
boys, obedient,
the kind to punish those who hate their father
and honor those who love him
as much as he does himself.
The man who has worthless children—
what has he got for himself but hardship
and a laugh for his enemies?

780

That's how things are.
Don't throw out principle for a little fun,
for the sake of a woman.
Remember a treacherous wife turns cold in your arms,
and no one can hurt you worse than a false friend.
Kick this out of your system.
Send that girl off like any other enemy.
Let her be a bride in Hades' household.

790

I caught her in open rebellion,
her alone out of all the nation.
I won't be a leader who lies to his people.
No: I will kill her.
Let her sing a song to Zeus for the bonds of blood.
If I rear a disorderly family
I am feeding general disorder.

800

Anyone who's a good man inside his house
is a just man where the state is concerned.
Any man who breaks laws,
uses violence against them,
thinks he can give orders to stronger men,
gains no praise from me.

The state: when she sets someone up, you must obey him
in small matters, in just acts, and in both opposites.
For my part, I am confident
that a man willing to be ruled can himself rule well.

810

He is the one who stands firm in the storm of battle,
holds his post in front of you and by your side,
rightly, nobly.

Nothing is worse than lack of leadership.
It destroys nations, drives men from their homes,
smashes armies, makes allies defect.
But when men are ruled right
their obedience to authority saves their lives.

That's why we have to defend orderly people,
and never let women get the better of us.
If we must fall, better to fall to a real man
and not be called worse than women.

KORYPHAIOS In my belief,
unless time has robbed me of discernment,
you are speaking intelligently on this subject.

HAIMON Father, the gods implant intelligence in humans.
Of all our properties, that is the supreme one.
I lack the power and the training to tell you you're wrong,
and that's just as well.
But perhaps a second opinion will be valuable.

I am bound naturally
to watch over anything concerning you:
what people say or do
or what fault anyone can find with you.
Because, for the common man, your gaze is terrible.
He can't find words to explain things that displease you.
But I do hear things, under cover of darkness,
what our country says, in grief for this girl:

that no one is more innocent,
no death more awful,
no deeds more noble than hers;
with her own brother fallen slaughtered,

then not buried,
she wouldn't leave him for dogs' and crows' butchering.
Shouldn't her fate be golden glory?
Isn't she worthy?

That is the word.
It is dark, and marches in silence.

There is no possession, Father, that I honor more
than your happiness and fortune.
After all, what greater prize can children possess
than a father flourishing in glory
and glorying in their honor?

Please, be different this once.
Believe in what someone else says for once.
Whenever a man supposes that he alone
has intelligence or expression or feelings,
he exposes himself and shows his emptiness.
But it's no shame even for a wise man
to learn and to relent.

In the winter floods you can see
how the trees that give way save every stem,
and how those that strain are destroyed, uprooted.
In the same way, the man who tightens the halyard
and doesn't slacken it, is capsized.

Don't be angry. Allow yourself some leeway.
Let me give my opinion, young as I am:—
It would be best if we were born knowing everything;
but it is honorable to learn from honest men.

KORYPHAIOS What he says is to the point, sir.
You may do well to learn from him. And you too, from your
father.
Both have spoken well.

KREON Men our age, learn from him?

HAIMON If I happen to be right? Suppose I am young.
Don't look at my age, look at what I do.

KREON What you do? Give your loyalty to rebels?

HAIMON No, nor would I ever encourage anyone else
to respect or be faithful to someone who is doing wrong. 880

KREON But didn't that girl do wrong?

HAIMON The whole nation denies it.

KREON Will the nation tell me what orders I can give?

HAIMON See? You're talking like a boy.

KREON It's my job to rule this land.
There is no one else.

HAIMON No country belongs to one man.

KREON Nations belong to the men with power:
That's common knowledge.

HAIMON You could rule a desert right,
if you were alone there. 890

KREON Look at him! Taken that woman's side, fighting me.

HAIMON I'm on your side. It's you I'm concerned about.

KREON A fine son you are, putting me on the stand.

HAIMON It's because I can see you're making a mistake.
You're a witness against yourself.

KREON What mistake? Respecting my high office?

HAIMON Respecting it? By dishonoring the gods?

KREON Rotten, degraded, on your knees to a woman!
Everything you've said was for her sake. 900

HAIMON And for my sake, and yours especially,
and for the nether gods as well.
You can tell me I'm on my knees,
but you will find that I never surrender
when I know something is wrong.

KREON There's no use.
You'll never marry Antigone. Not in this world.

HAIMON Then she'll die, and her death will destroy others.

KREON Are you threatening me?

HAIMON No, I'm arguing, in a void. 910

KREON Of your own mind; and trying to teach me.
Your tears will teach you.

HAIMON If you weren't my father, I'd say you'd lost your mind.

KREON Don't "father" me. You're no man. You're a slave.
Property of a woman.

HAIMON And you expect to talk but not listen,
and to speak but not be judged by what you say.

KREON Just understand:
You don't insult me and go off laughing.
Bring her here! Let him see her.
Kill her here, beside her bridegroom. 920

HAIMON No, you won't. Don't think it.
While I am with her, she will not die.
And you, you will never see me again.
Stay with your friends, if these are friends,
and rave at them, if they'll listen.

Rushes out, to the left.

KORYPHAIOS Sir, it was anger that made him run away.
When a person his age is hurt, he can be dangerous.

KREON Let him try, let him imagine; he's only a man.
He can't save those two girls.

KORYPHAIOS Two girls? Do you plan to kill both?

KREON No. You're right: Ismene didn't help her. Thank you.

KORYPHAIOS Antigone, then. By what form of execution?

KREON Have her taken up a road men have deserted;
hidden there, living, in a rock hollow;
leave her enough fodder only
to defend the country from the filth of a curse.
There she can beg from Death, the only god she honors;
possibly Death will excuse her from dying!
That, or she'll learn, too late,
that homage to Death and the dead is useless.

*KREON returns to the palace. Now it is noon. The harsh sun
stands in the square.*

CHORUS Desire, you, unconquered in war;
Desire, vaulting upon our dear goods;
at night you rest on young girls' gentle smiles,
then travel, grazing the deep ocean,
to visit the far dwellers whose houses are fields.
The deathless gods cannot escape,

or humans whose whole life is a day.
Welcoming you, they run mad.

You twist good and just men to crime and shame.
You shook the rift in one blood,
revolt among these men.
Clear longing in the lowered eyes of a young bride
is your victory.

Your power is equal, your place beside
the great gods and eternal mandates;
for Love conquers without war, and destroys with glad games.

KORYPHAIOS Now, though, even I am borne
outside those mandates laid down for here
when I see, there . . .

ANTIGONE is led from the palace by armed slaves.

and I cannot dam the force of my tears
when I see Antigone
who is reaching the end of her progress
to the room and the bed of universal rest.

ANTIGONE Look at me now, citizens of my homeland.
I walk the last path
watching my last of sunlight. Never again,
for Death, giver of universal rest,
is taking me, living, to the shore of the river of Pain.
No wedding song has been sung for this bride.
I have lost that birthright.

CHORUS You go with fame and in glory
to the hidden place of the dead.
No sickness has diminished you:
no weapon has paid you war's wages.
You descend to the kingdom of Death
alive, of your own accord,
you alone of mortal women.

ANTIGONE Niobe, a stranger, once queen of our country,
I know of her death:
like tightened ivy a stone growth covered her.
Now she shrinks in incessant rain and snowfall,
and off her brow, a cliff,
fall tears to drench the hill breast.
Mine is like her death night.

980

CHORUS But she was a god, descendant of a god,
and we are human and born to die.
Still, your doom is worth grand fame;
for living and dying, both, you share
the heritage of the gods' equals.

990

ANTIGONE No, no: laughing at me!
Can't you wait till I'm gone to insult me?
Home, country, my city,
citizens, you, men grand in possessions,
west river, holy plain of Thebes splendid with chariots,
now I have made you all my witnesses:
how, friendless, unmourned, I go to what strange funeral
and under what kind of law.
Wait to laugh. I have been unlucky.
I come as a stranger always to the home hearth
of humans and spirits both,
an alien only, among the living and the dead.

1000

CHORUS You were harsh and daring, child.
You went too far and fell broken
against the lofty pedestal of Justice.
Perhaps, though, you are paying
for some ancestral failing.

ANTIGONE The memory that wounds most,
turned like plowland year to year:
my father's griefs, the family
doomed whole in its glory, disastrous deceptions,
the bed incest lay in, mother and father,

1010

condemned men—these are my origins.
There: you opened that wound again, not I.
So condemned, I will find a new place,
not a home, a spinster's residence, with them,
with Polyneices—doomed young by alliance,
marriage in Argos, exile from our home—
by whose death I died and still lived.

CHORUS Your devotion is a kind of reverence.
Power, though, must be revered, not trampled
by those who must wield it.

1020

KREON enters.

But you, holding rebellion,
followed your own destruction.

ANTIGONE Unmourned, friendless, I am led away.
The path is ready. They sing no wedding song.
I will never be able to see—there!
the holy eye of radiant day—again.
But my fate is my own, to die;
and there is no one I love who sighs over me.

1030

KREON Singing and sighing!
If it were any use to talk before you die
no one would ever stop.
Take her away. Hurry!
Shut the tomb where it arches over, the way I told you;
leave her there, alone. Either she'll die,
or, if she likes her new house, she can live in it, buried.
Our hands are clean.
She was only a stranger in our world,
and her stay is over.

1040

ANTIGONE To my tomb, my wedding, my home
the eternal vigil of the grave:
I am going to my own people there;

where Persephone has welcomed their greater number
among the spirits of the dead.
I am the last and least.
Before my time, I am descending to that world;
but I am returning home as well, from an exile.

As I go, I nurse the hope in my heart
that you, Father and Mother, will love me and be with me, 1050
and you, brother, will let me see your face.
When you died, it was I, with my own hands,
who bathed you and tidied you, both of you,
and who gave offerings at your graveside.
Polyneices, I buried you too:
And today, this is my reward.

But I was right to honor you,
and men who understand will agree.
Suppose I had been a mother and widow.
I would not have taken this burden on 1060
or defied the nation, in that case.
The principle I followed is this:
If my husband had died, there might be another,
and a son by another man if I had lost my children.
But my mother and father were gone.
I could never have had a new brother.

It was on that principle, Polyneices,
I honored you above all.
To Kreon it seemed wrong, a terrible act of daring.
He had me caught and held, 1070
and today he is taking me living to the grave.
And I never was loved,
I never nursed a child;
and with those I love gone,
I go alone and desolate.

What divine and just law have I evaded?
Is there any use in my looking toward the gods?

Is there any ally among the gods I can call to,
if my reverence has made me impious?
But if this is the will of the gods, 1080
we will learn we were wrong through suffering.
But if these others are wrong,
I can pray for nothing worse for them
than what they are doing to me,
their unjust justice.

KORYPHAIOS The same torrents of the soul
still compel this girl.

KREON I said to take her out. Guards!
No more delay, or you'll suffer for it.

ANTIGONE In your words, death is approaching. 1090

KREON I won't encourage you. You've been condemned.

ANTIGONE Land of Thebes, city of my fathers,
ancient gods of Thebes,
I can wait no longer.
You, the nation's leaders, look
at the last daughter of the house of your kings,
and see what I suffer at my mother's brother's hands
for an act of loyalty and devotion.

*Slaves lead her out to the left, the west. Now the sun begins
to follow.*

CHORUS Danaë suffered the same fate, 1100
exchanging the sky's heavenly light
for locked halls fastened with brass.
Hidden within a tomb that became her marriage
chamber
she was yoked down, head bowed under.
Nevertheless, this proud child of a glorious race
received and stored the Golden Rain;

the seed of Zeus was her treasure.
But the force of fate is terrible,
inescapable,
riches and war, strong cities and sea-beaten ships notwith-
standing.

And he, king and a king's son,
Lykurgos, was yoked, fastened in stone.
And there, that terrible mood;
flourishing madness, trickled away; and he, the scoffer,
who had touched truth with his laughter,
now understood that this same Dionysos was god,
and had imprisoned him because
he tried suppressing the fervor
of the faithful, fire of holiness,
and had then no less
angered the Muses, lovers of ritual beat danced to piping.

1110

By the black cliffs where the broad sea is cleft
are the headlands of Thrace and the beach of the Bosphorus,
where once the god of war, a neighbor there, watched
while the twin sons of Phineus were blinded
by their father's wife:
the damning wound and the unforgiving eyes,
savage hands and weapons bloodied.

1120

As they fell, hopeless, they wept hopeless pain,
and their mother, divorced and imprisoned.
But she was from an ancient house and daughter of the
North Wind;
and in far caves, among her father's hurricanes,
was nursed and healed.
Now, flying even, or riding hills,
she knew well how harshly fate oppressed her.

1130

TEIRESIAS enters from the east. The declining sun is full in
his face, but he proceeds unblinking. He is terribly old. A
boy leads him by the hand.

TEIRESIAS Nobles of Thebes,
we two have come one common path,
one man watching the way for both.
The blind must walk where others lead.

KREON Dear old Teiresias! But is there something wrong?

TEIRESIAS I will inform you. That is my prophetic duty.
Yours is to comply.

1140

KREON I have never disobeyed you in the past . . .

TEIRESIAS In consequence, you've been a good captain for the state,
and steered her right.

KREON . . . and I can attest, from my experience,
to the utility . . .

TEIRESIAS Then listen, please:
Once more you are walking the razor's edge.

KREON What do you mean?

TEIRESIAS You will know when you hear what the signs are:

1150

Seated at my station of augury,
a harbor under my command since ancient days,
where every bird puts in in safety,
I heard weird cries:
birds squawking in an evil frenzy.
They were tearing one another, clawing for murder.
The whirring of their wings made this clear.
It frightened me.
Immediately I lit the altars for sacrifice.
I tried; but, from the offerings,
no flash.
Instead, a putrid slime dribbled down
and smoked and spat in the ashes.

1160

The gall exploded in vapor.
The fat peeled off the thighs, exposing them,
the bones slithering.
The ritual had failed.

All that, I learned from this boy.
He guides me, as I do others.

The state is sick.
You and your principles are to blame.
Every altar and hearth has been loaded
with fodder brought by birds and dogs off him,
the fallen son of Oedipus.
Therefore, the gods reject our prayers and our sacrifices,
and birds, feeding fat on a murdered man's blood,
scream nonsense.

My son,
stop and consider.
All mankind is subject to error.
Once a mistake is made, and a man stumbles into
misfortune,
it is both wise and worthy of him
to make amends and not be unbending.
Stubbornness is stupidity. It is criminal.
No. Give yourself leeway. Yield.
When someone has been destroyed, do you stab him?
Give in.
What good is it to kill the dead again?
What kind of power is it?

I have spoken frankly for your own good.
When you benefit from what he tells you
it is a true pleasure
to learn from an honest man.

KREON Old man,
all of you shoot at me like archers at a bull's-eye.
No, this fortune-telling isn't new to me.

You and your kind, for a long time now,
have been selling me out and trying to deliver me.

Make money!
Deal in silvered gold from Sardis, get gold from India:
that's what you want.
But bury that man, no!
No, not if the eagles rip him for food,
not if they carry him to the throne of Zeus!
I'm not afraid even of that. I won't let you bury him.
I know full well no man has the power to pollute gods.
But you, my dear Teiresias, old as you are, listen:
It's you wonderfully clever people that fall hardest in disgrace
when you hide ugly ideas in pretty speeches
in order to make money.

TEIRESIAS Doesn't anyone know, won't anyone consider . . .

KREON Consider what?
What universal truth are you going to proclaim?

TEIRESIAS . . . how much more valuable than money
good advice is?

KREON Or how much worse losing your judgment is?

TEIRESIAS And that is what's wrong with you.
You are a sick man.

KREON I don't choose to return the insult.
You're supposed to be a prophet.

TEIRESIAS But you're doing just that.
You say my prophecies are lies.

KREON Yes, and I say so because you love cash,
all of you, prophetic profiteers. . . .

TEIRESIAS And tyrants love to have their own way
regardless of right and wrong.

KREON Do you know who you're talking to?
We're your rulers.

TEIRESIAS I know you are. It's thanks to me
that you saved the state and rule now.

KREON Thanks to your skill as a prophet.
But as a man, you don't care about right or wrong.

TEIRESIAS And you are forcing me to tell you things I know
and would prefer to leave undisturbed.

KREON Go ahead, disturb them, tell me.
But don't expect to benefit by it.

TEIRESIAS I don't expect that you will.

KREON Just understand: I'm not for sale.
I have principles.

TEIRESIAS Very well. Now you understand this:

Few courses of the racing sun remain
before you lose a child of your own loins
and give him back, a corpse, exchange for corpses.
You have dishonored a living soul with exile in the tomb,
hurling a member of this upper world below.
You are detaining here, moreover,
a dead body, unsanctified, and so unholy,
a subject of the nether gods.

The matter is out of your hands and those of the gods above.
A crime of violence is being done and you are commanding it.
Therefore, relentless destroyers pursue you,
Furies of death and deity;

they lie in wait for you now
to catch you in the midst of your crimes.

Consider that, and see if I've been bribed.
The time is near.
Weeping of women and men will be heard in your house.
All the enemy nations will be aroused,
all whose altars are stinking and corrupted
with the torn fragments the dogs, wild beasts, and birds
bring.

You have hurt me. These facts
are the arrows that I fire into your heart,
unfailing, like a marksman.
You will not escape their pain by running.

Boy, lead me home.
Kreon can fire on younger men.
He ought to teach his tongue silence
and his mind better principles.

The boy leads TEIRESIAS away.

KORYPHAIOS Kreon, I've lived a long time,
and I, no, none of us
has ever known Teiresias to lie.

KREON I know it. I know. I'm not sure any more.
It's terrible to give in. What can I do?
Resist? I may be deluding myself.

KORYPHAIOS You need prudent council, sir.

KREON What should I do? Tell me. I promise to comply.

KORYPHAIOS Go, release the girl from the cave.
and build a tomb for the body you cast out.

KREON That's your advice? To give in?

KORYPHAIOS As quickly as possible.
The gods are swift to strike.
They cut fools' hesitations short.

1280

KREON Oh, it's hard. This is not what I hoped.
I'll do as you say. I must not fight
wrongly, only to be defeated, against fate.

KORYPHAIOS Then act now. Go. Don't leave it to others.

KREON I will, at once.
Attendants! Here! Some of you call the rest. Here!
You, hurry, bring axes! I'll lead the way.
I've changed my mind.
I did it and I'll undo it.
Life, I'm afraid, is best spent
maintaining the established laws,
for these are moored safe and steady.

1290

*They hurry out to the west, where the sun is now very low.
The MESSENGER leads KREON who leads the rest.*

CHORUS You, god of many names,
the pride of Theban virgins,
and son of the deep thunder of Zeus;
Protector of Italy's glory
and ruler of Eleusis whose valleys embosom all mankind;
Dionysos, Bacchus! Your home is Thebes,
the motherland of your worship,
beside the supple channel of the Ismenos
on the soil where the dragon's teeth were planted.

1300

Above the double cliffs—
like dazzling flame through vapor,
through ranks of your nymphs you are perceived—
and near the Kastalian fountain.

Descending ivied slopes of Euboia, down mountains, rivers
banked
with the green of numerous clustered vines,
accompanied by the worship
of words and anthems that themselves are immortal,
you are coming to visit Thebes, the city

1310

you honor higher than all others,
here, where lightning was your father.
Now that a violent sickness
holds the nation and all its people,
come, over the slope of Parnassos,
over the groaning channel,
walk here and heal us.

The stars are dancing; they pant fire.
Night is talking. You're their leader.
Boy god and child of Zeus,
master, show us your face; attended
by trains of your nymphs who in madness
dance till the night is ended,
treasurer, Bacchus.

1320

The MESSENGER returns from the west.

MESSENGER Noblemen of Thebes,
it is impossible ever to praise or to criticize
any period of a human life.
Fortune elevates and fortune tumbles
the fortunate downward and the luckless aloft.
Once affairs have been determined
even prophecy cannot assist mortal men.

1330

Once, in my opinion, Kreon was enviable.
He had saved our fatherland from its enemies,
had seized the monarchy,
and now ruled absolutely,
flourishing proud in his station and his high-born sons.

But now he has lost everything.
For indeed, when men have forfeited their pleasures,
they are not alive, but the living dead.

1340

To be sure, if you desire it,
gain wealth and power,
live in regal fashion.
However, should the pleasure of such a life be lost,
I, at least, would not purchase the rest,
not if the shadow of smoke were its price.

KORYPHAIOS Under what new burden must our king stand,
and his family? What is it?

MESSENGER The dead,
and the living liable for their dying.

KORYPHAIOS Who is dead? Who is responsible?

1350

MESSENGER Haimon has been destroyed.
Blood shed by one blood.

KORYPHAIOS His father? Himself?

MESSENGER He, himself, in anger at his father.

EURYDICE appears in the palace door.

KORYPHAIOS Teiresias was right. All he said has come true.

MESSENGER That is the state of affairs.
It is for you to deliberate upon them.

KORYPHAIOS Wait. Look:
Eurydice, Kreon's wife, leaving the palace.
Perhaps she has heard about her boy . . .
maybe it's only by chance.

1360

EURYDICE Oh, citizens, here you all are.
I was going out to pray;
then I heard you talking.

I was unlocking the door.
I wanted to go to the temple of Pallas
to speak to the goddess.
Then I heard things you were saying.

Something was wrong,
about my own home.
I was frightened.
I tried to lean on something:
My maids were holding me;
I must have fainted.

1370

What were you saying?
Tell it over; to me this time.
Please, go ahead.
I know what grief is.
I can hear more.

MESSENGER My queen, dear lady,
I was present, so I know;
and I shall not omit a word of the truth.
Indeed, why should I soften the story for you,
only to be shown a liar subsequently?
The truth is always the proper thing.

1380

Serving as guide,
I personally attended your royal consort
to the far side of the plain
where the mangled body of Polyneices
still lay, unpitied, where the dogs had dragged it.
We prayed to the goddess of the crossroads and to Pluto
to contain their anger and to bless us;
we bathed and sanctified the body;

1390

then, together with budding twigs we tore down,
burned the remains,
and heaped him a barrow of earth of his homeland,
straight and lofty.
The we proceeded to the maiden's tomb,
a bridal chamber spread with stone.

Even from afar, one of us heard a voice—
shrill weeping, an echo from the tomb—
and he came to our lord Kreon and informed him.
As Kreon approached, the cry hovered about him,
ever nearer, and he moaned then, and shouted:
"Oh, no! Am I a prophet too?

Is this the most luckless road I've ever gone?
'Father'—my son's voice!

Run ahead, men, as fast as you can, up to the tomb!
Some of the stones have been pulled down: get inside!
If that is Haimon's voice I hear . . .
Maybe the gods are robbing me!"

Our master was in despair.
We obeyed him and looked inside.
We saw her down at the tomb's end,
hanged by the neck,
a noose made from her linen robe;
and him, his arms around her waist;
bewept his bride and their lost love,
and his father who had caused this.

Then his father saw him, and cried,
went toward him, cried and called out:
"What did you do? What are you thinking?
What hurt you so? Don't die! Come out!
I'm begging you! On bended knees!"
But the boy looked, wild-eyed, around at him:
spat in his face; not one word;
but drew his sword.

His father dodged and ran back;
so he missed, then turned on himself,
curled over the blade and drove it into his side.
He was still conscious.
His arms flowed about the girl;
he held her and tried to breathe
and breathed out a rush of blood;
and the red drops were on her white cheek.

Now the dead lie in the arms of the dead.
They have been wedded in the house of Death.
Kreon has shown there is no greater evil
than men's failure to consult and to consider.

Exit EURYDICE

KORYPHAIOS The lady is gone,
returned without a word, good or bad.
What do you think it means?

MESSENGER I don't know; but I have faith in her.
I believe that she prefers to mourn her son
in her own home.
She is intelligent. She will not do wrong.

KORYPHAIOS I don't know.
I think that too much silence is more serious
than futile outcries.

MESSENGER Very well, I shall find out.
Possibly she concealed something,
kept it and contained it in her heart.
I'll follow her. You are right—thank you:
excessive silence, to be sure, is sometimes grave.

MESSENGER goes into the palace. By now the scene is as dark
as at the beginning of the drama.

KORYPHAIOS But look, there, he is coming, the king, Kreon.
He carries the token of his own
misdeed, of his own delusion.

KREON enters, from the left, bearing HAIMON's body.

KREON Mindless, hard, deadly crime!
Look: the killer and kill, a father and son.
Poor and worthless counsel, my own.
My boy, young,
and death come soon.
Gone, gone!
I was wrong, not you.

1460

KORYPHAIOS Now you see what Justice is. Too late, it seems.

KREON I have learned, and am ruined.
It was a god. Then, right then!
Hit me, held me, heaped heavy on my head;
shaken on savage paths;
joy trampled;
and for all men, futile struggle.

1470

Enter MESSENGER.

MESSENGER My lord, you have come with grief
like money, in your hands;
and now, in your home, you will see there is more.

KREON What more is left? What's worse?

MESSENGER Your wife, sir, this boy's mother
fresh wounds . . . She is dead.

KREON Ruthless last harbor, death!
Why, when I am destroyed, destroy me again?
Pain and evil! Tell me the worst,
please, young man.

1480

A new victim?
What? What?
Now my wife, so soon?

KORYPHAIOS Now we can see. They're bringing her out.

Slaves lay EURYDICE's body before the altar in front of the palace.

KREON I do see: there's no pity.
Where is the end? Where now? Where?
I just held my child, here in my own hands.
Look, there's a second dead.
Grief doubled.
For all sons, all mothers, torture:

1490

MESSENGER On an altar, bent on a sword,
she shuts her eyes in peaceful blackness.
First Megareus, the older son, dead a hero;
and today Haimon:
she wept for both, and at the end
cursed you for both sons' dying.

KREON No, no!
I'm rising on horror, and horror flies.
Why don't you hack me down?
Has someone a sword?
I and grief are blended. I am grief.

1500

MESSENGER You are responsible for her death as well.

KREON How did she die?

MESSENGER When she learned what happened to the boy,
she struck herself, her own hand.

KREON Nobody else; it's my fault.
I killed you. Me, really me,
Men, take me away.