

Antigone

Sophocles

Translated by E.F. Watling

Characters:

Ismene –daughter of Oedipus

Antigone – daughter of Oedipus

Creon – King of Thebes

Haemon – Son of Creon

Teiresias – a blind prophet

A Sentry

A Messenger

Eurydice – wife of Creon

Chorus of Theban Elders

The following characters do not speak in the play

King's Attendants

Queen's Attendants

A Boy leading Teiresias

Soldiers

Scene: Before the palace in Thebes

PROLOGOS *Enter ISMENE from the central door of the Palace. ANTIGONE follows, anxious and urgent; she closes the door carefully, and comes to join her sister.*

ANTIGONE: O sister! Ismene dear, dear sister Ismene!

You know how heavy the hand of God is upon us;
How we who are left must suffer for our fathers, Oedipus.

There is no pain, no sorrow, no suffering, no dishonor

5 We have not shared together, you and I.

And now there is something more. Have you heard this order,

The latest order that the King has proclaimed to the city?

Have you heard how our dearest are being treated like enemies?

ISMENE: I have heard nothing about any of those we love,

10 Neither good or evil—not, I mean, since the death

Of our two brothers, both fallen in a day.

The Argive army,¹ I hear was withdrawn last night.

I know no more to make me sad or glad.

ANTIGONE: I thought you did not. That's why I brought you out here,

15 Where we shan't be heard, to tell you something alone

ISMENE: What is it, Antigone? Black news, I can see already.

ANTIGONE: O Ismene, what do you think? Our two dear brothers...

Creon has given funeral honors to one,²

And not to the other; nothing but shame and ignominy.

¹ **Argive:** The army that attacked Thebes from Argos, a city in southern Greece.

² **Funeral Honors to one:** In Greek myth, the souls of unburied human beings could not cross into the underworld – the realm of the dead, so the soul would wander forever with no permanent resting place. Therefore, burial was a sacred duty of the surviving friends and relatives.

20 Eteocles³ had been buried, they tell me, in state,
 With all honorable observances due to the dead.
 But, Polynices,⁴ just as unhappily fallen—the order
 Says he is not to be buried, not to be mourned;
 To be left unburied, unwept, a feast of flesh
 25 For keen-eyed carrion birds.⁵ The noble Creon!
 It is against you and me he had made this order.
 Yes, against me. And soon he will be here himself
 To make it plain to those who have not heard it,
 And to enforce it. This is no idle threat;
 30 The punishment for disobedience is death by stoning.
 So now you know. And now is time to show
 Whether or not you are worthy of your high blood
ISMENE: My poor Antigone, if this is really true,
 What more can I do, or undo, to help you?
 35 **ANTIGONE:** *Will* you help me? Will you do something with me? Will you?
ISMENE: Help you do what, Antigone? What do you mean?
ANTIGONE: Would you help me lift the body.. you and me?
ISMENE: You cannot mean...to bury him? Against the order?
ANTIGONE: Is he not my brother, and yours, whether you like it
 40 Or not? *I* shall never desert him, never.
ISMENE: How could you dare, when Creon has expressly forbidden it?
ANTIGONE: He has no right to keep me from my own.
ISMENE: O sister, sister, do you forget how our father
 Perished is same in misery, his awful sin
 45 Self proved, blinded by his own self-mutilation?
 And then his mother, his wife—for she was both—
 Destroyed herself in a noose of her own making⁶
 And now our brothers, both in a single day
 Fallen in an awful exaction of death for death.
 50 Blood for blood, each slain by the other's hand.
 Now we two are left; and what will be the end of us,
 If we transgress the law and defy the king?
 O think, Antigone; we are women; it is not for us
 To fight against men; our rulers are stronger than we,
 55 And we must obey in this, or in worse than this,
 May the dead forgive me, I can do no other
 But as I am commanded; to do more is madness.
ANTIGONE: No; then I will not ask you for your help.
 Nor would I thank you for it, if you gave it.
 60 Go your own way; I will bury *my* brother;
 And if I die fore it, what happiness?
 Convicted of reverence—I shall be content
 To lie beside a brother whom I love.

³**Eteocles:** (ih-tee-uh-kleez)

⁴**Polynices:** (pol-eh-nuh-seez)

⁵**carrion birds:** birds that eat dead, rotting flesh

⁶**his mother...own making:** Jocasta, realizing that she was both wife and mother to Oedipus, hanged herself.

65 We have only a little time to please the living.
 But all eternity to love the dead.
 There I shall lie forever. Live, if you will;
 Live, and defy the holiest laws of heaven.
ISMENE: I do not defy them; but I cannot act
 Against the State. I am not strong enough.
 70 **ANTIGONE:** Let that be your excuse, then. I will go
 And heap a mound of earth over my brother.
ISMENE: I fear for you, Antigone; I fear—
ANTIGONE: You need not fear for me. Fear for yourself.
ISMENE: At least be secret. Do not breathe a word.
 75 I'll not betray your secret.
ANTIGONE: Publish it
 To all the world! Else I shall hate you more.
ISMENE: Your heart burns! Mine is frozen at the thought.
ANTIGONE: I know my duty, where true duty lies.
ISMENE: If you can do it; but you're bound to fail.
 80 **ANTIGONE:** When I have *tried* and failed, I shall have failed.
ISMENE: No sense in starting a hopeless task.
ANTIGONE: Oh, I shall hate you if you talk like that!
 And *he*⁷ shall hate you, rightly. Leave me alone
 With my own madness. There is no punishment
 85 Can rob me of my honorable death.
ISMENE: Go then, if you are determined, to your folly.
 But remember that those you love you...love you still.

(ISMENE goes into the Palace. ANTIGONE leaves the stage by side exit)

PARADOS: *(Enter the CHORUS of Theban Elders)*

CHORUS: Hail the sun! the brightest of all that ever
 Dawned on the City of Seven Gates, City of Thebes!
 90 Hail the golden dawn over Dirce' river⁸
 Rising to speed the flight of the white invaders
 Homeward in full retreat

The army of Polynices was gathered against us,
 In angry dispute his voice was lifted against us,
 95 Like a ravening bird of prey he swooped around us
 With white wings flashing, with flying plumes,
 With armed hosts ranked in thousands.

At the threshold of seven gates in a circle of blood
 His swords stood round us, his jaws were opened against us;
 100 But before he could taste our blood, or consume us with fire,
 He fled, fled with the roar of the dragon behind him
 And thunder was in his ears.

⁷*he:* Polynices

⁸*Dirce's River:* Dirce, the wife of a previous ruler of Thebes, was brutally murdered and her

corpse thrown into a stream thereafter called by her name.

105 The Father of Heaven abhors the proud tongue's boasting;
He marked the oncoming torrent, the flashing stream
Of their golden harness, the clash of their battle gear;
He heard the invader cry Victory over our ramparts,
And smote him with fire to the ground⁹

110 Down to the ground from the crest of his hurricane onslaught
He swung, with fiery brands of his hate brought low;
Each and all to their doom of destruction appointed
By the god that fighteth for us.

115 Seven invaders at seven gates seven defenders
Spoiled of their bronze for a tribute to Zeus;¹⁰ save two
Luckless brothers in one fight matched together
And in one death laid low.¹¹

120 Great is the victory, great be the joy
In the city of Thebes, the city of chariots.
Now is the time to fill the temples
With glad thanksgiving for warfare ended;
Shake the ground with the night-long dances,
Bacchus afoot and delight abounding.

125 But see, the King comes here,
Creon, the son of Menoecus,¹²
Whom the gods have appointed for us
In our recent change of fortune,
That has led him to call us together
By his special proclamation?

EPISODE ONE: (*The central door is opened, and CREON enters*)

130 **CREON:** My councilors: now that the gods have brought our city
Safe through the storm of trouble to tranquility,
I have called you especially out of all my people
To conference together, knowing that you
Were loyal subjects when King Laius¹³ reigned,
And when King Oedipus so wisely ruled us,

⁹***The Father of Heaven...smote him with fire to the ground:*** Zeus, who favored the Thebans in battle, struck down the invading Argive army with thunderbolts.

¹⁰***Seven invaders...tribute to Zeus:*** Polynices and six Argive chiefs each attacked one of Thebes' seven gates, which were successfully defended by seven Theban heroes. The Theban defenders offered the armor of the slain Argive chiefs as a tribute to Zeus

¹¹***Luckless brothers...laid low:*** Antigone's brothers, Polynices and Eteocles, killed each other in single combat, ending the war.

¹²***Menoecus:*** (Meh-nee-cee-us)

¹³***King Laius:*** former king of Thebes and father of Oedipus

135 And again, upon his death, faithfully served
His sons, till they in turn fell—both slayers, both slain,
Both stained with brother-blood, dead in a day—
And I their next of kin, inherited
The throne and kingdom which I now possess.
140 No other touchstone can test the heart of a man,
The temper of his mind and spirit, till he be tried
In the practice of authority and rule.
For my part, I have always held the view,
And hold it still, that a king whose lips are sealed
145 By fear, unwilling to seek advice, is damned.
And no less damned is he who puts friend
Above his country; I have no good word for him.
As god is my witness, who sees all,
When I see any danger threatening my people,
150 Whatever it may be, I shall declare it.
No man who is my country's enemy
Shall call himself my friend. Of this I am sure—
Our country is our life; only when she¹⁴
Rides safely, have we any friends at all.
155 Such is my policy for our common weal
In pursuance of this, I have made a proclamation
Concerning the sons of Oedipus, as follows:
Eteocles, who fell fighting in defense of the city,
Fighting gallantly, is to be honored with burial
160 And with all the rites due to the noble dead.
The other—you know whom I mean—his brother, Polynices,
Who came back from exile intending to burn and destroy
His fatherland and the gods of his fatherland,
To drink the blood of his kin, to make them slaves—
165 He is to have no grave, no burial,
No mourning from anyone; it is forbidden.
He is to be left unburied, left to be eaten
By dogs and vultures, a horror for all to see.
I am determined that never, if I can help it,
170 Shall evil triumph over good. Alive
Or dead, the faithful servant of this country
Shall be rewarded.

CHORUS: Creon, son of Menoceaes,
You have given your judgment for the friend and for the enemy.
As for those that are dead, so for us who remain,
175 Your will is law.

CREON: See then that it be kept

CHORUS: My lord, some younger would be fitter for the task.

CREON: Watchers are already set over the corpse

CHORUS: What other duty then remains for us?

CREON: Not to connive at any disobedience.

¹⁴ *she*: Thebes

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CHORUS: If there were any so mad as to ask for death---

(He turns to go. A SENTRY enters from the side of the stage. CREON pauses at the Palace Door)

CREON: Ay, that is penalty. There is always someone
Ready to be lured to ruin by hope of gain.

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SENTRY: My lord: if I am out of breath, it is not from haste.
I have not been running. ON the contrary, many a time
I stopped to think and loitered on the way,
Saying to myself “Why hurry to your doom,
Poor fool?” and then I said, “Hurry, you fool.
If Creon hears this from another man,
Your head’s as good as off.” So here I am,
As quick as my unwilling haste could bring me;
In no great hurry, in fact. So now I am here . . .
But I’ll tell my story. . . though it may be nothing after all.
And whatever I have to suffer, it can’t be more
Than what God wills, so I cling to that for my comfort.

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CREON: Good heavens, man whatever is the matter?

SENTRY: To speak of myself first—I never did it, sir/
Nor saw who did; no one can punish me for that.

CREON: You tell your story with a deal of artful precaution.
It’s evidently something strange.

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SENTRY: It is.
So strange, it’s very difficult to tell.

CREON: Well, out with it, and let’s be done with you.

SENTRY: It’s this, sir. The corpse. . . someone has just
Buried it and gone. Dry dust over the body
They scattered, in the manner of holy burial.

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CREON: What! Who dared to do it?

SENTRY: I don’t know, sir.
There was no sign of a pick, no scratch of a shovel;
The ground was hard and dry – no trace of a wheel;
Whoever it was has left no clues behind him.
When the sentry on the first watch showed it us,
We were amazed. The corpse was covered from sight—
Not with a proper grave—just a layer of earth—
As it might be, the act of some pious passer-by.
There were no tracks of animal either, a dog
Or anything that might have come and mauled the body.
Of course we all started pitching in to each other,
Accusing each other, and might have come to blows,
With no one to stop us; for anyone might have done it,
But it couldn’t be proved against him, and all denied it.
We were all ready to take hot iron in hand
And go through fire and swear by God and heaven
We hadn’t done it, nor knew of anyone
That could have thought of doing it, much less done it.
Well, we could make nothing of it. Then one of our men

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225 Said something that make all our blood run cold—
 Something we could never refuse to do, nor do.
 But at our own risk. What he said was, “This
 Must be reported to the King; we can’t conceal it.”
 So it was agreed. We drew lots for it, and I,
 Such was my luck, was chosen. So here I am,
 230 As much against my will as yours, I’m sure;
 A bringer of bad news expects no welcome.

CHORUS: My lord, I fear—I feared it from the first—
 That this may prove to be an act of the gods.

CREON: Enough of that! Or I shall lose my patience.
 235 Don’t talk like an old fool, old though you be.
 Blasphemy, to say the gods could give a thought
 To carrion flesh! Held him in high esteem,
 I suppose, and buried him like a benefactor—
 A man who came to burn their temples down,
 240 Ransack their holy shrines, their land, their laws?
 Is that the sort of man you think the gods love?
 Not they. No. There’s a party of malcontents
 In the city, rebels against my word and law,
 Shakers of heads in secret, impatient of rule;
 245 *They* are the people, I see it well enough,
 Who have bribed their instruments to do this thing.
 Money! Money’s the curse of man, none greater.
 That’s what wrecks cities, banishes men from him,
 Tempts and deludes the most well-meaning soul,
 250 Pointing out the way to infamy and shame.
 Well, they shall pay for their success. (*To the SENTRY*) See to it!
 See to it, you! Upon my oath, I swear,
 As Zeus is my god above; either you find
 The perpetrator of this burial
 255 And bring him here into my sight, or death—
 No, not your mere death shall pay the reckoning,
 But, for a living lesson against such infamy,
 You shall be racked and tortured till you tell
 The whole truth of this outrage; so you may learn
 260 To seek your gain where gain is yours to get,
 Not try to grasp it everywhere. In wickedness
 You’ll find more loss than profit

SENTRY: May I say more?
CREON: No more; each word you say but stings me more.
SENTRY: Stings in your ears, sir, or in your deeper feelings?
 265 **CREON:** Don’t bandy words, fellow about my feelings.
SENTRY: Though I offend your ears, sir, it is not I
 But he that’s guilty that offends your soul.
CREON: Oh, born to argue, were you?
SENTRY: Maybe so;
 But still not guilty in this business.

CREON: Doubly soul, if you have sold your soul for money.
 270 **SENTRY:** To think that thinking men should think so wrongly!

CREON: Think what you will. But if you fail to find
The doer of this deed, you'll learn one thing:
Ill-gotten gain brings no one any good.
(he goes into the Palace)

275 **SENTRY:** Well, heaven send they find him. But whether or no,
They'll not find me again, that's sure. Once free,
Who never thought to see another day,
I'll thank my lucky stars, and keep away.
(exit)

STASIMON ONE:

280 **CHORUS:** Wonders are many on earth, and the greatest of these
Is man, who rides the ocean and takes his way
Through the deeps, though wide-swept valleys of perilous seas
That surge and sway.

285 He is master of ageless Earth, to his own will bending
The immortal mother of gods by the sweat of his brow,
As year succeeds to year, with toil unending
Of mule and plough.

290 He is lord of all things living; birds of the air,
Beasts of the field, all creatures of sea and land.
He taketh, cunning to capture and ensnare
With sleight of hand;

Hunting the savage beast from the upland rocks,
Taming the mountain monarch in his lair,
Teaching the wild horse and the roaming ox
His yoke to bear.

295 The use of language, the wind-swift motion of brain
He learnt; found out the laws of living together
In cities, building him shelter against the rain
And wintry weather.

300 There is nothing beyond his power. His subtlety
Meeteth all chance, all danger conquereth.
For every ill he hath found its remedy,
Save only death.

305 O wondrous subtlety of man, that draws
To good or evil ways! Great honor is given
And power to him who upholdeth his country's laws
And the justice of heaven

310 But he that, too rashly daring, walks in sin
In solitary pride to his life's end.
At door or mine shall never enter in
To call me friend.

(Seeing some persons approach from a distance. Each of the following lines are spoken by a different member of the CHORUS)

O gods! A wonder to see!

Surely it cannot be—

It is no other—

Antigone!

315 Unhappy maid—

Unhappy Oedipus' daughter; it is she they bring.

Can she have rashly disobeyed

The order of the King?

EPISODE TWO: *(Enter the SENTRY, bringing ANTIGONE guarded by two more soldiers)*

SENTRY: We've got her. Here's the woman that did the deed.

320 We found her in the act of burying him. Where's the king?

CHORUS: He is just coming out of the palace now.

(enter CREON)

CREON: What's this? What am I just in time to see?

SENTRY: My lord, an oath's a very dangerous thing.

Second thoughts may prove us liars. Not long since

325 I swore I wouldn't trust myself again

To face your threat; you gave me a drubbing the first time.

But there's no pleasure like an unexpected pleasure,

Not by a long way. And so I've come again,

Though against my solemn oath. And I've brought this lady,

330 Who's been caught in the act of setting that grave in order.

And no casting lots for it this time—the prize is mine

And no one else's. So take her; judge and convict her.

I'm free, I hope, and quit of the horrible business.

CREON: How did you find her? Where have you brought her from?

335 **SENTRY:** She was burying the man with her own hands, and that's the truth.

CREON: Are you in your senses? Do you know what you are saying?

SENTRY: I saw her myself, burying the body of the man

Whom you said not to bury. Don't I speak plain?

CREON: How did she come to be seen and taken in the act?

340 **SENTRY:** It was this way. After I got back to the place,

With all your threats and curses ringing in my ears,

We swept off all the earth that covered the body,

And left it a sodden, naked corpse again;

Then sate up on the hill, on the windward side,

345 Keeping clear of the stench of him, as far as we could;

All of us keeping each other up to the mark,

With pretty sharp speaking, not to be caught napping this time.

So this went on some hours, till the flaming sun

Was high in the top of the sky, and the heat was blazing.

350 Suddenly a storm of dust, like a plague from heaven,

Filling the sky; you had to shut your eyes

To stand against it. When at last it stopped,

There was a girl, screaming like an angry bird,

355 When it finds its nest empty and little ones gone.

Just like that she screamed, seeing the body
 Naked, crying and cursing the ones who had done it.
 Then she picks up the dry earth in her hands,
 And pouring out of a fine bronze urn she's brought
 360 She makes her offering three times to the dead¹⁵
 Soon as we saw it, down we came and caught her.
 She wasn't at all frightened. As so we charged her
 With what she'd done before, and this. She admitted it,
 I'm glad to say—though sorry, too, in a way.
 365 It's good to save your own skin, but a pity
 To have to see another get into trouble,
 Whom you've no grudge against. However, I can't say
 I've ever valued anyone else's life
 More than my own, and that's the honest truth.
 370 **CREON**(to *ANTIGONE*): Well, what do you say—you, hiding your head there:
 Do you admit, or do you deny the deed?
ANTIGONE: I do admit it. I do not deny it.
CREON (to *SENTRY*): You—you may go. You are discharged from blame
 (*exit Sentry*)
 Now tell me, in as few words as you can,
 375 Did you know the order forbidding such an act?
ANTIGONE: I knew it, naturally. It was plain enough.
CREON: And yet, you dared to contravene it?
ANTIGONE: Yes.
 That order did not come from God. Justice,
 That dwells with the gods below, knows no such law.
 380 I did not think your edicts strong enough
 To overrule the unwritten unalterable laws
 Of God and heaven, you being only a man.
 They are not of yesterday or today, but everlasting
 Though where they came from, none of us can tell.
 385 Guilty of their transgression before God
 I cannot be, for any man on earth.
 I knew that I should die, of course,
 With or without your order. If it be soon,
 So much the better. Living in daily torment
 390 As I do, who would not be glad to die?
 This punishment will not be any pain.
 Only if I let my mother's son
 Lie there unburied, then I could not have borne it.
 This I can bear. Does that seem foolish to you?
 395 Or is it you that are foolish to judge me so?
CHORUS: She shows her father's stubborn spirit; foolish
 Not to give way when everything is against her.
CREON: Ah, but you'll see. The over-obstinate spirit
 Is soonest broken; as the strongest iron will snap
 400 If over-tempered in the fire to brittleness.
 A little halter is enough to break

¹⁵*And pouring...to the dead* pouring wine or water as an offering to the gods

The wildest horse. Proud thoughts do not sit well
 Upon subordinates. This girl's proud spirit
 Was first in evidence when she broke the law;
 405 And now, to add insult to her injury,
 She gloats over her deed. But, as I live,
 She shall not flout my orders with impunity.
 My sister's child—ay, were she ever nearer,
 Nearest and dearest, she should not escape
 410 Full punishment—she, and her sister too,
 Her partner, doubtless, in this burying.
 Let her be fetched! She was in the house just now;
 I saw her, hardly in her right mind either.
 Often the thoughts of those who plan dark deeds
 415 Betray themselves before the deed is done.
 The criminal who being caught still tries.
 To make a fair excuse, is damned indeed.
ANTIGONE: Now that you have caught, will you do more than kill me?
CREON: No, nothing more; that is all I could wish.
 420 **ANTIGONE:** Why then delay? There is nothing that you can say
 That I should wish to hear, as nothing I say
 Can weigh with you. I have given my brother burial.
 What greater honor could I wish? All these
 Would say that what I did was honorable,
 425 But fear locks up their lips. To speak and act
 Just as he likes is a king's prerogative
CREON: You are wrong. Non of my subjects thinks as you do.
ANTIGONE: Yes, sir, they do; but dare not tell you so.
CREON: An you are not only alone, but unashamed.
 430 **ANTIGONE:** There is no shame in honoring my brother.
CREON: Was not his enemy, who died with him, your brother?
ANTIGONE: Yes, both were brothers, both of the same parents.
CREON. You honor one,, and so insult the other.
ANTIGONE: He that is dead will not accuse me of that.
 435 **CREON:** He will, if you honor him no more than the traitor.
ANTIGONE: It was not a slave, but his brother that died with him.
CREON: Attacking his country, while the other defended it.
ANTIGONE: Even so, we have a duty to the dead.
CREON: Not to give equal honor to good and bad.
 440 **ANTIGONE:** Who Knows? In the country of the dead that may be the law.
CREON: An enemy can't be a friend, even when dead.
ANTIGONE: My way is to share my love, not share my hate.
CREON: Go then, and share your love among the dead.
 We'll have no woman's law here, while I live.
(enter ISMENE from the Palace)
 445 **CHORUS:** Here comes Ismene, weeping
 In sisterly sorrow; a darkened brow,
 Flushed face, and the fair cheek marred
 With flooding rain.
CREON: You crawling viper! Lurking in my house
 450 to suck my blood! Two traitors unbeknown

Plotting against my throne. Do you admit
To share in this burying, or deny all knowledge?

ISMENE: I did it—yes—if she will let me say so
I am as much to blame as she is.

ANTIGONE: No.
That is not just. You would not lend a hand
And I refused your help in what I did.

ISMENE: But I am not ashamed to stand beside you
Now in your hour of trial, Antigone.

ANTIGONE: Whose was the deed, Death and the dead are witness
I love no friend whose love is only words.

ISMENE: O sister, sister, let me share your death,,,
Share in the tribute of honor to him that is dead.

ANTIGONE: You shall not die with me. You shall not claim
That which you would not touch. One death is enough.

ISMENE: How can I bear to live, if you must die?

ANTIGONE: Ask Creon. Is not he the one you care for?

ISMENE: You do yourself no good to taunt me so.

ANTIGONE: Indeed, no: even my jests are bitter pains.

ISMENE: But how, O tell me, how can I still help you?

ANTIGONE: Help yourself. I shall not stand in your way.

ISMENE: For pity, Antigone—can I not die with you?

ANTIGONE: You chose; life was your choice, when mine was death.

ISMENE: Although I warned you that it would be so.

ANTIGONE: Your way seemed right to some, to others mine.

ISMENE: But now both in the wrong, and both condemned.

ANTIGONE: No, no. You live. My heart was long since dead,
So it was right for me to help the dead.

CREON: I do believe the creatures both are mad;
One lately crazed the other from her birth.

ISMENE: Is it not likely, sir? The strongest mind
Cannot but break under misfortune's blows.

CREON: Yours did, when you threw in your lot with hers.

ISMENE: How could I wish to live without my sister?

CREON: You have no sister. Count her dead already.

ISMENE: You could not take her—kill your own son's bride?

CREON: Oh, there are other fields for him to plough.

ISMENE: No truer troth was ever made then theirs.

CREON: No son of mine shall wed so vile a creature.

ANTIGONE: O Haemon, can your father spite you so?

CREON: You and your paramour, I hat you both.

CHORUS: Sir, would you take her from your own son's arm?

CREON: Not I, but death shall take her.

CHORUS: Be it so.

Her death is seems is certain.

CREON: Certain it is.

No more delay. Take them and keep them within—

The proper place for women. None so brave

As not to look for some way to escape

When they see life stand face to face with death.

STASIMON TWO: (*the women are taken away*)

CHORUS: Happy are they who know not the taste of evil.

From a house that heaven hath shaken
500 The curse departs not
But falls upon all the blood¹⁶
Like the restless surge of the sea when the dark storm drives
The black sand hurled from the deeps
And the Thracian gales boom down
505 On the echoing shore.

In life and in death is the house of Labdacus¹⁷ stricken.
Generation to generation,
With no atonement,
It is scourged by the wrath of a god.

510 And now for the dead dust's sake is light of promise,
The tree's last root, crushed out
By pride of heart and the sin
Of presumptuous tongue.

515 For what presumption of man can match thy power,
O Zeus, that art not subject to sleep or time
Or age, living forever in bright Olympus?
Tomorrow and for all time to come,
As in the past,
This law is immutable:¹⁸
520 For mortals greatly to live is greatly to suffer

Roving ambition helps many a man to good,
And many it falsely lures to light desires,
Till failure trips them unawares, and they fall
On the fire that consumes them. Well was it said,
525 Evil seems good
To him who is doomed to suffer;
And short is the time before that suffering comes¹⁹

But here comes Haemon,
Your youngest son.
530 Does he come to speak his sorrow
For the doom of his promised bride,
The loss of his marriage hopes?

EPISODE THREE: **CREON:** We shall know it soon, and need no prophet to tell us.
(*enter HAEMON*)

¹⁶*The curse...upon all the blood:* The curse on Oedipus has passed on to his descendants

¹⁷*the house of Labdacus:* the ruling family of Thebes. Labdacus, a former king of Thebes, was the grandfather of Oedipus.

¹⁸*immutable:* unchangeable

¹⁹*Evil seems good...suffering comes:* although a man may convince himself that the evil he does is good, he must eventually suffer punishment for his wrongdoing.

535 Son, You have heard, I think, our final judgment
 On your late betrothed. No angry words, I hope?
 Still friends, in spite of everything, my son?

HAEMON: I am your son, sir; by your wise decisions
 My life is ruled, and them I shall always obey.
 I cannot value any marriage tie
 540 Above your own good guidance.

CREON: Rightly said.
 Your father's will should have your heart's first place.
 Only for this do fathers pray for sons
 Obedient, loyal, ready to strike down
 Their father's foes, and love their father's friends.
 545 To be the father of unprofitable sons
 Is to be the father of sorrows, a laughingstock
 To all one's enemies. Do not be fooled, my son,
 By lust and the wiles of a woman. You'll have bought
 Cold comfort if your wife's a worthless one.
 550 No wound strikes deeper than love that is turned to hate.
 This girl's an enemy; away with her,
 And let her go and find a mate in Hades.
 Once having caught her in a flagrant act—
 The one and only traitor in our State—
 555 I cannot make myself a traitor too;
 So she must die. Well may she pray to Zeus,
 The god of family love. How, if I tolerate
 A traitor at home, shall I rule those abroad?
 He that is a righteous master of his house
 560 Will be a righteous statesman. To transgress
 Or twist the law to one's own pleasure, presume
 To order where one should obey, is sinful,
 And I will have none of it.
 He whom the State appoints must be obeyed
 565 To the smallest matter, be it right—or wrong.
 And he that rules his household, without a doubt,
 Will make the wisest king, or, for that matter,
 The staunchest subject. He will be the man
 You can depend on in the storm of war,
 570 The faithfulest comrade in the day of battle.
 There is no more deadly peril than disobedience;
 States are devoured by it, homes laid in ruins,
 Armies defeated, victory turned to rout.
 While simple obedience saves the lives of hundreds
 575 Of honest folk. Therefore, I hold to the law,
 And will never betray it—least of all for a woman.
 Better be beaten, if need be, by a man,
 Than let a woman get the better of us.

CHORUS: To me, as far as an old man can tell,
 580 It seems your Majesty has spoken well.

HAEMON: Father, man's wisdom is the gift of heaven,
 The greatest gift of all. I neither am

Nor wish to be clever enough to prove your wrong,
 Though all men might no think the same as you do.
 585 Nevertheless, I have to be your watchdog,
 To know what others say and what they do,
 And what they find to praise and what to blame.
 Your frown is a sufficient silencer
 Of any word that is not for your ears.
 590 But *I* hear whispers spoken in the dark;
 On every side, I hear voices of pity
 For this poor girl, doomed to the cruelest death,
 And most unjust, that ever woman suffered
 For and honorable action—burying a brother
 595 Who was killed in battle, rather than leave him naked
 For dogs to maul and carrion birds to peck at.
 Has she not rather earned a crown of gold?—
 Such is the secret talk about the town.
 Father, there is noting I can prize above
 600 Your happiness and well-being. What greater good
 Can any son desire? Can any father
 Desire more from his son? Therefore I say,
 Let not your first thought be your only thought.
 Think if there cannot be some other way.
 605 Surely, to think your own the only wisdom,
 And yours the only word, the only will,
 Betrays a shallow spirit, an empty heart.
 It is no weakness for the wisest man
 To learn when he is wrong, know when to yield.
 610 So, on the margin of a flooded river
 Trees bending to the torrent live unbroken,
 While those that strain against it are snapped off.
 A sailor has to tack and slacken sheets
 Before the gale, or find himself capsized.
 615 So, father, pause, and put aside your anger.
 I think, for what my young opinion's worth,
 That good as it is to have infallible wisdom,
 Since this is rarely found, the next best thing
 Is to be willing to listen to wise advice.
 620 **CHORUS:** There is something to be said, my lord, for this point of view,
 And for yours as well; there is so much to be said on both sides.
CREON: Indeed! Am I to take lessons at my time of life
 From a fellow of his age?
HAEMON: No lesion you need to be ashamed of .
 625 It isn't a question of age, but of right and wrong.
CREON: Would you call it right to admire an act of obedience?
HAEMON: Not if the act were also dishonorable.
CREON: And was not this woman's action dishonorable?
HAEMON: The people of Thebes think not.
CREON: The people of Thebes!
 630 Since when do I take my orders from the people of Thebes?
HAEMON: Isn't that a rather childish thing to say?

CREON: No, I am king, and responsible only to myself.
HAEMON: A one-man state? What sort of state is that?
CREON: Why, does not every state belong to its ruler?
635 **HAEMON:** You'd be an excellent king—on a desert island.
CREON: Of course, if you are on the woman's side—
HAEMON: No, no—
Unless you're the woman. It's you I'm fighting for.
CREON: What, villain, when every word you speak is against me?
HAEMON: Only because I know you're wrong, wrong.
640 **CREON:** Wong? To respect my own authority?
HAEMON: What sort of respect tramples on all that is holy?
CREON: Despicable coward! No more will than a woman!
HAEMON: I have nothing to be ashamed of.
CREON: You plead her cause.
HAEMON: No, *yours*, and mine, and that of the gods of the dead.
645 **CREON:** You'll never marry her this side of death.
HAEMON: Then, if she dies, she does not die alone.
CREON: Is that a threat, you impudent—
HAEMON: It is a threat
To try to argue against wrong-headedness?
CREON: You'll learn what wrong-headedness is, my friend, to your cost.
650 **HAEMON:** O father, I could call you mad, were you not my father.
CREON: Don't toady me, boy; keep that for your lady-love.
HAEMON: You mean to have the last word, then?
CREON: I do.
And what is more, by all the gods in heaven,
I'll make you sorry for your impudence.
(calling to those within)
655 Bring out that she-devil, and let her die
Now, with her bridegroom by to see it done!
HAEMON: That sight I'll never see. Nor from this hour
Shall you see me again. Let those that will
Be witness to your wickedness and folly.
(exit)
660 **CHORUS:** He is gone, my lord, in very passionate haste.
And who shall say what a young man's wrath may do?
CREON: Let him go! Let him do! Let him rage as never man raged,
He shall not save those women from their doom.
CHORUS: You mean, then, sire, to put them both to death?
665 **CREON:** No, not the one whose hand is innocent.
CHORUS: And to what death do you condemn the other?
CREON: I'll have her taken to a desert place
Where no man ever walked, and there walled up
Inside a cave, alive, with food enough
670 To acquit ourselves of the blood-guiltiness
That else would lie upon our commonwealth.

There she may pray to Death, the god she loves,
And ask release from death; or learn at last
What hope there is for those who worship death.²⁰ (*Exit*)

EPISODE FOUR:

675 **CHORUS:** Where is the equal of Love?
Where is the battle he cannot win,
The power he cannot outmatch?
In the farthest corners of earth, in the midst of the sea,
He is there; her is here
680 In the bloom of a fair face
Lying in wait;
And the grip of his madness
Spares not god or man,
Marring the righteous man,
685 Driving his soul into mazes of sin
And strife, dividing a house.
For the light that burns in the eyes of a bride of desire
Is a fire that consumes.
At the side of the great gods
690 Aphrodite immortal
Works her will upon all.
(*the doors are opened and ANTIGONE enters, guarded*)
But here is a sight beyond all bearing,
At which my eyes cannot but weep;
Antigone forth faring
695 To her bridal bower of endless sleep
ANTIGONE: You see me, countrymen, on my last journey,
Taking my last leave of the light of day;
Going to my rest, where death shall take me
Alive across the silent river²¹
700 No wedding day, no marriage music;
Death will be all by bridal dower
CHORUS: But glory and praise go with you, lady,
To your resting place. You go with your beauty
Unmarred by the hand of consuming sickness
705 Untouched by the sword, living and free,
As none other that ever died before you
ANTIGONE: The daughter of Tantalus,²² a Phrygian maid,
Was doomed a piteous death on the rock
Of Sipylus, which embraced and imprisoned her,
710

²⁰*I'll have her taken...worship death:* If Antigone is provide with enough food for enable her to pray for her life, then whether or not she dies or not is up to the gods, and Creon and the State are blameless

²¹*silent river:* in Greek mythology, one of the rivers that separated the land of the dead from the land of the living

²²*the daughter of Tantalus:* Niobe (ni-o-be), whose children were slain by the gods to punish her for her excessive pride (hubris). Overcome with grief, she turned into a stone from which tears continued to flow. The stone was carried by a whirlwind to Mount Sipylus in Phrygia, the kingdom of Niobe's father.

Merciless as the ivy, rain and snow
Beat down upon her, mingled with her tears,
As she wasted and died. Such was her story,
And such is the sleep that I shall go to.

715 **CHORUS:** She was a goddess of immortal birth,
And we are mortals; the greater the glory,
To share the fate of a god-born maiden,
A living death, but name undying.

720 **ANTIGONE:** Mockery, mockery!²³ By the gods of your fathers,
Must you make me a laughingstock while I yet live?
O lordly sons of my city! O Thebes!
Your valleys of rivers, your chariots and horses!
No friend to weep at my banishment
To a rock-hewn chamber of endless duration,
In a strange cold tomb alone to linger
725 Lost between life and death for ever.

CHORUS: My child, you have gone your way
To the outermost limit of daring
And have stumbled against Law enthroned.
This is the expiation²⁴
730 You must make for the sin of your father.

ANTIGONE: My father—the thought that sears my soul—
The unending burden of the house of Labdacus.
Monstrous marriage of mother and son. . .
My father . . . my parents. . . O hideous shame!
735 Whom now I follow, unwed, curse-ridden,
Doomed to this death by the ill-starred marriage
That marred my brother's life.

CHORUS: An act of homage is good in itself, my daughter;
But authority cannot afford to connive at disobedience.
740 You are the victim of your own self-will.

ANTIGONE: And must go the way that lies before me.
No funeral hymn; no marriage music;
No sun from this day forth, no light,
No friend to weep at my departing
(*enter CREON*)

745 **CREON:** Weeping and wailing at the door of death!
There'd be no end of it, if it had force
To buy death off. Away with her at once.
And close her up in her rock-vaulted tomb.
Leave her and let her die, if die she must,
750 Or live within her dungeon. Thon on earth
Her life is ended from this day, her blood
Will not be on our hands.

²³*Mockery:* Antigone mistakenly thinks that the chorus, in comparing her to the gods, is making fun of her.

²⁴*expiation:* atonement

ANTIGONE: So to my grave,
 My bridal bower, my everlasting prison,
 I go, to join those many of my kinsmen
 755 Who dwell in the mansions of Persephone²⁵
 Last and unhappiest, before my time.
 Yet I believe my father will be there
 To welcome me, my mother greet me gladly,
 And you, my brother, gladly see me come.
 760 Each one of you, my hands have laid to rest,
 Pouring the due libations on your graves.
 It was by this service to your dear body, Polynices,
 I earned the punishment which I now suffer,
 Though all good people know it was for your honor.
 765 O but I would not have done the forbidden thing
 For any husband or for any son.
 For why? I could have had another husband
 And by him other sons, if one were lost;
 But father and mother lost, where would I get
 770 Another brother? For thus preferring you,
 My brother, Creon condemns me and hales me away,
 Never a bride, never a mother, unfriended,
 Condemned alive to solitary death.
 What law of heaven have I transgressed? What god
 775 Can save me now? What help or hope have I,
 In whom devotion is deemed sacrilege?
 If this is God's will, I shall learn my lesson
 In death; but if my enemies are wrong,
 I wish them no worse punishment than mine.
 780 **CHORUS:** Still the same tempest in the heart
 Torments her soul with angry gusts.
CREON: The more cause than have they that guard her
 To hasten their work; or they too suffer
CHORUS: Alas, that word had the sound of death.
 785 **CREON:** Indeed there is no more to hope for.
ANTIGONE: Gods of our fathers, my city, my home,
 Rulers of Thebes! Time stays no longer.
 Last daughter of your royal house
 Go I, *his* prisoner, because I honored
 790 Those things to which honor truly belongs.
 (*ANTIGONE is led away*)

STASIMON FOUR: CHORUS: So, long ago, lay Danae²⁶
 Entombed within her brazen bower
 Noble and beautiful was she,
 On whom there fell the golden shower
 795 Of life from Zeus. There is no tower.

²⁵**Persephone:** (per-seff-uh-nee) Queen of the Underworld

²⁶**Danae:** a maiden imprisoned in a bronze chamber by her father, who feared a prophecy that a child born to Danae would some day kill him. Zeus entered the chamber as a golden rain, and from their union, Perseus, who eventually did kill his grandfather, was born.

So high, no armory so great,
No ship so swift, as is the power
Of man's inexorable fate.

800 There as the proud Edonian kin,
Lycurgus,²⁷ in rock-prison pent
For arrogantly challenging
God's laws: it was his punishment
Of that swift passion to repent.

805 In slow perception, for that he
Had braved the rule omnipotent
Of Dionysus' sovereignty
On Phineus' wife²⁸ the hand of fate
Was heavy, when her children fell
Victims to a stepmother's hate,
810 And she endured a prison-cell
Where the North Wind stood sentinel
In caverns amid mountains wild.
Thus the grey spinners wove their spell
On her, as upon thee, my child²⁹

EPISODE FIVE: (*Enter TEIRESIAS, the blind prophet, led by a boy*)

815 **TEIRESIAS:** Gentlemen of Thebes, we greet you, my companion and I,
Who share one pair of eyes on our journeys together—
For the blind man goes where his leader tells him to.

CREON: You are welcome, father Teiresias. What's your news?

TEIRESIAS: Ay, news you shall have; and advice, if you can heed it.

820 **CREON:** There was never a time when I failed to heed, it father.

TEIRESIAS: And thereby have so far steered a steady course.

CREON: And gladly acknowledge the debt we owe to you.

TEIRESIAS: Then mark me now; for you stand on a razor's edge.

CREON: Indeed? Grave words from your lips, good priest. Say on.

825 **TEIRESIAS:** I will; and show you all that my skill reveals.

At my seat of divination,³⁰ where I sit
These many years to read the signs of heaven,
An unfamiliar sound came to my ears
Of birds in vicious combat, savage cries
830 In strange outlandish language, and the whirr
Of flapping wings; from which I well could picture
The gruesome warfare of their deadly talons.

²⁷**Lycurgus:** (li ker gus) A Greek king who opposed the worship of Dionysus and was punished by being imprisoned in a cave and driven insane.

²⁸**Phineus' Wife:** King Phineus (fin-ee-us) imprisoned his form wife and their two sons when he believed false accusations about them mayd by their step-mother, Idaeia (I- day-uh)

²⁹**So long ago, lay Danae...as upon thee my child:** In this speech, the Chorus compares Antigone's fate to that of three other mortals who had been imprisoned.

³⁰**Seat of divination:** the place where Teiresias sat to listen to the birds, which were believed to tell him the future.

Full of foreboding then I made the test
 Of sacrifice upon the alter fire.
 835 There was no answering flame; only rank juice
 Oozed from the flesh and dripped among the ashes,
 Smoldering and sputtering; the gall vanished in a puff,
 And the fat ran down and left the haunches bare.
 Thus, through the eyes of my young acolyte,
 840 Who sees for me, that I my see for others,
 I read the signs of failure in my quest.
 And why? The blight upon us is *your* doing.
 The blood that stains our alters and our shrines,
 The blood that dogs and vultures have licked up,
 845 It is none other than the blood of Oedipus
 Spilled from the veins of his ill-fated son.
 Our fires, our sacrifices, and our prayers
 The gods abominate. How should the birds
 Give any other than ill-omened voices,
 850 Gorged with the dregs of blood that man has shed?
 Mark this, my son: all men fall into sin.
 But sinning, he is not forever lost
 Hapless and helpless, who can make amends
 And has not set his face against repentance.
 855 Only a fool is governed by self-will.
 Pay to the dead his due. Wound not the fallen.
 It is no glory to kill and kill again.
 My words are for your good, as is my will,
 And should be acceptable, being for your good.
 860 **CREON:** You take me for your target, reverend, sir,
 Like all the rest. I know your art of old,
 And how you make your commodity
 To trade and traffic in for your advancement.
 Trade as you will; but all the silver of Sardis
 865 And all the gold of India will not buy
 A tomb for yonder traitor. No. Let the eagles
 Carry his carcass up to the throne of Zeus;
 Even that would not be sacrilege enough
 To frighten me from my determination
 870 Not to allow this burial. No man's act
 Has power enough to pollute the goodness of God.
 But great and terrible is the fall, Teiresias,
 Of mortal men who seek their own advantage
 By uttering evil in the guise of good.
 875 **TEIRESIAS:** Ah, is there any wisdom in the world?
CREON: Why, what is the meaning of that wide-flung taunt?
TEIRESIAS: What prize outweighs the priceless worth of prudence?
CREON: Ay, what indeed? What mischief matches the lack of it?
TEIRESIAS: And there you speak of your own symptom, sir.
 880 **CREON:** I am loth to pick a quarrel with you, priest.
TEIRESIAS: You do so, calling my divination false.
CREON: I say all prophets seek their own advantage

TEIRESIAS: All kings, say I, seek gain unrighteously.

CREON: Do you forget to whom you say it?

TEIRESIAS: No.

885 Our king and benefactor, by my guidance.

CREON: Clever you may be, but not therefore honest.

TEIRESIAS: Must I reveal my yet unspoken mind?

CREON: Reveal all; but expect no gain from it.

TEIRESIAS: Does that still seem to you my motive, then?

890 **CREON:** Nor is my will for sale, sir, in your market.

TEIRESIAS: Then hear this. Ere the chariot of the sun

Had rounded once or twice his wheeling way,

You shall have given a son of your own loins

To death, in payment for death—two debts to pay:

895 One for the life that you have sent to death,

The life you have abominably entombed;

One for the dead still lying above ground

Unburied, unhonored, unblest by the gods below.

You cannot alter this. The gods themselves

900 Cannot undo it. It follows of necessity

From what you have done. Even now the avenging Furies,

The hunters of Hell that follow and destroy,

Are lying in wait for you, and will have their prey,

When the evil you have worked for others falls on you.

905 Do I speak this for my gain? The time shall come,

And soon, when your house will be filled with the lamentation

Of men and women; and every neighboring city

Will be goaded to fury against you, for upon them

Too the pollution falls when the dogs and vultures

910 Bring the defilement of blood to their hearths and alters.³¹

I have done. You pricked me, and these shafts of wrath

Will find their mark in your heart. You cannot escape

The sting of their sharpness.

(to the boy leading TEIRESIAS around).

Lead me home, my boy.

Let us leave him to vent his anger on younger ears,

915 Or school his mind and tongue to a milder mood

Than that which no possesses him. Lead on.

(Exit)

CHORUS: He had gone, my lord. He has prophesied terrible things.

And for my part, I that was young and now am old

Have never known his prophecies proved false.

920 **CREON:** It is true enough; and my heart is torn in two.

It is hard to give way, and hard to stand and abide

The coming of the curse. Both ways are hard.

³¹*The time shall come...and alters:* This prophecy by Teiresias later came true when the families of the slain Argive chiefs enlisted the aid of the Athenian King, Theseus, to obtain burial rites for their dead. The Athenian army marched against Thebes and conquered it.

CHORUS: If you would be advised, my good lord, Creon—

CREON: What must I do? Tell me, and I will do it.

925 **CHORUS:** Release the woman from her rocky prison.
Set up a tomb for him that lies unburied.

CREON: Is it your wish that I consent to this?

CHORUS: It is, and quickly, The gods do not delay
The stroke of their swift vengeance on the sinner.

930 **CREON:** It is hard, but I must do it. Well I know
There is no armor against necessity.

CHORUS: Go. Let your own hand do it, and no other.

CREON: I will go this instant. Slaves there! One and all.
Bring spades and mattocks out on the hill!
935 My mind is made; 'twas I imprisoned her, d
And I will set her free. Now I believe
It is by the laws of heaven that man must live.

(EXIT)

STASIMON FIVE:

CHORUS: O Thou whose name is many,³²
Son of the Thunderer, dear child of his Cadmean bride,
940 Whose hand is mighty
In Italia,
In the hospitable valley
Of Eleusis
And in Thebes,
945 The mother-city of thy worshippers,
Were sweet Ismenus gently watereth
The soil whence sprang the harvest of the dragon's teeth,³³

Where torches on the crested mountains gleam,
And by Castalia's stream
950 The nymph-train in thy dance rejoices,
When from the ivy-tangled glens
Of Nysa³⁴ and from vine-clad plains
Thou comest to Thebes where the immortal voices
Sing thy glad strains.
955 Thebes, where thous lovest most to be,
With her, thy mother, the fire-stricken one,³⁵
Sickens for need of thee.

³²*Thou whose name is many:* The chorus invokes the god, Dionysus, God of theatre and wine, whose native city of Thebes was under his special protection. Bacchus, Iacchus, and God of Wine are three of his many names.

³³*Ismenus. . . dragon's teeth:* Cadmus, the founder of Thebes, sowed dragon's teeth in the soil from which sprung armed men who helped him build the city near the river Ismenus (is-meh-nus).

³⁴*Nymph-train. . . Nysa:* When Semele, the mother of Dionysus, died, Zeus took his infant son to the nymphs of Nysa, who cared for him during his childhood.

³⁵*thy mother, the fire-stricken one:* Zeus had promised Semele that he would grant her one wish. Her wish was to see him in his full splendor as the king of gods and men. Being mortal, she could not endure the sight and was consumed to ashes.

960 Healer of all her ills;
Come swiftly o'er the high Parnassian hills,³⁶
Come o'er the sighing sea.

965 The stars, whose breath if fie, delight
To dance for thee; the echoing night
Shall with thy praises ring.
Zeus-born, appear! With Thyiads³⁷
Come bountiful
Iacchus, King!

(Enter a MESSENGER, from the side of the stage)

EPILOGOS:

970 **MESSENGER:** Hear, men of Cadmus's city, hear and attend,
Men of the house of Amphion,³⁸ people of Thebes!
What is the life of man? A thing not fixed
For good or evil, fashioned for praise or blame.
Chance raises a man to the heights, chance casts him down,
And none can foretell what will be from what is.
Creon was once an enviable man;
He saved his country from her enemies,
975 Assumed the sovereign power, and bore it well,
The honored father of a royal house.
Now all is lost; for life without life's joys
Is living death; and such a life is his.
Riches and rank and show of majesty
980 And state, where no joy is, are empty, vain
And unsubstantial shadows, of now weight
To be compared with happiness of heart.

CHORUS: What is your news? Disaster in the royal house?

985 **MESSENGER:** Death; and the guilt of it on living hands.

CHORUS: Who dead? And by what hand?

MESSENGER: Haemon is dead,
Slain by his own—

CHORUS: His father?

MESSENGER: His own hand.

CHORUS: Then all had happened as the prophet said.

MESSENGER: What's next to do, your worships will decide.
(the palace door opens)

990 **CHORUS:** Here comes the Queen, Eurydice. Poor soul,
It may be she has heard about her son.

(Enter EURYDICE, attended by women)

EURYDICE: My friends, I heard something of what you were saying
As I came to the door. I was on my way to prayer

³⁶**Parnassian hills:** Parnassus, a mountain in southern Greece, was sacred to Apollo and the Muses.

³⁷**Thyiads:** women driven mad by wine and the power of Dionysus. Also called Maenads.

³⁸**Amphion:** a former king of Thebes

995 At the temple of Pallas,³⁹ and had barely turned the latch
When I caught you talk of some near calamity.
I was sick with fear and reeled in the arms of my women.
But tell me what is the matter; what have you heard?
I am not unacquainted with grief,⁴⁰ and I can bear it.

1000 **MESSENGER:** Madam, it was I that saw it, and will tell you all
To try to make it any lighter now
Would be to prove myself a liar. Truth
Is always best.

It was thus. I attended your husband,
The King, to the edge of the field where lay the body
Of Polynices, in pitiable state, mauled by the dogs.
1005 We prayed for him to the Goddess of the Roads,⁴¹ and to Pluto⁴²
That they might have mercy upon him. We washed his remains
In holy water, and on a fire of fresh-cut branches
We burned all that was left of him, and raised
Over his ashes a mound of his native earth.
1010 That done, we turned toward the deep rock-chamber
Of the maid that was married with death.

Before we reached it,
One that stood near the accursed place had heard
Loud cried of anguish, and came to tell King Creon.
As he approached, came strange uncertain sounds
1015 Of lamentation, and he cried aloud:
“Unhappy wretch! Is my foreboding true?
Is this the most sorrowful journey that ever I went?
My son’s voice greets me. Go, some of you, quickly
Through the passage where the stones are thrown apart,
1020 Into the mouth of the cave, and see if it be
My son, my own Haemon that I hear.
If not, I am the sport of the gods.”

We went
And looked, as bidden by our anxious master.
There in the furthest corner of the cave
1025 We saw her hanging by the neck. The rope
Was of the woven linen of her dress.
And, with his arms about her, there stood he
Lamenting his lost bride, his luckless love,
His father’s cruelty.

³⁹**Pallas:** The goddess, Athena, also called Pallas Athena – the goddess of wisdom

⁴⁰**I am not unacquainted with grief:** Menoeceus, a son of Creon and Eurydice, had sacrificed himself at the beginning of the war because a prophecy said that Thebes would be saved only if he were killed.

⁴¹**Goddess of the Roads:** Hecate, a goddess of the underworld who sent apparitions to frighten travelers at night.

⁴²**Pluto:** another name for Hades, the god of the underworld.

The father, the son.
 O the curse of my stubborn will!
 Son, newly cut off in the newness of youth,
 1070 Dead as were my fault, not yours.
CHORUS: Alas, too late you have seen the truth.
CREON: I learn in sorrow. Upon my head
 God has delivered this heavy punishment,
 Has struck me down in the ways of wickedness,
 1075 And trod my gladness under foot.
 Such is the bitter affliction of mortal man.
(Enter the MESSENGER from the Palace)
MESSENGER: Sir, you have this and more than this to bear.
 Within there's more to know, more to your pain.
CREON: What more? What pain can overtop this pain?
MESSENGER: She is dead—your wife, the mother of him that is dead—
 1080 The death wound fresh in her heart. Alas, poor lady!
CREON: Insatiable Death, wilt thou destroy me yet?
 What say you, teller of evil?
 I am already dead,
 1085 And is there more?
 Blood upon blood?
 More death? My wife?
(the central doors open, revealing the body of EURYDICE)
CHORUS: Look the, and see; nothing is hidden now.
CREON: O second horror!
 1090 What fate awaits me now?
 My child here in my arms . . . and there, the other. . .
 The son . . . the mother. . .
MESSENGER: There at the altar with the whetted knife
 She stood, and as the darkness dimmed her eyes
 1095 Called on the dead, her elder son and this,
 And with her dying breath cursed you, their slayer.
CREON: O horrible. . .
 Is there no sword for me
 To end this misery?
MESSENGER: Indeed you bear the burden of two deaths
 1100 It was her dying word.
CREON: And her last act?
MESSENGER: Hearing her son was dead, with her own hand
 She drove the sharp sword home into her heart.
 1105 **CREON:** There is no man can bear this guilt but I.
 It is true, I killed him.
 Lead me away. I live no longer.
CHORUS: 'Twere best, if anything is best in evil times.
 What's soonest done, is best, when all is ill.
 1110 **CREON:** Come, my last hour and fairest,
 My only happiness . . . come soon.
 Let me not see another day.
 Away . . . Away . . .
CHORUS: The future is not to be known; our present care

1115 Is with the present; the rest is in other hands.

CREON: I ask no more than I have asked.

CHORUS: Ask nothing.

What is to be, no mortal can escape.

CREON: I am nothing. I have no life.

1120 Lead me away . . .

That have killed unwittingly

My son, my wife.

I know not where I should turn,

Where to look for help.

1125 My hands have done amiss, my head is bowed

With fate too heavy for me.

(Exit)

EXODOS:

CHORUS: Of happiness the crown

And chiefest part

Is wisdom, and to hold

1130 The gods in awe.

This is the law

That, seeing the stricken heart

Of pride brought down,

We learn when we are old.

(Exeunt)