
ANTIGONE

for Clarissa
ΤΟ ΠΡΙΝ ΔΟΜΩΝ ΑΓΑΜΕΥΑ
(to prin domōn agā(ma))

THE CHARACTERS

ANTIGONE, daughter of Oedipus and sister of Polyneices
and Eteocles

ISMENE, sister of Antigone

CHORUS of Citizens of Thebes

CREON, king of Thebes and uncle of Antigone
and Ismene

A SENTRY

HAEMON, son of Creon and betrothed to Antigone

TIRESIAS, a blind prophet

EURYDICE, wife of Creon and mother of Haemon

FIRST MESSENGER

Guards, Ladies-in-waiting, and a Boy

TIME AND SETTING

After the death of OEDIPUS, his two sons contend for the throne of Thebes. POLYNEICES, leading the Seven Champions, attacks from Argos and batters at the seven gates of Thebes. ETEOCLES defends the city, supported by CREON, who appears to have been acting as regent. In a great battle the two brothers meet face to face and kill each other. The Argive forces retreat. It is the morning after the battle. The dead still lie on the field, including POLYNEICES and ETEOCLES. CREON, once again the undisputed master of Thebes, proclaims that POLYNEICES, because he died fighting against his own city, shall be left to rot on the battlefield—the most ignominious of ends for any Greek. ANTIGONE, caught in a conflict of loyalties, to her dead brother and to the State, decides to defy CREON's edict. It is daybreak. She calls her sister out from the palace.

Antigone

PROLOGUE

ANTIGONE

Come, Ismene, my own dear sister, come!
What more do you think could Zeus require of us
to load the curse that's on the House of Oedipus?
There is no sorrow left, no single shame,
no pain, no tragedy,
which does not hound us, you and me, towards our
And now,
what's this promulgation which they say
our ruler has made to all the state?
Do you know? Have you heard?
Or are you sheltered from the news
that deals a deathblow to our dearest?

ISMENE

Our dearest, Antigone? I've heard no news
either good or bad,
ever since we two were stripped
of two brothers in a single day,
Each dismissing each by each other's hand.
And since the Argive army fled last night,
I've heard no more—either glad or sad.

ANTIGONE

That's what I thought,
that's why I've brought you here beyond the gates
that you may hear my news alone.

ISMENE

What mischief are you hinting at?

ANTIGONE

I think you know . . . Our two dear brothers:
Creon is burying one to desecrate the other.
Eteocles, they say, he has dispatched with proper rites
as one judged fit to pass in glory to the shades.
But Polyneices, killed as piteously,
an interdict forbids that anyone should bury him
or even mourn.
He must be left unwept, unsepulchered,
a vulture's prize,
sweetly scented from afar.

That's what they say our good and noble Creon plans:
plans for you and me, yes me;
And now he's coming here to publish it and make it
plain

to those who haven't heard.

Anyone who disobeys will pay no trifling penalty
but die by stoning
before the city walls.
There's your chance to prove your worth,
or else a sad degeneracy.

ISMENE

You firebrand! Could I do a thing
to change the situation as it is?

ANTIGONE

You could. Are you willing
to share danger and suffering and . . .

ISMENE

Danger? What are you scheming at?

ANTIGONE

. . . take this hand of mine to bury the dead?

ISMENE

What! Bury him and flout the interdict?

ANTIGONE

He is my brother still, and yours,
though you would have it otherwise,
but I shall not abandon him.

ISMENE

What! Challenge Creon to his face?

ANTIGONE

He has no right to keep me from my own.

ISMENE

Sister, please, please!

Remember how our father died:

hated, in disgrace,

self-dismantled in horror of himself,

his own hand stabbing out his sight.

And how his mother-wife in one

twisted off her earthly days with cord;

And thirdly how our two brothers in a single day

each achieved for each a suicidal nemesis.

And now, we two are left.

Think how much worse our end will be than all the rest

if we defy our sovereign's edict and his power.

Remind ourselves that we are women

and as such are not made to fight with men.

For might unfortunately is right

and makes us bow to things like this and worse.

Therefore shall I beg the shades below

to judge me leniently as one who knecfed to force.

It's madness to meddle.

ANTIGONE

I will not press you any more.
 I would not want you as a partner if you asked.
 Go to what you please. I go to bury him.
 How beautiful to die in such pursuit!
 To rest loved by him whom I have loved,
 sinner of a holy sin,
 With longer time to charm the dead than those who live,
 for I shall abide forever there.
 So go. And please your fantasy
 and call it wicked what the gods call good.

ISMENE

You know I don't do that.
 I'm just not made to war against the state.

ANTIGONE

Make your apologies!
 I go to raise a tomb above my dearest brother.

ISMENE

You foolhardy thing! You frighten me.

ANTIGONE

Don't fear for me. Be anxious for yourself.

ISMENE

At least tell no one what you do, but keep it dark,
 and I shall keep it secret too.

ANTIGONE

Oh tell it, tell it, shout it out!
 I'd hate your silence more than if you told the world.

ISMENE

So fiery—in a business that chills!

ANTIGONE

ANTIGONE

Perhaps, but I am doing what I must.

ISMENE

Yes, more than must. And you are doomed to fail.

ANTIGONE

Why then, I'll fail, but not give up before.

ISMENE

Don't plunge into such a hopeless enterprise.

ANTIGONE

Urge me so, and I shall hate you soon.
 He, the dead, will justly hate you too.
 Say that I'm mad, and madly let me risk:
 The worst that I can suffer and the best:
 A death that martyrdom can render blest.

ISMENE

Go then, if you must toward your end:
 Fool, wonderful fool, and loyal friend.

[ISMENE watches ANTIGONE walk away, then she goes
 into the palace.]

ENTRY ODE

[The CHORUS in a march-dance files into the theater, singing
 a hymn of triumph. They celebrate the defeat of the invading
 Polynices and the victory of Thebes over Argos.]

Strophe I

CHORUS

Sunshaft of the sun
 Most resplendent sun
 That ever shone on Thebes
 The Seven Gates of Thebes:
 Epiphany, you broke
 Eye of the golden day
 Marching over Dirce's streams
 At dawn to drive in headlong flight
 The warrior who came with shields
 All fulminant as snow
 In Argive stand at arms
 Scattered now before the lancing sun.

LEADER

Propelled against our land
 By Polyneices's claims
 This screaming eagle circled round
 Caparisoned with arms he swooped
 His wings their shields of snow. His crest
 Their helmets in the sun.

Antistrophe I

CHORUS

He stooped above our towers
 Gaped above our gates
 His hungry spears hovered
 Then before he gorged
 And glutted on our blood
 Before Hephaestus hot
 With pitch and flame had seized
 Our crown of towers, all the din
 That Ares loves burst around
 Their rear, and panic turned
 His flank. The fight came on
 Behind their backs: a dragon-breathing foe.

LEADER

The braggart's pompous tongue
 Is hated most by Zeus
 And seeing them advance superb
 In clank of gold, he struck their first
 Man down with fire before he yelled
 Triumph from the walls.

Strophe II

CHORUS

Thundering down to the ground with his torch
 Knocked from his hands, this bacchanalian
 Passionate lunatic breathing out hate
 In hurricanes, fell in a flaming arc
 His brandished torch all quenched, and great
 Ares like a war horse wheeled:
 Ubiquitous his prancing strength
 Trampling in the dust
 Havoc that he dealt with several dooms.

LEADER

Seven champions dueled
 With seven at the Seven
 Gates and gave their panoplies
 To Zeus, save two, the fatal two
 Who sharing parents shared their fall,
 Brother killing brother.

Antistrophe II

CHORUS

But now that this triumph, the loudest of triumphs,
 Oh joy-bearing triumph! has come to our Thebes
 The proud city of chariots, why
 Now let us chase the memory far
 Away of the wars that are blessedly past.
 Come call on the gods with song and with dance

All through the night at the groves and the shrines,
And Bacchus shall lead the round—
Shouting and shaking all Thebes with his revels.

LEADER

But look who comes, the lucky
Son of Menoecus:
The man the gods have made our king.
What new vicissitudes of state
Vex him now? Why has he sent
A herald to our summons?

[CREON has entered from the palace, surrounded by soldiers. He addresses the CHORUS.]

FIRST EPISODE

CREON

Gentlemen, the gods have graciously
steadied our ship of state, which storms
have terribly tossed.
And now I have called you here privately
because of course I know
your loyalty to the House of Laius.
How again, when Oedipus was king,
your duty never faltered,
and when he fell you still upheld his sons.
But now that they have gone,
sharing their double end on a single day,
(mutual murder, mutual recompense!),
I nearest in line enjoy the scepter and the throne.

Now, naturally, there is no way
to tell the character and mettle of a man
until you've seen him govern.
Nevertheless, I want to make it plain:
I am the kind of man who can't and never could
abide the tongue-tied ruler who through fear
backs away from sound advice.

And I find intolerable the man who puts his country
second to his friends.
For instance, if I saw ruin and danger
heading for the state,
I would speak out.
Never could I make my country's enemy my private
friend,
knowing as I do,
she is the good ship that bears us safe.

So there you have my principles by which I govern.
In accord with them, I made the proclamation
that you heard just now:
Eteocles, who died in arms for Thebes,
shall have a glorious funeral
as befits a hero going to join the noble dead.
But his brother Polyneices,
he who came from exile breathing fire
against this city of his fathers and its shrines;
The man who came all thirsting for his country's blood
to drag the rest of us away as slaves—
I've sent the edict out
that none shall bury him or even mourn.
He must be left all ghastly where he fell,
a corpse for dogs to maul and vultures pick his bones.

You see the kind of man I am!
You'll not catch me putting traitors up on pedestals
beside the loyal and true.
I'll honor him alone, alive or dead, who honors Thebes.

LEADER

Your disposition is quite clear,
son of Menoecus, Creon,
touching friend or enemy of this our city.
We know you have the power too
to wreak your will upon the living and the dead.

CREON

Then see to it my injunctions are performed.

LEADER

Put the burden on some younger men.

CREON

No. Sentries are already posted on the corpse.

LEADER

Then what exactly do you want us to do?

CREON

Merely see there're no infringements of the law.

LEADER

No man is mad enough to welcome death.

CREON

And death it is. But greed of gain
has often made men fools.

[A SENTRY, *disheveled and distraught, comes bumbling
in towards the King*]

SENTRY

King, I won't pretend I come at breakneck speed,
all out of breath.

I kept on stopping in my tracks . . . to think . . .
and turning back.

I held committee meetings with myself:

"You fool," I said,

"you're 'eading straight for the lion's mouth,"

then, "Blockhead, what're you waiting for?"

if Creon gets the news from someone else, you're done!"

So I've come scurrying at a snail's pace
by the long shortcut,
the "forward" voice in charge.

And 'ere I am, with a tale to tell that makes no sense,
which any'ow I'll tell, cos I do believe
nothing bad can 'appen that isn't on one's ticket.

CREON

Come to the point, man! What are you dithering about?

SENTRY

First, sir, if I may slip in a word about miself.
It in't me that done it,

and I dunno who darned done it neither;
so it in't fair to make me take the rap.

CREON

Done it? Done it? You're a great marksman--
hit the target first time!
You must have something very odd to say.

SENTRY

It's awfully off-putting, sir, to bring bad news--
especially to you, sir.

CREON

Then get on with it and go.

SENTRY

Right! I'll tell you straight. The body--it's buried like.
I mean someone's just gone and sprinkled dust on it--
right proper thirsty dust--and gone . . .
done the ritual, sir, you see.

CREON

What are you saying, man? Who would have dared?

SENTRY

Don't ask me, sir!

There ain't no mark of pick or mattock,
ground's all 'ard, unbroken,
no wheel tracks neither:

Not a sign of 'uman 'ands.

When the sentry of the morning watch pointed to it,
there it was at dawn, the corpse,
an ugly mystery that struck us dumb.

T'weren't exactly buried,
just sprinkled with earth ritual like
as if someone wanted to set it free.

No marks of dog or jackal neither—not a scratch.

Then we flew at one another, guard accusing guard.

It came near to blows.

There weren't no clue to clinch the quarrel.

Any one of us coulda done it. See!

No evidence to disprove any one of us—not a shred.

So we dared one another to pick up red-'ot iron,

walk through fire, and swear by all the gods

He neither done the deed nor 'ad the slightest inking

who 'ad.

Well, one of us cut through the deadlock, saying . . .

(We went weak as straws when we 'eard it,

cos there weren't no denying,

nor coming out of it in one piece neither):

This fella there and then blurts out: "We gotta tell the

King.

There ain't no way to cover up."

He convinced the lot of us, so we drew straws.

And 'oo should be the unlucky one to win the prize

but yours truly.

So 'ere I am, unwelcome I can tell, and un'appy too,

For there ain't no one likes the bringer of bad news.

LEADER

Sire, I've had misgivings from the first:

could this be more than purely natural work?

CREON

Enough! You make me furious with such senile dod-

dering remarks.

You really think they give a damn, the gods, about this

corpse?

Next you'll say they make it a priority to bury him in state,
and thank him for his burning down their altars,
sacking shrines, scouting laws, and raping all the land.

Or are the gods these days considerate to criminals?
Far from it! No, from the first,

there's been a group of grumblers in this town:
men who can hardly abide my rule,

who nod and whisper, chafing beneath my law,
who are not in love with it at all.

These are the ones, I'll warrant,
who have suborned my guards with bribes.

Ah, Money! Money is a currency that's rank.
Money topples cities to the ground,

seduces men away from happy homes,
corrupts the honest heart to shifty ways,

makes men crooked connoisseurs of vice.
But these plotters who have sold themselves,

every man jack of them,
Will end up, gentlemen,

with much more than he's bargained for.

[*He turns on the SENTRY*]

You there! Get this straight:

I swear by almighty Zeus whom I revere and serve,
that either you find the man who did this burial
and stand him here before my eyes,

or Hades itself will be too good for you
until you've first confessed to everything—

yes, hanging from a cross.
That perhaps will teach you, soldier,
where to look for profit

and that gold can glisten from an evil source.

Ah! Money never makes as many as it mars.

SENTRY

Am I allowed a word, sir? Or do I just go?

CREON

Can't you see your very voice gets on my nerves?

SENTRY

'urts your ears, does it, sir? Or kinda your conscience?

CREON

What business of yours is it to diagnose my pain?

SENTRY

Because I only affect your ears; the culprit, your brain.

CREON

By God, what a born chatterer you are!

SENTRY

Maybe, but it weren't me that did the burying.

CREON

No, you just sold yourself for silver.

SENTRY

Oh, what a crying shame, when right reason reasons wrong!

CREON

A logic-chopper and a wit! But don't imagine that will save your skin.

If you fail to stand the man before my face, you'll find that dirty money pays in hurt.

[CREON strides into the palace]

SENTRY

Well, let's 'ope he's found. But caught or not (and only chance can tell), one thing's for sure: you won't catch me coming back again.

It's a goddam miracle I got out of 'ere alive.

[SENTRY runs off]

FIRST CHORAL ODE

[The CHORUS of Citizens, in an intuitive foreshadowing of both Creon's and Antigone's fate, contrast the prowess and glory of human kind with the tragedy of their downfall when they overstep the mark. There is a veiled warning to Creon not to exceed humane bounds, but also, by their listing all the predominantly masculine occupations (sailing, plowing, hunting, fishing, domesticating animals, verbal skills, building, making laws), they are advising women like Antigone to beware of taking on what they consider male roles.]

Strophe I

Creation is a marvel and
 Man its masterpiece. He scuds
 Before the southern wind, between
 The pounding white-piling swell.
 He drives his thoroughbreds through Earth
 (Great goddess inexhaustible)
 And overturns her with the plow
 Unfolding her from year to year.

Antistrophe I

The light-balanced light-headed birds
 He snares; wild beasts of every kind.
 In his nets the deep sea fish
 Are caught. Oh, mastery of man!

The free forest animal
He herds; the roaming upland deer.
The shaggy horse he breaks to yoke
The unflagging mountain bull.

Strophe II

Training his agile thoughts
volatile as air
He's civilized the world
of words and wit and law.
With a roof against the sky,
the javelin crystal frosts
The arrow-lancing rains,
he's fertile in resource
Provident for all,
healing all disease:
All but death, and death—
death he never cures.

Antistrophe II

Beyond imagining wise:
his cleverness and skills
Through labyrinthine ways
for good and also ill.
Distinguished in his city
when law-abiding, pious
But when he promulgates
unsavory ambition,
Citiless and lost.
And then I will not share
My hearth with him; I want
no parcel of his thoughts.

SECOND EPISODE

[The SENTRY returns, leading ANTIGONE]

CHORUS

What visitation do I see from heaven?
And one I wish I could deny.
I am amazed. It is Antigone.
What! They bring you here in charge?
Poor Antigone, daughter of unlucky Oedipus.
Were you rash enough to cross the King?
And did they take you in your folly?

SENTRY

'ere she is, the culprit: caught red'anded
in the very act of burying 'im.
But where is Creon?

CHORUS

Coming from the house, and just in time.

[Enter CREON]

CREON

Just in time for what?

SENTRY

King, it's most unwise, I find,
ever to promise not to do a thing.
Now look at me! I could 'ave sworn
I'd not come scurrying back,
After being almost skinned alive by all your flailing
threats.
Yet 'ere I am against my oath, bringing in this girl,
and all because beyond my wildest dreams,
in fact with quite a thrill,
I caught 'er at it—actually at the burying.

No drawing straws this time—I'll say not!
So grab 'er, King, she's yours.
And I'm scot-free, or I should 'ope,
quit of this 'ole goddam thing.

CREON

Tell me first when and how you found her.

SENTRY

She was burying the man. There ain't nothing more to tell.

CREON

Are you rambling? Do you know what you are saying?

SENTRY

Sir, I saw 'er in the act
of burying that forbidden corpse.
Is that plain and clear?

CREON

But how actually was she surprised and taken?

SENTRY

Well it was like this.
We 'ad returned to the spot,
our ears ringing with all your nasty threats,
and 'ad brushed the earth from off the body
to make it bare again
(it was all soft and clammy),
And were squatting there windward of the stench,
keeping each other up to the mark
And rounding 'ard on anybody that nodded . . .
Watching we were, till the midday sun,
a great blazing ball
bashed down on us something fierce,

When suddenly came this right twisting squall,
sweeping across the plain,
tearing the leaves off trees,
buffeting 'eaven itself.
We 'ad to shut our eyes against this god-sent blight.
When at last it cleared

there was this vision of this girl,
Standing there she was,
giving out little shrill-like sobs:
'eartrending as a mother bird's
what 'as seen its nest pillaged
and its bairns all gone.

That's 'ow she was wailing
and calling curses down
on them what done it
when she saw the body bared.

Immediately she scoops up earth—a dry 'andful like—
and sprinkles it. Then 'olding up
a shapely brazen urn, she pours
three libations for the dead.

That's when we swooped and closed upon our quarry.
She didn't flinch, and when we charged 'er
with what she'd gorne and done,
and done before, she just admitted it.
It made me glad and sad:

bliss to get myself out of trouble,
distress to bring it on a friend.

When all's said and done, 'owever,
the safety of one's own sweet skin comes first.

CREON

Come girl, you with downcast eyes,
did you, or did you not, do this deed?

ANTIGONE

I did. I deny not a thing.

You, soldier, you can go—be off wherever you please—
Free of any serious charge.

[*The SENTRY stands for a moment, smiles, then bounds
away*]

Now tell me, Antigone, a straight yes or no:
Did you know an edict had forbidden this?

ANTIGONE

Of course I knew. Was it not publicly proclaimed?

CREON

So you chose flagrantly to disobey my law?

ANTIGONE

Naturally! Since Zeus never promulgated such a law,
Nor will you find that Justice,
Mistress of the world below,

publishes such laws to humankind.

I never thought your mortal edicts had such force
they nullified the laws of heaven,
which unwritten, not proclaimed,

can boast a currency that everlastingly is valid,
an origin beyond the birth of man.

And I, whom no man's frown can frighten,

Am far from risking heaven's frown by flouting these.
I need no trumpeter from you to tell me I must die,
we all die anyway

And if this hurries me to death before my time,

why, such a death is gain. Yes, surely gain
to one whom life so overwhelms.

Therefore, I can go to meet my end
without a trace of pain.

But had I left the body of my mother's son unburied,
lying where he lay,

ah, that would hurt!

For this, I feel no twinges of regret.

And if you judge me fool, perhaps it is
because a fool is judge.

ANTIGONE

LEADER

My word! The daughter is as headstrong as the father.
Submission is a thing she's never learned.

CREON

You wait and see! The toughest will
is first to break: like hard untempered steel
which snaps and shivers at a touch
when hot from off the forge.

And I have seen high-mettled horses curbed
by a little scrap of bit.

One who has no more authority than a common slave
can ill afford to put on airs.

And yet, this girl, already versed in disrespect
the first time she disobeyed my law,
Now adds a second insult, has done it again,
and vaunts it to my face.

Oh, she's the man, not I,
if she can flout authority and walk away unscathed.

I swear I hardly care
if she be my sister's child

or linked to me by blood more closely
than any member of my hearth and home;

She and her sister will not now escape
the utmost penalty.

I say the sister too.

I charge her as accomplice of this burial.
Call her forth.

I saw her whimpering in there just now, all gone to
pieces.

So does remorse blurt out the secret sin . . .
Although its opposite is even worse:
crime detected glorifying crime.

ANTIGONE

Is there something more you want? Or just my life?

CREON

Not a thing, by God! It gives me what I want.

ANTIGONE

Why dawdle, then? Your conversation is hardly something I enjoy, or ever could, nor mine be more acceptable to you. And yet it ought to be.

Where could I win respect and praise more validly than this:

burial of my brother?

Not a man here would say the opposite, were his tongue not locked in fear.

Unfortunately, tyranny (blessed in so much else besides) can lay the law down any way it wants.

CREON

Your view is hardly shared by all these Thebans here.

ANTIGONE

They think as I, but trim their tongues to you.

CREON

Are you not ashamed to differ from such men?

ANTIGONE

There is no shame to reverence relatives.

CREON

And the other duelist who died—was he no relative?

ANTIGONE

ANTIGONE

He was. And of the same father and same mother.

CREON

So, slighting one, you would salute the other?

ANTIGONE

The dead man would not agree with you on this.

CREON

Surely! If you make the hero honored with the black-guard.

ANTIGONE

It was his brother not his slave that died.

CREON

Yes, ravaging our land, while *he* fell as its champion.

ANTIGONE

Hades makes no distinction in its rites and honors.

CREON

The just and unjust do not urge an equal claim.

ANTIGONE

The "crime" (who knows?) may be called a virtue there.

CREON

Not even death can metamorphose hate to love.

ANTIGONE

No, nor decompose my love to hate.

CREON

Curse you! Find the outlet for your love down there.
No woman while I live shall govern me.

[ISMENE is brought in under guard]

LEADER OF CHORUS

See where Ismene comes
Crying from the palace gates,
Her face all flushed.
A sister's tears are breaking rains
Upon her cheeks and from her eyes,
Her loveliness a shadow.

CREON

[Turning viciously towards ISMENE]

Come, you serpent, secret lurker in my home,
who sucked my blood
Even while I nurtured you two sister vipers at my
throne—
Speak. Confess your part in burying him.
Or do you dare deny complicity?

ISMENE

I did it too. If she'll allow my claim,
I share with her the credit and the blame.

ANTIGONE

That is not true. You do not share with me,
nor did I grant you partnership.

ISMENE

But now that your poor ship is buffeted,
I'm not ashamed to sail the voyage at your side.

ANTIGONE

The dead of Hades know whose act it was.
I do not take to those who take to talk.

ISMENE

Sister, do not scorn me; let me share
your death and holy homage to the dead.

ANTIGONE

No share in work, no share in death,
and I must consummate alone what I began.

ISMENE

Then what is left of life to me when you are gone?

ANTIGONE

Ask Creon. You and he are friends.

ISMENE

Ah! Must you jeer at me? It does not help.

ANTIGONE

You are right. It is a joyless jeering.

ISMENE

Tell me, even now: how can I help?

ANTIGONE

Save yourself. I shall not envy you.

ISMENE

Poor dear sister—let me suffer with you!

ANTIGONE

No. For you choose life, and I chose death.

ISMENE

When all my protests were of no avail.

ANTIGONE

We played our different parts, with different acclaim.

ISMENE

But now we share and equal share of blame.

ANTIGONE

Look up! You live! And I died long ago,
when I gave my life to serve the dead.

CREON

These girls, I swear, are crazed: One mad by birth,
the other by attainment.

ISMENE

Yes, my lord, for when misfortune comes,
he sends our reason packing out of doors.

CREON

And yours went flying fast
when you chose damnation with the damned.

ISMENE

Yet, with her gone, what portion had I left?

CREON

Do not mention *her*. She does not still exist.

ISMENE

You would not kill your own son's bride?

CREON

Let him sow his seed in other furrows.

ISMENE

A match like theirs will *not* repeat itself.

CREON

I shudder at the jades who court our sons.

ANTIGONE

My darling Haemon, how your father heaps disgrace on you!

CREON

Damn you and damn your cursed marriage!

LEADER

You would not tear your own son's bride from him?

CREON

Let us say that Death is going to come between.

LEADER

I fear, I fear it's fixed. Her death is sealed.

CREON

Yes, let us both be quite assured of *that*.
Guards, take them away and lock them up.
No more roaming. They are women now.
The breath of Hades pressing close to kill
Can make the bravest turn, and turn the bravest will.

[ANTIGONE and ISMENE are led away. CREON stays]

SECOND CHORAL ODE

[The CHORUS cries out in an ode which begins by being both a lament for the past victimization of the House of Oedipus and an omen for the present, and then goes on to warn all those who think they can live their lives apart from the universal providence of Zeus.]

Strophe I

Happy the man who has not sipped the bitter day,
Whose house is firm against divine assault.
No planted curse creeps on and on
Through generations like the dark and driven surge
Booming from the bosom of the sea while Thracian gales
Churn perpetually the ooze in waves that throw
Down upon the headlands swept and carded by the storm
Their thunderous mass.

Antistrophe I

So do I see the house of Labdacus struck down,
In all its generations victimized by some
Pursuing deity. Its useless dead.
Its never-ending doom. And now once more the sun
Gone down in blood: the final hope of Oedipus
Felled to the root, put out in smoke and Hades' dust,
And all because of headlong folly and the reckless speech
Of a frenzied heart.

Strophe II

O Zeus, what creature pits himself against thy power?
Not Sleep encumbrous with his sublet net
And not the menstrual cycle
Of the tireless moon.
Thou in ancient splendors still art young
When worlds are old
On Mount Olympus.
Everything past, everything present,

And everything still to come
Is thy domain
No mortal thing however vast can steal
Outside thy grasp.

Antistrophe II

Hope, eternally gadding, alights on many with nothing
But bliss, but just as blithely brings to others
Delusions and seething ambition,
No man can tell
What has come stealthily creeping over his life
Until too late
Hot ashes and pain
Sear his feet . . . Once long ago
A sage famously said:
"If evil good appear
To any, the gods are near. Unscathed he'll go,
And then they'll bring him low."

[HAEMON is seen approaching]

LEADER

Here Haemon comes, your youngest son,
Driven perhaps by pangs of grief
For Antigone his sentenced bride:
A bitter groom, a marriage marred.

CREON

We shall see in a moment, and without the need of seers.

THIRD EPISODE

[HAEMON enters. The men stare warily at each other for a few seconds]

CREON

Son, do you come provoked against your father for the death warrant of your would-be bride, or still my loving son, whatever I may do?

HAEMON

Father, I am your loving son and you the wise preceptor of my ways, whom I must follow. No marriage I could make would ever match the good of your abiding counsel.

CREON

Well spoken son!

Just what a right-minded son should feel: unremitting deference to his father's will.

Such is a parent's prayer, to see grow up a race of filial sons to deck his home: Ready always to avenge their father's wrongs, and of course to give his friends

the selfsame honor that the father gives.

But a man who raises a batch of worthless boys, what has he hatched for himself but nuisances, and jubilant sneers from the ill-disposed!

Oh Haemon, don't lose your balance for a woman's sake! Don't hug a joy that's cheap and cool:

an evil woman for your bed and board.

No wound is worse than counterfeited love.

She is poison. Spit her out.

Let her go and find a mate in Hades.

Why, I've just caught her in an open act of treason—she alone of all the city.

I will not break my word to Thebes. She dies.

So let her plead to Zeus the sanctity of kindred ties.

How can I, if I nurse sedition in my house, not foster it outside?

No. If a man can keep his home in hand, he proves his competence to keep the state.

But one who breaks the law and flouts authority, I never will allow.

Unswerving submission

to whomsoever the state has put in charge is what is asked: in little things as well as great, in right and wrong.

And I am confident that one who thus obeys, will make a perfect subject or a perfect king: the kind of man who in the thick of flying spears never flinches from his post

but stands dauntless at his comrade's side. But as for anarchy,

there is no greater curse than anarchy.

It topples cities down, it crumbles homes, it shatters allied ranks in broken flight which discipline kept whole:

For discipline preserves and orders well.

Let us then defend authority

and not be ousted by a girl.

If yield we must, then let it be to men,

And never have it said we were worsted by a woman.

LEADER

What you say (unless my wits have run to seed) sounds reasonable and makes good sense.

HAEMON

Yes, Father, reason: the gods' greatest gift to man. I would not dream of criticizing yours

or saying you were wrong, even if I could.

But other men can reason rightly too.

As your son, you see, I find myself
 marking every word and act and comment of the crowd,
 to gauge the temper of the simple citizen,
 who dares not risk your scowl to speak his mind.
 But I from the shadows hear them:
 hear a city's sympathy for this girl,
 because no woman ever faced
 so unreasonable, so cruel a death,
 for such a generous cause.
 She would not leave her brother where he fell,
 for carrion birds and dogs to maul.
 "Should not her name be writ in gold?" they say,
 and so the whisper grows.

You know, my Father, how I prize
 your well-being and your name.
 For sons and father's crown each other's glory
 with each other's fame.
 So I beg you Father,
 don't entrench yourself in your opinion
 as if everyone else was wrong.
 The kind of man who always thinks that he is right,
 that his opinions, his pronouncements,
 are the final word,
 is usually exposed as hollow as they come.
 But a wise man is flexible, has much to learn
 without a loss of dignity.
 See the trees in floodtime, how they bend
 along the torrent's course,
 and how their twigs and branches do not snap,
 but stubborn trees are torn up roots and all.
 In sailing too, when fresh weather blows,
 a skipper who will not slaken sail, turns turtle,
 finishes his voyage beam-ends up.

So let your anger cool, and change your mind.
 I may be young but not without some sense.
 Let men be wise by instinct if they can,
 but when this fails and nature won't oblige,
 be wise by good advice.

LEADER
 Sire, the young man speaks good sense: worth listening to.
 And you, son, too, should listen. You both speak to the
 point.

CREON
 You mean that men of my years have to learn to think
 by taking notes from men of his?

HAEMON

In only what is right.

It is my merit not my years that count.

CREON

Your merit is to foment lawlessness.

HAEMON

You know I do not plead for criminals.

CREON

So this creature is no criminal, eh?

HAEMON

The whole of Thebes says "no."

CREON

And I must let the mob dictate my policy?

HAEMON

See now who is speaking like a boy!

CREON

Do I rule this state, or someone else?

HAEMON

A one man state is no state at all.

CREON

The state is his who rules it. Is that plain?

HAEMON

The state that you should rule would be a desert.

CREON

This boy is hopelessly on the woman's side.

HAEMON

I'm on your side. Are you a woman then?

CREON

You reprobate! At open loggerheads with your father!

HAEMON

On the contrary: you at loggerheads with open justice!

CREON

My crime, of course, the discharge of my rule:

HAEMON

What rule—when you trample on the rule of heaven?

CREON

Insolent pup! A woman's lackey!

HAEMON

Lackey to nothing of which I am ashamed.

CREON

Not ashamed to be the mouthpiece for that trollop?

HAEMON

I speak for you, for me, and for the holy spirits of the dead.

CREON

The dead? Precisely—you'll never marry her alive.

HAEMON

Well then, dead—one death beckoning to another.

CREON

So it's come to that—you threaten me?

HAEMON

One cannot threaten empty air!

CREON

My word, what wisdom! How you'll regret dispensing it!

HAEMON

If you weren't my father, I'd say your mind had gone.

CREON

You woman's slave! Don't come toadying to me!

HAEMON

Go on—make remarks and never listen to an answer!

CREON

Is that so? Then by Olympus be quite sure of this:
You shall not rant and jeer at me without reprisal.
Off with the wretched girl! I say she dies
In front of him, before her bridegroom's eyes.

HAEMON

She shall not die—don't think it—
in my sight or by my side.
And you shall never see my face again.
I commit you raving to your chosen friends.

[HAEMON rushes out]

LEADER

Gone, your Majesty, but gone distraught.
He is young, his rage will make him desperate.

CREON

Let him do or dream up acts as murderous as a fiend's,
these girls, he shall not snatch from death.

LEADER

You do not mean to kill them both?

CREON

You are right. Not the one who did not meddle.

LEADER

What kind of death do you plan?

CREON

I'll take her down a path untrud by man.
I'll hide her living in a rock-hewn vault,
With ritual food enough to clear the taint
Of murder from the City's name.
I'll leave her pleading to her favorite god,
Hades. He may charm her out a way to life.
Or perhaps she'll learn though late the cost
Of homage to the dead is labor lost.

[CREON walks away into the palace]

THIRD CHORAL ODE

[The CHORUS, apprehensive of the fate of the young lovers, sings of the desperately destructive power of love. Their words also veil a condemnation of men like CREON, who overvalue the so-called masculine qualities of the soul and fail to realize the duality of male and female within the person.]

Strophe 1

Love, unquelled in battle
Love, making nonsense of wealth
Pillowed all night on the cheek of a girl
You roam the seas, pervade the wilds
And in a shepherd's hut you lie.
Shadowing immortal gods
You dog ephemeral man—
Madness your possession.

Antistrophe 1

Turning the wise into fools
You twist them off their course
And now you have stung us to this strife
Of father fighting son . . . Oh, Love,
The bride has but to glance
With the lyrical light of her eyes
To win you a seat in the stars
And Aphrodite laughs.

[End of Choral Ode and beginning of Choral Dialogue
which continues through FOURTH EPISODE]

FOURTH EPISODE

[ANTIGONE is led in under guard]

LEADER

And now you turn on me
 Unman my loyalty
 Loose my tears to see
 You Antigone
 Pass your wedding bower
 Death's chamber, pass
 So easily.

Strophe I

[ANTIGONE and the CHORUS chant alternately]

ANTIGONE

See me, friends and citizens,
 Look on this last walk—
 The sun's light snuffed out with my dower
 And Death leading me to Acheron
 Alive, where all must sleep.
 No wedding march, no bridal song
 Cheer me on my way,
 I whom Hades Lord of the dark lake weds.

CHORUS

Yet you walk with fame, bedecked
 In praise towards the dead man's cave.
 No sickness severed you
 No sword incited struck.
 All mistress of your fate you move
 Alive, unique, to Hades Halls.

ANTIGONE

Antistrophe I

ANTIGONE

Oh, but I have heard what happened
 To that Phrygian girl, poor foreigner
 (The child of Tantalus), who clings
 Like ivy on the heights of Sipylus
 Captured in stone, petrified
 Where all the rains, they say, the flying snow,
 Waste her form away which weeps
 In waterfalls. I feel her trance,
 Her lonely exodus, in mine.

CHORUS

And she a goddess born of gods
 While we are mortals born of men.
 What greater glory for a woman's end
 To partner gods in death
 Who partnered them in life!

Strophe II

ANTIGONE

Ah! Now you laugh at me.
 Thebes, Thebes, by all our father's gods
 You my own proud chariot city
 Can you not wait till I am gone?
 And you sweet Dirce's stream and Theban groves
 You at least be witnesses to me with love
 Who walk in dismal passage to my heavy tomb
 Unwept, unjustly judged
 Displaced from every home
 Disowned by both the living and the dead.

Strophe III

CHORUS

Perhaps you aimed too high
 You dashed your foot on Fate
 Where Justice sits enthroned.
 You fall a plummet fall
 To pay a father's sin.

Antistrophe II

ANTIGONE

You touch my wounds, my memories
 Make fresh again my tears: the triple curse
 That haunts the House of Labdacus:
 The spilt and tainted blood, the horrid bed,
 My fated mother sleeping with her son
 To father me in incest . . . Parents here I come,
 Home at last, not wed, no broken spell.
 Brother when you made
 Your blindfold match, you made
 Your death and mine—mine to come.

Antistrophe III

CHORUS

Pious is as pious does
 But where might is right
 It's reckless to do wrong.
 Self-propelled to death
 You go with open eyes.

Epode

ANTIGONE

Unwept, unwedded, unloved I go
 On this last journey of all.
 Eye of the blessed sun—

I shall miss you soon.
 No tears will mourn me dead.
 No friend to cry.

[*End of Choral Dialogue. CREON has entered.*]

CREON

Listen you!
 Panegyrics and dirges go on forever
 if given the chance.
 Dispatch her at once, I say. Seal up the tomb.
 Let her choose a death at leisure—or perhaps,
 in her new home,
 An underground life forlorn.
 We wash our hands of this girl—
 except to take her from the light.

ANTIGONE

Come tomb, my wedding chamber, come!
 You sealed off habitations of the grave!
 My many family dead, finished, fetched
 in final muster to Persephone.
 I am last to come, and lost the most of all,
 my life still in my hands.
 And yet I come (I hope I come) toward a father's love,
 beloved by my mother,
 And by you, my darling brother, loved.
 Yes, all of you,
 Whom these my hands have washed, prepared and sped
 with ritual to your burials.
 And now, sweet Polynices, dressing you,
 I've earned this recompense,
 though richly honored you the just will say.
 No husband dead and gone, no children lisping "mother"
 ever could have forced me to withstand
 the city to its face.
 By what law do I assert so much? Just this:

TIRESIAS

And therefore have you safely piloted the state.

CREON

Gladly do I own my debt to you.

TIRESIAS

Then beware, you're standing once again upon the razor's edge.

CREON

How so? Your words and aspect chill.

TIRESIAS

Listen, I'll read the signs and make them plain.
I was sitting by my ancient chair of augury,
the haunt of every kind of bird,
When suddenly a noise not heard before
assaults my ears:

A panic screeching and a pandemonium deafening jargon:
beaks and bloody talons tearing—I could tell it—
pinions whirring,
all shocked me as a portent.

At once I kindled sacrifice to read by fire,
but Hephaestus fanned no leaping flame.
Instead, a sort of sweat distilled from off the thigh fat,
slid in smoke upon the sputtering fire.

The gallbladders burst and spouted up.
The grease oozed down and left the thighbones bare.
These were the signs I learnt from off this boy,
omens of a ruined sacrifice:
he is my eyes as I am yours.

See it—how the city sickens, Creon,
these the symptoms, yours the fanatic will that caused
them:

ANTIGONE

Dogs and crows all glutted carrying
desecrated carrion to the hearths and altars—
carrion from the poor unburied son of Oedipus.
Burnt offerings go up in stench. The gods are dumb.
The birds of omen cannot sing.
But obscene vultures flap away
with crops all gorged on human flesh.

Think, son, think! To err is human, true,
and only he is damned who having sinned
will not repent, will not repair.
He is a fool, a proved and stubborn fool.
Give death his due, and do not kick a corpse.
Where is renown to kill a dead man twice?
Believe me, I advise you well.
It should be easy to accept advice.
It so sweetly tuned to your good use.

CREON

Old man,
you pot away at me like all the rest
as if I were a bull's-eye,
And now you aim your seer craft at me.
Well, I'm sick of being bought and sold
by all your soothsaying tribe.
Bargain away! All the silver of Sardis,
all the gold of India
is not enough to buy this man a grave.
Not even if Zeus's eagles come, and fly away
with carrion morsels to their master's throne.
Even such a threat of such a taint
will not win this body burial.
It takes much more than human remains
to desecrate the majesty divine.
Old man Tiresias,
The most reverend fall from grace when lies are sold
Wrapped up in honeyed words—and all for gold.

TIRESIAS

Creon! Creon!
Is no one left who takes to heart that . . .

CREON

Come, let's have the platitude!

TIRESIAS

. . . That prudence is the best of all our wealth.

CREON

As folly is the worst of all our woes?

TIRESIAS

Yes, infectious folly! And you are sick with it.

CREON

I'll not exchange a fish-wife's set-to with a seer.

TIRESIAS

Which is what you do when you say I sell my prophecies.

CREON

As prophets do—a money-grubbing race.

TIRESIAS

Or as kings, who grub for money in the dung.

CREON

You realize this is treason—lese majesty?

TIRESIAS

Majesty? Yes, thanks to me you are savior of Thebes.

CREON

And you are not without your conjuring tricks. But still
a crook.

TIRESIAS

Go on! You will drive me to divulge something that . . .

CREON

Out with it! But not for money, please.

TIRESIAS

Unhappily for you this can't be bought.

CREON

Then don't expect to bargain with my wits.

TIRESIAS

All right then! Take it if you can.
A corpse for a corpse the price, and flesh for flesh,
one of your own begotten.

The sun shall not run his course for many days
before you pay.

You plunged a child of light into the dark;
entombed the living with the dead; the dead

Dismissed unmourning, denied a grave—a corpse
Unhallowed and defeated of his destiny below.

Where neither you nor gods must meddle,
you have thrust your thumbs.

Do not be surprised that heaven—yes, and hell—
have set the Furies loose to lie in wait for you,
Ready with the punishments you engineered for others.

Does this sound like flattery for sale?
Yet a little while and you shall wake

to wailing and gnashing of teeth in the house of Creon.

LEADER

What fresh news do you bring of royal ruin?

MESSENGER

Death twice over, and the living guilty for the dead.

LEADER

Who struck and who is stricken? Say.

MESSENGER

Haemon's gone. Blood spilt by his own hand.

LEADER

By his own hand? Or by his father's?

MESSENGER

Both. Driven to it by his father's murdering.

LEADER

Oh Prophet, your prophecy's come true!

MESSENGER

So stands the case. Make of it what you will.

LEADER

Look, I see Eurydice approach,

Creon's unhappy queen.

Is it chance or has she heard the deathknell of her son?

[EURYDICE staggers in, supported by her maids]

EURYDICE

Yes, good citizens, all of you, I heard:
Even as I went to supplicate

the goddess Pallas with my prayers.

Just as I unloosed the bolt that locks the door,
the sound of wailing struck my ears,
the sound of family tragedy.

I was stunned—

and fell back fainting into my ladies' arms.

But tell me everything however bad:

I am no stranger to the voice of sorrow.

MESSENGER

Dear Mistress, I was there.

I shall not try to glaze the truth;

for where is there comfort in a lie.

so soon found out? The truth is always best

In attendance on your Lord,

I took him deep into the plain

where Polynceices lay

abandoned still—all mauled by dogs.

And there with humble hearts

we prayed to Hecate, goddess of the Great Divide.

to Hades too, and begged their clemency.

Then we sprinkled him with holy water,

lopped fresh branches down

and laid him on a funeral pyre

to burn away his poor remains.

Lastly, we heaped a monument to him,

a mound of his native earth, then turned away

to unseal the vault in which there lay

a virgin waiting on a bed of stone

for her bridegroom—Death.

And one of us, ahead,

heard a wail of deep despair

echoing from that hideous place of honeymoon.

He hurried back and told the King,

who then drew near

and seemed to recognize those hollow sounds.

He gave a bleat of fear:

"Oh, are my heart's forebodings true?"

I cannot bear to tread this path.

My son's voice strikes my ears.
 Hurry, hurry, servants, to the tomb,
 And through those stones once pried away peer down
 into that cadaverous gap
 and tell me if it's Haemon's voice.
 Oh, tell me I am heavenly deceived!"

His panic sent us flying to the cave,
 and in the farthest corner we could see her
 hanging with a noose of linen round her neck,
 and leaning on her,
 hugging his cold lover lost to Hades,
 Haemon, bridegroom, broken,
 cursed the father who had robbed him,
 pouring out his tears of sorrow.

A groan agonized and loud—
 broke from Creon when he saw him.
 "You poor misguided boy!" he sobbed,
 staggering forward,

"What have you done? What were you thinking of?
 And now, come to me, my son. Your father begs you.
 But the boy glared at him with flaming eyes,
 spat for answer in his face,
 and drawing a double-hilted sword,
 lunged but missed

as his father stepped aside and ran.
 Then, the wretched lad,
 convulsed with self-hatred and despair,
 pressed against that sword and drove it home,
 halfway up the hilt into his side.
 And conscious still but failing, limply folded

Antigone close into his arms—
 Choking blood in crimson jets upon her waxen face.
 Corpse wrapped in love with corpse he lies,
 married not in life but Hades:
 Lesson to the world that inhumane designs
 Wreak a havoc immeasurably inhumane.

[EURYDICE is seen moving like a sleepwalker into the
 palace]

LEADER

What does her exit mean?
 The Queen has gone without a word of comfort or of
 sorrow.

MESSENGER

I am troubled too. And yet I hope
 the reason is she shrinks from public sorrow for her son,
 And goes into the house to lead her ladies
 in the family dirge.
 She will not be unwise. She is discreet.

LEADER

You may be right, but I do not trust
 extremes of silence or of grief.

MESSENGER

Let me go into the house and see.
 Extremes of silence, as you say, are sinister.
 Her heart is broken and can hide
 some sinister design.

[As the MESSENGER hurries into the palace through a side
 door, the great doors open and a procession carrying the
 dead body of HAEMON on a bier approaches, with CREON
 staggering behind]

CHORUS

Look, the King himself draws near, his load
 in a kind of muteness crying out his sorrow
 (Dare we say it?) from a madness of misdoing
 started by himself and by no other.

CHORAL DIALOGUE

Strophe I

CREON

Purblind sin of mine!
 There is no absolution
 For perversity that dragged
 A son to death:
 Murdered son, father murdering.
 Son, my son, cut down dead!
 New life that's disappeared
 And by no youthful foolishness
 But by my folly.

CHORUS

Late, too late, your reason reasons right!

Strophe II

CREON

Yes, taught by bitterness.
 Some god has cast his spell,
 Has hit me hard from heaven,
 Let my cruelty grow rank;
 Has slashed me down, my joys
 Trodden in the earth.
 Man, man, oh how you suffer!

[Enter the MESSENGER]

MESSENGER

Sire, you are laden,
 You the author loading:
 Half your sorrow in your hands,
 The other half still in your house
 Soon to be unhidden.

ANTIGONE

CREON

What half horror coming?

MESSENGER

Your queen is dead:
 Mother for her son;
 The suicidal thrust:
 Dead for whom she lived.

Antistrophe I

CREON

Oh, Death, pitiless receiver!
 Kill me? Will you kill me?
 Your mercy dwindles does it?
 Must you bring me words
 That crush me utterly.
 I was dead and still you kill me.
 Slaughter was piled high,
 Ah then, do not tell me
 You come to pile it higher:
 A son dead, then a wife.

CHORUS

Look! Everything is open to full view.

[The scene suddenly opens by a movement of the
 ekkuklema* to reveal EURYDICE lying dead, surrounded
 by her attendants]

Antistrophe II

CREON

Oh, oh! A second deathblow.
 Fate, my bitter cup

*The ekkuklema was a theatrical machine which could open up the stage to an inner scene: frequently a murder or a suicide.

Should have no second brimming,
 Yet the sight I see laid out
 Compels a second sorrow:
 My son just lifted up
 A corpse, and now a corpse his mother.

MESSENGER

Her heart was shattered
 And her hand drove keen the dagger.
 At the altar there she fell
 And darkness swamped her drooping eyes
 As with cries she sobbed her sorrow
 For her hero son Megareus—
 Long since nobly dead—
 And for this son her other,
 Mingling with her dying gasp
 Curses on you—killer.

Strophe III

CREON

My heart is sick with dread.
 Will no one lance a two-edged sword
 Through this bleeding seat of sorrow?

MESSENGER

She charged you, yes,
 With both their deaths—
 This lifeless thing
 As double filicidal killer!

CREON

Tell me, how did she go?

MESSENGER

Self-stabbed to the heart;
 Her son's death ringing
 New dirges in her head.

Strophe IV

CREON

I killed her, I
 Can own no alibi:
 The guilt is wholly mine.
 Take me quickly, servants,
 Take me quickly hence.
 Let this nothing be forgotten.

CHORUS

Good advice, at last,
 If anything be good
 In so much bad.
 Such evils need quick riddance.

Antistrophe III

CREON

Oh, let it come! Let it break!
 My last and golden day:
 The best, the last, the worst
 To rob me of tomorrow.

LEADER

Tomorrow is tomorrow
 And we must mind today.

CREON

All my prayers are that:
 The prayer of my desires.

LEADER

Your prayers are done.
 Man cannot flatter Fate,
 And punishments must come.

Antistrophe IV

CREON

Then lead me please away,
A rash weak foolish man,
A man of sorrows,
Who killed you, son, so blindly
And you my wife—so blind.
Where can I look?
Where hope for help,
When everything I touch is lost
And death has leapt upon my life?

CHORUS

Where wisdom is, there happiness will crown
A piety that nothing will corrode.
But high and mighty words and ways
Are flogged to humbleness, till age,
Beaten to its knees, at last is wise.