Antigone

SOPHOCLES

c. 497–406 BC

Antigone

Ἀντιγόνη

Translated from the Greek with AI (Claude) and edited



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Antigone · Sophocles (c. 497–406 BC)

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INTRODUCTION

The war for Thebes is over. Oedipus' two sons have killed each other, one defending the city and one attacking it. Their uncle Creon, now king, decrees that the defender will be buried with honor and the traitor Polynices left for the dogs and birds, on pain of death for anyone who buries him.

Their sister Antigone defies the order, appealing to the unwritten laws of the gods against the law of the city. Creon, determined to show he cannot be defied by a woman or by his own family, will not bend—not for his son Haemon, Antigone's fiancé, nor for the prophet Teiresias—until it is too late.

First staged around 441 BC, Antigone is the classic drama of conscience against state, and of two people each partly in the right. Hegel called it one of the most sublime works of art ever made; it also contains the great choral ode on humankind, "Many things are wondrous, but nothing more wondrous than man."

Antigone

Before the royal palace at Thebes, at dawn after the defeat of the Argive army.
Antigone defies Creon to bury her brother.

PROLOGUE

Antigone tells Ismene of Creon's ban on burying Polynices and resolves to bury him; Ismene refuses to help.

ANTIGONE [1] Ismene, my sister, my own flesh and blood, do you know a single one of the evils handed down from Oedipus that Zeus is not bringing to pass for the two of us while we are still alive? There is nothing painful, nothing free of ruin, nothing shameful, nothing dishonoring that I haven't seen among your sorrows and mine. And now what is this proclamation they say the general has just issued to the whole city? Do you know anything? Have you heard? Or haven't you noticed that evils meant for our enemies are marching against those we love?

ISMENE [11] No word about our loved ones has reached me, Antigone, either sweet or painful, since the two of us were robbed of our two brothers, who died on a single day, each by the other's hand. Since the Argive army left, this past night, I know nothing more, nothing that makes me luckier or more ruined.[1]

ANTIGONE [18] I knew it well. That's why I brought you out beyond the courtyard gates, so that you alone could hear.

1 The army of Argos had marched on Thebes to restore Polynices, driven into exile by his brother Eteocles; in the battle the two brothers killed each other.

ISMENE [20] What is it? You're clearly brooding darkly over some news.

ANTIGONE [21] Hasn't Creon given one of our brothers the honor of burial and denied it to the other? Eteocles, they say, he has laid beneath the earth, treating him justly as justice and law require, so that he is honored among the dead below. But the body of Polynices, who died so wretchedly, they say it has been proclaimed to the citizens that no one is to cover it in a grave or mourn it. He is to be left unwept, unburied, a sweet treasure for the birds as they look down, eager for a feast. [31] That, they say, is what our good Creon has proclaimed for you and for me. Yes, I say for me too. And he is coming here to proclaim it plainly to those who don't know, and he is not treating the matter lightly: whoever does any of this is to be stoned to death by the people of the city. That's how things stand for you, and you will soon show whether you are nobly born, or base though your blood is noble.

ISMENE [39] But, my poor sister, if things are like this, what more could I accomplish, whether I tie the knot or untie it?

ANTIGONE [41] Think whether you'll share the work and the deed with me.

ISMENE [42] What kind of risk? What are you thinking of?

ANTIGONE [43] Whether you'll help this hand of mine lift the body.

ISMENE [44] You mean to bury him, when the city has forbidden it?

ANTIGONE [45] Yes, my brother, and yours too, even if you won't. No one will ever catch me betraying him.

ISMENE [47] You reckless girl, when Creon has forbidden it?

ANTIGONE [48] He has no right to keep me from my own.

ISMENE [49] Oh, no. Think, my sister, how our father died, hated and disgraced, after he struck out both his eyes with his own hand for the crimes he himself laid bare. Then his mother and

wife, two names for one woman, destroyed her life in a twisted noose. And third, our two brothers, on a single day, poor wretches, killing each other, brought about a shared death, each by the other's hand. [58] And now think how much worse our death will be, the two of us left all alone, if we defy the law and set ourselves against the rulers' decree and power. No: we must remember first that we were born women, not made to fight against men; and then, that we are ruled by those who are stronger, and must obey in this and in things more painful still. [65] So I'll ask those beneath the earth to forgive me, since I am forced in this, and I'll obey those in authority. Doing more than you can makes no sense at all.

ANTIGONE [69] I won't urge you. And even if you were willing to act after all, I wouldn't be glad to have you with me. Be whatever you think best. I will bury him. It will be a fine thing for me to die doing it. I will lie with him, loved one with loved one, when I have committed a holy crime. For I have longer to please those below than those here. There I will lie forever. As for you, if you think so, go on dishonoring what the gods hold in honor.

ISMENE [78] I'm not dishonoring anything. But I have no strength to act against the citizens' will.

ANTIGONE [80] You can make that your excuse. I am going to heap up a grave for my dearest brother.

ISMENE [82] Oh, no, my poor sister, how afraid I am for you!

ANTIGONE [83] Don't fear for me. Set your own fate straight.

ISMENE [84] Well, at least don't tell anyone about this beforehand. Keep it hidden, secret, and so will I.

ANTIGONE [86] Oh, no, speak out! You'll be far more hateful to me if you keep silent and don't proclaim it to everyone.

ISMENE [88] You have a hot heart for chilling deeds.

ANTIGONE [89] But I know I'm pleasing those I most ought to please.

ISMENE [90] If you even can. But you're in love with the impossible.

ANTIGONE [91] Then when my strength gives out, I'll stop.

ISMENE [92] It's wrong to hunt the impossible in the first place.

ANTIGONE [93] If you talk like that, I will hate you, and the dead will rightly hold you his enemy too. Leave me and my own folly to suffer this terrible thing. Nothing I suffer will be so terrible that I won't die a fine death.

ISMENE [98] Well, if you're set on it, go. But know this: you are going senselessly, yet truly loving to those you love.

PARODOS

The elders of Thebes celebrate the defeat of the Argive army and the deaths of the two brothers.

CHORUS

Beam of the sun,
fairest light ever shown
to seven-gated Thebes,
at last you have dawned,
eye of golden day,
coming over Dirce's streams,
and the man who marched from Argos
with his white shield, in full armor,
you have driven in headlong flight,
urged on by a sharper bridle.[2]

He whom Polynices
roused against our land
out of quarrels and strife
swooped down on our country
like a shrill-screaming eagle,
sheltered by a wing white as snow,
with weapons in plenty
and helmets plumed with horsehair.

2 Dirce: a spring and stream at Thebes.

He stood above our houses,
his blood-hungry spears
gaping all around
our seven-gated mouth.
But he went, before his jaws
were glutted with our blood,
before Hephaestus' pine-fed fire
could seize our crown of towers.
Such a clangor of Ares
was stretched about his back,
too hard to master for his rival, the dragon.[3]

For Zeus hates above all things
the boasts of a proud tongue,
and when he saw them
advancing in a great flood,
arrogant in the clang of gold,
he hurled his brandished fire
at one already on the ramparts' top,
rushing to raise the shout of victory.[4]

Swung through the air, he fell
on the hard-striking earth,
the fire-bearer who just now,
in a frenzied rush,
raving like a Bacchant,
breathed against us
blasts of the most hateful winds.
But things went another way:
great Ares, our strong right-hand horse,
dealt other blows to others,
battering them hard.

3 The dragon stands for Thebes, whose first people were said to have sprung from the teeth of a dragon slain by Cadmus.

4 This is Capaneus, one of the seven Argive captains, who boasted that not even Zeus would stop him burning the city and was struck down by Zeus's thunderbolt.

141 For seven captains at seven gates,
matched man to man,
left their armor all of bronze
as tribute to Zeus who turns the battle,
all but the two ill-fated ones,
who, born of one father
and one mother,
leveled their conquering spears
at each other
and both won a share
of a common death.

148 But Victory, great in name, has come,
rejoicing with Thebes of the many chariots.
So let us put out of mind
the wars just past,
and go to all the temples of the gods
with dances all night long,
and may Bacchus, who shakes the land of Thebes,
lead the way.

155 But here comes the king of the land,
Creon, son of Menoeceus,
our new ruler
under the gods' new fortunes.
What plan is he turning over,
that he has called
this special council of elders,
summoned by general proclamation?

FIRST EPISODE

Creon proclaims his ban; a guard reports that someone has already sprinkled dust on the body.

CREON 162 Gentlemen, the gods tossed our city on a heavy sea, and now they have set it safely upright again. I've sent messengers to summon you here, apart from everyone else, because I know well that you always revered the power of Laius' throne;

and again, when Oedipus kept the city upright, and after he perished, you stood by their children, steadfast in your loyalty. Now, since those sons have perished on a single day by a double fate, striking and struck, stained by the pollution of their own hands, I hold all power and the throne by right of nearest kinship to the dead. 175 You cannot learn any man's soul, his thinking and his judgment, until he has been seen practiced in rule and in the laws. To my mind, whoever guides the whole city and does not hold to the best counsels, but keeps his tongue locked up out of some fear, is the worst of men; I think so now and always have. And whoever counts a loved one above his own country, I hold him of no account. 184 As for me, may Zeus, who sees all things forever, be my witness: I would not keep silent if I saw ruin coming on the citizens instead of safety, nor would I ever make a man hostile to this land my friend. I know this: it is our country that keeps us safe, and only while we sail on her upright do we make friends. By laws like these I will make this city great. And now I have proclaimed to the citizens something akin to them concerning the sons of Oedipus. 194 Eteocles, who died fighting for this city, the bravest of all with the spear, is to be buried in a grave and given every holy rite that goes down to the noblest dead. But his brother, Polynices, I mean, who came back from exile and wanted to burn to the ground the land of his fathers and the gods of his race, wanted to taste his kinsmen's blood and lead the rest away as slaves: it has been proclaimed to this city that no one is to honor him with burial or mourn him. He is to be left unburied, his body food for birds and dogs, a mangled thing to look at. 207 That is my resolve. Never, if it rests with me, will the wicked stand ahead of the just in honor. But whoever is loyal to this city, dead or alive, will be honored by me alike.

CHORUS 211 That is your pleasure, Creon, son of Menoeceus, for the man who is hostile to this city and the man who is loyal to it. And you have the power, I suppose, to use any law you like, both for the dead and for those of us still living.

CREON 215 Then see that you watch over what has been ordered.

CHORUS [216] Lay that burden on someone younger.

CREON [217] No, there are men posted already to watch the body.

CHORUS [218] Then what else would you still have us do?

CREON [219] Not to side with those who disobey these orders.

CHORUS [220] No one is fool enough to be in love with death.

CREON [221] Yes, that's the wage. But the hope of profit has often been the ruin of men.

GUARD [223] My lord, I won't say I've come here out of breath from hurrying, lifting a light foot. I stopped a lot of times to think, and kept turning around on the road to go back. My soul kept talking to me, saying all sorts of things: "You poor fool, why are you going where you'll get punished when you arrive?" "You idiot, stopping again? What if Creon hears this from somebody else? How are you not going to get hurt for it?" Turning all that over, I took my time and went slowly, and that's how a short road gets long. In the end, though, coming here to you won out. And even if what I tell you is nothing, I'll tell it anyway. I've come clinging to the hope that I can't suffer anything except what's fated.

CREON [237] What is it that has you so disheartened?

GUARD [238] First I want to tell you my side of it. I didn't do the deed, and I didn't see who did it, and it wouldn't be just for me to come to any harm.

CREON [241] You take good aim, and you fence the matter off all round. Clearly you've got some news to report.

GUARD [243] Well, terrible news makes a man hesitate a good deal.

CREON [244] Won't you tell it, then, and be off out of my way?

GUARD [245] All right, I'm telling you. Somebody has just buried the body and gone off. Sprinkled thirsty dust on its skin and performed the proper rites.

CREON [248] What are you saying? What man dared to do this?

GUARD [249] I don't know. There was no mark of a pickaxe there, no earth thrown up by a mattock. The ground was hard and dry, unbroken, no wheel ruts across it. Whoever did it left no trace. When the first day-watchman showed us, it was an awful wonder to all of us. The body was gone from sight. Not buried in a grave, but there was a thin layer of dust on it, as if from someone trying to escape the pollution. And there were no signs that any wild animal or any dog had come and torn at it. Ugly words were flying back and forth, guard accusing guard, and in the end it would have come to blows, and there was no one there to stop it. [262] Every one of us was the one who'd done it, and nobody was caught red-handed; each man claimed he knew nothing. We were ready to pick up red-hot iron in our hands, to walk through fire, and to swear by the gods that we hadn't done it, and weren't in on it with anybody who'd planned it or carried it out. In the end, when searching got us nowhere, one man spoke up, and what he said made us all hang our heads to the ground in fear. We couldn't argue with him, and we couldn't see how we'd come out of it well if we did it. What he said was that this business had to be reported to you, not hidden.[5] [274] That won the day, and the lot condemned unlucky me to win this prize. So here I am, as unwilling as you are to see me, I know that. Nobody loves the man who brings bad news.

CHORUS [278] My lord, my mind has long been asking whether this deed might be something the gods have sent.

CREON [280] Stop, before your words fill me with rage, or you'll turn out to be a fool as well as old. What you say is intolerable, when you say the gods care for this corpse. Was it to honor him above all others as their benefactor that they covered him, the man who came to burn their pillared temples and their offerings, and to scatter their land and its laws to the winds? Or do you see the gods honoring the wicked? It isn't so. No: for a long time there have been men in this city who could barely stand

5 Holding red-hot iron and walking through fire were ancient ordeals for proving one's innocence.

my orders and muttered against me, shaking their heads in secret, and would not keep their necks under the yoke as they ought, and be content with me. [293] These are the men, I know it well, who bribed the guards to do this. Nothing that has ever grown up among human beings is as evil as money. Money sacks cities; it drives men from their homes; it teaches honest minds and twists them to turn to shameful deeds. It has shown human beings how to practice every villainy and to know the irreverence of every act. But all those who did this for pay have made sure that sooner or later they will pay the penalty. [304] As surely as Zeus still has my reverence, know this well, and I tell you on my oath: if you don't find the man whose own hand made this burial and bring him before my eyes, Hades alone won't be enough for you. First you will be strung up alive until you reveal this outrage, so that from now on you'll know where profit should be got before you grab it, and learn that you mustn't love gain from every source. [313] You'll find more men ruined by shameful gains than saved.

GUARD [315] Will you let me say something, or shall I just turn around and go?

CREON [316] Don't you know even now how your talk annoys me?

GUARD [317] Does it sting in your ears, or in your soul?

CREON [318] Why are you trying to pin down where my pain is?

GUARD [319] The man who did it pains your mind. I only pain your ears.

CREON [320] Ah, you're a born babbler, that much is plain.

GUARD [321] Maybe, but I never did this deed.

CREON [322] You did, and sold your soul for silver too.

GUARD [323] Ah. It's a terrible thing when a man who's made up his mind makes it up wrong.

CREON [324] Go on, be clever about making up minds. But if you don't show me who did this, you'll have to admit that cowardly gains bring grief.

GUARD 327 Well, I hope above all he's found. But whether he's caught or not, and luck will decide that, there's no way you'll see me coming back here. Even now I've been saved against all my hope and expectation, and I owe the gods a lot of thanks.

FIRST STASIMON

The chorus sings of human ingenuity, which leads now to good, now to evil.

CHORUS

333 Many things are wondrous, and nothing
is more wondrous than man.
He crosses the gray sea
in the stormy south wind,
passing beneath the swells
that roar around him.
And Earth, highest of the gods,
immortal, unwearying,
he wears away,
as the plows turn back and forth
year after year,
turning the soil with the breed of horses.[6]

343 The tribe of light-minded birds
he snares and carries off,
and the nations of wild beasts,
and the creatures of the sea,
in the coils of woven nets,
man, the ingenious.
By his devices he masters
the beast that roams the wild hills;
he tames the shaggy-maned horse,
putting the yoke about its neck,
and the tireless mountain bull.

6 The Greek word *deinos* means both "wondrous" and "terrible"; the ode keeps both senses in play.

Speech, and thought swift as the wind,
and the temper that orders cities,
he has taught himself,
and how to escape the arrows
of frost under the open sky,
where shelter is hard to find,
and the arrows of the pelting rain.
Resourceful in everything,
he meets nothing that is to come
without resource.
From Hades alone
he will find no escape;
but from diseases past all help
he has devised ways out.

Clever beyond hope
is the skill of his devising;
it carries him now to evil,
now to good.
When he honors the laws of the land
and the justice of the gods he has sworn by,
high stands his city;
cityless is he who,
for the sake of daring,
keeps company with what is not noble.
May he never share my hearth,
never share my thoughts,
the man who does such things.

376 At this portent sent by the gods
my mind is torn in two.
Knowing her, how can I deny
that this girl is Antigone?
Unhappy girl,
child of an unhappy father, Oedipus,
what is this? Surely they're not
bringing you here as one who disobeyed
the king's laws,
caught in an act of folly?

SECOND EPISODE

The guard brings in Antigone; she defends the unwritten laws, and Creon condemns her and Ismene.

GUARD 384 Here she is, the one who did it. We caught her burying him. But where is Creon?

CHORUS 386 Here he is, coming back out of the house just when he's needed.

CREON 387 What is it? What has happened, that my coming is so timely?

GUARD 388 My lord, there's nothing a man should swear he'll never do. Second thoughts make a liar of your first judgment. I'd have sworn I'd be slow to come back here, after those threats of yours that hit me like a storm. But since a joy that comes from nowhere, beyond all hope, is bigger than any other pleasure, I've come, even though I swore I wouldn't, bringing this girl, who was caught tending the grave. No lots were shaken this time; this windfall's mine and nobody else's. And now take her yourself, as you like, and judge her and question her. As for me, I have the right to be free and clear of this trouble.

CREON 401 This girl you've brought: how did you catch her, and where?

GUARD 402 She was burying the man. Now you know everything.

CREON 403 Do you understand what you're saying? Is it the truth?

GUARD [404] I saw her burying the body you forbade anyone to bury. Is that plain and clear enough?

CREON [406] And how was she seen and caught in the act?

GUARD [407] Here's how it was. When we got back, with those terrible threats of yours hanging over us, we swept off all the dust that covered the body and stripped the rotting corpse thoroughly bare. Then we sat down on the top of the hills, upwind, to keep clear of the stench coming off it, each man keeping the next one awake with a stream of abuse in case anyone got careless with the job. That went on for a long time, until the bright disk of the sun stood in the middle of the sky and the heat was scorching. And then suddenly a whirlwind lifted a storm of dust off the ground, a trouble sent from the sky, and filled the plain, tearing all the leaves off the trees there, and the whole wide air was choked with it. We shut our eyes and endured this plague from the gods. [422] When at last, after a long time, it passed, there was the girl, and she let out a sharp cry, like a bird in its bitterness when it sees its nest empty and its young gone. Just so, when she saw the body bare, she broke into wailing and groans, and called down evil curses on the ones who had done it. And at once she brought thirsty dust in her hands, and lifting high a fine bronze pitcher she crowned the body with a triple libation. [432] When we saw that, we rushed at her and caught her right away, and she wasn't the least bit frightened. We charged her with what she'd done before and what she'd done now, and she didn't deny any of it, which pleased me and pained me at the same time. Getting out of trouble yourself is the sweetest thing there is, but bringing people you care about into trouble is painful. Still, all that naturally counts for less with me than my own safety.

CREON [441] You. Yes, you, with your head bowed to the ground. Do you admit you did this, or deny it?

ANTIGONE [443] I admit I did it. I don't deny it.

CREON [444] You can take yourself off wherever you like, free and clear of a heavy charge. And you, tell me, not at length but briefly: did you know there was a proclamation forbidding this?

ANTIGONE [448] I knew. How could I not? It was public.

CREON [449] And still you dared to overstep these laws?

ANTIGONE [450] Yes, because it wasn't Zeus who made this proclamation to me. Nor did Justice, who lives with the gods below, lay down laws like these among human beings. And I didn't think your proclamations had such force that you, a mortal, could override the unwritten, unfailing laws of the gods. They aren't of today or yesterday. They live forever, and no one knows when they first appeared. [458] I wasn't going to pay the penalty before the gods for breaking them out of fear of any man's pride. I knew I would die. How could I not? I'd know it even if you'd made no proclamation. And if I die before my time, I count that a gain. When someone lives, as I do, surrounded by so many evils, how can death be anything but a gain? So for me to meet this fate is no pain at all. But if I had let my own mother's son lie dead and unburied, that would have pained me. This doesn't. [469] And if you think what I'm doing is foolish, it may be a fool who's calling me a fool.

CHORUS [471] It shows. The girl is the fierce child of a fierce father. She doesn't know how to bend before trouble.

CREON [473] But you should know that the most rigid wills are the ones that fall hardest. The toughest iron, baked hard in the fire, is the iron you'll most often see snap and shatter. And I know that spirited horses are broken in with a small bit. There's no room for pride in someone who is a slave to his neighbors. She knew perfectly well how to commit outrage back then, when she overstepped the established laws. And now that she's done it, here's a second outrage: to boast about it and laugh at what she's done. [484] Now, truly, I am no man, and she's the man, if she gets to keep this victory unpunished. Whether she's my sister's child, or closer in blood to me than all who worship at my household altar of Zeus, she and her sister will not escape the worst of

deaths. Because I accuse that one too, just as much, of plotting this burial. Call her. I saw her inside just now, raving, out of her mind.[7] [493] When people are plotting something crooked in the dark, the mind is usually caught out, like a thief, before the deed. But I hate it just as much when someone caught in wrongdoing then wants to dress it up as something fine.

ANTIGONE [497] Do you want anything more than to seize me and kill me?

CREON [498] Nothing. With that, I have everything.

ANTIGONE [499] Then why wait? Nothing you say pleases me, and I hope it never will. And in the same way, what I say is bound to displease you. And yet where could I have won more glorious fame than by laying my own brother in his grave? Everyone here would say they approve, if fear didn't lock their tongues. But kingship is blessed in many ways, and above all it can do and say whatever it likes.

CREON [508] You're the only one of these Thebans who sees it that way.

ANTIGONE [509] They see it too. They just hold their tongues for you.

CREON [510] And aren't you ashamed to think differently from them?

ANTIGONE [511] There's nothing shameful in honoring those born from the same womb.

CREON [512] And wasn't the one who died on the other side your brother too?

ANTIGONE [513] My brother, by the same mother and the same father.

CREON [514] Then how can you pay the traitor a tribute that is irreverent toward the other?

ANTIGONE [515] The dead man won't bear witness to that.

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7 Zeus Herkeios, "Zeus of the courtyard," had an altar in every household; Creon means "closer than all my family."

CREON [516] He will, if you honor him only as much as the irreverent one.

ANTIGONE [517] It wasn't some slave who died. It was his brother.

CREON [518] Ravaging this land, while the other stood against him to defend it.

ANTIGONE [519] Even so, Hades wants these laws observed.

CREON [520] But the good man shouldn't get the same share as the bad.

ANTIGONE [521] Who knows whether, down below, this is held pure?

CREON [522] An enemy is never a loved one, not even when he's dead.

ANTIGONE [523] I wasn't born to join in hating, but in loving.

CREON [524] Then go down below, and if you must love, love them. While I'm alive, no woman will rule me.

CHORUS

[526] But look, here at the gates is Ismene,
shedding a sister's loving tears.
A cloud above her brows
mars her flushed face
and wets her lovely cheeks.

CREON [531] And you, lurking in my house like a viper, secretly drinking my blood, while I never knew I was raising two ruinous plagues to overthrow my throne. Come on, tell me: will you admit to your part in this burial too, or will you swear you know nothing?

ISMENE [536] I did it, if she'll agree. I share the blame and I bear it.

ANTIGONE [538] No. Justice won't allow you that, because you weren't willing, and I didn't make you my partner.

ISMENE [540] But now that you're in trouble, I'm not ashamed to make myself your shipmate in suffering.

ANTIGONE [542] Whose deed it was, Hades and the dead below know. I have no love for a loved one whose love is only words.

ISMENE [544] Sister, don't dishonor me by refusing to let me die with you and give the dead his sacred rites.

ANTIGONE [546] Don't die with me, and don't claim as yours what you never touched. My dying will be enough.

ISMENE [548] And what life will I care for, left without you?

ANTIGONE [549] Ask Creon. He's the one you care about.

ISMENE [550] Why do you hurt me like this, when it does you no good?

ANTIGONE [551] If I do laugh at you, it hurts me to laugh.

ISMENE [552] Then how can I help you, even now?

ANTIGONE [553] Save yourself. I don't begrudge you your escape.

ISMENE [554] Oh, no, how wretched I am! Am I to have no share in your fate?

ANTIGONE [555] No, because you chose to live, and I chose to die.

ISMENE [556] But not without my saying what I had to say.

ANTIGONE [557] Some thought you were wise, and others thought I was.

ISMENE [558] And yet the offense is the same for both of us.

ANTIGONE [559] Take heart. You are alive. But my soul died long ago, so that I could serve the dead.

CREON [561] These two girls, I tell you: one has just been shown to be senseless, and the other has been ever since she was born.

ISMENE [563] Yes, my lord, because whatever sense people are born with never stays with them in misfortune. It leaves them.

CREON [565] It left you, at any rate, when you chose to do wrong alongside wrongdoers.

ISMENE [566] How could I live alone, without her?

CREON [567] Don't speak of "her." She is no more.

ISMENE [568] But will you kill your own son's bride?

CREON [569] Yes. There are other fields for him to plow.

ISMENE [570] Not as well matched as he and she were.

CREON [571] I hate wicked wives for my sons.

ANTIGONE [572] Haemon, dearest, how your father dishonors you!

CREON [573] You're too much trouble for me, you and that marriage of yours.

CHORUS [574] Will you really rob your own son of her?

CREON [575] It is Hades who will put a stop to this marriage.

CHORUS [576] It's decided, it seems, that she will die.

CREON [577] Yes, decided by you, and by me. No more delay. Servants, take them inside. From now on they must be women, not left to roam free. Even the bold try to run when they see Hades closing in on their lives.

SECOND STASIMON

The chorus sings of the ruin that pursues the house of Labdacus and of Zeus's unbounded power.

CHORUS

583 Blessed are those whose lives have never tasted evil.
For once the gods have shaken a house,
no ruin is left undone;
it creeps on through the generations of the family,
like a swell of the sea
when the harsh Thracian gales
drive it over the dark of the deep beneath the waves:
it rolls up the black sand from the bottom,
and the windswept headlands, struck head-on,
roar and groan.

I see the ancient sorrows of the house of Labdacus
falling on the sorrows of the dead;
one generation does not set the next one free,
but some god strikes them down, and there is no release.
For now the light that had spread
over the last root in the house of Oedipus
is cut down in its turn
by the bloody dust owed to the gods below,
by folly in speech and a Fury in the mind.[8]

Your power, Zeus—what human transgression could hold it back?
Sleep, who ensnares all things, never seizes it,
nor the tireless months of the gods;
ageless through time,
you rule the dazzling radiance of Olympus.
For what is coming, and what is to come,
and what has been,
this law will hold:
nothing vast enters the life of mortals
without ruin.

For hope, the far-wandering,
is a blessing to many men,
but to many a deception, a lure of light-headed desires;
it steals over a man who knows nothing
until he burns his foot in the hot fire.
Someone in his wisdom spoke the famous saying:
that sooner or later evil seems good
to the one whose mind
a god is leading toward ruin;

and he fares only the briefest time free of ruin.

8 Labdacus was Oedipus' grandfather; his descendants are the royal house of Thebes.

626 But here is Haemon, the last-born
of your sons. Does he come grieving
for the fate of Antigone, his promised bride,
in bitter pain at being cheated of his marriage?

THIRD EPISODE

Haemon pleads with his father for Antigone, they quarrel, and Creon decrees she will be entombed alive.

CREON 631 We'll soon know better than any prophet could. My son, have you heard the final verdict on your bride-to-be, and come here raging at your father? Or do you still love me, whatever I do?

HAEMON 635 Father, I am yours. You guide me with good judgment, and I will follow it. No marriage could matter more to me than your leading me well.

CREON 639 Yes, my son, that's how you should feel in your heart: stand behind your father's judgment in everything. That's why men pray to father obedient children and keep them in their homes—so that they'll pay back their father's enemy with harm, and honor his friend as much as their father does. But a man who fathers useless children—what would you say he's produced, except trouble for himself and plenty of laughter for his enemies? So never, my son, throw away your good sense for the pleasure of a woman. Know that it turns into a cold embrace, a bad woman sharing your bed in your home. What wound could be worse than one of your own who turns out bad? 653 No, spit her out like an enemy and let the girl find a husband in Hades. I caught her openly, the only one in the whole city to disobey me, and I won't make myself a liar in front of the city. I will kill her. So let her sing all the hymns she likes to Zeus, guardian of kin. If I raise my own family to be unruly, how much more will it be with outsiders? A man who is good in his own household will also prove just in the city. But whoever oversteps and does violence to the laws, or thinks he can give orders to those in power, will get no praise from me. 666 No: whoever the city appoints

must be obeyed, in small things, in just things, and in their opposite. And I'd be confident that a man like that would rule well and be willing to be ruled well, and that in the storm of battle he would hold his post, a just and loyal comrade at your side. There is no greater evil than anarchy. It destroys cities, it turns homes upside down, it breaks the allied spears and sends them into rout. But among those who stand firm, it is obedience that saves most lives. [677] So we must defend order, and never, in any way, be beaten by a woman. Better, if it has to happen, to fall at a man's hands; then no one could call us weaker than women.

CHORUS [681] To us, unless age has stolen our wits, what you say seems to make sense.

HAEMON [683] Father, the gods plant sense in human beings, the highest of all the things we possess. I couldn't say that you're wrong in what you say, and I hope I'd never know how to. Still, someone else might have a good thought too. In any case, it's my natural role to keep watch for you on everything people say or do or find to criticize. Your look terrifies an ordinary man, when it comes to words you wouldn't like to hear. But I can hear, in the shadows, how the city mourns for this girl: no woman ever deserved it less, they say, and she is dying the worst of deaths for the most glorious of deeds. [696] Her own brother had fallen in the slaughter, and she wouldn't leave him unburied to be destroyed by flesh-eating dogs or by some bird. Doesn't she deserve a golden honor? That's the dark rumor spreading in silence. For me, Father, nothing is more precious than your success. What greater treasure is there for children than a father's flourishing glory, or for a father than his children's? So don't carry only one way of thinking inside you, that what you say, and nothing else, is right. [707] Anyone who thinks he alone has sense, or a tongue or a mind like no one else's—open people like that up and you find them empty. No, for a man, even a wise one, there's no shame in learning a great deal and not being too rigid. You see how, beside streams swollen by winter rain, the trees that bend save their branches, while those that resist are destroyed, roots and

all. In the same way, a sailor who keeps his sheet hauled tight and never gives an inch capsizes, and sails the rest of the voyage with his benches upside down. [718] So give way, and let your anger change. If even I, young as I am, have any judgment to offer, I say it would be far best for a man to be born full of knowledge in everything. But if not—and things don't usually tip that way—it's good to learn from those who speak well.

CHORUS [724] My lord, if he says anything to the point, it's right for you to learn from him; and for you, son, to learn from your father in turn. Both of you have spoken well.

CREON [726] So men of my age are to be taught sense by a boy of his?

HAEMON [728] Nothing that isn't just. If I'm young, you should look at what I do, not at my years.

CREON [730] And is it something to be proud of, to show respect for the unruly?

HAEMON [731] I would never ask anyone to show reverence to the wicked.

CREON [732] And isn't she sick with exactly that disease?

HAEMON [733] The people of Thebes, her fellow citizens, say not.

CREON [734] So the city is going to tell me how to rule?

HAEMON [735] Do you see how you just spoke, like someone far too young?

CREON [736] Am I to rule this land for someone other than myself?

HAEMON [737] There's no city that belongs to one man.

CREON [738] Isn't the city held to belong to the one in power?

HAEMON [739] You'd make a fine ruler of a desert, all by yourself.

CREON [740] This boy, it seems, is fighting on the woman's side.

HAEMON [741] If you're the woman. It's you I'm looking out for.

CREON [742] You utter villain, taking your father to task?

HAEMON [743] Because I see you doing wrong against what's just.

CREON [744] Is it wrong of me to respect my own authority?

HAEMON [745] You don't respect it when you trample on the honors due to the gods.

CREON [746] What a vile nature, giving way to a woman!

HAEMON [747] You'll never catch me giving in to what's shameful.

CREON [748] Well, everything you say is on her behalf.

HAEMON [749] And yours, and mine, and the gods' below.

CREON [750] You will never marry her while she's still alive.

HAEMON [751] Then she will die, and in dying she'll destroy someone.

CREON [752] Are you so bold that you come at me with threats?

HAEMON [753] What threat is it to argue against empty judgments?

CREON [754] You'll regret lecturing me on sense when you have none yourself.

HAEMON [755] If you weren't my father, I'd say you weren't thinking straight.

CREON [756] You woman's slave, don't try to sweet-talk me.

HAEMON [757] Do you want to talk and talk, and never hear a word back?

CREON [758] Is that so? Well, by Olympus up there, you can be sure you won't get away with heaping insults on me. Bring out that hateful thing, so she can die right now, before his eyes, right beside her bridegroom.

HAEMON [762] No, not beside me—don't ever imagine it—she will not die beside me. And you will never set eyes on my face again. Go on raving, with any of your friends who can stand it.

CHORUS [766] My lord, the man has gone, rushing off in anger. A mind that young, when it's been hurt, is dangerous.

CREON [768] Let him do what he likes; let him go and think thoughts too big for a man. He still won't save these two girls from death.

CHORUS [770] So you mean to kill them both?

CREON [771] Not the one who didn't touch it. You're right about that.

CHORUS [772] And what death do you plan for the other?

CREON [773] I'll take her to a place where no one ever walks and hide her away alive in a rocky cave, setting out just enough food to avert pollution, so that the whole city escapes defilement. And there, praying to Hades, the only god she reveres, she may perhaps win her way out of dying. Or else she'll learn, at last, even then, that revering the dead in Hades is wasted effort.

THIRD STASIMON

The chorus sings of the unconquerable power of Love, then weeps to see Antigone led away.

CHORUS

781 Love, unconquered in battle,
Love, you who swoop down on men's wealth,
who keep your night watch
on a young girl's soft cheeks,
you roam over the sea
and through the farmsteads in the wild;
no immortal can escape you,
nor any human who lives for a day;
and whoever has you is mad.

791 You wrench even the minds of the just to injustice, to their ruin;
you it is who have stirred up this quarrel too,
between men of one blood.
Victory goes to the desire that shines
from the eyes of the bride, fair in her bed,
desire enthroned in power beside the great laws.
For the goddess Aphrodite plays her game,
and no one can fight her.

And now I too am swept
beyond the laws when I see this,
and I can no longer hold back
the springs of my tears,
as I see Antigone here making her way
to the bridal chamber where all are laid to rest.

FOURTH EPISODE

Antigone laments her living death with the chorus, defends her choice, and is led to the tomb.

ANTIGONE

Look at me, citizens of my fathers' land,
setting out on my last road,
looking my last on the light of the sun,
and never again.
Hades, who lays all to rest,
leads me living
to the shore of Acheron.
I've had no share in wedding songs,
no hymn has ever been sung for me at the bridal chamber:
it's Acheron I will marry.[9]

CHORUS

And yet you go, famous and praised,
down to this hiding place of the dead.
You weren't struck by wasting sickness,
you didn't win the wages of the sword:
a law to yourself, living, alone
of mortals, you will go down to Hades.

9 Acheron is a river of the underworld, which the dead must cross.

ANTIGONE

I've heard how pitifully she died,
the Phrygian stranger, Tantalus' daughter,
on the peak of Sipylus.
The rock grew over her like clinging ivy
and overpowered her;
and as she wastes away, so people say,
the rain never leaves her,
nor the snow,
and from under her ever-weeping brows
she soaks the ridges.
Most like her, some god lays me to sleep.[10]

CHORUS

But she was a goddess, born of gods,
and we are mortals, born of mortals.
Still, for a woman who dies, it is a great thing to have it said
that she shared the lot of those equal to gods,
in life, and afterward in death.

10 This is Niobe, who boasted of her children over the goddess Leto; they were killed and she was turned to stone on Mount Sipylus in Asia Minor, where a rock was said to weep.

ANTIGONE

Oh, no, I'm mocked! By my fathers' gods,
why do you insult me
not when I'm gone, but here in plain sight?
My city,
you wealthy men of my city!
Ah, springs of Dirce,
grove of Thebes of the fine chariots,
you at least I take as my witnesses:
unwept by my own, under such laws,
I go to a prison heaped up for a tomb,
a grave unheard of.
Ah, wretched me,
at home neither among mortals nor among corpses,
not with the living, not with the dead.

CHORUS

You went to the furthest edge of daring
and struck hard, my child,
against the high pedestal of Justice.
You are paying for some ordeal of your father's.

ANTIGONE

858 You've touched my most painful care:
the lament for my father, plowed over and over,
and for the whole fate
of us, the famous house of Labdacus.
Ah, the ruin of my mother's bed,
my ill-fated mother sleeping
with her own son, my father!
From such parents I was born, poor wretch;
to them I go, cursed, unmarried, to make my home.
Ah, my brother,
it was a doomed marriage you found,
and dead, you've killed me while I live.[11]

CHORUS

872 To pay honor to the dead is a kind of reverence,
but power, for the one whose care is power,
may never be transgressed:
your self-willed temper has destroyed you.

ANTIGONE

876 Unwept, unloved, unwedded, wretched,
I am led along my last road.
No longer may I, in my misery,
look on this sacred eye of the sun.
And for my fate no tear is shed;
none of my own laments it.

CREON 883 Don't you know that no one would ever stop singing and wailing before death, if they were allowed to go on? Take her away, and quickly! Wall her up in the vaulted tomb, as I ordered, and leave her alone, deserted, whether she wants to die or to live entombed in a home like that. As far as this girl is con-

11 Polynices had married the daughter of Adrastus, king of Argos, and so won the army he brought against Thebes.

cerned, our hands are clean. But she will be stripped of her place among the living up here.

ANTIGONE [891] Tomb, bridal chamber, deep-dug home that will hold me forever: there I go, to my own, so many of whom have perished and been received by Persephone among the dead. I am the last of them, and by far the most miserable, going down before my portion of life has run out. Still, as I go, I cherish the strong hope that I'll arrive dear to my father, dear to you, Mother, and dear to you, my brother. For when you died, I washed you with my own hands and dressed you, and poured libations at your graves. And now, Polynices, for laying out your body, this is my reward. [904] And yet in the eyes of those who think straight, I was right to honor you. Never, if I had been a mother of children, or if my husband had died and lay rotting, would I have taken on this labor against the citizens' will. For the sake of what law do I say this? If my husband died, I could have had another, and a child by another man, if I lost this one; but with my mother and father hidden in Hades, no brother could ever be born to me again. [913] That was the law by which I honored you above all; and for that Creon thought I had done wrong and dared terrible things, my own brother. And now he has me in his hands and leads me away like this: no marriage bed, no wedding song, no share in marriage or in raising children. Deserted like this by my own, ill-fated, I go living into the hollow graves of the dead. What justice of the gods have I transgressed? Why should I, in my misery, look to the gods any longer? Which of them should I call to my aid? For my reverence, I have earned the name of irreverence. [925] Well, if this is what the gods think fine, then once I've suffered I'll acknowledge I was wrong. But if these men are the ones in the wrong, may they suffer no worse evils than what they are unjustly doing to me.

CHORUS

929 Still the same gusts
of the same winds of the soul
have hold of her.

CREON 931 And so those taking her away / will have cause to weep for their slowness.

ANTIGONE 933 Oh, no—that word / comes very close to death.

CHORUS 935 I can give you no comfort, / no hope that this won't be fulfilled the way it stands.

ANTIGONE

937 Town of my fathers in the land of Thebes,
gods of my ancestors,
I am led away now; there's no more delay.
Look, you lords of Thebes,
on the only one left of your royal line:
see what I suffer, and from what men,
for holding reverence in reverence.

FOURTH STASIMON

The chorus recalls Danaë, Lycurgus and the sons of Phineus, all imprisoned or destroyed by fate.

CHORUS

Danaë too endured
to trade the light of heaven
for walls bound in bronze;
hidden in a chamber like a tomb, she was yoked fast.
And yet she too was honored in her birth, child, my child,
and she kept the seed of Zeus that fell in streams of gold.
But the power of fate is a terrible thing:
neither wealth nor Ares, no tower,
no black ships beaten by the sea
could escape it.[12]

And the son of Dryas, quick to anger,
king of the Edonians, was yoked
for his mocking rage:
Dionysus walled him up in a prison of rock.
So the terrible, flowering force of his madness
drips away. He came to know the god
he had assailed in madness with his mocking tongue.
For he tried to stop the women filled with the god
and the Bacchic fire,
and he provoked the Muses who love the pipe.[13]

12 Danaë's father shut her in a bronze chamber; Zeus came to her as a shower of gold, and she bore Perseus.
13 This is Lycurgus, a Thracian king who persecuted Dionysus and his women followers.

966 By the Dark Rocks, by the double sea,
lie the shores of the Bosporus
and Thracian Salmydessus, cruel to strangers,
where Ares, the city's neighbor,
saw the cursed wound
dealt to Phineus' two sons,
blinded by a savage wife:
darkness on the eyes that cried out for vengeance,
gouged out by her bloody hands
and the points of her shuttles.[14]

977 Wasting away, the wretched boys wept
for their wretched suffering,
sons of a mother whose marriage was unblessed.
Yet she traced her seed
to the ancient line of Erechtheus,
and in far-off caves she was raised
among her father's storms,
Boreas' daughter, swift as a horse over the steep hills,
child of gods. But on her too
the long-lived Fates bore down, child.[15]

FIFTH EPISODE

Teiresias warns Creon of the gods' anger; Creon insults him, then gives in and hurries to undo his orders.

TEIRESIAS 988 Lords of Thebes, we have come on a shared road, two seeing through the eyes of one. For the blind, that's how the road goes: with someone to lead.

CREON 991 What is it, old Teiresias? What news?

TEIRESIAS 992 I'll tell you; and you, obey the seer.

CREON 993 Well, I've never strayed from your judgment before.

14 Phineus' second wife blinded his two sons by his first wife, Cleopatra, with her weaving shuttles.
15 Cleopatra was the daughter of Boreas, the North Wind, and of an Athenian princess descended from Erechtheus, an early king of Athens.

TEIRESIAS 994 And that's why you've steered this city on a straight course.

CREON 995 I've felt the benefit, and I can vouch for it.

TEIRESIAS 996 Then think: once again you stand on the razor's edge of fortune.

CREON 997 What is it? How I shudder at what you say!

TEIRESIAS 998 You'll know, when you hear the signs of my art. I was taking my seat at my ancient augur's chair, where every bird comes to me as to a harbor, when I heard an unknown voice of birds, shrieking in an evil frenzy, a meaningless gibberish. And I knew they were tearing at one another with their talons, murderously: the whirr of their wings made that clear. At once, afraid, I tried burnt sacrifice on the blazing altars. But no flame of Hephaestus shone from the offerings. Instead the juice of the thigh bones oozed onto the ashes and melted, smoked and sputtered; the gall burst and scattered into the air, and the thigh bones, streaming, lay bare of the fat that had wrapped them. 1012 That is what I learned from this boy here: the prophecies were failing, the rites gave no sign. He is my guide, as I am others'. And it's from your thinking that the city is sick. Our altars and our hearths, every one of them, are full of carrion that birds and dogs have torn from the ill-fated fallen son of Oedipus. And so the gods no longer accept our prayers at sacrifice, nor the flame of the thigh bones, and no bird screams out cries of good omen, for they have gorged on the fat and blood of a slain man. 1023 Think about this, my son. To err is common to all people. But when a man errs, he is no longer witless or luckless if, having fallen into trouble, he cures it and doesn't stay immovable. Stubbornness, believe me, earns the charge of stupidity. Yield to the dead; don't keep stabbing a man who's gone. What prowess is it to kill the dead all over again? I mean you well, and I'm giving you good advice. And nothing is sweeter than learning from someone who advises well, if what he says is to your profit.

CREON 1033 Old man, all of you shoot at me like archers at a target, and even your prophecy is put to work against me. By your

tribe of prophets I've long been bought and sold and shipped off as cargo. Make your profits; trade in the silver-gold of Sardis if you like, and the gold of India. But you will not hide that man in a grave—not even if the eagles of Zeus want to snatch him and carry him off as food to the throne of Zeus. Not even then will I, in fear of that pollution, allow him to be buried. For I know well that no human being has the power to pollute the gods. But men fall, old Teiresias, even the very clever ones, they take shameful falls, when they dress up shameful words in fine language for the sake of profit.[16]

TEIRESIAS 1048 Ah. Does any man know, does anyone consider—

CREON 1049 Consider what? What's this universal truth you're announcing?

TEIRESIAS 1050 —how far good judgment is the best of all possessions?

CREON 1051 As far, I imagine, as not thinking straight is the greatest harm.

TEIRESIAS 1052 And that's exactly the sickness you're full of.

CREON 1053 I don't want to answer a seer with insults.

TEIRESIAS 1054 But you do, when you say my prophecies are false.

CREON 1055 The whole breed of prophets loves money.

TEIRESIAS 1056 And the breed of kings loves shameful gain.

CREON 1057 Do you realize you're saying this about your rulers?

TEIRESIAS 1058 I do. It's thanks to me that you saved this city and hold it.

CREON 1059 You're a wise seer, but you love to do wrong.

TEIRESIAS 1060 You'll provoke me to speak what lies undisturbed in my mind.

CREON 1061 Disturb it—only don't speak for profit.

16 Sardis, capital of Lydia, was famous for electrum, a natural alloy of gold and silver.

TEIRESIAS 1062 As far as you're concerned, I don't think I will.

CREON 1063 Know this: you won't be buying and selling my judgment.

TEIRESIAS 1064 Then know this well: you won't complete many more racing circuits of the sun before you yourself give one born of your own body, a corpse in exchange for corpses. For you have thrust below one who belongs above, and shamefully housed a living soul in a grave, while you keep here a corpse that belongs to the gods below, robbed of its due, unburied, unholy. Neither you nor the gods above have any part in this: it is violence you are doing them. 1074 For this the avengers who destroy at the last, the Furies of Hades and the gods, lie in wait for you, to catch you in these same evils. Now look closely and see whether I'm saying this because someone paid me in silver. It won't take long to show: the wailing of men and women in your house. And all the cities are rising in hatred against you, the cities whose sons' mangled bodies have been given their only rites by dogs or wild beasts or some winged bird, carrying an unholy stench to each city's hearth. Since you provoke me, those are the arrows I've let fly at you like an archer, in anger, at your heart: sure ones, and you won't run out from under their burning.[17] 1087 Boy, lead me home, so that this man can vent his anger on younger men, and learn to keep his tongue quieter and a better mind in his breast than the one he has now.

CHORUS 1091 The man has gone, my lord, after terrible prophecies. And we know that ever since this hair of mine turned from black to white, he has never once uttered a falsehood to the city.

CREON 1095 I know it too, and my mind is shaken. To give way is terrible; but to stand firm and strike my pride against ruin—that is terrible too.

CHORUS 1098 You need good counsel, son of Menoeceus.

CREON 1099 Then what should I do? Tell me, and I'll obey.

17 These are the cities of the Argive allies, whose dead Creon also left unburied.

CHORUS 1100 Go and release the girl from her chamber dug in the earth, and build a grave for the one lying out there.

CREON 1102 That's what you advise? You think I should give in?

CHORUS 1103 Yes, and as fast as you can. Harm from the gods is swift of foot, and it cuts short those who think wrongly.

CREON 1105 Oh, no. It's hard, but I'm giving up my heart's resolve, and I'll do it. There's no fighting against necessity.

CHORUS 1107 Then go and do it; don't leave it to others.

CREON 1108 I'll go just as I am. Go, go, servants, those of you here and those who aren't: take axes in your hands and hurry to that place there in view. And I, since my judgment has turned this way, I who bound her will be there and set her free myself. For I'm afraid it may be best to keep the established laws to the very end of one's life.

FIFTH STASIMON

The chorus calls on Dionysus, god of Thebes, to come and heal the city.

CHORUS

1115 You of many names, glory of the Cadmean bride,
child of Zeus who thunders deep,
you who watch over famous Italy
and rule, welcoming all,
in the vales of Eleusinian Deo:
Bacchus, who dwell in Thebes,
mother-city of Bacchants,
by the flowing streams of Ismenus,
on the soil where the savage dragon's teeth were sown.[18]

18 The Cadmean bride is Semele, daughter of Cadmus and mother of Dionysus; Deo is Demeter, whose mysteries were celebrated at Eleusis near Athens.

1126 You the flaring smoke of torches has seen
above the twin-peaked rock,
where the Corycian nymphs,
your Bacchants, go,
and by the stream of Castalia.
And the ivy-clad slopes of Nysa's mountains
and the green shore heavy with grapes
send you here,
while immortal voices raise the Bacchic cry,
to watch over the streets of Thebes.[19]

1137 Thebes you honor above all cities,
you and your mother struck by lightning.
And now, since the city and all its people
are held by a violent sickness,
come with cleansing step
over the slope of Parnassus
or across the moaning strait.

1146 Oh, leader of the dance of fire-breathing stars,
overseer of voices in the night,
son born of Zeus, appear,
lord, with your attendant Thyiads,
who in their madness dance all night long
for you, Iacchus, giver of good things.[20]

EXODOS

Messengers report the suicides of Antigone, Haemon and Eurydice, and Creon laments his ruin.

MESSENGER 1155 Neighbors of the house of Cadmus and of Amphion, there is no human life, however it stands, that I would ever praise or blame as settled. For fortune raises up and fortune brings down the fortunate and the unfortunate, always,

19 The twin-peaked rock is Parnassus above Delphi, with the Corycian cave and the Castalian spring; Nysa is a mountain linked with Dionysus' childhood.
20 The Thyiads are women possessed by Bacchus; Iacchus is a name of Dionysus from the Eleusinian mysteries.

and no one can prophesy to mortals how what is now will stand. Creon was once enviable, as I saw it. He saved this land of Cadmus from its enemies, took sole command of the country and steered it, flourishing with a noble crop of children.[21] 1165 And now it's all gone. For when men lose their joys, I don't count that man alive; I regard him as a breathing corpse. Be very rich in your house, if you like, and live in a king's style; but if the joy of it is missing, I wouldn't buy the rest from anyone for the shadow of smoke, compared with joy.

CHORUS 1172 What is this new burden of grief for our royal house that you bring?

MESSENGER 1173 They're dead. And the living are to blame for their deaths.

CHORUS 1174 And who is the killer? Who lies dead? Tell us.

MESSENGER 1175 Haemon is dead. A hand of his own has shed his blood.

CHORUS 1176 His father's hand, or his own?

MESSENGER 1177 His own, in rage against his father for the killing.

CHORUS 1178 Prophet, how true your word has proved!

MESSENGER 1179 That's how things stand; you must consider the rest.

CHORUS 1180 Look, here is poor Eurydice, Creon's wife, coming out of the palace—either she has heard about her son, or it's chance.

EURYDICE 1183 Citizens, all of you, I heard what you were saying as I was on my way out to go and address the goddess Pallas with my prayers. I happened to be loosening the bolt to open the door when the sound of disaster for my house struck my ears. I fell back in terror into my servants' arms and fainted. But tell me again what the news was. I'll hear it as one who is no stranger to sorrow.

21 Amphion was a legendary king of Thebes who built its walls.

MESSENGER 1192 Dear mistress, I was there, and I'll tell you, and leave out not a word of the truth. Why should I soften it for you, when later we'd be shown up as liars? The truth is always the right course. I went along as guide for your husband to the far end of the plain, where Polynices' body still lay, pitiless, torn by dogs. We prayed to the goddess of the roads and to Pluto to restrain their anger and be kind, and we washed him with holy washing, and on freshly cut branches we burned what was left of him. We heaped up a high mound of his native earth, and then made our way toward the girl's stone-floored bridal chamber, the hollow chamber of Hades.[22] 1206 From a distance someone hears a voice wailing aloud around the chamber with no funeral rites, and he goes and tells our master Creon. As Creon comes closer, the faint sounds of a miserable cry surround him, and he groans and lets out words of bitter grief: "Oh, I'm wretched! Am I a prophet? Am I walking the most unhappy road of all the roads I've ever traveled? It's my son's voice that greets me. Servants, go closer, quickly. Stand by the tomb and look—get in through the gap where the stones of the mound have been torn away, right to the mouth—and see whether it's Haemon's voice I hear, or the gods are deceiving me."

1219 At our despairing master's orders we looked. And in the furthest part of the tomb we saw her hanging by the neck, fastened by a noose of fine linen, and him lying beside her, his arms around her waist, mourning the loss of his bride now below, and his father's deeds, and his unhappy marriage. When Creon saw them, he groaned bitterly, went in toward him and called out to him with a wail: "Poor boy, what have you done! What were you thinking? What disaster has wrecked you?" 1230 "Come out, my son, I beg you on my knees." But the boy glared at him with savage eyes, spat in his face, and without a word in reply drew his double-edged sword. His father rushed out to escape, and he missed him. Then the ill-fated boy, angry at himself, just as he was, leaned onto it and drove half the blade into

22 The goddess of the roads is Hecate; Pluto is another name for Hades.

his side. Still conscious, he folded the girl in his limp arms, and gasping, he shot out a sharp stream of bloody drops onto her white cheek. 1240 He lies there, a corpse embracing a corpse. Poor boy, he has won his marriage rites in the house of Hades, and shown the world that bad judgment is by far the greatest evil that besets a man.

CHORUS 1244 What do you make of this? The queen has gone back inside before saying a word, good or bad.

MESSENGER 1246 I'm amazed myself. But I nourish the hope that, having heard of her son's sorrows, she won't think it right to mourn before the city, but will set her servants to lament the grief of the house indoors. She has too much judgment to do anything wrong.

CHORUS 1251 I don't know. To me, at any rate, too much silence seems as heavy as a great deal of crying in vain.

MESSENGER 1253 Well, we'll find out whether she is hiding something held back in secret in her passionate heart; I'll go into the house. You're right: there is a heaviness, too, in too much silence.

CHORUS

1257 But look, here is the king himself,
carrying in his arms
a clear memorial,
if it is right to say so,
of a ruin that is not another's,
but his own wrongdoing.

CREON

Oh!
The errors of a mind gone wrong,
stubborn, deadly!
You who see us,
killers and killed of one blood!
Oh, no, the misery of my counsels!
Oh, my son, young, with a young death,
no, no!
You died, you were set free
through my bad counsel, not yours.

CHORUS Oh, it seems you've seen what justice is too late.

CREON

Oh, no,
I've learned it, wretched me. Then,
then it was that a god
struck my head with a great weight
and hurled me down savage roads,
oh, no, overturning my joy, trampling it underfoot.
Ah, ah, the toils of mortals, bitter toils!

SECOND MESSENGER Master, you come, it seems, like a man with a store of troubles, and adding to it: some you carry here in your arms, and others in the house you'll soon see.

CREON What is there still, worse than these evils?

SECOND MESSENGER Your wife is dead, the true mother of this dead boy—poor woman, just now, by blows freshly struck.

CREON

1284 Oh!
Oh, harbor of Hades, so hard to appease,
why, why are you destroying me?
You who have brought me this sorrow,
so cruelly told,
what is this word you speak?
No! You've killed a man already dead!
What are you saying, boy? What new thing do you tell me—
no, no!—
of my wife's death,
slaughter piled on ruin,
lying around me?

CHORUS 1293 You can see it: it's no longer hidden indoors.

CREON

1294 Oh, no,
I see this second evil, wretched me.
What fate, what fate is still waiting for me?
I have just held my child in my arms,
wretched, and I see another corpse before me.
Ah, ah, unhappy mother! Ah, my son!

SECOND MESSENGER 1301 She stood at the altar, by the sharp-edged sword, and let her eyes close in darkness, after wailing first for the famous fate of Megareus, who died before, and then for this one, and last of all calling down evil fortune on you, the killer of her sons.[23]

23 Megareus was an elder son of Creon and Eurydice who died in the defense of Thebes.

CREON

No, no!
I'm shaken with fear. Why does no one
strike me full in the chest with a two-edged sword?
Wretched me, no!
I'm steeped in wretched anguish.

SECOND MESSENGER Yes: she, the dead woman here, charged you with the blame for both deaths, this one and that one.

CREON And how did she take her leave in blood?

SECOND MESSENGER She struck herself under the liver with her own hand, when she learned of her son's suffering, so loud with wailing.

CREON

Oh, no, no! This guilt can never be fitted
on any other mortal; it's mine.
It was I, I who killed you, wretch that I am,
I, I say it truly. Oh, servants,
lead me away as fast as you can, lead me out of the way,
a man who is no more than nobody.

CHORUS You urge what is best, if anything is good in the midst of evils. Troubles at our feet are best when they are shortest.

CREON

Let it come, let it come,
let it appear, the best of my fates,
bringing my final day,
the last of all: let it come, let it come,
so I never see another day.

CHORUS That is for the future. We must do something about what lies before us. Those whose concern it is will see to the rest.

CREON 1336 But all I long for is in that prayer.

CHORUS 1337 Then pray for nothing. For mortals there is no escape from destined disaster.

CREON

1339 Lead this worthless man out of the way,
who killed you, my son, not meaning to,
and you too, lying here—oh, no, wretched me! I don't know
which way to look, where to lean. Everything
in my hands has gone askew, and on my head
a fate too heavy to bear has leapt.

CHORUS

1347 Good sense is by far
the first part of happiness.
In what concerns the gods
we must never be irreverent.
The great words of the overproud
are paid for with great blows,
and in old age they teach good sense.