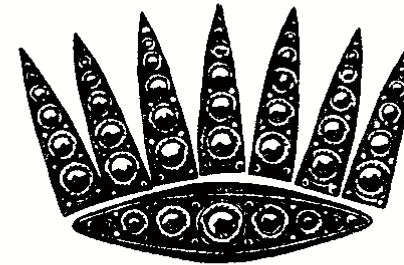


BERNARD KNOX is Director Emeritus of Harvard's Center for Hellenic Studies in Washington, D.C. His essays and reviews have appeared in numerous publications and in 1978 he won the George Jean Nathan Award for Dramatic Criticism. His works include *Oedipus at Thebes*; *Sophocles' Tragic Hero and His Time*; *The Heroic Temper: Studies in Sophoclean Tragedy*; *World and Action: Essays on the Ancient Theater*; *Essays Ancient and Modern* (awarded the 1989 PEN/Spielmann Diamonstein Award); *The Oldest Dead White European Males and Other Reflections on the Classics*; and *Backing into the Future: The Classical Tradition and its Renewal*. He is the editor of *The Norton Book of Classical Literature* and has collaborated with Robert Fagles on *The Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

SOPHOCLES
**THE THREE
THEBAN PLAYS**
ANTIGONE • OEDIPUS THE KING
OEDIPUS AT COLONUS



TRANSLATED BY
ROBERT FAGLES

INTRODUCTIONS AND
NOTES BY
BERNARD KNOX



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FOR KATYA, FOR NINA

tois philois d' orthôs philê

ANTIGONE

CHARACTERS

ANTIGONE

daughter of Oedipus and Jocasta

ISMENE

sister of Antigone

A CHORUS

of old Theban citizens and their LEADER

CREON

king of Thebes, uncle of Antigone and Ismene

A SENTRY

HAEMON

son of Creon and Eurydice

TIRESIAS

a blind prophet

A MESSENGER

EURYDICE

wife of Creon

Guards, attendants, and a boy

[Line numbers at the head of each page refer to the Greek text; those in the margin refer to the English translation.]

TIME AND SCENE: *The royal house of Thebes. It is still night, and the invading armies of Argos have just been driven from the city. Fighting on opposite sides, the sons of Oedipus, Eteocles and Polynices, have killed each other in combat. Their uncle, CREON, is now king of Thebes.*

Enter ANTIGONE, slipping through the central doors of the palace. She motions to her sister, ISMENE, who follows her cautiously toward an altar at the center of the stage.

ANTIGONE:

My own flesh and blood—dear sister, dear Ismene,
how many griefs our father Oedipus handed down!
Do you know one, I ask you, one grief
that Zeus will not perfect for the two of us
while we still live and breathe? There's nothing, 5
no pain—our lives are pain—no private shame,
no public disgrace, nothing I haven't seen
in your griefs and mine. And now this:
an emergency decree, they say, the Commander
has just now declared for all of Thebes. 10
What, haven't you heard? Don't you see?
The doom reserved for enemies
marches on the ones we love the most.

ISMENE:

Not I, I haven't heard a word, Antigone.
Nothing of loved ones, 15
no joy or pain has come my way, not since
the two of us were robbed of our two brothers,
both gone in a day, a double blow—
not since the armies of Argos vanished,
just this very night. I know nothing more, 20
whether our luck's improved or ruin's still to come.

ANTIGONE:

I thought so. That's why I brought you out here,
past the gates, so you could hear in private.

ISMENE:

What's the matter? Trouble, clearly . . .
you sound so dark, so grim.

25

ANTIGONE:

Why not? Our own brothers' burial!
Hasn't Creon graced one with all the rites,
disgraced the other? Eteocles, they say,
has been given full military honors,
rightly so—Creon has laid him in the earth
and he goes with glory down among the dead.
But the body of Polynices, who died miserably—
why, a city-wide proclamation, rumor has it,
forbids anyone to bury him, even mourn him.
He's to be left unwept, unburied, a lovely treasure
for birds that scan the field and feast to their heart's content.

30

35

Such, I hear, is the martial law our good Creon
lays down for you and me—yes, me, I tell you—
and he's coming here to alert the uninformed
in no uncertain terms,
and he won't treat the matter lightly. Whoever
disobeys in the least will die, his doom is sealed:
stoning to death inside the city walls!

40

There you have it. You'll soon show what you are,
worth your breeding, Ismene, or a coward—
for all your royal blood.

45

ISMENE:

My poor sister, if things have come to this,
who am I to make or mend them, tell me,
what good am I to you?

ANTIGONE:

Decide.

Will you share the labor, share the work?

50

ISMENE:

What work, what's the risk? What do you mean?

ANTIGONE:

Raising her hands.

Will you lift up his body with these bare hands
and lower it with me?

ISMENE:

What? You'd bury him—
when a law forbids the city?

ANTIGONE:

Yes!

He is my brother and—deny it as you will—
your brother too.
No one will ever convict me for a traitor.

55

ISMENE:

So desperate, and Creon has expressly—

ANTIGONE:

No,

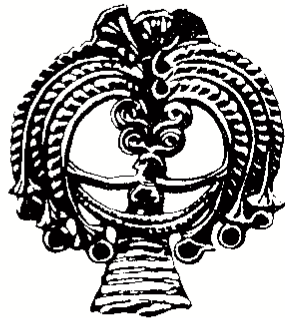
he has no right to keep me from my own.

ISMENE:

Oh my sister, think—
 think how our own father died, hated,
 his reputation in ruins, driven on
 by the crimes he brought to light himself
 to gouge out his eyes with his own hands—
 then mother . . . his mother and wife, both in one,
 mutilating her life in the twisted noose—
 and last, our two brothers dead in a single day,
 both shedding their own blood, poor suffering boys,
 battling out their common destiny hand-to-hand.

Now look at the two of us, left so alone . . .
 think what a death we'll die, the worst of all
 if we violate the laws and override
 the fixed decree of the throne, its power—
 we must be sensible. Remember we are women,
 we're not born to contend with men. Then too,
 we're underlings, ruled by much stronger hands,
 so we must submit in this, and things still worse.

I, for one, I'll beg the dead to forgive me—
 I'm forced, I have no choice—I must obey
 the ones who stand in power. Why rush to extremes?
 It's madness, madness.



ANTIGONE:

I won't insist,
 no, even if you should have a change of heart,
 I'd never welcome you in the labor, not with me.
 So, do as you like, whatever suits you best—
 I will bury him myself.
 And even if I die in the act, that death will be a glory.
 I will lie with the one I love and loved by him—
 an outrage sacred to the gods! I have longer
 to please the dead than please the living here:
 in the kingdom down below I'll lie forever.
 Do as you like, dishonor the laws
 the gods hold in honor.

ISMENE:

I'd do them no dishonor . . .
 but defy the city? I have no strength for that.

ANTIGONE:

You have your excuses. I am on my way,
 I will raise a mound for him, for my dear brother.

ISMENE:

Oh Antigone, you're so rash—I'm so afraid for you!

ANTIGONE:

Don't fear for me. Set your own life in order.

ISMENE:

Then don't, at least, blurt this out to anyone.
 Keep it a secret. I'll join you in that, I promise.

ANTIGONE:

Dear god, shout it from the rooftops. I'll hate you
all the more for silence—tell the world! 100

ISMENE:

So fiery—and it ought to chill your heart.

ANTIGONE:

I know I please where I must please the most.

ISMENE:

Yes, if you can, but you're in love with impossibility.

ANTIGONE:

Very well then, once my strength gives out
I will be done at last. 105

ISMENE:

You're wrong from the start,
you're off on a hopeless quest.

ANTIGONE:

If you say so, you will make me hate you,
and the hatred of the dead, by all rights,
will haunt you night and day. 110
But leave me to my own absurdity, leave me
to suffer this—dreadful thing. I will suffer
nothing as great as death without glory.

Exit to the side.

ISMENE:

Then go if you must, but rest assured,
wild, irrational as you are, my sister, 115
you are truly dear to the ones who love you.

Withdrawing to the palace.

*Enter a CHORUS, the old citizens
of Thebes, chanting as the sun begins
to rise.*

CHORUS:

Glory!—great beam of the sun, brightest of all
that ever rose on the seven gates of Thebes,
you burn through night at last!

Great eye of the golden day, 120
mounting the Dirce's banks you throw him back—
the enemy out of Argos, the white shield, the man of bronze—
he's flying headlong now
the bridle of fate stampeding him with pain!

And he had driven against our borders, 125
launched by the warring claims of Polynices—
like an eagle screaming, winging havoc
over the land, wings of armor
shielded white as snow,
a huge army massing, 130
crested helmets bristling for assault.

He hovered above our roofs, his vast maw gaping
closing down around our seven gates,
his spears thirsting for the kill
but now he's gone, look, 135
before he could glut his jaws with Theban blood
or the god of fire put our crown of towers to the torch.
He grappled the Dragon none can master—Thebes—
the clang of our arms like thunder at his back!

Zeus hates with a vengeance all bravado, 140
the mighty boasts of men. He watched them
coming on in a rising flood, the pride
of their golden armor ringing shrill—
and brandishing his lightning
blasted the fighter just at the goal, 145
rushing to shout his triumph from our walls.

Down from the heights he crashed, pounding down on the earth!
And a moment ago, blazing torch in hand—

mad for attack, ecstatic
he breathed his rage, the storm
of his fury hurling at our heads! 150

But now his high hopes have laid him low
and down the enemy ranks the iron god of war
deals his rewards, his stunning blows—Ares
rapture of battle, our right arm in the crisis. 155

Seven captains marshaled at seven gates
seven against their equals, gave
their brazen trophies up to Zeus,
god of the breaking rout of battle,
all but two: those blood brothers, 160
one father, one mother—matched in rage,
spears matched for the twin conquest—
clashed and won the common prize of death.

But now for Victory! Glorious in the morning,
joy in her eyes to meet our joy 165
she is winging down to Thebes,

our fleets of chariots wheeling in her wake—
Now let us win oblivion from the wars,
thronging the temples of the gods
in singing, dancing choirs through the night! 170

Lord Dionysus, god of the dance
that shakes the land of Thebes, now lead the way!

*Enter CREON from the palace,
attended by his guard.*

But look, the king of the realm is coming,
Creon, the new man for the new day,
whatever the gods are sending now . . . 175
what new plan will he launch?
Why this, this special session?
Why this sudden call to the old men
summoned at one command?

CREON:

My countrymen,
the ship of state is safe. The gods who rocked her, 180
after a long, merciless pounding in the storm,
have righted her once more.

Out of the whole city
I have called you here alone. Well I know,
first, your undeviating respect
for the throne and royal power of King Laius. 185
Next, while Oedipus steered the land of Thebes,
and even after he died, your loyalty was unshakable,
you still stood by their children. Now then,
since the two sons are dead—two blows of fate
in the same day, cut down by each other's hands, 190
both killers, both brothers stained with blood—
as I am next in kin to the dead,
I now possess the throne and all its powers.

Of course you cannot know a man completely,
his character, his principles, sense of judgment, 195
not till he's shown his colors, ruling the people,
making laws. Experience, there's the test.
As I see it, whoever assumes the task,
the awesome task of setting the city's course,
and refuses to adopt the soundest policies 200
but fearing someone, keeps his lips locked tight,
he's utterly worthless. So I rate him now,
I always have. And whoever places a friend
above the good of his own country, he is nothing:
I have no use for him. Zeus my witness, 205
Zeus who sees all things, always—

I could never stand by silent, watching destruction
 march against our city, putting safety to rout,
 nor could I ever make that man a friend of mine
 who menaces our country. Remember this: 210
our country is our safety.
 Only while she voyages true on course
 can we establish friendships, truer than blood itself.
 Such are my standards. They make our city great.

Closely akin to them I have proclaimed, 215
 just now, the following decree to our people
 concerning the two sons of Oedipus.
 Eteocles, who died fighting for Thebes,
 excelling all in arms: he shall be buried,
 crowned with a hero's honors, the cups we pour 220
 to soak the earth and reach the famous dead.

But as for his blood brother, Polynices,
 who returned from exile, home to his father-city
 and the gods of his race, consumed with one desire—
 to burn them roof to roots—who thirsted to drink 225
 his kinsmen's blood and sell the rest to slavery:
 that man—a proclamation has forbidden the city
 to dignify him with burial, mourn him at all.
 No, he must be left unburied, his corpse
 carrion for the birds and dogs to tear, 230
 an obscenity for the citizens to behold!

These are my principles. Never at my hands
 will the traitor be honored above the patriot.
 But whoever proves his loyalty to the state—
 I'll prize that man in death as well as life. 235

LEADER:
 If this is your pleasure, Creon, treating
 our city's enemy and our friend this way . . .
 The power is yours, I suppose, to enforce it
 with the laws, both for the dead and all of us,
 the living.

CREON:
 Follow my orders closely then, 240
 be on your guard.

LEADER:
 We are too old.
 Lay that burden on younger shoulders.

CREON:
 No, no,
 I don't mean the body—I've posted guards already.

LEADER:
 What commands for us then? What other service?

CREON:
 See that you never side with those who break my orders. 245

LEADER:
 Never. Only a fool could be in love with death.

CREON:
 Death is the price—you're right. But all too often
 the mere hope of money has ruined many men.

A SENTRY enters from the side.

SENTRY:

My lord,

I can't say I'm winded from running, or set out
with any spring in my legs either—no sir, 250
I was lost in thought, and it made me stop, often,
dead in my tracks, wheeling, turning back,
and all the time a voice inside me muttering,
“Idiot, why? You're going straight to your death.”
Then muttering, “Stopped again, poor fool? 255
If somebody gets the news to Creon first,
what's to save your neck?”

And so,
mulling it over, on I trudged, dragging my feet,
you can make a short road take forever . . .
but at last, look, common sense won out, 260
I'm here, and I'm all yours,
and even though I come empty-handed
I'll tell my story just the same, because
I've come with a good grip on one hope,
what will come will come, whatever fate— 265

CREON:

Come to the point!
What's wrong—why so afraid?

SENTRY:

First, myself, I've got to tell you,
I didn't do it, didn't see who did—
Be fair, don't take it out on me. 270

CREON:

You're playing it safe, soldier,
barricading yourself from any trouble.
It's obvious, you've something strange to tell.

SENTRY:

Dangerous too, and danger makes you delay
for all you're worth. 275

CREON:

Out with it—then dismiss!

SENTRY:

All right, here it comes. The body—
someone's just buried it, then run off . . .
sprinkled some dry dust on the flesh,
given it proper rites.

CREON:

What? 280
What man alive would dare—

SENTRY:

I've no idea, I swear it.
There was no mark of a spade, no pickaxe there,
no earth turned up, the ground packed hard and dry,
unbroken, no tracks, no wheelruts, nothing, 285
the workman left no trace. Just at sunup
the first watch of the day points it out—
it was a wonder! We were stunned . . .
a terrific burden too, for all of us, listen:
you can't see the corpse, not that it's buried,
really, just a light cover of road-dust on it, 290
as if someone meant to lay the dead to rest
and keep from getting cursed.
Not a sign in sight that dogs or wild beasts
had worried the body, even torn the skin.

But what came next! Rough talk flew thick and fast, 295
 guard grilling guard—we'd have come to blows
 at last, nothing to stop it; each man for himself
 and each the culprit, no one caught red-handed,
 all of us pleading ignorance, dodging the charges,
 ready to take up red-hot iron in our fists, 300
 go through fire, swear oaths to the gods—
 "I didn't do it, I had no hand in it either,
 not in the plotting, not the work itself!"

Finally, after all this wrangling came to nothing,
 one man spoke out and made us stare at the ground, 305
 hanging our heads in fear. No way to counter him,
 no way to take his advice and come through
 safe and sound. Here's what he said:
 "Look, we've got to report the facts to Creon,
 we can't keep this hidden." Well, that won out, 310
 and the lot fell to me, condemned me,
 unlucky as ever, I got the prize. So here I am,
 against my will and yours too, well I know—
 no one wants the man who brings bad news.

LEADER:

My king,
 ever since he began I've been debating in my mind, 315
 could this possibly be the work of the gods?

CREON:

Stop—
 before you make me choke with anger—the gods!
 You, you're senile, must you be insane?
 You say—why it's intolerable—say the gods 320
 could have the slightest concern for that corpse?
 Tell me, was it for meritorious service
 they proceeded to bury him, prized him so? The hero
 who came to burn their temples ringed with pillars,
 their golden treasures—scorch their hallowed earth
 and fling their laws to the winds. 325
 Exactly when did you last see the gods
 celebrating traitors? Inconceivable!

No, from the first there were certain citizens
 who could hardly stand the spirit of my regime,
 grumbling against me in the dark, heads together, 330
 tossing wildly, never keeping their necks beneath
 the yoke, loyally submitting to their king.
 These are the instigators, I'm convinced—
 they've perverted my own guard, bribed them
 to do their work.

Money! Nothing worse 335
 in our lives, so current, rampant, so corrupting.
 Money—you demolish cities, root men from their homes,
 you train and twist good minds and set them on
 to the most atrocious schemes. No limit,
 you make them adept at every kind of outrage, 340
 every godless crime—money!

Everyone—
 the whole crew bribed to commit this crime,
 they've made one thing sure at least:
 sooner or later they will pay the price.

Wheeling on the SENTRY.

You—

I swear to Zeus as I still believe in Zeus, 345
if you don't find the man who buried that corpse,
the very man, and produce him before my eyes,
simple death won't be enough for you,
not till we string you up alive
and wring the immorality out of you. 350
Then you can steal the rest of your days,
better informed about where to make a killing.
You'll have learned, at last, it doesn't pay
to itch for rewards from every hand that beckons.
Filthy profits wreck most men, you'll see— 355
they'll never save your life.

SENTRY:

Please,
may I say a word or two, or just turn and go?

CREON:

Can't you tell? Everything you say offends me.

SENTRY:

Where does it hurt you, in the ears or in the heart?

CREON:

And who are you to pinpoint my displeasure? 360

SENTRY:

The culprit grates on your feelings,
I just annoy your ears.

CREON:

Still talking?
You talk too much! A born nuisance—

SENTRY:

Maybe so,
but I never did this thing, so help me!

CREON:

Yes you did—
what's more, you squandered your life for silver! 365

SENTRY:

Oh it's terrible when the one who does the judging
judges things all wrong.

CREON:

Well now,
you just be clever about your judgments—
if you fail to produce the criminals for me,
you'll swear your dirty money brought you pain. 370

*Turning sharply, reentering
the palace.*

SENTRY:

I hope he's found. Best thing by far.
But caught or not, that's in the lap of fortune:
I'll never come back, you've seen the last of me.
I'm saved, even now, and I never thought,
I never hoped— 375
dear gods, I owe you all my thanks!

Rushing out.

CHORUS:

Numberless wonders
terrible wonders walk the world but none the match for man—
that great wonder crossing the heaving gray sea,
driven on by the blasts of winter
on through breakers crashing left and right, 380
holds his steady course
and the oldest of the gods he wears away—
the Earth, the immortal, the inexhaustible—
as his plows go back and forth, year in, year out
with the breed of stallions turning up the furrows. 385

And the blithe, lightheaded race of birds he snares,
the tribes of savage beasts, the life that swarms the depths—
with one fling of his nets
woven and coiled tight, he takes them all, 390
man the skilled, the brilliant!
He conquers all, taming with his techniques
the prey that roams the cliffs and wild lairs,
training the stallion, clamping the yoke across
his shaggy neck, and the tireless mountain bull.

And speech and thought, quick as the wind 395
and the mood and mind for law that rules the city—
all these he has taught himself
and shelter from the arrows of the frost
when there's rough lodging under the cold clear sky
and the shafts of lashing rain— 400
ready, resourceful man!

Never without resources
never an impasse as he marches on the future—
only Death, from Death alone he will find no rescue
but from desperate plagues he has plotted his escapes. 405

Man the master, ingenious past all measure
past all dreams, the skills within his grasp—
he forges on, now to destruction
now again to greatness. When he weaves in
the laws of the land, and the justice of the gods 410
that binds his oaths together
he and his city rise high—
but the city casts out
that man who weds himself to inhumanity
thanks to reckless daring. Never share my hearth 415
never think my thoughts, whoever does such things.



*Enter ANTIGONE from the side,
accompanied by the SENTRY.*

Here is a dark sign from the gods—
what to make of this? I know her,
how can I deny it? That young girl's Antigone!
Wretched, child of a wretched father, 420
Oedipus. Look, is it possible?
They bring you in like a prisoner—
why? did you break the king's laws?
Did they take you in some act of mad defiance?

SENTRY:
She's the one, she did it single-handed— 425
we caught her burying the body. Where's Creon?

Enter CREON from the palace.

LEADER:
Back again, just in time when you need him.

CREON:
In time for what? What is it?

SENTRY:
My king,
there's nothing you can swear you'll never do—
second thoughts make liars of us all. 430
I could have sworn I wouldn't hurry back
(what with your threats, the buffeting I just took),
but a stroke of luck beyond our wildest hopes,
what a joy, there's nothing like it. So,
back I've come, breaking my oath, who cares? 435
I'm bringing in our prisoner—this young girl—
we took her giving the dead the last rites.
But no casting lots this time; this is *my* luck,
my prize, no one else's.

Now, my lord,
here she is. Take her, question her, 440
cross-examine her to your heart's content.
But set me free, it's only right—
I'm rid of this dreadful business once for all.

CREON:
Prisoner! Her? You took her—where, doing what?

SENTRY:
Burying the man. That's the whole story.

CREON:
What? 445
You mean what you say, you're telling me the truth?

SENTRY:
She's the one. With my own eyes I saw her
bury the body, just what you've forbidden.
There. Is that plain and clear?

CREON:

What did you see? Did you catch her in the act? 450

SENTRY:

Here's what happened. We went back to our post,
those threats of yours breathing down our necks—
we brushed the corpse clean of the dust that covered it,
stripped it bare . . . it was slimy, going soft,
and we took to high ground, backs to the wind 455
so the stink of him couldn't hit us;

jostling, baiting each other to keep awake,
shouting back and forth—no napping on the job,
not this time. And so the hours dragged by
until the sun stood dead above our heads. 460

a huge white ball in the noon sky, beating,
blazing down, and then it happened—
suddenly, a whirlwind!

Twisting a great dust-storm up from the earth,
a black plague of the heavens, filling the plain. 465
ripping the leaves off every tree in sight,
choking the air and sky. We squinted hard
and took our whipping from the gods.

And after the storm passed—it seemed endless—
there, we saw the girl! 470

And she cried out a sharp, piercing cry,
like a bird come back to an empty nest,
peering into its bed, and all the babies gone . . .

Just so, when she sees the corpse bare
she bursts into a long, shattering wail 475
and calls down withering curses on the heads
of all who did the work. And she scoops up dry dust,
handfuls, quickly, and lifting a fine bronze urn,
lifting it high and pouring, she covers the dead
with three full libations.

Soon as we saw 480
we rushed her, closed on the kill like hunters,
and she, she didn't flinch. We interrogated her,
charging her with offenses past and present—
she stood up to it all, denied nothing. I tell you,
it made me ache and laugh in the same breath. 485
It's pure joy to escape the worst yourself,
it hurts a man to bring down his friends.
But all that, I'm afraid, means less to me
than my own skin. That's the way I'm made.

CREON:

Wheeling on ANTIGONE.

You, 490
with your eyes fixed on the ground—speak up.
Do you deny you did this, yes or no?

ANTIGONE:

I did it. I don't deny a thing.

CREON:

To the SENTRY.

You, get out, wherever you please—
you're clear of a very heavy charge.

*He leaves; CREON turns back to
ANTIGONE.*

You, tell me briefly, no long speeches— 495
were you aware a decree had forbidden this?

ANTIGONE:

Well aware. How could I avoid it? It was public.

CREON:

And still you had the gall to break this law?

ANTIGONE:

Of course I did. It wasn't Zeus, not in the least,
 who made this proclamation—not to me. 500
 Nor did that Justice, dwelling with the gods
 beneath the earth, ordain such laws for men.
 Nor did I think your edict had such force
 that you, a mere mortal, could override the gods,
 the great unwritten, unshakable traditions. 505
 They are alive, not just today or yesterday:
 they live forever, from the first of time,
 and no one knows when they first saw the light.

These laws—I was not about to break them,
 not out of fear of some man's wounded pride, 510
 and face the retribution of the gods.
 Die I must, I've known it all my life—
 how could I keep from knowing?—even without
 your death-sentence ringing in my ears.
 And if I am to die before my time 515
 I consider that a gain. Who on earth,
 alive in the midst of so much grief as I,
 could fail to find his death a rich reward?
 So for me, at least, to meet this doom of yours
 is precious little pain. But if I had allowed 520
 my own mother's son to rot, an unburied corpse—
 that would have been an agony! This is nothing.
 And if my present actions strike you as foolish,
 let's just say I've been accused of folly
 by a fool.

LEADER:

Like father like daughter, 525
 passionate, wild . . .
 she hasn't learned to bend before adversity.

CREON:

No? Believe me, the stiffest stubborn wills
 fall the hardest; the toughest iron,
 tempered strong in the white-hot fire, 530
 you'll see it crack and shatter first of all.
 And I've known spirited horses you can break
 with a light bit—proud, rebellious horses.
 There's no room for pride, not in a slave,
 not with the lord and master standing by. 535

This girl was an old hand at insolence
 when she overrode the edicts we made public.
 But once she had done it—the insolence,
 twice over—to glory in it, laughing,
 mocking us to our face with what she'd done. 540
 I am not the man, not now: she is the man
 if this victory goes to her and she goes free.

Never! Sister's child or closer in blood
 than all my family clustered at my altar
 worshipping Guardian Zeus—she'll never escape, 545
 she and her blood sister, the most barbaric death.
 Yes, I accuse her sister of an equal part
 in scheming this, this burial.

To his attendants.

Bring her here!
 I just saw her inside, hysterical, gone to pieces.
 It never fails: the mind convicts itself 550
 in advance, when scoundrels are up to no good,
 plotting in the dark. Oh but I hate it more
 when a traitor, caught red-handed,
 tries to glorify his crimes.

ANTIGONE:

Creon, what more do you want 555
 than my arrest and execution?

CREON:

Nothing. Then I have it all.

ANTIGONE:

Then why delay? Your moralizing repels me,
every word you say—pray god it always will.
So naturally all I say repels you too.

Enough.

560

Give me glory! What greater glory could I win
than to give my own brother decent burial?
These citizens here would all agree,

To the CHORUS.

they would praise me too
if their lips weren't locked in fear.

565

Pointing to CREON.

Lucky tyrants—the perquisites of power!
Ruthless power to do and say whatever pleases *them*.

CREON:

You alone, of all the people in Thebes,
see things that way.

ANTIGONE:

They see it just that way
but defer to you and keep their tongues in leash.

570

CREON:

And you, aren't you ashamed to differ so from them?
So disloyal!

ANTIGONE:

Not ashamed for a moment,
not to honor my brother, my own flesh and blood.

CREON:

Wasn't Eteocles a brother too—cut down, facing him?

ANTIGONE:

Brother, yes, by the same mother, the same father.

575

CREON:

Then how can you render his enemy such honors,
such impieties in his eyes?

ANTIGONE:

He will never testify to that,
Eteocles dead and buried.

CREON:

He will—

if you honor the traitor just as much as him.

580

ANTIGONE:

But it was his brother, not some slave that died—

CREON:

Ravaging our country!—
but Eteocles died fighting in our behalf.

ANTIGONE:

No matter—Death longs for the same rites for all.

CREON:

Never the same for the patriot and the traitor.

585

ANTIGONE:

Who, Creon, who on earth can say the ones below
don't find this pure and uncorrupt?

CREON:

Never. Once an enemy, never a friend,
not even after death.

ANTIGONE:

I was born to join in love, not hate—
that is my nature. 590

CREON:

Go down below and love,
if love you must—love the dead! While I'm alive,
no woman is going to lord it over me.

*Enter ISMENE from the palace,
under guard.*

CHORUS:

Look,
Ismene's coming, weeping a sister's tears,
loving sister, under a cloud . . . 595
her face is flushed, her cheeks streaming.
Sorrow puts her lovely radiance in the dark.

CREON:

You—
in my own house, you viper, slinking undetected,
sucking my life-blood! I never knew
I was breeding twin disasters, the two of you 600
rising up against my throne. Come, tell me,
will you confess your part in the crime or not?
Answer me. Swear to me.

ISMENE:

I did it, yes—
if only she consents—I share the guilt,
the consequences too.

ANTIGONE:

No, 605
Justice will never suffer that—not you,
you were unwilling. I never brought you in.

ISMENE:

But now you face such dangers . . . I'm not ashamed
to sail through trouble with you,
make your troubles mine.

ANTIGONE:

Who did the work? 610
Let the dead and the god of death bear witness!
I have no love for a friend who loves in words alone.

ISMENE:

Oh no, my sister, don't reject me, please,
let me die beside you, consecrating
the dead together.

ANTIGONE:

Never share my dying, 615
don't lay claim to what you never touched.
My death will be enough.

ISMENE:

What do I care for life, cut off from you?

ANTIGONE:

Ask Creon. Your concern is all for him.

ISMENE:

Why abuse me so? It doesn't help you now.

ANTIGONE:

You're right— 620

if I mock you, I get no pleasure from it,
only pain.

ISMENE:

Tell me, dear one,
what can I do to help you, even now?

ANTIGONE:

Save yourself. I don't grudge you your survival.

ISMENE:

Oh no, no, denied my portion in your death? 625

ANTIGONE:

You chose to live, I chose to die.

ISMENE:

Not, at least,
without every kind of caution I could voice.

ANTIGONE:

Your wisdom appealed to one world—mine, another.

ISMENE:

But look, we're both guilty, both condemned to death.

ANTIGONE:

Courage! Live your life. I gave myself to death, 630
long ago, so I might serve the dead.

CREON:

They're both mad, I tell you, the two of them.
One's just shown it, the other's been that way
since she was born.

ISMENE:

True, my king,
the sense we were born with cannot last forever . . . 635
commit cruelty on a person long enough
and the mind begins to go.

CREON:

Yours did,
when you chose to commit your crimes with her.

ISMENE:

How can I live alone, without her?

CREON:

Her?
Don't even mention her—she no longer exists. 640

ISMENE:

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

CREON:

Absolutely:
there are other fields for him to plow.

ISMENE:

Perhaps,
but never as true, as close a bond as theirs.

CREON:

A worthless woman for my son? It repels me.

ISMENE:

Dearest Haemon, your father wrongs you so! 645

CREON:

Enough, enough—you and your talk of marriage!

ISMENE:

Creon—you're really going to rob your son of Antigone?

CREON:

Death will do it for me—break their marriage off.

LEADER:

So, it's settled then? Antigone must die?

CREON:

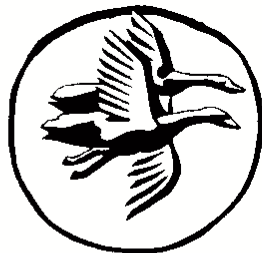
Settled, yes—we both know that.

650

To the guards.

Stop wasting time. Take them in.
 From now on they'll act like women.
 Tie them up, no more running loose;
 even the bravest will cut and run,
 once they see Death coming for their lives.

655



*The guards escort ANTIGONE and
 ISMENE into the palace. CREON
 remains while the old citizens form
 their CHORUS.*

CHORUS:

Blest, they are the truly blest who all their lives
 have never tasted devastation. For others, once
 the gods have rocked a house to its foundations
 the ruin will never cease, cresting on and on
 from one generation on throughout the race—

660

like a great mounting tide
 driven on by savage northern gales,
 surging over the dead black depths
 roiling up from the bottom dark heaves of sand
 and the headlands, taking the storm's onslaught full-force,
 roar, and the low moaning

665

echoes on and on

and now

as in ancient times I see the sorrows of the house,
 the living heirs of the old ancestral kings,
 piling on the sorrows of the dead
 and one generation cannot free the next—
 some god will bring them crashing down,
 the race finds no release.

670

And now the light, the hope

springing up from the late last root
 in the house of Oedipus, that hope's cut down in turn
 by the long, bloody knife swung by the gods of death
 by a senseless word

675

by fury at the heart.