# Sophocles: from Antigone<sup>1</sup>

Though it was the first of the Oedipus, or Theban, trilogy to be composed, Antigone deals with the fortunes of Oedipus's children: sisters Antigone and Ismene and twin brothers Eteocles and Polyneices. The brothers had shared rule of Thebes, but Polyneices quarreled with his brother and eventually betrayed his city, siding with Argos against Thebes; the brothers killed each other in battle. Creon, who then became king, lost the first of his two sons in the fight, and begrudged Polyneices, decreeing that he be neither buried nor mourned.

Antigone's story was told by others, including Aeschylus; but unlike Aeschylus's heroine, who is supported by friends and even half of the chorus, Sophocles's Antigone stands alone, with a dreadful death explicitly before her in consequence of her defiance, a heightening of the tragic situation characteristic of Sophocles.

#### **ANTIGONE**

Ismene, my sister, true child of my own mother, do you know any evil out of all the evils bequeathed by Oedipus that Zeus will not fulfil for the two of us in our lifetime? There is nothing—no pain, no ruin, [5] no shame, nor dishonor—that I have not seen in your sufferings and mine. And now what is this new edict that they say the general has just decreed to all the city? Do you know anything? Have you heard? Or does it escape you that [10] evils from our enemies are on the march against our friends?

### ISMENE

To me no word of our friends, Antigone, either bringing joy or bringing pain has come since we two were robbed of our two brothers who died in one day by a double blow. [15] And since the Argive army has fled during this night, I have learned nothing further, whether better fortune is mine, or further ruin.

### ANTIGONE

I knew it well, so I was trying to bring you outside the courtyard

<sup>1</sup>Translated by Sir Richard Jebb. Cambridge University Press. 1891.

gates to this end, that you alone might hear.

### **ISMENE**

[20] Hear what? It is clear that you are brooding on some dark news.

### Antigone

Why not? Has not Creon destined our brothers, the one to honored burial, the other to unburied shame? Eteocles, they say, with due observance of right and custom, he has laid in the earth [25] for his honor among the dead below. As for the poor corpse of Polyneices, however, they say that an edict has been published to the townsmen that no one shall bury him or mourn him, but instead leave him unwept, unentombed, for the birds a pleasing store [30] as they look to satisfy their hunger. Such, it is said, is the edict that the good Creon has laid down for you and for me yes, for me—and it is said that he is coming here to proclaim it for the certain knowledge of those who do not already know. They say that he does not conduct this business lightly, [35] but whoever performs any of these rites, for him the fate appointed is death by public stoning among the entire city. This is how things stand for you, and so you will soon show your nature, whether you are noble-minded, or the corrupt daughter of a noble line.

### **ISMENE**

Poor sister, if things have come to this, what would I [40] profit by loosening or tightening this knot?

#### **ANTIGONE**

Consider whether you will share the toil and the task.

### ISMENE

What are you hazarding? What do you intend?

# ANTIGONE

Will you join your hand to mine in order to lift his corpse?

### **ISMENE**

You plan to bury him—when it is forbidden to the city?

### ANTIGONE

[45] Yes, he is my brother, and yours too, even if you wish it otherwise. I will never be convicted of betraying him.

### **ISMENE**

Hard girl! Even when Creon has forbidden it?

### **ANTIGONE**

No, he has no right to keep me from my own.

### **ISMENE**

Ah, no! Think, sister, how our father [50] perished in hatred and infamy, when, because of the crimes that he himself detected, he smashed both his eyes with self-blinding hand; then his motherwife, two names in one, with a twisted noose destroyed her life; [55] lastly, our two brothers in a single day, both unhappy murderers of their own flesh and blood, worked with mutual hands their common doom. And now we, in turn-we two who have been left all alone—consider how much more miserably we will be destroyed, if in defiance of the law [60] we transgress against an autocrat's decree or his powers. No, we must remember, first, that ours is a woman's nature, and accordingly not suited to battles against men; and next, that we are ruled by the more powerful, so that we must obey in these things and in things even more stinging. [65] I, therefore, will ask those below for pardon, since I am forced to this, and will obey those who have come to authority. It is foolish to do what is fruitless.

### **ANTIGONE**

I would not encourage you—no, nor, even if you were willing later, [70] would I welcome you as my partner in this action. No, be the sort that pleases you. I will bury him—it would honor me to die while doing that. I shall rest with him, loved one with loved one, a pious criminal. For the time is greater [75] that I must serve the dead than the living, since in that world I will rest forever. But if you so choose, continue to dishonor what the gods in honor have established.

### **ISMENE**

I do them no dishonor. But to act in violation of the citizens' will —of that I am by nature incapable.

### **ANTIGONE**

[80] You can make that your pretext! Regardless, I will go now to heap a tomb over the brother I love.

### **ISMENE**

Oh no, unhappy sister! I fear for you!

#### ANTIGONE

Do not tremble for me. Straighten out your own destiny.

# **ISMENE**

Then at least disclose the deed to no one before you do it. [85] Conceal it, instead, in secrecy—and so, too, will I.

# ANTIGONE

Go on! Denounce it! You will be far more hated for your silence, if you fail to proclaim these things to everyone.

# **ISMENE**

You have a hot heart for chilling deeds.

### ANTIGONE

I know that I please those whom I am most bound to please.

### **ISMENE**

[90] Yes, if you will also have the power. But you crave the impossible.

### **ANTIGONE**

Why then, when my strength fails, I will have finished.

### **ISMENE**

An impossible hunt should not be tried in the first place.

### ANTIGONE

If you mean that, you will have my hatred, and you will be subject to punishment as the enemy of the dead. [95] But leave me and the foolish plan I have authored to suffer this terrible thing, for I will not suffer anything so terrible that my death will lack honor.

#### **ISMENE**

Go, then, if you so decide. And of this be sure: though your path is foolish, to your loved ones your love is straight and true. [Exit Antigone on the spectators' left. Ismene exits into the palace.]

. . .

[Enter the Guard, on the spectators' left, leading in Antigone.]

### **CHORUS**

[376] What marvel sent by the gods is this?—I am bewildered! I know her. How can I deny that this girl is Antigone? O unhappy child [380] of your unhappy father, of Oedipus! What can this mean? What! Surely they are not bringing you captive for disobeying the King's laws and being caught in lunacy?

# **GUARD**

Here is she, the one who did the deed. [385] We caught this one burying him. Where is Creon?

[Enter Creon from the palace.]

### **CHORUS**

There, he is coming from the house again at our need.

#### **CREON**

What is it? What has happened that makes my coming timely?

### **GUARD**

My king, there is nothing that a man can rightly swear he will not do. For second thought belies one's first intent. [390] I could have vowed that I would not ever come here again, because of your threats by which I had just been storm-tossed. But since this joy that exceeds and oversteps my hopes can be compared in fulness to no other pleasure, I am back—though it is contrary to my

sworn oath— [395] bringing this girl who was caught giving burial honors to the dead. This time there was no casting of lots. No, this piece of luck has fallen to me, and me alone. And now, my king, as it pleases you, take her yourself, question her and convict her. But justice would see me [400] released free and clear from this trouble.

### **CREON**

Your prisoner here—how and where did you take her?

### **GUARD**

She was burying the man. You know all there is to tell.

### **CREON**

Are you clear and sure about what you are saying?

### **GUARD**

I am. I saw her burying the corpse that you [405] had forbidden to bury. Is that plain and sufficient?

### **CREON**

And how was she observed? How taken in the act?

### **GUARD**

It happened like this. When we had come to the place with those fierce threats of yours still in our ears, we swept away all the dust that covered [410] the corpse and bared the damp body well. We then sat down on the brow of the hill to windward, fleeing the smell from him, lest it strike us. Each man was wide awake and kept his neighbor alert with torrents of threats, if any one should be careless of this task. [415] So time passed, until the disk of the sun stood bright in mid-sky and the heat began to burn. And then suddenly a whirlwind lifted from the earth a storm of dust, a trouble in the sky, and it filled the plain, marring all the foliage of its woods. [420] Soon the wide air was choked with it. We closed our eyes, and endured the plague from the gods. When, after a long while, this storm had passed, the girl was seen, and she wailed aloud with the sharp cry of a grieving bird, as when inside her empty [425] nest she sees the bed stripped of its nestlings. So she, too, when she saw the corpse bare, broke into a cry of lamentation and cursed with harsh curses those who had done it. Immediately she took thirsty dust in her hands, [430] and from a pitcher of beaten bronze held high she crowned the dead with thrice-poured libations. We rushed forward when we saw it, and at once closed upon our quarry, who was not at all dismayed. We then charged her with her past and present doings, [435] but she made no denial of anything—at once to my joy and to my pain. For to have escaped from trouble one's self gives the greatest joy, but it stings to lead friends to evil. Naturally, though, all such things are [440] of less account to me than my own safety.

### **CREON**

You, you with your face bent to the ground, do you admit, or deny that you did this?

### ANTIGONE

I declare it and make no denial.

### **CREON**

[*To the Guard.*] You can take yourself wherever you please, [445] free and clear of a heavy charge. [*Exit Guard.*]

[*To Antigone.*] You, however, tell me—not at length, but briefly—did you know that an edict had forbidden this?

### ANTIGONE

I knew it. How could I not? It was public.

### **CREON**

And even so you dared overstep that law?

### **ANTIGONE**

[450] Yes, since it was not Zeus that published me that edict, and since not of that kind are the laws which Justice who dwells with the gods below established among men. Nor did I think that your decrees were of such force, that a mortal could override the unwritten [455] and unfailing statutes given us by the gods. For their life is not of today or yesterday, but for all time, and no man knows when they were first put forth. Not for fear of any man's pride was I about to owe a penalty to the gods for breaking these. [460] Die I must, that I knew well (how could I not?) . That is true even without your edicts. But if I am to die before my time, I count that a gain. When anyone lives as I do, surrounded by evils, how can he not carry off gain by dying? [465] So for me to meet this doom is a grief of no account. But if I had endured that my mother's son should in death lie an unburied corpse, that would have grieved me. Yet for this, I am not grieved. And if my present actions are foolish in your sight, [470] it may be that it is a fool who accuses me of folly.

# **CHORUS**

She shows herself the wild offspring of a wild father, and does not know how to bend before troubles.

# **CREON**

Yet remember that over-hard spirits most often collapse. It is the stiffest iron, baked to [475] utter hardness in the fire, that you most often see snapped and shivered. And I have witnessed horses with great spirit disciplined by a small bit. For there is no place for pride, when one is his neighbors' slave. [480] This girl was already practiced in outrage when she overstepped the published laws. And, that done, this now is a second outrage, that she glories in it and exults in her deed. In truth, then, I am no man, but she is, [485] if this victory rests with her and brings no penalty. No! Whether she is my sister's child, or nearer to me in blood than any of my kin that worship Zeus at the altar of our house, she and her sister will not escape a doom most harsh. For in truth [490] I charge that other with an equal share in the plotting of this burial. Call her out! I saw her inside just now,

raving, and not in control of her wits. Before the deed, the mind frequently is convicted of stealthy crimes when conspirators are plotting depravity in the dark. [495] But, truly, I detest it, too, when one who has been caught in treachery then seeks to make the crime a glory.

### ANTIGONE

What more do you want than to capture and kill me?

### **CREON**

I want nothing else. Having that, I have everything.

### ANTIGONE

Why then do you wait? In none of your maxims [500] is there anything that pleases me—and may there never be! Similarly to you as well my views must be displeasing. And yet, how could I have won a nobler glory than by giving burial to my own brother? All here would admit that they approve, [505] if fear did not grip their tongues. But tyranny, blest with so much else, has the power to do and say whatever it pleases.

### **CREON**

You alone out of all these Thebans see it that way.

#### ANTIGONE

They do, too, but for you they hold their tongues.

### **CREON**

[510] Are you not ashamed that your beliefs differ from theirs?

### ANTIGONE

No, there is nothing shameful in respecting your own flesh and blood.

### **CREON**

Was not he your brother too, who died in the opposite cause?

# ANTIGONE

A brother by the same mother and the same father.

### **CREON**

Why, then, do you pay a service that is disrespectful to him?

### ANTIGONE

[515] The dead man will not support you in that.

# **CREON**

Yes, he will, if you honor him equally with the wicked one.

# ANTIGONE

It was his brother, not his slave, who died.

#### **CREON**

But he died ravaging this land, while he fell in its defense.

### ANTIGONE

Hades craves these rites, nevertheless.

### **CREON**

[520] But the good man craves a portion not equal to the evil's.

#### ANTIGONE

Who knows but that these actions are pure to those below?

### **CREON**

You do not love someone you have hated, not even after death.

### ANTIGONE

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

### **CREON**

Then, go down to hell and love them [525] if you must. While I live, no woman will rule me.

[Enter Ismene from the house, led in by two attendants.]

### **CHORUS**

Look, here comes Ismene from the palace, shedding the tears of a loving sister. A cloud over her eyes mars her red-flushed face, [530] and it breaks into rain on her comely cheek.

#### **CREON**

You who were lurking like a viper in my own house and secretly gulping up my life's blood, while I was oblivious that I was nurturing two plagues, two revolutions against my throne—tell me now, will you also affirm [535] your share in this burial, or will you forswear all knowledge of it?

### **ISMENE**

I performed the deed—as long as she concurs—and I share and carry the burden of guilt.

### ANTIGONE

No, justice will not permit you to do this, since you were not willing to help with the deed, nor did I give you a part in it.

### **ISMENE**

[540] But now with this sea of troubles around you, I am not ashamed to sail in a sea of suffering at your side.

#### ANTIGONE

As to whose deed it is, Hades and the dead are witnesses. A friend in words is not the type of friend I love.

# **ISMENE**

No, sister, do not strip me of death's honor, [545] but let me die with you and make due consecration to the dead.

### ANTIGONE

Do not share my death. Do not claim deeds to which you did not put your hand. My death will suffice.

#### **ISMENE**

And how can I cherish life, once I am deprived of you?

### ANTIGONE

Ask Creon. Your concern is for him.

### **ISMENE**

[550] Why torture me like this, when it does not help you?

### ANTIGONE

No, if I mock you, it is to my own pain that I do so.

### **ISMENE**

Tell me, how can I help you, even now?

#### ANTIGONE

Save yourself. I do not grudge your escape.

### **ISMENE**

Ah, misery! Will I fall short of sharing your fate?

### ANTIGONE

[555] Your choice was to live, it was mine to die.

### **ISMENE**

At least your choice was not made without my protests.

# ANTIGONE

One world approved your wisdom, another approved mine.

### **ISMENE**

Nevertheless, the offense is identical for both of us.

### ANTIGONE

Take heart! You live. But my life has long been [560] in Death's hands so that I might serve the dead.

#### **CREON**

One of these maidens, I declare, has just revealed her foolishness; the other has displayed it from the moment of her birth.

### **ISMENE**

Yes, Creon. Whatever amount of reason nature may have given them does not remain with those in dire straits, but goes astray.

# **CREON**

[565] Yours did, when you chose dire actions with dire allies.

#### ISMENE

What life would there be for me alone, without her presence?

#### **CREON**

Do not speak of her "presence". She lives no longer.

### **ISMENE**

What? You will kill your own son's bride?

### **CREON**

Why not? There are other fields for him to plough.

### **ISMENE**

[570] But not fitted to him as she was.

### **CREON**

I abhor an evil wife for my son.

### ANTIGONE

Haemon, dearest! How your father wrongs you!

### **CREON**

Enough! Enough of you and of your marriage!

### **CHORUS**

Will you really cheat your son of this girl?

### **CREON**

[575] Death it is who will end these bridals for me.

#### **CHORUS**

Then it seems that it is resolved that she will die.

### **CREON**

Resolved, yes, for you and by me. To the two Attendants. No more delay! Servants, take them inside! Hereafter they must be women, and not left at large. [580] For it is known that even the brave seek to flee, when they see Death now closing on their life. Exeunt Attendants, guarding Antigone and Ismene. Creon remains.

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#### **CHORUS**

[626] But here is Haemon, the last of your offspring. Does he come grieving for the doom of Antigone, his promised bride, [630] and bitter for the deceived hope of their marriage?

#### **CREON**

We will soon know better than seers could tell us.—My son, can it be that after hearing the final judgment concerning your betrothed, you have come in rage against your father? Or do I have your loyalty, act how I may?

### **HAEMON**

[635] Father, I am yours, and you keep me upright with precepts good for me—precepts I shall follow. No marriage will be deemed by me more important than your good guidance.

### **CREON**

[640] Yes, my son, this is the spirit you should maintain in your heart—to stand behind your father's will in all things. It is for this that men pray: to sire and raise in their homes children who are obedient, that they may requite their father's enemy with evil and honor his friend, just as their father does. [645] But the man who begets unhelpful children—what would you say that he has sown except miseries for himself and abundant exultation for his enemies? Never, then, my son, banish your reason for pleasure on account of a woman, [650] knowing that this embrace soon becomes cold and brittle-an evil woman to share your bed and home. For what wound could strike deeper than a false friend? No, spit her out as if she were an enemy, let her go find a husband in Hades. [655] For since I caught her alone of all the city in open defiance, I will not make myself a liar to my city. I will kill her. So let her call on Zeus who protects kindred blood. If I am to foster my own kin to spurn order, [660] surely I will do the same for outsiders. For whoever shows his excellence in the case of his own household will be found righteous in his city as well. But if anyone oversteps and does violence to the laws, or thinks to dictate to those in power, [665] such a one will never win praise from me. No, whomever the city may appoint, that man must be obeyed in matters small and great and in matters just and unjust. And I would feel confident that such a man would be a fine ruler no less than a good and willing subject, [670] and that beneath a hail of spears he would stand his ground where posted, a loyal and brave comrade in the battle line. But there is no evil worse than disobedience. This destroys cities; this overturns homes; this breaks [675] the ranks of allied spears into headlong rout. But the lives of men who prosper upright, of these obedience has saved the greatest part. Therefore we must defend those who respect order, and in no way can we let a woman defeat us. It is better to fall from power, if it is fated, by a man's hand, [680] than that we be called weaker than women.

# **CHORUS**

To us, unless our years have stolen our wit, you seem to say what you say wisely.

#### **HAEMON**

Father, the gods implant reason in men, the highest of all things that we call our own. [685] For my part, to state how you are wrong to say those things is beyond my power and my desire, although another man, too, might have a useful thought. In any case, it is my natural duty to watch on your behalf all that men say, or do, or find to blame. [690] For dread of your glance forbids the ordinary citizen to speak such words as would offend your ear. But I can hear these murmurs in the dark, how the city moans for this girl, saying: "No woman ever merited death less—[695] none ever died so shamefully for deeds so glorious as hers, who, when her own brother had fallen in bloody battle, would not leave him unburied to be devoured by savage dogs, or by any bird. Does she not deserve to receive golden honor?" [700] Such is the rumor shrouded in darkness that silently spreads. For me, father,

no treasure is more precious than your prosperity. What, indeed, is a nobler ornament for children than the fair fame of a thriving father, or for a father than that of his children? [705] Do not, then, bear one mood only in yourself: do not think that your word and no other, must be right. For if any man thinks that he alone is wise—that in speech or in mind he has no peer—such a soul, when laid open, is always found empty. [710] No, even when a man is wise, it brings him no shame to learn many things, and not to be too rigid. You see how the trees that stand beside the torrential streams created by a winter storm yield to it and save their branches, while the stiff and rigid perish root and all? [715] And in the same way the pilot who keeps the sheet of his sail taut and never slackens it, upsets his boat, and voyages thereafter with his decking underwater. Father, give way and allow a change from your rage. For if even from me, a younger man, a worthy thought may be supplied, [720] by far the best thing, I believe, would be for men to be all-wise by nature. Otherwise—since most often it does not turn out that way-it is good to learn in addition from those who advise you well.

### **CHORUS**

My king, it is right, if he speaks something appropriate, that you should learn from him [725] and that you, in turn, Haemon, should learn from your father. On both sides there have been wise words.

#### **CREON**

Men of my age—are we, then, to be schooled in wisdom by men of his?

### **HAEMON**

Not in anything that is not right. But if I am young, you should look to my conduct, not to my years.

#### **CREON**

[730] Is it worthy conduct to honor disrupters?

#### **HAEMON**

I could not urge anyone to show respect for the wicked.

#### **CREON**

And is she not in the grasp of that disease?

# HAEMON

All the people of this city of Thebes deny it.

### **CREON**

Shall Thebes prescribe to me how I must rule?

### **HAEMON**

[735] See, there, how you have spoken so much like a child.

#### **CREON**

Am I to rule this land by the will of another than myself?

**HAEMON** 

That is no city, which belongs to one man.

**CREON** 

Does not the city by tradition belong to the man in power?

**HAEMON** 

You would make a fine monarch in a desert.

**CREON** 

[740] This boy seems to be fighting on the side of the woman.

**HAEMON** 

If you are a woman, for, to be sure, my concern is for you.

**CREON** 

You traitor, attacking your father, accusing him!

**HAEMON** 

Because I see you making a mistake and committing injustice.

**CREON** 

Am I making a mistake when I respect my own prerogatives?

**HAEMON** 

[745] Yes. You do not respect them, when you trample on the gods' honors.

**CREON** 

Polluted creature, submitting to a woman!

**HAEMON** 

You will never catch me submitting to shamelessness.

**CREON** 

You do. Your every word, after all, pleads her case.

**HAEMON** 

And yours, and mine, and that of gods below.

**CREON** 

[750] You can never marry her, not while she is still alive.

**HAEMON** 

Then she will die, and in death destroy another.

**CREON** 

What! Does your audacity run to open threats?

**HAEMON** 

How is it a threat to speak against empty plans?

**CREON** 

You will regret your unwise instructions in wisdom.

### **HAEMON**

[755] If you were not my father, I would have called you insane.

#### **CREON**

You woman's slave, do not try to cajole me.

#### **HAEMON**

Do you want to have your say and then have done without a reply?

### **CREON**

Is that so? By Olympus above—know this well—you will have no joy for taunting me over and above your censures. [760] Bring out that hated thing, so that with him looking on she may die right now in her bridegroom's presence and at his side!

### **HAEMON**

No, not at my side will she die—do not ever imagine it. Nor shall you ever look at me and set eyes on my face again. [765] Indulge in your madness now with whomever of your friends can endure it. [Exit Haemon.]

### **CHORUS**

The man is gone, King Creon, in anger and haste. A young mind is fierce when stung.

### **CREON**

Let him do—no!—let him plan something more immense than befits a man. Farewell to him! Still he will not save these two girls from death.

### **CHORUS**

[770] Then the pair of them, you really intend to kill them both?

### **CREON**

Not she who did not put her hands to the burial. You are right.

### **CHORUS**

And by what mode of death do you mean to kill the other?

### **CREON**

I will take her where the path is deserted, unvisited by men, and entomb her alive in a rocky vault, [775] setting out a ration of food, but only as much as piety requires so that all the city may escape defilement. And praying there to Hades, the only god she worships, perhaps she will obtain immunity from death, or else will learn, at last, even this late, [780] that it is fruitless labor to revere the dead. [Exit Creon.]

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### **CREON**

[883] Do you not know that dirges and wailing before death would never be given up, if it were allowed to make them freely?

[885] Take her away—now! And when you have enshrouded her, as I proclaimed, in her covered tomb, leave her alone, deserted—let her decide whether she wishes to die or to live entombed in such a home. It makes no difference, since our hands are clean so far as regards this girl. [890] But no matter what, she will be stripped of her home here above.

### ANTIGONE

Tomb, bridal-chamber, deep-dug eternal prison where I go to find my own, whom in the greatest numbers destruction has seized and Persephone has welcomed among the dead! [895] Last of them all and in by far the most shameful circumstances, I will descend, even before the fated term of my life is spent. But I cherish strong hopes that I will arrive welcome to my father, and pleasant to you, Mother, and welcome, dear brother, to you. [900] For, when each of you died, with my own hands I washed and dressed you and poured drink-offerings at your graves. But now, Polyneices, it is for tending your corpse that I win such reward as this. [And yet I honored you rightly, as the wise understand. [905] Never, if I had been a mother of children, or if a husband had been rotting after death, would I have taken that burden upon myself in violation of the citizens' will. For the sake of what law, you ask, do I say that? A husband lost, another might have been found, [910] and if bereft of a child, there could be a second from some other man. But when father and mother are hidden in Hades, no brother could ever bloom for me again. Such was the law whereby I held you first in honor, but for that Creon judged me guilty of wrongdoing [915] and of dreadful outrage, dear brother! And now he leads me thus in his hands' strong grasp, when I have enjoyed no marriage bed or bridal song and have not received any portion of marriage or the nurture of children. But deserted by friends, [920] in misery I go living to the hollow graves of the dead.] What law of the gods have I transgressed? Why should I look to the gods anymore? What ally should I call out to, when by my reverence I have earned a name for irreverence? [925] Well, then, if these events please the gods, once I have suffered my doom I will come to know my guilt. But if the guilt lies with my judges, I could wish for them no greater evils than they inflict unjustly on me.

### **CHORUS**

Still the same tempest of the soul [930] grips this girl with the same fierce gusts.

#### **CREON**

Then because of this her guards will have reason to lament their slowness.

### **ANTIGONE**

Ah, no! That command verges close on death.

### **CREON**

[935] I cannot console you with any hope that your doom is not to be fulfilled in that way.

### ANTIGONE

O city of my fathers, land of Thebes, and you gods, our ancestors! I am led away now; there is no more delay! [940] Look at me, you who are Thebes' lords—look at the only remaining daughter of the house of your kings. See what I suffer, and at whose hands, because I revered reverence! [Antigone is led away by the guards.]

• • •

Warned of dire consequences for himself and Thebes by the seer Tiresias for his unholy treatment of Polyneices's body, Creon is prevailed upon by the chorus to free Antigone and entomb her brother.

### **MESSENGER**

[1155] Neighbors of the house of Cadmus and of Amphion, there is no station of human life that I would ever praise or blame as being settled. Fortune sets upright and Fortune sinks the lucky and unlucky from day to day, [1160] and no one can prophesy to men concerning the order that has just been established. For Creon, as I saw it, was once blest: he had saved this land of Cadmus from its enemies; and having won sole and total dominion in the land, he guided it on a straight course and flourished in his noble crop of children. [1165] And now all this has been lost. When a man has forfeited his pleasures, I do not reckon his existence as life, but consider him just a breathing corpse. Heap up riches in your house, if you wish! Live with a tyrant's pomp! But if there is no joy [1170] along with all of that, I would not pay even the shadow of smoke for all the rest, compared with joy.

### **CHORUS**

What is this new grief for our princes that you have come to report?

# MESSENGER

They are dead, and the living are guilty of the deaths.

### **CHORUS**

Who is the murderer? Who the murdered? Tell us.

### MESSENGER

[1175] Haemon is dead—his blood was shed by no strange hand.

### **CHORUS**

Was it his father's, or his own?

### MESSENGER

He did it by his own, enraged with his father for the murder.

# CHORUS

Ah, prophet, how true, then, you have proved your word!

### MESSENGER

Knowing that these things are so, you must consider the rest.

### **CHORUS**

[1180] Wait, I see the unhappy Eurydice, Creon's wife, nearby. She comes from the house either knowing of her son, or merely by chance.

[Enter Eurydice.]

### **EURYDICE**

People of Thebes, I heard your words as I was on my way to the gates to address divine Pallas with my prayers. [1185] At one and the same time I was loosening the bolts of the gate to open it, and the sound of a blow to our house struck my ear. In terror I sank back into the arms of my handmaids, and my senses fled. [1190] But repeat what your news was, for I shall hear it with ears that are no strangers to sorrow.

### **MESSENGER**

Dear mistress, I will tell what I witnessed and leave no word of the truth unspoken. For what good would it do that should I soothe you with words in which I must later be found false? [1195] The truth is always best. I attended your husband as his guide to the furthest part of the plain, where unpitied the body of Polyneices, torn by dogs, still lay. After we had prayed to the goddess of the roads [1200] and to Pluto to restrain their anger in mercy, we washed him with pure washing, and with freshlyplucked boughs we burned what remains there were. Lastly we heaped a high-mounded tomb of his native earth. Afterwards we turned away to enter the maiden's stoney-bedded [1205] bridal chamber, the caverned mansion of Hades' bride. From a distance, one of us servants heard a voice of loud wailing near that bride's unwept bed and came to tell our master Creon. And as the King moved closer and closer, obscure signs rising from a bitter cry surrounded him- [1210] he groaned and said in bitter lament, "Ah, misery, am I now the prophet of evil? Am I going on the path most lined with grief of all that I have walked before? My son's voice greets me. Go, my servants, [1215] hurry closer, and when you have reached the tomb, enter the opening where the stones of the mound have been torn away, up to the cell's very mouth. See if it is Haemon's voice that I recognize, or if I am cheated by the gods."

This search, at our desperate master's word, [1220] we went to make, and in the furthest part of the tomb we saw her hanging by the neck, fastened by a halter of fine linen threads, while he was embracing her with arms thrown around her waist, bewailing the loss of his bride to the spirits below, as well as his father's deeds, and his grief-filled marriage. [1225] But his father, when he saw him, cried aloud with a dreadful cry and went in and called to him with a voice of wailing: "Ah, unhappy boy, what have you done! What plan have you seized on? By what misfortune have you lost your reason? [1230] Come out, my son, I pray you, I beg

you!" But the boy glared at him with savage eyes, spat in his face, and without a word in response drew his twin-edged sword. As his father rushed out in flight, he missed his aim. Then the ill-fated boy was enraged with himself [1235] and straightway stretched himself over his sword and drove it, half its length, into his side. Still conscious, he clasped the maiden in his faint embrace, and, as he gasped, he shot onto her pale cheek a swift stream of oozing blood. [1240] Corpse enfolding corpse he lay, having won his marriage rites, poor boy, not here, but in Hades' palace, and having shown to mankind by how much the failure to reason wisely is the most severe of all afflictions assigned to man. [Eurydice departs into the house.]

#### **CHORUS**

What would you infer from this? The lady [1245] has turned back and gone without a word, either for good or for evil.

### **MESSENGER**

I, too, am startled. Still I am nourished by the hope that at the grave news of her son she thinks it unworthy to make her laments before the city, but in the shelter of her home will set her handmaids to mourn the house's grief. [1250] For she is not unhabituated to discretion, that she should err.

#### **CHORUS**

I do not know. But to me, in any case, a silence too strict seems to promise trouble just as much as a fruitless abundance of weeping.

### **MESSENGER**

I will find out whether she is not, in fact, hiding some repressed plan in the darkness of her passionate heart. [1255] I will go in, since you are right—in an excess of silence, too, there may be trouble. [Exit Messenger.]

[Enter Creon, attended and carrying the shrouded body of Haemon, on the spectators' left.]

### **CHORUS**

Look, here is the King himself approaching, his hands grasping a monument plainly signing that his—if we may say it—and no one else's, [1260] was the madness of this error.

# CREON

[1261] Ah, the blunders of an unthinking mind, blunders of rigidity, yielding death! Oh, you witnesses of the killers and the killed, both of one family! [1265] What misery arises from my reasonings! Haemon, you have died after a young life, youngest and last of my sons! O God! You have departed not by your foolishness, but by my own!

# **CHORUS**

[1270] Ah, how late you seem to see the right!

#### **CREON**

God, I have mastered the bitter lesson! But then, I think, some god struck me on my head with a crushing weight, and drove me into savage paths, [1275] —ah!—and overthrew my joy to be trampled on! Ah, the labors men must toil through!

[Enter the Messenger from the house.]

### **MESSENGER**

[1278] My master, you have come, I think, like one whose hands are not empty, but who has a ready store: first, you carry that burden visible in your arms; [1280] second, you will soon look upon further sufferings inside your house.

#### **CREON**

What worse suffering is still to follow upon these sufferings?

### MESSENGER

Your wife is dead, true mother of that corpse, poor lady, by wounds newly cut.

### **CREON**

[1284] O harbor of Hades, hard to purify! [1285] Why, why do you ruin me? Herald of evil, of grief, what word do you say? Ah, you have done in a dead man anew! What are you saying, boy? What is this you report to me [1290] God no!—what new slaughter, my wife's doom, is heaped upon this ruin?

[The palace doors are opened, and the corpse is disclosed.]

### **CHORUS**

The sight is at hand. It is no longer hidden inside.

### **CREON**

Ah, misery! [1295] There I see a new, a second evil! What destiny, ah, what, can still await me? I have just now taken my son in my arms, and now I see another corpse before me! [1300] Oh, tormented mother! Oh, my son!

# MESSENGER

[1301] By the altar, with a sharp-whetted sword, she struck until her eyes went slack and dark. Before that she bewailed the noble fate of Megareus who died earlier, and then the fate of this boy, and also, with her last breath, [1305] she called down evil fortune upon you, the slayer of her sons.

### **CREON**

[1306] Ah, no! I tremble with fear. Why does no one strike me full on my chest with a two-edged sword? [1310] I am miserable —ah—and bathed in miserable anguish!

### MESSENGER

Yes, because you were accused of responsibility for both this son's death, and the other's, by her whose corpse you see.

#### **CREON**

What was the manner of the violent deed by which she departed?

### **MESSENGER**

[1315] Her own hand struck her to the heart upon learning her son's sharply-lamented fate.

### **CREON**

[1317] Ah this guilt can never be fastened onto any other mortal so as to remove my own! It was I, yes, I, who killed you, I the wretch. [1320] I admit the truth. Lead me away, my servants, lead me from here with all haste, who am no more than a dead man!

#### **CHORUS**

[1325] The course you recommend is to your gain, if there can be gain amidst evil. What is briefest is best, when trouble lies at your feet.

### **CREON**

[1328] Let it come, let it appear, that fairest of fates for me, that brings my final day, [1330] the fate supreme! Oh, let it come, so that I may never see tomorrow's light!

### **CHORUS**

[1334] These things are in the future. We must see to present affairs. [1335] Fulfillment of these things rests in the hands where it should rest.

### **CREON**

All that I crave was summed in that prayer.

# **CHORUS**

Then pray no more; for mortals have no release from destined misfortune.

#### **CREON**

[1339] Lead me away, I beg you, a rash, useless man. [1340] I have murdered you, son, unwittingly, and you, too, my wife—the misery! I do not know which way I should look, or where I should seek support. All is [1345] amiss that is in my hands, and, again, a crushing fate has leapt upon my head.

# **CHORUS**

[1347] Wisdom is provided as the chief part of happiness, and our dealings with the gods must be in no way unholy. The great words of arrogant men have to make repayment with great blows, and in old age teach wisdom.