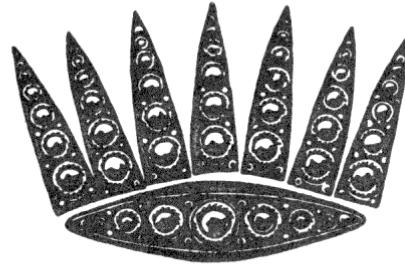


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SOPHOCLES  
THE THREE  
THEBAN PLAYS  
ANTIGONE · OEDIPUS THE KING  
OEDIPUS AT COLONUS



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,  
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.  
What, haven't you heard? Don't you see?  
The doom reserved for enemies  
marches on the ones we love the most.

5

10

15

ISMENE:

Not I, I haven't heard a word, Antigone.  
Nothing of loved ones,  
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,  
whether our luck's improved or ruin's still to come.

(dwell)

20

**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.

60

65

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.

70

75

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.

80



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.

85

90

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.

95

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 105  
I will be done at last.

**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.  
But leave me to my own absurdity, leave me  
to suffer this—dreadful thing. I will suffer  
nothing as great as death without glory. 110

*Exit to the side.*

**ISMENE:**

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

*Withdrawning 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,  
rushing to shout his triumph from our walls. 145

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

mad for attack, ecstatic  
*(Baenkt)*

he breathed his rage, the storm  
of his fury hurling at our heads!

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.

150

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,  
one father, one mother—matched in rage,  
spears matched for the twin conquest—  
clashed and won the common prize of death.

160

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 . . .  
what new plan will he launch?  
Why this, this special session?  
Why this sudden call to the old men  
summoned at one command?

175

CREON:

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

180

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.  
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,  
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.

185

190

Of course you cannot know a man completely,  
his character, his principles, sense of judgment,  
not till he's shown his colors, ruling the people,  
making laws. Experience, there's the test.

195

As I see it, whoever assumes the task,  
the awesome task of setting the city's course,  
and refuses to adopt the soundest policies  
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,  
Zeus who sees all things, always—

200

205

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,  
just now, the following decree to our people  
concerning the two sons of Oedipus.

215

Eteocles, who died fighting for Thebes,  
excelling all in arms: he shall be buried,  
crowned with a hero's honors, the cups we pour  
to soak the earth and reach the famous dead.

220

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  
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.

225

No, he must be left unburied, his corpse  
carrión for the birds and dogs to tear,  
an obscenity for the citizens to behold!

230

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,  
be on your guard.

240

**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?

245

**CREON:**

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

**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?  
What man alive would dare— 280

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,  
the workman left no trace. Just at sunup 285  
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,  
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. 290

But what came next! Rough talk flew thick and fast,  
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,  
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!”

295

300

Finally, after all this wrangling came to nothing,  
one man spoke out and made us stare at the ground,  
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,  
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.

305

310

LEADER:

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

315

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  
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.  
Exactly when did you last see the gods  
celebrating traitors? Inconceivable!

320

325

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,  
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.

330

Money! Nothing worse  
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,  
every godless crime—money!

335

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.

340

*Wheeling on the SENTRY.*

You—

I swear to Zeus as I still believe in Zeus,  
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. 345  
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—  
they'll never save your life. 355

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—  
dear gods, I owe you all my thanks! 375

*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,  
man the skilled, the brilliant! 390

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  
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—

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  
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  
never think my thoughts, whoever does such things. 415



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

460

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

465

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  
 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 crowns the dead  
 with three full libations.

475

Soon as we saw  
 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.  
 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.

480

485

CREON:

*Wheeling on ANTIGONE.*

You,

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

490

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—  
 were you aware a decree had forbidden this?

495

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,  
and face the retribution of the gods.

510

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  
my own mother's son to rot, an unburied corpse—  
that would have been an agony! This is nothing.

520

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,  
you'll see it crack and shatter first of all.

530

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.  
I am not the man, not now: she is the man  
if this victory goes to her and she goes free.

540

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

545

*To his attendants.*

Bring her here!  
I just saw her inside, hysterical, gone to pieces.  
It never fails: the mind convicts itself  
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.

550

**ANTIGONE:**

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

555

**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.

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 . . .  
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  
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.

590

595

600

ANTIGONE:

No,  
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?  
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,  
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.

605

610

615

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,  
long ago, so I might serve the dead. 630

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 . . .  
commit cruelty on a person long enough  
and the mind begins to go. 635

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!

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—  
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

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.

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

by fury at the heart.

660

665

670

675