

Sophocles (c.496 B.C.–406 B.C.). *Antigone*.  
The Harvard Classics. 1909–14.

Dramatis Personæ

Creon, *King of Thebes*  
Hæmon, *son of Creon*  
Teiresias, *a seer*  
*Guard*  
*First Messenger*  
*Second Messenger*  
Eurydice, *wife of Creon*  
Antigone, Ismene, *daughters of Œdipus*  
*Chorus of Theban Elders*

SCENE—Thebes, *in front of the Palace*.

*Enter ANTIGONE and ISMENE*

ANTIGONE ISMENE, mine own sister, dearest one;  
Is there, of all the ills of Œdipus,  
One left that Zeus will fail to bring on us, 4  
While still we live? for nothing is there sad  
Or full of woe, or base, or fraught with shame,  
But I have seen it in thy woes and mine.  
And now, what new decree is this they tell, 8  
Our ruler has enjoined on all the state?  
Know'st thou? hast heard? or is it hid from thee,  
The doom of foes that comes upon thy friends?

ISM. No tidings of our friends, Antigone,  
Painful or pleasant since that hour have come 12  
When we, two sisters, lost our brothers twain,  
In one day dying by each other's hand.  
And since in this last night the Argive host  
Has left the field, I nothing further know, 16  
Nor brightening fortune, nor increasing gloom.

ANTIG. That knew I well, and therefore sent for thee  
Beyond the gates, that thou mayst hear alone.

ISM. What meanest thou? It is but all too clear 20  
Thou broodest darkly o'er some tale of woe.

ANTIG. And does not Creon treat our brothers twain  
One with the rites of burial, one with shame? 24  
Eteocles, so say they, he interred  
Fitly, with wonted rites, as one held meet  
To pass with honour to the gloom below.

But for the corpse of Polynices, slain  
So piteously, they say, he has proclaimed 28  
To all the citizens, that none should give  
His body burial, or bewail his fate,  
But leave it still unsepulchred, unwept,  
A prize full rich for birds that scent afar 32  
Their sweet repast. So Creon bids, they say,  
Creon the good, commanding thee and me,  
Yes, me, I say, and now is coming here,  
To make it clear to those who knew it not, 36  
And counts the matter not a trivial thing;  
But whoso does the things that he forbids,  
For him, there waits within the city's walls  
The death of stoning. Thus, then, stands thy case; 40  
And quickly thou wilt show, if thou art born  
Of noble nature, or degenerate liv'st,  
Base child of honoured parents.

ISM. How could I, 44  
O daring in thy mood, in this our plight,  
Or doing or undoing, aught avail?

ANTIG. Wilt thou with me share risk and toil? Look to it.

ISM. What risk is this? What purpose fills thy mind? 48

ANTIG. Wilt thou with me go forth to help the dead?

ISM. And dost thou mean to give him sepulture,  
When all have been forbidden?

ANTIG. He is still 52  
My brother; yes, and thine, though thou, it seems,  
Wouldst fain he were not. I desert him not.

ISM. O daring one, when Creon bids thee not!

ANTIG. What right has he to keep me from mine own? 56

ISM. Ah me! remember, sister, how our sire  
Perished, with hate o'erwhelmed and infamy,  
From evils that he brought upon himself,  
And with his own hand robbed himself of sight, 60  
And how his wife and mother, both in one,  
With twist and cordage, cast away her life;  
And thirdly, how our brothers in one day  
In suicidal conflict wrought the doom, 64  
Each of the other. And we twain are left;

And think, how much more wretchedly than all  
We twain shall perish, if, against the law,  
We brave our sovereign's edict and his power. 68  
For this we need remember, we were born  
Women; as such, not made to strive with men.  
And next, that they who reign surpass in strength,  
And we must bow to this, and worse than this. 72  
I, then, entreating those that dwell below,  
To judge me leniently, as forced to yield,  
Will hearken to our rulers. Over-zeal  
In act or word but little wisdom shows. 76

ANTIG. I would not ask thee. No! if thou shouldst wish  
To do it, and wouldst gladly join with me.  
Do what thou wilt, I go to bury him;  
And good it were, this having done, to die. 80  
Loved I shall be with him whom I have loved,  
Guilty of holiest crime. More time have I  
In which to win the favour of the dead,  
Than that of those who live; for I shall rest 84  
For ever there. But thou, if thus thou please,  
Count as dishonoured what the Gods approve.

ISM. I do them no dishonour, but I find  
Myself too weak to war against the state. 88

ANTIG. Make what excuse thou wilt, I go to rear  
A grave above the brother whom I love.

ISM. Ah, wretched me! how much I fear for thee.

ANTIG. Fear not for me. Thine own fate guide aright. 92

ISM. At any rate, disclose this deed to none:  
Keep it close hidden. I will hide it too.

ANTIG. Speak out! I bid thee. Silent, thou wilt be  
More hateful to me than if thou shouldst tell  
My deed to all men. 96

ISM. Fiery is thy mood,  
Although thy deeds might chill the very blood.

ANTIG. I know I please the souls I seek to please. 100

ISM. If thou canst do it; but thy passion craves  
For things impossible.

ANTIG. I'll cease to strive  
When strength shall fail me. 104

ISM. Even from the first,  
It is not meet to seek what may not be.

ANTIG. If thou speak thus, my hatred wilt thou gain,  
And rightly wilt be hated of the dead. 108  
Leave me and my ill counsel to endure  
This dreadful doom. I shall not suffer aught  
So evil as a death dishonourable.

ISM. Go, then, if so thou wilt. Of this be sure, 112  
Wild as thou art, thy friends must love thee still. [*Exeunt.*]

*Enter Chorus*

STROPH. I

*Chor.* Ray of the glorious sun,  
Brightest of all that ever shone on Thebes,  
Thebes with her seven high gates, 116  
Thou didst appear that day,  
Eye of the golden dawn,  
O'er Dirke's streams advancing, 120  
Driving with quickened curb,  
In haste of headlong flight,  
The warrior who, in panoply of proof,  
From Argos came, with shield as white as snow; 124  
Who came to this our land,  
Roused by the strife of tongues  
That Polynices stirred;  
Shrieking his shrill sharp cry, 128  
The eagle hovered round,  
With snow-white wing bedecked,  
Begirt with myriad arms,  
And flowing horsehair crests.

ANTISTROPH. I 132

He stood above our towers,  
Circling, with blood-stained spears,  
The portals of our gates;  
He went, before he filled 136  
His jaws with blood of men,  
Before Hephæstus with his pitchy flame  
Had seized our crown of towers.  
So loud the battle din that Ares loves, 140  
Was raised around his rear,  
A conflict hard and stiff,  
E'en for his dragon foe.

For breath of haughty speech  
Zeus hateth evermore exceedingly; 144  
And seeing them advance,  
Exulting in the clang of golden arms,  
With brandished fire he hurls them headlong down,  
In act, upon the topmost battlement 148  
    Rushing, with eager step,  
To shout out, 'Victory!'

STROPH. II

Crashing to earth he fell,  
Who came, with madman's haste, 152  
Drunken, but not with wine,  
And swept o'er us with blasts,  
The whirlwind blasts of hate.  
Thus on one side they fare, 156  
And mighty Ares, bounding in his strength,  
    Dashing now here, now there,  
    Elsewhere brought other fate.  
For seven chief warriors at the seven gates met, 160  
    Equals with equals matched,  
To Zeus, the Lord of War,  
Left tribute, arms of bronze;  
All but the hateful ones 164  
Who, from one father and one mother sprung,  
Stood wielding, hand to hand,  
Their doubly pointed spears;  
They had their doom of death, 168  
In common, shared by both.

ANTISTROPH. II

But now, since Victory, of mightiest name,  
Hath come to Thebes, of many chariots proud, 172  
    Joying and giving joy,  
After these wars just past,  
    Learn ye forgetfulness,  
And all night long, with dance and voice of hymns  
Let us go round to all the shrines of Gods, 176  
While Bacchus, making Thebes resound with shouts,  
    Begins the strain of joy;  
But, lo! the sovereign of this land of ours,  
*CREON*, Menœkeus' son, 180  
He, whom strange change and chances from the God  
    Have nobly raised to power,  
Comes to us, steering on some new device;  
For, lo! he hath convened, 184  
    By herald's loud command,  
This council of the elders of our land.

*Enter CREON*

CREON. My Friends, for what concerns our commonwealth,  
The Gods who vexed it with the billowing storms 188  
Have righted it again; but I have sent,  
By special summons, calling you to come  
Apart from all the others, This, in part,  
As knowing ye did all along uphold 192  
The might of Laius' throne, in part again,  
Because when Œdipus our country ruled,  
And, when he perished, then towards his sons  
Ye still were faithful in your steadfast mind. 196  
And since they fell, as by a double death,  
Both on the selfsame day with murderous blow,  
Smiting and being smitten, now I hold  
Their thrones and all their power of sov'reignty 200  
By nearness of my kindred to the dead.  
And hard it is to learn what each man is,  
In heart and mind and judgment, till one gains  
Experience in the exercise of power. 204  
For me, whoe'er is called to guide a state,  
And does not catch at counsels wise and good,  
But holds his peace through any fear of man,  
I deem him basest of all men that are, 208  
Of all that ever have been; and whoe'er  
As worthier than his country counts his friend,  
I utterly despise him. I myself,  
Zeus be my witness, who beholdeth all, 212  
Will not keep silence, seeing danger come,  
Instead of safety, to my subjects true.  
Nor could I take as friend my country's foe;  
For this I know, that there our safety lies, 216  
And sailing in her while she holds her course,  
We gather friends around us. By these rules  
And such as these will I maintain the state.  
And now I come, with edicts close allied 220  
To these in spirit, for my subjects all,  
Concerning those two sons of Œdipus.  
Eteocles, who died in deeds of might  
Illustrious, fighting for our fatherland, 224  
To honour him with sepulture, all rites  
Duly performed that to the noblest dead  
Of right belong. Not so his brother; him  
I speak of, Polynices, who, returned 228  
From exile, sought with fire and sword to waste  
His father's city and the shrines of Gods,  
Yea, sought to glut his rage with blood of men,  
And lead them captives to the bondslave's doom; 232

Him I decree that none should dare entomb,  
That none should utter wail or loud lament,  
But leave his corpse unburied, by the dogs  
And vultures mangled, foul to look upon. 236  
Such is my purpose. Ne'er, if I can help,  
Shall the vile share the honours of the just;  
But whoso shows himself my country's friend,  
Living or dead, from me shall honour gain. 240

*Chor.* This is thy pleasure, O Menœkeus' son,  
For him who hated, him who loved our state;  
And thou hast power to make what laws thou wilt,  
Both for the dead and all of us who live. 244

CREON. Be ye, then, guardians of the things I speak.

*Chor.* Commit this task to one of younger years.

CREON. The watchmen are appointed for the corpse.

*Chor.* What duty, then, enjoin'st thou on another? 248

CREON. Not to consent with those that disobey.

*Chor.* None are so foolish as to seek for death.

CREON. And that shall be his doom; but love of gain  
Hath oft with false hopes lured men to their death. 252

*Enter Guard*

GUARD. I will not say, O king, that I am come  
Panting with speed and plying nimble feet,  
For I had many halting-points of thought,  
Backwards and forwards turning, round and round; 256  
For now my mind would give me sage advice:  
"Poor wretch, and wilt thou go and bear the blame?"  
Or—"Dost thou tarry now? Shall Creon know  
These things from others? How wilt thou escape?" 260  
Resolving thus, I came in haste, yet slow,  
And thus a short way finds itself prolonged,  
But, last of all, to come to thee prevailed.  
And though I tell of naught, thou shalt hear all; 264  
For this one hope I cling to steadfastly,  
That I shall suffer nothing but my fate.

CREON. What is it, then, that causes such dismay?

GUARD. First, for mine own share in it, this I say, 268

I did not do it, do not know who did,  
Nor should I rightly come to ill for it.

CREON. Thou tak'st good aim and fencest up thy tale  
All round and round. 'Twould seem thou hast some news. 272

GUARD. Yea, news of fear engenders long delay.

CREON. Tell thou thy tale, and then depart in peace.

GUARD. And speak I will. The corpse ... Some one has been  
But now and buried it, a little dust 276  
O'er the skin scattering, with the wonted rites.

CREON. What say'st thou? Who has dared this deed of guilt?

GUARD. I know not. Neither was there stroke of spade,  
Nor earth cast up by mattock. All the soil 280  
Was dry and hard, no track of chariot wheel;  
But he who did it went and left no sign.

But when the first day's watchman showed it us,  
The sight caused wonder and sore grief to all, 284  
For he had disappeared. No tomb, indeed,  
Was over him, but dust all lightly strown,

As by some hand that shunned defiling guilt;  
And no work was there of a beast of prey 288  
Or dog devouring. Evil words arose  
Among us, guard to guard imputing blame,

Which might have come to blows, for none was there  
To check its course, and each to each appeared 292  
The man whose hand had done it. As for proof,  
That there was none, and so he 'scaped our ken.

And we were ready in our hands to take  
Bars of hot iron, and to walk through fire, 296  
And call the Gods to witness none of us  
Had done the deed, nor knew who counselled it,

Nor who had wrought it. Then at last, when naught  
Was gained by all our searching, some one says 300  
What made us bend our gaze upon the ground  
In fear and trembling; for we neither saw

How to oppose it, nor, accepting it,  
How we might prosper in it. And his speech 304  
Was this, that all our tale should go to thee,  
Not hushed up anywise. This gained the day;

And me, ill-starred, the lot condemns to win  
This precious prize. So here I come to thee 308  
Against my will; and surely do I trow  
Thou dost not wish to see me. Still 'tis true



That no man loves the messenger of ill.

*Chor.* For me, my prince, my mind some time has thought 312  
That this perchance has some divine intent.

CREON. Cease thou, before thou fillest me with wrath,  
Lest thou be found a dastard and a fool. 316  
For what thou say'st is most intolerable,  
That for this corpse the providence of Gods  
Has any care. What! have they buried him,  
As to their patron paying honours high, 320  
Who came to waste their columned shrines with fire,  
To desecrate their offerings and their lands,  
And all their wonted customs? Dost thou see  
The Gods approving men of evil deeds?  
It is not so; but men of rebel mood, 324  
Lifting their head in secret long ago,  
Have stirred this thing against me. Never yet  
Had they their neck beneath the yoke, content  
To own me as their ruler. They, I know, 328  
Have bribed these men to let the deed be done.  
No thing in use by man, for power of ill,  
Can equal money. This lays cities low,  
This drives men forth from quiet dwelling-place, 332  
This warps and changes minds of worthiest stamp,  
To turn to deeds of baseness, teaching men  
All shifts of cunning, and to know the guilt 336  
Of every impious deed. But they who, hired,  
Have wrought this crime, have laboured to their cost,  
Or soon or late to pay the penalty.  
But if Zeus still claims any awe from me, 340  
Know this, and with an oath I tell it thee,  
Unless ye find the very man whose hand  
Has wrought this burial, and before mine eyes  
Present him captive, death shall not suffice, 344  
Till first, impaled still living, ye shall show  
The story of this outrage, that henceforth,  
Knowing what gain is lawful, ye may grasp  
At that, and learn it is not meet to love 348  
Gain from all quarters. By base profit won,  
You will see more destroyed than prospering.

GUARD. May I, then speak? Or shall I turn and go?

CREON. Dost thou not see how vexing are thy words?

GUARD. Is it thine ears they trouble, or thy soul? 352

CREON. Why dost thou gauge my trouble where it is?

GUARD. The doer grieves thy heart, but I thine ears.

CREON. Pshaw! what a babbler, born to prate, art thou.

GUARD. And therefore not the man to do this deed.

356

CREON. Yes, that too; selling e'en thy soul for pay.

GUARD. Ah me!

How fearful 'tis, in thinking, false to think.

CREON. Prate about thinking; but unless ye show

360

To me the doers, ye shall say ere long

That evil gains still work their punishment. [*Exit.*]

GUARD. God send we find him! Should we find him not,

364

As well may be, for this must chance decide,

You will not see me coming here again;

For now, being safe beyond all hope of mine,

Beyond all thought, I owe the Gods much thanks. [*Exit.*]

STROPH. I

368

*Chor.* Many the forms of life,

Fearful and strange to see,

But man supreme stands out,

For strangeness and for fear.

He, with the wintry gales,

372

O'er the foam-crested sea,

'Mid billows surging round,

Tracketh his way across:

Earth, of all Gods, from ancient days, the first,

376

Mightiest and undecayed,

He, with his circling plough,

Wears ever year by year.

ANTISTROPH. I

380

The thoughtless tribe of birds,

The beasts that roam the fields,

The finny brood of ocean's depths,

He takes them all in nets of knotted mesh,

Man, wonderful in skill.

384

And by his arts he holds in sway

The wild beasts on the mountain's height;

And brings the neck-encircling yoke

On horse with shaggy mane,

388

Or bull that walks untamed upon the hills.

STROPH. II

And speech, and thought as swift as wind,  
And tempered mood for higher life of states,  
These he has learnt, and how to flee 392  
The stormy sleet of frost unkind,  
The tempest thunderbolts of Zeus.  
So all-preparing, unprepared  
He meeteth naught the coming days may bring; 396  
Only from Hades, still  
He fails to find a refuge at the last,  
Though skill of art may teach him to escape  
From depths of fell disease incurable. 400

ANTISTROPH. II

So, gifted with a wondrous might,  
Above all fancy's dreams, with skill to plan,  
Now unto evil, now to good,  
He wends his way. Now holding fast the laws, 404  
His country's sacred rights,  
That rest upon the oath of Gods on high,  
High in the state he stands.  
An outlaw and an exile he who loves 408  
The thing that is not good,  
In wilful pride of soul:  
Ne'er may he sit beside my hearth,  
Ne'er may my thoughts be like to his, 412  
Who worketh deeds like this.

*Enter Guards, bringing in ANTIGONE*

As to this portent which the Gods have sent,  
I stand in doubt. Can I, who know her, say  
That this is not the maid Antigone? 416  
O wretched one of wretched father born,  
What means this? Surely 'tis not that they bring  
Thee as a rebel 'gainst the king's decree,  
And taken in the folly of thine act? 420

GUARD. Yes! She it was by whom the deed was done.  
We found her burying. Where is Creon, pray?

*Chor.* Forth from his palace comes he just in time.

*Enter CREON*

CREON. What chance is this with which my coming fits? 424

GUARD. Men, O my king, should pledge themselves to naught;  
For cool reflection makes their purpose void.

I hardly thought to venture here again,  
Cowed by thy threats, which then fell thick on me; 428  
But since no joy is like the sweet delight  
Which comes beyond, above, against our hopes,  
I come, although I swore the contrary,  
Bringing this maiden, whom in act we found 432  
Decking the grave. No need for lots was now;  
The prize was mine, no other claimed a share.  
And now, O king, take her, and as thou wilt,  
Judge and convict her. I can claim a right 436  
To wash my hands of all this troublous coil.

CREON. How and where was it that ye seized and brought her?

GUARD. She was in act of burying. Now thou knowest  
All that I have to tell. 440

CREON. And dost thou know  
And rightly weigh the tale thou tellest me?

GUARD. I saw her burying that selfsame corpse  
Thou bad'st us not to bury. Speak I clear? 444

CREON. How was she seen, detected, prisoner made?

GUARD. The matter passed as follows: When we came,  
With all those dreadful threats of thine upon us,  
Sweeping away the dust which, lightly spread, 448  
Covered the corpse, and laying stript and bare  
The tained carcass, on the hill we sat  
To windward, shunning the infected air,  
Each stirring up his fellow with strong words, 452  
If any shirked his duty. This went on  
Some time, until the glowing orb of day  
Stood in mid-heaven, and the scorching heat  
Fell on us. Then a sudden whirlwind rose, 456  
A scourge from heaven, raising squalls on earth,  
And filled the plain, the leafage stripping bare  
Of all the forest, and the air's vast space  
Was thick and troubled, and we closed our eyes 460  
Until the plague the Gods had sent was past;  
And when it ceased, a weary time being gone,  
The girl was seen, and with a bitter cry,  
Shrill as a bird's, she wails, when it beholds 464  
Its nest all emptied of its infant brood;  
So she, when she beholds the corpse all stript,  
Groaned loud with many moanings. And she called  
Fierce curses down on those who did the deed, 468

And in her hand she brings some sandlike dust,  
And from a well-chased ewer, all of bronze,  
She pours the three libations o'er the dead. 472  
And we, beholding, started up forthwith,  
And run her down, in nothing terrified.  
And then we charged her with the former deed,  
As well as this. And nothing she denied. 476  
But this to me both bitter is and sweet,  
For to escape one's-self from ill is sweet,  
But to bring friends to trouble, this is hard  
And bitter. Yet my nature bids me count 480  
Above all these things safety for myself.

CREON. [*to* ANTIGONE] And thou, then, bending to the ground thy head,  
Confessest thou, or dost deny the deed?

ANTIG. I own I did it. I will not deny.

CREON. [*to* GUARD] Go thou thy way, where'er thy will may choose, 484  
Freed from a weighty charge. [*Exit* GUARD.  
[*To* ANTIGONE] And now for thee,  
Say in few words, not lengthening out thy speech, 488  
Didst thou not know the edicts which forbade  
The things thou ownest?

ANTIG. Right well I knew them all.  
How could I not? Full clear and plain were they.

CREON. Didst thou, then, dare to disobey these laws? 492

ANTIG. Yes, for it was not Zeus who gave them forth,  
Nor Justice, dwelling with the Gods below,  
Who traced these laws for all the sons of men; 496  
Nor did I deem thy edicts strong enough,  
Coming from mortal man, to set at naught  
The unwritten laws of God that know not change.  
They are not of to-day nor yesterday, 500  
But live for ever, nor can man assign  
When first they sprang to being. Not through fear  
Of any man's resolve was I prepared  
Before the Gods to bear the penalty 504  
Of sinning against these. That I should die  
I knew (how should I not?), though thy decree  
Had never spoken. And, before my time  
If I should die, I reckon this a gain; 508  
For whoso lives, as I, in many woes,  
How can it be but death shall bring him gain?  
And so for me to bear this doom of thine

Has nothing painful. But, if I had left  
My mother's son unburied on his death, 512  
I should have given them pain. But as things are,  
Pain I feel none. And should I seem to thee  
To have done a foolish deed, 'tis simply this,—  
I bear the charge of folly from a fool. 516

*Chor.* The maiden's stubborn will, of stubborn sire  
The offspring shows itself. She knows not yet  
To yield to evils.

CREON. Know, then, minds too stiff 520  
Most often stumble, and the rigid steel  
Baked in the furnace, made exceeding hard,  
Thou seest most often split and broken lie;  
And I have known the steeds of fiery mood 524  
With a small curb subdued. It is not meet  
That one who lives in bondage to his neighbours  
Should boast too loudly. Wanton outrage then  
She learnt when first these laws of mine she crossed, 528  
But, having done it, this is yet again  
A second outrage over it to boast,  
And laugh at having done it. Surely, then,  
She is the man, not I, if all unscathed 532  
Such deeds of might are hers. But be she child  
Of mine own sister, nearest kin of all  
That Zeus o'erlooks within our palace court,  
She and her sister shall not 'scape their doom 536  
Most foul and shameful; for I charge her, too,  
With having planned this deed of sepulture.  
Go ye and call her. 'Twas but now within  
I saw her raving, losing self-command. 540  
And still the mind of those who in the dark  
Plan deeds of evil is the first to fail,  
And so convicts itself of secret guilt.  
But most I hate when one found out in guilt 544  
Will seek to glaze and brave it to the end.

ANTIG. And dost thou seek aught else beyond my death?

CREON. Naught else for me. That gaining, I gain all.

ANTIG. Wilt thou delay? Of all thy words not one 548  
Pleases me now, nor aye is like to please,  
And so all mine must grate upon thine ears.  
And yet how could I higher glory gain  
Than giving my true brother all the rites 552  
Of solemn burial? These who hear would say

It pleases them, did not their fear of thee  
Close up their lips. This power has sovereignty,  
That it can do and say whate'er it will. 556

CREON. Of all the race of Cadmus thou alone  
Look'st thus upon the deed.

ANTIG. They see it too  
As I do, but in fear of thee they keep 560  
Their tongue between their teeth.

CREON. And dost thou feel  
No shame to plan thy schemes apart from these?

ANTIG. There is no baseness in the act which shows 564  
Our reverence for our kindred.

CREON. Was he not  
Thy brother also, who against him fought?

ANTIG. He was my brother, of one mother born, 568  
And of the selfsame father.

CREON. Why, then, pay  
Thine impious honours to the carcase there?

ANTIG. The dead below will not accept thy words. 572

CREON. Yes, if thou equal honours pay to him,  
And that most impious monster.

ANTIG. 'Twas no slave  
That perished, but my brother. 576

CREON. Yes, in act  
To waste this land, while *he* in its defence  
Stood fighting bravely.

ANTIG. Not the less does death 580  
Crave equal rites for all.

CREON. But not that good  
And evil share alike?

ANTIG. And yet who knows 584  
If in that world these things are counted good?

CREON. Our foe, I tell thee, ne'er becomes our friend,

Not even when he dies.

ANTIG. My bent is fixed, 588  
I tell thee, not for hatred, but for love.

CREON. Go, then, below. And if thou must have love,  
Love those thou find'st there. While I live, at least,  
A woman shall not rule. 592

*Enter ISMENE*

*Chor.* And, lo! Ismene at the gate  
Comes shedding tears of sisterly regard,  
And o'er her brow a gathering cloud  
Mars the deep roseate blush, 596  
Bedewing her fair cheek.

CREON. [*to ISMENE*]. And thou who, creeping as a viper creeps,  
Didst drain my life in secret, and I knew not  
That I was rearing two accursèd ones, 600  
Subverters of my throne: come, tell me, then,  
Dost thou confess thou took'st thy part in it?  
Or wilt thou swear thou didst not know of it?

ISM. I did the deed. Since she will have it so, 604  
I share the guilt; I bear an equal blame.

ANTIG. This, Justice will not suffer, since, in truth,  
Thou wouldst have none of it. And I, for one,  
Shared it not with thee. 608

ISM. I am not ashamed  
To count myself companion in thy woes.

ANTIG. Whose was the deed, Death knows, and those below.  
I do not love a friend who loves in words. 612

ISM. Do not, my sister, put me to such shame  
As not to let me share thy death with thee,  
And with thee pay due reverence to the dead.

ANTIG. Share not my death, nor make thine own this deed 616  
Thou hadst no hand in. Let my death suffice.

ISM. And what to me is life, bereaved of thee?

ANTIG. Ask Creon there. To him thy tender care  
Is given so largely. 620



ISM. Why wilt thou torture me,  
In nothing bettered by it?

ANTIG. Yes—at thee,  
E'en while I laugh, I laugh with pain of heart.

624

ISM. But now, at least, how may I profit thee?

ANTIG. Save thou thyself. I grudge not thy escape.

ISM. Ah, woe is me! and must I miss thy fate?

ANTIG. Thou mad'st thy choice to live, and I to die.

628

ISM. 'Tis not through want of any words of mine.

ANTIG. To these thou seemest, doubtless, to be wise;  
I to those others.

ISM. Yet our fault is one.

632

ANTIG. Take courage. Thou wilt live. My soul long since  
Has given itself to Death, that to the dead  
I might bring help.

CREON. Of these two maidens here,  
The one, I say, hath lost her mind but now,  
The other ever since her life began.

636

ISM. Yea, O my king. No mind that ever lived  
Stands firm in evil days, but still it goes,  
Beside itself, astray.

640

CREON. So then did thine  
When thou didst choose thy evil deeds to do,  
With those already evil.

644

ISM. How could I.  
Alone, apart from her, endure to live?

CREON. Speak not of her. She stands no longer here.

ISM. And wilt thou slay thy son's betrothed bride?

648

CREON. Full many a field there is which he may plough.

ISM. But none like that prepared for him and her.

CREON. Wives that are vile, I love not for my son.

ANTIG. Ah, dearest Hæmon, how thy father shames thee!

652

CREON. Thou art too vexing, thou, and these thy words,  
On marriage ever harping.

ISM. Wilt thou rob  
Thine own dear son of her whom he has loved?

656

CREON. 'Tis Death who breaks the marriage contract off.

ISM. Her doom is fixed, it seems, then. She must die.

CREON. So thou dost think, and I. No more delay,  
Ye slaves. Our women henceforth must be kept  
As women—suffered not to roam abroad;  
For even boldest natures shrink in fear  
When they behold the end of life draw nigh. [*Exeunt Guards with ANTIGONE  
and ISMENE.*]

660

STROPHE. I

664

*Chor.* Blessed are those whose life has known no woe!  
For unto those whose house  
The Gods have shaken, nothing fails of curse  
Or woe, that creepeth on,  
To generations, far,  
As when a wave, where Thracian blasts blow strong  
On that tempestuous shore,  
Up surges from the depths beneath the sea,  
And from the deep abyss  
Rolls the black wind-vexed sand,  
And every jutting peak that drives it back  
Re-echoes with the roar.

668

672

ANTISTROPHE. I

676

I see the ancient doom  
That fell upon the seed of Labdacus,  
Who perished long ago,  
Still falling, woes on woes;  
That generation cannot rescue this;  
Some God still urges on,  
And will not be appeased.  
So now there rose a gleam  
Over the last weak shoots  
That sprang from out the race of Ædipus;  
And thus the blood-stained sword  
Of those that reign below

680

684

Cuts off relentlessly 688  
Madness of speech, and fury of the soul.

STROPHE. II

Thy power, O Zeus, what haughtiness of man  
Could ever hold in check?  
Which neither sleep, that maketh all things old, 692  
Nor the long months of Gods that wax not faint,  
Can for a moment seize.  
But still as Lord supreme,  
Through time that grows not old, 696  
Thou dwellest in thy sheen of radiancy  
On far Olympus' height.  
Through all the future and the coming years,  
As through all time that's past, 700  
One law holds ever good,  
That nothing comes to life of man on earth,  
Unscathed throughout by woe.

ANTISTROPHE. II

To many, hope may come, in wanderings wild, 704  
A solace and a joy;  
To many, shows of fickle-hearted love;  
But still it creepeth on,  
On him who knows it not, 708  
Until he brings his foot  
Within the scorching flame.  
Wisely from one of old  
The far-famed saying came 712  
That evil ever seems to be as good  
To those whose thoughts of heart  
God leadeth unto woe,  
And without woe, but shortest time he spends. 716  
And here comes Hæmon, youngest of thy sons.  
Comes he bewailing sore  
The fate of her who should have been his wife,  
His bride Antigone, 720  
Sore grieving at the failure of his joys?

*Enter HÆMON*

CREON. Soon we shall know much more than seers can tell.  
Surely thou dost not come, my son, to rage  
Against thy father, hearing his decree, 724  
Fixing her doom who should have been thy bride;  
Or are we still, whate'er we do, beloved?

HÆMON. My father, I am thine. Do thou direct  
With thy wise counsels, I will follow them. 728

No marriage weighs one moment in the scales  
With me, while thou art prospering in thy reign.

CREON. This thought, my son, should dwell within thy breast,  
That all things stand below a father's will: 732  
For this men pray that they may rear and keep  
Obedient offspring by their hearths and homes,  
That they may both requite their father's foes,  
And pay with him like honours to his friend. 736  
But he who reareth sons that profit not,  
What could one say of him but this, that he  
Breeds his own sorrow, laughter to his foes? 740  
Lose not thy reason, then, my son, o'ercome  
By pleasure, for a woman's sake, but know,  
A cold embrace is that to have at home  
A worthless wife, the partner of thy bed. 744  
What ulcerous sore is worse than one we love  
Who proves all worthless? No! with loathing scorn,  
As hateful to thee, let her go and wed  
A spouse in Hades. Taken in the act  
I found her, her alone of all the state, 748  
Rebellious. And I will not make myself  
False to the state. She dies. So let her call  
On Zeus, the lord of kindred. If I rear  
Of mine own stock things foul and orderless, 752  
I shall have work enough with those without.  
For he who in the life of home is good  
Will still be seen as just in things of state;  
While he who breaks or goes beyond the laws, 756  
Or thinks to bid the powers that be obey,  
He must not hope to gather praise from me.  
No! we must follow whom the state appoints  
In things or just and lowly, or, may be, 760  
The opposite of these. Of such a man  
I should be sure that he would govern well,  
And know well to be governed, and would stand,  
In war's wild storm, on his appointed post, 764  
A just and good defender. Anarchy  
Is our worst evil, brings our commonwealth  
To utter ruin, lays whole houses low,  
In battle strife hurls men in shameful flight; 768  
But they who walk uprightly, these shall find  
Obedience saves most men. Sure help should come  
To what our rulers order; least of all  
Ought we to bow before a woman's sway. 772  
Far better, if it must be so, to fall  
By a man's hand, than thus to bear reproach,  
By woman conquered.

*Chor.* Unto us, O king, 776  
Unless our years have robbed us of our wit,  
Thou seemest to say wisely what thou say'st.

HÆM. The Gods, my father, have bestowed on man 780  
His reason, noblest of all earthly gifts;  
Nor dare I say nor prove that what thou speak'st  
Is aught but right. And yet another's thoughts 784  
May have some reason. I am wont to watch  
What each man says or does, or blames in thee  
(For dread thy face to one of low estate),  
In words thou wouldst not much rejoice to hear.  
But I can hear the things in darkness said, 788  
How the whole city wails this maiden's fate,  
As one "who of all women worthiest praise,  
For noblest deed must die the foulest death.  
She who, her brother fallen in the fray, 792  
Would neither leave unburied, nor expose  
To carrion dogs, or any bird of prey,  
May she not claim the meed of golden crown?"  
Such is the whisper that in secret runs 796  
All darkling. And for me, my father, naught  
Is dearer than thy welfare. What can be  
A nobler form of honour for the son  
Than a sire's glory, or for sire than son's?  
I pray thee, then, wear not one mood alone, 800  
That what thou say'st is right, and naught but that;  
For he who thinks that he alone is wise,  
His mind and speech above what others boast,  
Such men when searched are mostly empty found. 804  
But for a man to learn, though he be wise,  
Yea, to learn much, and know the time to yield,  
Brings no disgrace. When winter floods the streams,  
Thou seest the trees that bend before the storm, 808  
Save their last twigs, while those that will not yield  
Perish with root and branch. And when one hauls  
Too tight the mainsail sheet, and will not slack,  
He has to end his voyage with deck o'erturned. 812  
Do thou, then, yield. Permit thyself to change.  
Young though I be, if any prudent thought  
Be with me, I at least will dare assert 816  
The higher worth of one who, come what will,  
Is full of knowledge. If that may not be  
(For nature is not wont to take that bent),  
'Tis good to learn from those who counsel well.

*Chor.* My king! 'tis fit that thou shouldst learn from him, 820

If he speaks words in season; and, in turn,  
That thou [*to HÆMON*] shouldst learn of him, for both speak well.

CREON. Shall we at our age stoop to learn from him,  
Such as he is, our lesson? 824

HÆM. 'Twere not wrong.  
And if I be but young, not age but deeds  
Thou shouldst regard.

CREON. Fine deeds, I trow, to pay 828  
Such honour to the lawless.

HÆM. 'Tis not I  
Would bid you waste your honour on the base.

CREON. And has she not been seized with that disease? 832

HÆM. The men of Thebes with one accord say, No.

CREON. And will my subjects tell me how to rule?

HÆM. Dost thou not see that these words fall from thee  
As from some beardless boy? 836

CREON. And who, then, else  
But me should rule this land?

HÆM. That is no state  
Which hangs on one man's will. 840

CREON. The state, I pray,  
It is not reckoned his who governs it?

HÆM. Brave rule! Alone, and o'er an empty land!

CREON. Here, as it seems, is one who still will fight,  
A woman's friend. 844

HÆM. If thou a woman be,  
For all my care I lavish upon thee.

CREON. Basest of base, who with thy father still  
Wilt hold debate! 848

HÆM. For, lo! I see thee still  
Guilty of wrong.

CREON. And am I guilty, then, 852  
Claiming due reverence for my sovereignty?

HÆM. Thou show'st no reverence, trampling on the laws  
The Gods hold sacred.

CREON. O thou sin-stained soul, 856  
A woman's victim.

HÆM. Yet thou wilt not find  
In me the slave of baseness.

CREON. All thy speech 860  
Still hangs on her.

HÆM. Yes, and on thee, myself,  
And the great Gods below.

CREON. Of this be sure, 864  
Thou shalt not wed her in the land of life.

HÆM. She, then, must die, and in her death will slay  
Another than herself.

CREON. And dost thou dare 868  
To come thus threatening?

HÆM. Is it then a threat  
To speak to erring judgment?

CREON. To thy cost 872  
Thou shalt learn wisdom, having none thyself.

HÆM. If thou wert not my father, I would say  
Thou wert not wise.

CREON. Thou woman's slave, I say, 876  
Prate on no longer.

HÆM. Dost thou wish to speak,  
And, speaking, wilt not listen? Is it so?

CREON. No, by Olympus! Thou shalt not go free 880  
To flout me with reproaches. Lead her out  
Whom my soul hates, that she may die forthwith  
Before mine eyes, and near her bridegroom here.

HÆM. No! Think it not! Near me she shall not die, 884

And thou shalt never see my face alive,  
So mad art thou with all that would be friends. [*Exit.*

*Chor.* The man has gone, O king, in hasty mood.  
A mind distressed in youth is hard to bear. 888

CREON. Let him do what he will, and bear himself  
Too high for mortal state, he shall not free  
Those maidens from their doom!

*Chor.* And dost thou mean 892  
To slay them both?

CREON. Not her who touched it not.

*Chor.* There thou say'st well: and with what kind of death  
Mean'st thou to kill her? 896

CREON. Where the desert path  
Is loneliest, there, alive, in rocky cave  
Will I immure her, just so much of food  
Before her set as may appease the Gods, 900  
And save the city from the guilt of blood;  
And there, invoking Hades, whom alone  
Of all the Gods she worships, she, perchance,  
Shall gain escape from death, or else shall know 904  
That all her worship is but labour lost. [*Exit.*

STROPHE.

*Chor.* O Love, in every battle victor owned;  
Love, now assailing wealth and lordly state,  
Now on a girl's soft cheek, 908  
Slumbering the livelong night;  
Now wandering o'er the sea,  
And now in shepherd's folds;  
The Undying Ones have no escape from thee, 912  
Nor men whose lives are measured as a day;  
And who has thee is mad.

ANTISTROPHE.

Thou makest vile the purpose of the just,  
To his own fatal harm; 916  
Thou stirrest up this fierce and deadly strife,  
Of men of nearest kin;  
The glowing eyes of bride beloved and fair  
Reign, crowned with victory, 920  
And dwell on high among the powers that rule,  
Equal with holiest laws;



For Aphrodite, she whom none subdues,  
Sports in her might divine. 924  
I, even I, am borne  
Beyond the bounds of right;  
I look on this, and cannot stay  
The fountain of my tears. 928  
For, lo! I see her, see Antigone  
Wind her sad, lonely way  
To that dread chamber where is room for all.

ANTIG. Yes! O ye men of this my fatherland, 932  
Ye see me on my way,  
Life's last long journey, gazing on the sun,  
His last rays watching, now and nevermore;  
Alone he leads me, who has room for all, 936  
Hades, the Lord of Death,  
To Acheron's dark shore,  
With neither part nor lot in marriage rites,  
No marriage hymn resounding in my ears, 940  
But Acheron shall claim me as his bride.

*Chor.* And hast thou not all honour, worthiest praise,  
Who goest to the home that hides the dead,  
Not smitten by the sickness that decays, 944  
Nor by the sword's sharp edge,  
But of thine own free will, in fullest life,  
To Hades tak'st thy way?

ANTIG. I heard of old her pitiable end, 948  
Where Sipylus rears high its lofty crag,  
The Phrygian daughter of a stranger land,  
Whom Tantalus begot;  
Whom growth of rugged rock, 952  
Clinging as ivy clings,  
Subdued, and made its own:  
And now, so runs the tale,  
There, as she melts in shower, 956  
The snow abideth aye,  
And still bedews yon cliffs that lie below  
Those brows that ever weep.  
With fate like hers doth Fortune bring me low. 960

*Chor.* Godlike in nature, godlike, too, in birth,  
Was she of whom thou tell'st,  
And we are mortals, born of mortal seed.  
And, lo! for one who liveth but to die, 964  
To gain like doom with those of heavenly race  
Is great and strange to hear.

ANTIG. Ye mock me, then. Alas! Why wait ye not?  
By all our fathers' Gods, I ask of you, 968  
Why wait ye not till I have passed away,  
But flout me while I live?  
O city that I love, O men that dwell,  
That city's wealthiest lords, 972  
O Dirke, fairest fount,  
O grove of Thebes, that boasts her chariot host,  
I take you all to witness, look and see,  
How, with no friends to weep, 976  
By what stern laws condemned,  
I go to that strong dungeon of the tomb,  
For burial new and strange.  
Oh, miserable me! 980  
Whom neither mortal men nor spirits own,  
Nor those that live, nor those that fall asleep.

*Chor.* Forward and forward still to farthest verge  
Of daring hast thou gone, 984  
And now, O child, thou fallest heavily  
Where Right erects her throne;  
Surely thou payest to the uttermost  
Thy father's debt of guilt. 988

ANTIG. Ah! thou hast touched the quick of all my grief,  
The thrice-told tale of all my father's woe,  
The fate which dogs us all,  
The race of Labdacus of ancient fame. 992  
Woe for the curses dire  
Of that defiled bed,  
With foulest incest stained,  
Whence I myself have sprung, most miserable. 996  
And now, I go to them,  
To sojourn in the grave,  
Bound by a curse, unwed;  
Ah, brother, thou didst find 1000  
Thy marriage fraught with ill,  
And in thy death hast smitten down my life.

*Chor.* Acts reverent and devout  
May claim devotion's name, 1004  
But power, in one who cares to keep his power,  
May never be defied;  
And thee thy stubborn mood,  
Self-chosen, layeth low. 1008

ANTIG. Unwept, without a friend,

Unwed, and whelmed in woe,  
I journey on the road that open lies. 1012  
No more shall it be mine (O misery!)  
To look upon the holy eye of day,  
And yet, of all my friends,  
Not one bewails my fate,  
No kindly tear is shed. 1016

*Enter CREON*

CREON. And know ye not, if men can vantage gain  
By songs and wailings at the hour of death,  
That they will never stop? Lead, lead her on,  
And, as I said, without delay immure 1020  
In yon cavernous tomb, and then depart.  
Leave her, or lone and desolate to die,  
Or, living, in the tomb to find her home.  
Our hands are clean in all that touches her; 1024  
But she no more shall sojourn here with us.

ANTIG. [*turning towards the cavern*]  
O tomb, my bridal chamber, vaulted home,  
Guarded right well for ever, where I go 1028  
To join mine own, of whom, of all that die,  
As most in number Persephassa owns;  
And I, of all the last and lowest, wend  
My way below, life's little span unfilled. 1032  
And yet I go, and feed myself with hopes  
That I shall meet them, by my father loved,  
Dear to my mother, well-beloved of thee,  
Thou dearest brother: I, with these my hands,  
Washed each dear corpse, arrayed you, poured the stream, 1036  
In rites of burial. And in care for thee,  
Thy body, Polynices, honouring,  
I gain this recompense. And yet 'twas well;  
I had not done it had I come to be 1040  
A mother with her children,—had not dared,  
Though 'twere a husband dead that mouldered there,  
Against my country's will to bear this toil,  
And dost thou ask what law constrained me thus? 1044  
I answer, had I lost a husband dear,  
I might have had another; other sons  
By other spouse, if one were lost to me;  
But when my father and my mother sleep 1048  
In Hades, then no brother more can come.  
And therefore, giving thee the foremost place,  
I seemed in Creon's eyes, O brother dear,  
To sin in boldest daring. So himself, 1052  
He leads me, having taken me by force,

Cut off from marriage bed and marriage feast,  
Untasting wife's true joy, or mother's bliss,  
With infant at her breast, but all forlorn, 1056  
Bereaved of friends, in utter misery,  
Alive, I tread the chambers of the dead.  
What law of Heaven have I transgressed against?  
What use for me, ill-starred one, still to look 1060  
To any God for succour, or to call  
On any friend for aid? For holiest deed  
I bear this charge of rank unholiness.  
If acts like these the Gods on high approve, 1064  
We, taught by suffering, own that we have sinned;  
But if they sin [*looking at CREON*], I pray they suffer not  
Worse evils than the wrongs they do to me.

*Chor.* Still do the same wild blasts 1068  
Vex her poor storm-tossed soul.

CREON. Therefore shall these her guards  
Weep sore for this delay.

ANTIG. Ah me! this word of thine 1072  
Tells of death drawing nigh.

CREON. I cannot bid thee hope  
That other fate is thine.

ANTIG. O citadel of Thebes, my native land, 1076  
Ye Gods of old renown,  
I go, and linger not.  
Behold me. O ye senators of Thebes,  
The last, love scion of the kingly race, 1080  
What things I suffer, and from whom they come,  
Revering still where reverence most is due. [*Guards lead ANTIGONE away.*]

STROPHE. I

*Chor.* So Danæ's form endured of old, 1084  
In brazen palace hid,  
To lose the light of heaven,  
And in her tomblike chamber was enclosed,  
And yet high honour came to her, O child,  
And on her flowed the golden shower of Zeus. 1088  
But great and dread the might of Destiny:  
Nor tempest-storm, nor war,  
Nor tower, nor dark-hulled ships  
That sweep the sea, escape. 1092

ANTISTROPHE. I

Bitter and sharp in mood,  
The son of Dryas, king  
Of yon Edonian tribes,  
By Dionysus' hands, 1096  
Was shut in prison cave,  
And so his frenzy wild and soul o'erbold  
Waste slowly evermore. 1000  
And he was taught that he, with ribald tongue  
In what wild frenzy, had attacked the Gods.  
For fain had he the Mænad throng brought low,  
And that bright flashing fire,  
And roused the wrath of Muses sweet in song. 1104

STROPHE. II

And by Kyanean waters' double sea  
Are shores of Bosphorus, and Thracian isle,  
As Salmydessus known, inhospitable,  
Where Ares, God of all the region round, 1108  
Saw the accursed wound  
That smote with blindness Phineus' twin-born sons  
By a fierce stepdame's hand,—  
Dark wound, upon the dark-doomed eyeballs struck, 1112  
Not with the stroke of sword,  
But blood-stained hands, on point of spindle sharp.

ANTISTROPHE. II

And they in misery, miserable fate  
Lamenting, waste away, 1116  
Born of a mother wedded to a curse.  
And she who claimed descent  
From men of ancient fame,  
The old Erechtheid race, 1120  
Daughter of Boreas, in far distant caves  
Amid her father's woods,  
Was reared, a child of Gods,  
Swift moving as the steed, o'er lofty crag, 1124  
And yet, my child, on her  
Bore down the Destinies,  
Whose years are infinite.

*Enter TEIRESIAS, guided by a Boy.* 1128

TEIR. Princes of Thebes, we come as travellers joined,  
One seeing for both, for still the blind must use  
A guide's assistance to direct his steps.

CREON. And what new thing, Teiresias, brings thee here?

TEIR. That I will tell thee, and do thou obey  
The seer who speaks. 1132

CREON. Of old I was not wont  
To differ from thy judgment.

TEIR. Therefore, well 1136  
And safely dost thou steer our good ship's course.

CREON. I, from experience, bear my witness still  
Of good derived from thee.

TEIR. Bethink thee, then, 1140  
Thou walkest now upon a razor's edge.

CREON. What means this? Lo! I shudder at thy speech.

TEIR. Soon shalt thou know, as I unfold the signs 1144  
Of my dread art. For sitting, as of old,  
Upon my ancient seat of augury,  
Where every bird has access, lo! I hear  
Strange cry of winged creatures, shouting shrill,  
In clamour sharp and savage, and I knew 1148  
That they were tearing each the other's breast  
With bloody talons, for their whirring wings  
Made that quite clear; and straightway I, in fear, 1152  
Made trial of the sacrifice that lay  
On fiery altar. But the living flame  
Shone not from out the offering; then there oozed  
Upon the ashes, trickling from the bones,  
A moisture, and it bubbled, and it spat, 1156  
And, lo! the gall was scattered to the air,  
And forth from out the fat that wrapped them round,  
The thigh joints fell. Such omens of decay  
From strange mysterious rites I learnt from him, 1160  
This boy, who now stands here, for he is still  
A guide to me, as I to others am.  
And all this evil falls upon the state,  
From out thy counsels; for our altars all, 1164  
Our sacred hearths, are full of food for dogs  
And birds unclean, the flesh of that poor wretch  
Who fell, the son of Œdipus. And so  
The Gods no longer hear our solemn prayers, 1168  
Nor own the flame that burns the sacrifice;  
Nor do the birds give cry of omen good,  
But feed on carrion of a human corpse.  
Think thou on this, my son: to err, indeed, 1172  
Is common unto all, but having erred,

He is no longer reckless or unblest,  
Who, having fallen into evil, seeks  
For healing, nor continues still unmoved. 1176  
Self-will must bear the guilt of stubbornness:  
Yield to the dead, and outrage not a corpse.  
What gain is it a fallen foe to slay?  
Good counsel give I, planning good for thee; 1180  
And of all joys the sweetest is to learn  
From one who speaketh well, should that bring gain.

CREON. Old man, as archers aiming at their mark,  
So ye shoot forth your venom'd darts at me; 1184  
I know your augur's skill, and by your arts  
Long since am tricked and sold. Yes, gain your gains,  
Get precious bronze from Sardis, Indian gold,  
That corpse ye shall not hide in any tomb. 1188  
Not though the eagles, birds of Zeus, should bear  
Their carrion morsels to their master's throne,  
Not even fearing this pollution dire,  
Will I consent to burial. Well I know 1192  
That man is powerless to pollute the Gods.  
But many fall, Teiresias, dotard old,  
A shameful fall, who gloze their shameful words,  
For lucre's sake, with surface show of good. 1196

TEIR. Ah, me! Does no man know, does none consider....

CREON. Consider what? What trite poor saw is this?

TEIR. How far good counsel heaped up wealth excels?

CREON. By just so far methinks the greatest hurt 1200  
Is sheer unwisdom.

TEIR. Thou, at least, hast grown  
From head to foot all full of that disease.

CREON. Loath am I with a prophet evil words 1204  
To bandy to and fro.

TEIR. And yet thou dost so,  
Saying that I utter speech that is not true.

CREON. The race of seers is ever fond of gold. 1208

TEIR. And that of tyrants loves the gain that comes  
Of filthy lucre.

CREON. Art thou ignorant, then,  
That what thou say'st, thou speak'st of those that rule? 1212

TEIR. I know it. 'Twas from me thou hadst the state,  
By me preserved.

CREON. Wise art thou as a seer,  
But too much given to wrong and injury. 1216

TEIR. Thou wilt provoke me in my wrath to speak  
Of things best left unspoken.

CREON. Speak them out!  
Only take heed thou speak them not for gain. 1220

TEIR. And dost thou, then, already judge me thus?

CREON. Know that my judgment is not bought and sold.

TEIR. Know, then, and know it well, that thou shalt see  
Not many winding circuits of the sun, 1224  
Before thou giv'st a quittance for the dead,  
A corpse by thee begotten; for that thou  
Hast trampled to the ground what stood on high,  
And foully placed within a charnel-house 1228  
A living soul. And now thou keep'st from them,  
The Gods below, the corpse of one unblest,  
Unwept, unhallowed. Neither part nor lot  
Hast thou in them, nor have the Gods who rule 1232  
The worlds above, but at thy hands they meet  
This outrage. And for this they wait for thee,  
The sure though slow avengers of the grave,  
The dread Erinyes of the Gods above, 1236  
In these same evils to be snared and caught.  
Search well if I say this as one who sells  
His soul for money. Yet a little while,  
And in thy house men's wailing, women's cry, 1240  
Shall make it plain. And every city stirs  
Itself in arms against thee, owning those  
Whose limbs the dogs have buried, or fierce wolves,  
Or winged birds have brought the accursèd taint 1244  
To city's altar-hearth. Doom like to this,  
Sure darting as an arrow to its mark,  
I launch at thee (for thou dost grieve me sore),  
An archer aiming at the very heart, 1248  
And thou shalt not escape its fiery sting.  
And now, O boy, lead thou me home again,  
And let him vent his spleen on younger men,



And learn to keep his tongue more orderly, 1252  
With better thoughts than this his present mood. [*Exit.*

*Chor.* The man has gone, O king, predicting woe,  
And well we know, since first our raven hair  
Was mixed with gray, that never yet his words 1256  
Were uttered to our state and failed of truth.

CREON. I know it too, 'tis that that troubles me.  
To yield is hard, but, holding out, to smite  
One's soul with sorrow, this is harder still. 1260

*Chor.* Much need is there, O Creon, at this hour,  
Of wisest counsel.

CREON. What, then, should I do?  
Tell me and I will hearken. 1264

*Chor.* Go thou first,  
Release the maiden from her cavern tomb,  
And give a grave to him who lies exposed.

CREON. Is this thy counsel? Dost thou bid me yield? 1268

*Chor.* Without delay, O king, for, lo! they come,  
The God's swift-footed ministers of ill,  
And in an instant lay the wicked low.

CREON. Ah, me! 'tis hard; and yet I bend my will 1272  
To do thy bidding. With necessity  
We must not fight at such o'erwhelming odds.

*Chor.* Go, then, and act! Commit it not to others.

CREON. E'en as I am I'll go. Come, come, my men, 1276  
Present or absent, come, and in your hands  
Bring axes. Come to yonder eminence,  
And I, since now my judgment leans that way,  
Who myself bound her, now myself will loose. 1280  
Too much I fear lest it should wisest prove  
To end my life, maintaining ancient laws. [*Exit.*

STROPHE. I

*Chor.* O thou of many names,  
Of that Cadmeian maid 1284  
The glory and the joy,  
Child of loud-thundering Zeus,  
Who watchest over fair Italia,

And reign'st o'er all the bays that open wide, 1288  
Which Deo claims on fair Eleusis' coast:  
Bacchus, who dwell'st in Thebes,  
The mother city of thy Bacchant train,  
Among Ismenus' stream that glideth on, 1292  
And with the dragon's brood;

ANTISTROPHE. I

Thee, o'er the double peak of yonder height,  
The flashing blaze beholds, 1296  
Where nymphs of Corycus  
Go forth in Bacchic dance,  
And by Castalia's stream;  
And thee the ivied slopes of Nysa's hills,  
And vine-clad promontory, 1300  
While words of more than mortal melody  
Shout out the well-known name,  
Send forth, the guardian lord 1304  
Of all the streets of Thebes.

STROPHE. II

Above all cities thou,  
With her, thy mother, whom the thunder slew,  
Dost look on it with love;  
And now, since all the city bendeth low 1308  
Beneath the sullen plague,  
Come thou with cleansing tread  
O'er the Parnassian slopes,  
Or o'er the moaning straits. 1312

ANTISTROPHE. II

O thou, who lead'st the band  
Of stars still breathing fire,  
Lord of the hymns that echo in the night,  
Offspring of highest Zeus, 1316  
Appear, we pray thee, with thy Naxian train,  
Of Thyian maidens, frenzied, passionate,  
Who all night long, in maddening chorus, sing  
Thy praise, their lord, Iacchus. 1320

*Enter Messenger*

MESS. Ye men of Cadmus and Amphion's house,  
I know no life of mortal man which I  
Would either praise or blame. It is but chance  
That raiseth up, and chance that bringeth low, 1324  
The man who lives in good or evil plight,  
And none foretells a man's appointed lot.  
For Creon, in my judgment, men might watch

With envy and with wonder, having saved 1328  
This land of Cadmus from the bands of foes;  
And, having ruled with fullest sovereignty,  
He lived and prospered, joyous in a race  
Of goodly offspring. Now, all this is gone; 1332  
For when men lose the joys that sweeten life,  
I cannot count this living, rather deem  
As of a breathing corpse. His heaped-up stores  
Of wealth are large; so be it, and he lives 1336  
With all a sovereign's state, and yet, if joy  
Be absent, all the rest I count as naught,  
And would not weigh them against pleasure's charm,  
More than a vapour's shadow. 1340

*Chor.* What is this?  
What new disaster tell'st thou of our chiefs?

MESS. Dead are they, and the living cause their death.

*Chor.* Who slays, and who is slaughtered? Tell thy tale. 1344

MESS. Hæmon is dead. His own hand sheds his blood.

*Chor.* Was it father's hand that struck the blow,  
Or his own arm?

MESS. He by himself alone, 1348  
Yet in his wrath he charged his father with it.

*Chor.* O prophet! true, most true, those words of thine.

MESS. Since thus it stands, we may as well debate 1352  
Of other things in council.

*Chor.* Lo! there comes  
The wife of Creon, sad Eurydice.  
She from the house is come, or hearing speech  
About her son, or else by chance. 1356

*Enter EURYDICE*

EURYD. My friends,  
I on my way without, as suppliant bound  
To pay my vows at Pallas' shrine, have heard  
Your words, and so I chanced to slip the bolt 1360  
Of the half-opened door, when, lo! a sound  
Falls on my ears of evil near at hand,  
And terror-struck I fell in deadly swoon  
Back in my handmaids' arms; yet tell it me, 1364

Tell the tale once again, for I shall hear,  
By long experience disciplined to grief.

MESS. Dear lady, I will tell thee: I was by,  
And will not leave one word of truth untold. 1368  
Why should we smooth and gloze, when all too soon  
We should be found as liars? Truth is still  
The best and wisest. Lo! I went with him,  
Thy husband, in attendance, to the height 1372  
Of yonder plain, where still all ruthlessly  
The corpse of Polynices tombless lay,  
Mangled by dogs. And, having prayed to her,  
The Goddess of all pathways, and to Pluto, 1376  
To look with favour on them, him they washed  
With holy water; and what yet was left  
We burnt in branches freshly cut, and heaped  
A high raised grave from out the soil around, 1380  
And then we entered on the stone-paved home,  
Death's marriage-chamber for the ill-starred maid.  
And some one hears, while standing yet afar,  
Shrill voice of wailing near the bridal bower, 1384  
By funeral rites unhallowed, and he comes  
And tells my master, Creon. On his ears,  
Advancing nearer, falls a shriek confused  
Of bitter sorrow, and with grieving loud, 1388  
He utters one sad cry: "Me miserable!  
And am I, then, a prophet? Do I wend  
This day the dreariest way of all my life?  
My son's voice greets me. Go, my servants, go, 1392  
Quickly draw near, and standing by the tomb,  
Search ye and see; and where the joined stones  
Still leave an opening, look ye in, and say 1396  
If I hear Hæmon's voice, or if my soul  
Is cheated by the Gods." And then we searched,  
As he, our master, in his frenzy, bade us;  
And, in the furthest corner of the vault, 1400  
We saw her hanging by a twisted cord  
Of linen threads entwined, and him we found  
Clasping her form in passionate embrace,  
And mourning o'er the doom that robbed him of her,  
His father's deed, and that his marriage bed, 1404  
So full of sorrow. When he saw him there,  
Groaning again in bitterness of heart,  
He goes to him, and calls in wailing voice,  
"Ah! wretched me! what dost thou! Hast thou lost 1408  
Thy reason? In what evil sinkest thou?  
Come forth, my child, on bended knee I ask thee."  
And then the boy, with fierce, wild gleaming eyes,

Glared at him, spat upon his face, and draws, 1412  
Still answering naught, the sharp two-edged sword.  
Missing his aim (his father from the blow  
Turning aside), in anger with himself,  
The poor ill-doomed one, even as he was, 1416  
Fell on his sword, and drove it through his breast,  
Full half its length, and clasping, yet alive,  
The maiden's arm, still soft, he there breathes out  
In broken gasps, upon her fair white cheek, 1420  
A rain of blood. And so at last they lie,  
Dead bridegroom with dead bride, and he has gained  
His marriage rites in Hades' darksome home,  
And left to all men witness terrible, 1424  
That man's worst ill is stubbornness of heart. [*Exit* EURYDICE.]

*Chor.* What dost thou make of this? She turns again,  
And not one word, or good or ill, will speak.

MESS. I, too, am full of wonder. Yet with hopes 1428  
I feed myself, she will not think it meet,  
Hearing her son's woes, openly to wail  
Before her subjects, but beneath her roof  
Will think it best to bear her private griefs. 1432  
Too trained a judgment has she so to err.

*Chor.* I know not. To my mind, or silence hard,  
Or vain wild cries, are signs of bitter woe.

MESS. Soon we shall know, within the house advancing, 1436  
If, in the passion of her heart, she hides  
A secret purpose. Truly dost thou speak;  
There is a terror in that silence hard.

*Chor.* [*seeing* CREON *approaching with the corpse of* HÆMON *in his arms*] 1440  
And, lo! the king himself comes on,  
And in his hands he bears a record clear,  
No woe (if I may speak) by others caused,  
Himself the great offender.

*Enter* CREON *bearing* HÆMON'S *body* 1444

CREON. Woe! for the sins of souls of evil mood,  
Strong, mighty to destroy;  
O ye who look on those of kindred race,  
The slayers and the slain, 1448  
Woe for mine own rash plans that prosper not;  
Woe for thee, son; but new in life's career,  
And by a new fate dying.  
Woe! woe! 1452

Thou diest, thou art gone,  
Not by thine evil counsel, but by mine.

*Chor.* Ah me! Too late thou seem'st to see the right.

CREON. Ah me! 1456  
I learn the grievous lesson. On my head,  
God, pressing sore, hath smitten me and vexed,  
In ways most rough and terrible (ah me!),  
Shattering the joy, and trampling underfoot. 1460  
Woe! woe! We toil for that which profits not.

*Enter Second Messenger*

SEC. MESS. My master! thou, as one who hast full store,  
One source of sorrow bearest in thine arms,  
And others in thy house, too soon, it seems, 1464  
Thou need'st must come and see.

CREON. And what remains  
Worse evil than the evils that we bear?

SEC. MESS. Thy wife is dead. Thy dead son's mother true, 1468  
Ill starred one, smitten with a deadly blow,  
But some few moments since.

CREON. O agony? 1472  
Thou house of Death, that none may purify,  
Why dost thou thus destroy me?  
O thou who comest, bringing in thy train  
    Woes horrible to tell, 1476  
Thou tramplest on a man already slain.  
What say'st thou? What new tidings bring'st to me?  
    Ah me! ah me!  
Is it that over all the slaughter wrought  
My own wife's death has come to crown it all? 1480

*Chor.* It is but all too clear! No longer now  
Does yon recess conceal her.  
    [*The gates open and show the dead body of EURYDICE.*]

CREON. Woe is me! 1484  
This second stroke I gaze on, miserable,  
What fate, yea, what still lies in wait for me?  
Here in my arms I bear what was my son;  
And there, O misery! look upon the dead.  
Ah, wretched mother! ah, my son! my son! 1488

SEC. MESS. Sore wounded, she around the altar clung,

And closed her darkening eyelids, and bewailed  
The honoured bed of Megareus, who died  
Long since, and then again that corpse thou hast; 1492  
And last of all she cried a bitter cry  
Against thy deeds, the murderer of thy son.

CREON. Woe! woe! alas!  
I shudder in my fear: Will no one strike 1496  
A deadly blow with sharp two-edgèd sword?  
Fearful my fate, alas!  
And with a fearful woe full sore beset.

SEC. MESS. She in her death charged thee with being the cause 1500  
Of all their sorrows, his and hers alike.

CREON. And in what way struck she the murderous blow?

SEC. MESS. With her own hand below her heart she stabbed,  
Hearing her son's most pitiable fate. 1504

CREON. Ah me! The fault is mine. On no one else,  
Of all that live, the fearful guilt can come;  
I, even I, did slay thee, wretched one,  
I; yes, I say it clearly. Come, ye guards, 1508  
Lead me forth quickly; lead me out of sight,  
More crushed to nothing than the dead unborn.

*Chor.* Thou counsellest gain, if gain there be in ills,  
For present evils then are easiest borne 1512  
When shortest lived.

CREON. Oh, come thou, then, come thou,  
Last of my sorrows, that shall bring to me  
Best boon, my life's last day. Come, then, oh, come 1516  
That nevermore I look upon the light.

*Chor.* These things are in the future. What is near,  
That we must do. O'er what is yet to come  
They watch, to whom that work of right belongs. 1520

CREON. I did but pray for what I most desire.

*Chor.* Pray thou for nothing more. For mortal man  
There is no issue from a doom decreed.

CREON. [*looking at the two corpses*] Lead me, then, forth, 1524  
vain shadow that I am,  
Who slew thee, O my son, unwittingly,

And thee, too—(O my sorrow)—and I know not  
Which way to look. All near at hand is turned 1528  
Aside to evil; and upon my head  
There falls a doom far worse than I can bear.

*Chor.* Man's highest blessedness  
In wisdom chiefly stands; 1532  
And in the things that touch upon the Gods,  
'Tis best in word of deed  
To shun unholy pride;  
Great words of boasting bring great punishments; 1536  
And so to gray-haired age  
Comes wisdom at the last.

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