

Sophocles

Antigone

Translated,
with Introduction and Notes, by

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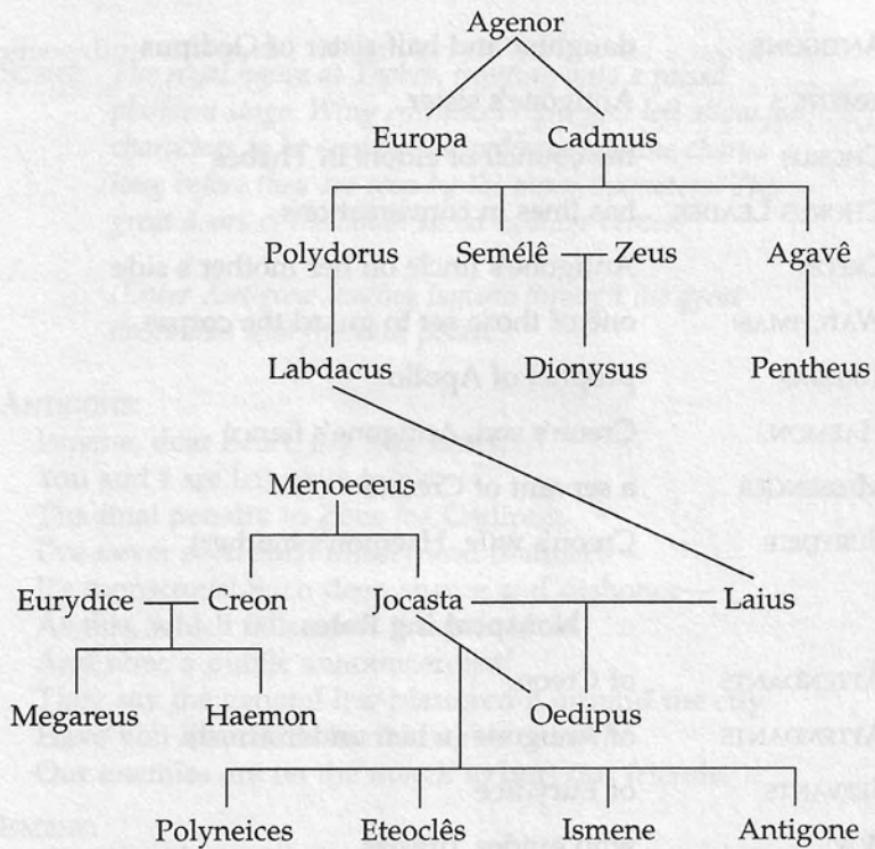
Cast of Characters

ANTIGONE	daughter and half-sister of Oedipus
ISMENE	Antigone's sister
CHORUS	the council of elders in Thebes
CHORUS LEADER	has lines in conversations
CREON	Antigone's uncle on her mother's side
WATCHMAN	one of those set to guard the corpse
TIRESIAS	prophet of Apollo
HAEMON	Creon's son, Antigone's fiancé
MESSENGER	a servant of Creon's
EURYDICE	Creon's wife, Haemon's mother

Nonspeaking Roles

ATTENDANTS	of Creon
ATTENDANTS	of Antigone (when under arrest)
SERVANTS	of Eurydice
BOY	who guides Tiresias

Theban Royal Family Tree



Antigone

SCENE: *The royal house at Thebes, fronting onto a raised platform stage. Wing entrances right and left allow for characters to be seen by the audience and the chorus long before they are seen by the main characters. The great doors of the house stand upstage center.*

(Enter Antigone leading Ismene through the great doors that lead from the palace.)

ANTIGONE:

Ismene, dear heart, my true sister:
You and I are left alive to pay
The final penalty to Zeus for Oedipus.
I've never seen such misery and madness—
It's monstrous! Such deep shame and dishonor—
As this, which falls upon the pair of us.
And now, a public announcement!
They say the general has plastered it around the city.
Have you heard this terrible news or not?
Our enemies are on the march to hurt our friends.

5

10

ISMENE:

No, Antigone, I have had no news of friends,
Nothing sweet or painful, since the day
We lost our brothers, both of us, on one day,
Both brothers dead by their two hands.
Last night the army that came from Argos

15

10: By "friends" Antigone means her brother Polyneices, who is her friend, come what may, because he is part of her immediate family. But who are her enemies? As I understand her, Antigone is revealing that she has already identified Creon as the enemy. See endnote for alternative readings.

14-15: The two brothers, Eteoclès and Polyneices, had planned to take turns ruling Thebes; but Eteoclès refused to give Polyneices his time on the throne. An army came from Argos in support of Polyneices' claim and

Disappeared, and after that I don't know
Anything that could bring me happiness—or despair.

ANTIGONE:

I knew it! That's the whole reason
I brought you outside—to hear the news alone.

ISMENE:

20 Tell me. You're as clear as a fog at sea.

ANTIGONE:

It's the burial of our two brothers. Creon
Promotes one of them and shames the other.
Eteocles—I heard Creon covered him beneath
The earth with proper rites, as law ordains,
25 So he has honor down among the dead.
But Polyneices' miserable corpse—
They say Creon has proclaimed to everyone:
"No Burial of any kind. No wailing, no public tears.
Give him to the vultures, unwept, unburied,
30 To be a sweet treasure for their sharp eyes and beaks."
That's what they say the good Creon has proclaimed
To you. And me. He forbids me, too.
And now he's strutting here to make it plain
To those who haven't heard—he takes
35 This seriously—that if anyone does what he forbids
He'll have him publicly stoned to death.
There's your news. Now, show your colors:
Are you true to your birth? Or a coward?

ISMENE:

40 You take things hard. If we are in this noose,
What could I do to loosen or pull tight the knot?

ANTIGONE:

If you share the work and trouble . . .

was defeated at the seven gates of the city. The two brothers killed each other. Argos, in the northeast corner of Peloponnesus, was seen as an enemy of Thebes.

21: "Creon"—In her breathless haste, Antigone frequently starts a thought just before the end of a line.

25: See Introduction, p. x on burial rites.

ISMENE:

In what dangerous adventure?

ANTIGONE:

If you help this hand raise the corpse . . . (*Indicating her own hand*)

ISMENE:

Do you mean to bury him? Against the city's ordinance?

ANTIGONE:

But he is mine. And yours. Like it or not, he's our brother.
They'll never catch me betraying him.

45

ISMENE:

How horrible! When Creon forbids it?

ANTIGONE:

He has no right to keep me from my own.

ISMENE:

Oh no! Think carefully, my sister.

Our father died in hatred and disgrace

50

After gouging out his own two eyes

For sins he'd seen in his own self.

Next, his mother and wife—she was both—

Destroyed herself in a knotted rope.

And, third, our two brothers on one day

55

Killed each other in a terrible calamity,

Which they had created for each other.

Now think about the two of us. We are alone.

How horrible it will be to die outside the law,

If we violate a dictator's decree!

60

No. We have to keep this fact in mind:

We are women and we do not fight with men.

We're subject to them because they're stronger,

And we must obey this order, even if it hurts us more.

As for me, I will say to those beneath the earth

65

This prayer: "Forgive me, I am held back by force."

And I'll obey the men in charge. My mind

Will never aim too high, too far.

ANTIGONE:

I won't press you any further. I wouldn't even let
You help me if you had a change of heart.

70

Go on and *be* the way you choose to be.
 Will bury him. I will have a noble death
 And lie with him, a dear sister with a dear brother.
 Call it a crime of reverence, but I must be good to those
 Who are below. I will be there longer than with you.
 That's where I will lie. You, keep to your choice:
 Go on insulting what the gods hold dear.

ISMENE:

I am not insulting anyone. By my very nature
 I cannot possibly take arms against the city.

ANTIGONE:

80 Go on, make excuses. I am on my way.
 I'll heap the earth upon my dearest brother's grave.

ISMENE:

Oh no! This is horrible for you. I am so worried!

ANTIGONE:

Don't worry about me. Put your own life straight.

ISMENE:

Please don't tell a soul what you are doing.

85 Keep it hidden. I'll do the same.

ANTIGONE:

For god's sake, speak out. You'll be more enemy to me
 If you are silent. Proclaim it to the world!

ISMENE:

Your heart's so hot to do this chilling thing!

ANTIGONE:

But it pleases those who matter most.

ISMENE:

90 Yes, if you had the power. But you love the impossible.

ANTIGONE:

So? When my strength is gone, I'll stop.

89: "Those who matter most"—the dead, or the gods of the dead.

90: "You love the impossible"—more accurately, perhaps, "You long for the impossible." But the verb is the same as the one used for sexual love. On Antigone's love, see Introduction, p. xviii.

ISMENE:

But it's the highest wrong to chase after what's impossible.

ANTIGONE:

When you say this, you set yourself against me.
 Your brother will take you to him—as his enemy.
 So you just let me and my 'bad judgment'
 Go to hell. Nothing could happen to me
 That's half as bad as dying a coward's death.

(*Exit Antigone toward the plain, through the stage left wing.*)

ISMENE:

Then follow your judgment, go. You've lost your mind,
 But you are holding to the love of your loved ones.

(*Exit Ismene through the great doors into the palace,
 as the chorus enter from the city, stage right wing.*)

CHORUS:

Parodos (Entry-song)

[Strophe a]

Let us praise the Sun:
 These brilliant beams
 Shine glory never seen before in Thebes,
 Our City of Seven Gates.
 O bright eye of golden day!
 You came striding over River Dirkê,
 And the White Shield of Argos ran away.
 He has fled,
 Man and weapon racing from your light,
 On sharpened spur.

He was roused against our land

100

105

110

100: "Let us praise the Sun"—See Introduction, p. xxiv on this choral passage.

105: Dirkê is one of the rivers of Thebes.

106: "White Shield of Argos"—the army of Argos.

For a fight that Polyneices, haggling, picked.
 And, like a screaming eagle,
 He dropped on our land:
 The shadow of his white-snow wing—
 A multitude of armored men,
 Helmets crested with horsehair.

[Antistrophe *a*]

He stooped over our homes,
 Mouth gaping wide for the kill,
 He engulfed our Seven Gates with spears of death;
 120 But he has gone,
 Gone before plunging his beak in our blood,
 Gone before torching our crown of towers
 With the flames of Hephaestus.
 For behind his back there arose too loud
 125 The clamor of war;
 His dragon-foe was too strong for him.

Zeus hates an arrogant boast,
 With towering hatred.
 He saw the river of men attack,
 130 Their golden armor clashing in contempt,
 And so he struck the man down with a missile of fire
 As he swooped toward his highest goal,
 Eager to shout "Victory!"

[Strophe *b*]

He crashed to the ground
 135 Like a weight slung down in an arc of fire,
 This man who had swooped like a dancer in ecstasy,
 Breathing hurricanes of hatred.

111: Polyneices—The chorus pun on the meaning of the young man's name, "much-quarreling."

126: "Dragon-foe"—The people of Thebes believed that they were descended from men who grew from the teeth of a dragon slain by Cadmus.

131-40: These lines refer to the attacker who boasts too much; according to the legend, this was an Argive named Kapaneus.

But his threats came to nothing:
 The mighty war god, fighting beside us,
 Swept them aside.

140

Seven captains at seven gates,
 Matched with seven defenders,
 All left trophies for Zeus the protector
 (They took off their armor and ran).
 Except for a savage pair, full brothers:
 Their two spears stand upright, conquering,
 Each in the other's dead breast.

145

[Antistrophe b]

Now Victory is ours,
 Great be her name! Now Thebes rejoices.
 Therefore let us forget our pain.
 The war is over: let us dance all night,
 Fill all the sacred precincts with joy:
 We must now be ruled by Bacchus,
 Dance-master of Thebes.

150

(Enter Creon through the great doors.)

CHORUS:

Here is the king of our land
 Creon, the son of Menoeceus,
 Our new ruler given us by chance and the gods.
 What plan has he been churning over on his way?
 Why has he summoned us—
 The council of elders—
 By public announcement?

155

160

CREON:

Gentlemen, the city is safe again, we may thank the gods:
 After a great upheaval, they have rescued Thebes.
 You are here because I chose you from the whole crowd

156: "Creon, the son of Menoeceus"—See Theban Royal Family Tree, p. xxxi.

157: "Our new ruler"—Creon is not altogether new, since he was the regent for Oedipus' sons. See line 289 with note.

- 165 And summoned you by escort. You always showed
respect
For Laius' power when he held the throne,
And the same again for Oedipus, when he rescued Thebes.
After he died I know you stood by their sons;
You were always there with good advice.
- 170 Now they are dead, both on one day;
Each stabbed the other and was stabbed.
Brother struck brother, and the blows were cursed.
- So now the throne and all the power in Thebes are mine,
Because I am closest kin to those who died.
- 175 No man has a mind that can be fully known,
In character or judgment, till he rules and makes law;
Only then can he be tested in the public eye.
I believe that if anyone tries to run a city
On the basis of bad policies and holds his tongue
180 Because he's afraid to say what is right,
That man is terrible. So I have always thought.
But it's even worse when he plays favorites,
Puts family or friends ahead of fatherland.
As for me—I call to witness all-seeing Zeus—
185 I will never hold my tongue about what I see
When ruin is afoot or the city is not safe.
I will never call a man my friend
If he is hostile to this land. I know this well:
The city is our lifeboat: we have no friends at all
190 Unless we keep her sailing right side up.
Such are my laws. By them I'll raise this city high.
- And I have just announced a twin sister of those laws,
To all the citizens, concerning Oedipus' sons:

165: "You always showed respect"—The same word covers "reverence" and is used with that broader sense elsewhere in the play. See lines 744–5 with note.

168: "You stood by their sons"—The plural "their" in the Greek is startling. We do not know whether it refers to Oedipus and Laius or to Oedipus and Jocasta. See endnote.

175–6: Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 5.1, "Ruling shows what a man is."

Eteoclēs fought for the city, and for it he died,
After everyfeat of heroism with his spear.
He shall be sanctified by every burial rite
That is given to the most heroic dead below.

195

As for his blood brother, Polyneices by name,
He broke his exile, he came back hungry for our blood,
He wanted to burn his fatherland and family gods
Down from the top. He wanted to lead his people—
Into slavery. This man will have no grave:
It is forbidden to offer any funeral rites;
No one in Thebes may bury him or mourn for him.
He must be left unburied. May birds and dogs
Feed on his limbs, a spectacle of utter shame.

200

Such is the character of my mind: Never, while I rule,
Will a criminal be honored higher than a man of justice.
But give me a true friend of this city
And I will pay him full honor, in death or life.

205

210

CHORUS:

That is your decision, son of Menoeceus,
As to the one who meant our city well
And the one who meant it ill. It's up to you:
Make any law you want—for the dead, or for us who live.

CREON:

Now, look after my commands. I insist.

215

CHORUS:

Ask someone younger to take up the task.

CREON:

No, no. I have men already watching the corpse.

CHORUS:

Then what's left for us to do? What are your orders?

CREON:

That you do not side with anyone who disobeys.

215–6: Creon meant "see that my commands are obeyed," but the chorus understood "watch over the corpse."

CHORUS:

220 No one is foolish enough to ask for death.

CREON:

Right. That would be their reward. But hope—
And bribery—often have led men to destruction.

(Enter Watchman from the stage left wing.)

WATCHMAN:

Sir, I am here. I can't say I am out of breath.

I have not exactly been "running on light feet."

225 I halted many times along the road so I could think,
And I almost turned around and marched right back.

My mind kept talking to me. It said, "You poor guy,
Why are you going there? You'll just get your ass kicked."

230 Then it said, "Are you stopping again, you damn fool?
If Creon hears this from another man, he'll give you hell."

235 It doesn't amount to much, but I might as well give it,
Because I won't let go this handful of hope

CREON:

What is it, man—where's your courage?

WATCHMAN:

First, I want to tell you where I stand:

I didn't do this thing, and I don't know who did,

240 And it wouldn't be fair if I got hurt.

CREON:

All right, your defense perimeter is up.

Now, let's have your report.

WATCHMAN:

It's terrible news. I can't come right out with that.

224: "Running on light feet"—An audience would normally expect a messenger to arrive gasping and out of breath. This one consciously flouts convention. The passage corroborates Haemon's claim, line 690 and following, that people are afraid to tell the truth to Creon.

CREON:

Speak up! And then get lost.

WATCHMAN:

OK, here it is. The body out there—someone buried it
Just now and went away. They spread thirsty dust
All over the skin and did the ceremony in full.

245

CREON:

What? No man would dare! Who did it?

WATCHMAN:

I don't know. The ground was so hard and dry.
It showed no marks. No spade scratches,
No pickaxe holes, not even chariot ruts.
The perpetrator had not left a single clue.
When the first day-watchman showed it to us,
We were all amazed. It was incredible:
The guy had vanished. There was no tomb,
Only fine dust lying over the body, enough to take
The curse away. No sign of wild animals,
No dogs sniffing or tugging at the corpse.

250

255

We burst out shouting at each other;
Everyone was hurling accusations.
We kept coming to blows, no one to stop us.
Any one of us could have done the thing.
No one caught red-handed, everyone pled ignorance.
We were about to test each other with red-hot iron
Or run our hands through fire and swear by all the gods:
"I didn't do it, and I had no part in any plot
To do it, not with anyone else, not by hand or word."
Well, we weren't getting anywhere, and in the end
Someone told us to do a thing we couldn't see how
To refuse or accept. So we dropped heads, stared at the
ground

260

265

In fear. There was no way it would turn out good for us.
We simply had to bring word to you,
Because we could not hide a thing like this.

270

255: "The guy had vanished"—The subject of this sentence probably is the corpse of Polyneices.

275 We voted to do it, and I am so damned unlucky
 I won the lottery to have this lovely job.
 I didn't want to come. And you sure didn't want to see me:
 No one loves the man who brings bad news.

CHORUS: (*To Creon.*)

You know, sir, as soon as I heard, it came to me:
 Somehow the gods are behind this piece of work.

CREON: (*To the chorus leader.*)

280 Stop right there, before I'm gorged with rage!
 You want to prove that you're as stupid as you are old?
 It's totally unacceptable, what you said about the gods—
 That they could have a caring thought for this man's corpse.
 You think they buried him for his good deeds?
 285 To give him highest honor? They know he came with fire
 To burn down their fine-columned shrines, their land,
 Their store of treasure—and to blow their laws away.
 Have you ever seen a criminal honored by the gods?
 Not possible.

290 But some *men* here have always champed,
 Like surf, against my orders, and obeyed me, if at all,
 Without cheer. They shake their heads when I'm not
 looking,
 Pull out of the yoke of justice, and are not content with me.
 They are the ones, I'm absolutely sure, who used bribes
 To lead our watchmen astray, into this crime.

295 Money is the nastiest weed ever to sprout
 In human soil. Money will ravage a city,
 Tear men from their homes and send them into exile.
 Money teaches good minds to go bad;
 It is the source of every shameful human deed.
 300 Money points the way to wickedness,

289: "Some *men* here have always champed"—The line suggests that Creon has been ruling for a long time. See line 157, with notes, and Introduction, p. xix.

292: "The yoke of justice"—With this powerful and undemocratic image, Creon speaks of holding his citizens to justice as he would of breaking animals to the yoke.

Lets people know the full range of irreverence.
 But those who committed this crime for hire
 Have set themselves a penalty, which, in time, they'll pay.

(To the Watchman.)

Now listen here. So long as I am reverent to Zeus
 I am under oath, and you can be absolutely sure
 That if you don't find the hand behind this burial
 And bring him so I can see him with my own eyes,
 Death alone will not be good enough for you—
 Not till I've stretched you with ropes and you confess
 To this outrageous crime. That will teach you
 Where to look to make a profit. And you will learn:
 Never accept money from just anyone who comes along.
 Those who take from a source that is wicked, you'll see,
 Are ruined far more often than saved.

305

310

WATCHMAN:

Permission to speak, sir? Or about face and go?

315

CREON:

Don't you see how badly your report annoyed me?

WATCHMAN:

So where's it biting you? On your ears or in your mind?

CREON:

What's it to you? Why should you analyze my pain?

WATCHMAN:

If it hurts your mind, blame the perpetrator.

If it's only your ears, blame me.

CREON:

Damn it, man, will you never stop babbling?

320

WATCHMAN:

Well, at least I never did the thing.

CREON:

Yes, you did. And for money! You gave up your life!

WATCHMAN:

Oh no, no, no.

It's terrible when false judgment guides the judge.

CREON:

All right, play with the word 'judgment.' But you'd better catch

325 The man who did this thing or I'll have proof:
You men ruined your miserable lives to make a profit!

(Creon turns and exits through the great doors to the palace.)

WATCHMAN:

We'll find him. You'd better believe it.
But if we don't—you know, if he gets lucky—
No way you'll ever see me coming back to you.
As it is, this has gone better than I expected—
I'm still alive, thanks be to the gods.

(Exit Watchman toward the plain, through the stage left wing.)

First Stasimon

CHORUS:

[Strophe a]

Many wonders, many terrors,
But none more wonderful than the human race
Or more dangerous.

335 This creature travels on a winter gale
Across the silver sea,
Shadowed by high-surgeing waves,
While on Earth, grandest of the gods,
He grinds the deathless, tireless land away,

332-75: First Stasimon—See Introduction, p. xxiv.

332: "Many wonders, many terrors" (*polla ta deina*)—A word-for-word translation would be "Many things are wonderful-terrible, but none is more so than a human being." The word *deinon* is used of things that are awe-inspiring in both good and bad ways. I have rendered this double meaning by using "wonder," "terror," and "dangerous" in the opening lines.

339: "Grinds the . . . land away"—The Greek verb implies that he does this for his benefit.

Turning and turning the plow
From year to year, behind driven horses.

340

[Antistrophe a]

Light-headed birds he catches
And takes them away in legions. Wild beasts
Also fall prey to him.

345

And all that is born to live beneath the sea
Is thrashing in his woven nets.
For he is Man, and he is cunning.
He has invented ways to take control
Of beasts that range mountain meadows:
Taken down the shaggy-necked horses,
The tireless mountain bulls,
And put them under the yoke.

350

[Strophe b]

Language and a mind swift as the wind
For making plans—
These he has taught himself—
And the character to live in cities under law.
He's learned to take cover from a frost
And escape sharp arrows of sleet.
He has the means to handle every need,
Never steps toward the future without the means.

355

360

347: "Man"—The ode begins at line 333 with the generic "human," but here the male of the species is plainly indicated. The quarrel between a man and a woman that lies at the heart of the play is in the background; Greek men of this period frequently used images of taming and controlling animals for the relation between the sexes.

348: "Ways to take control"—The Greek word is used for conquest or the illegitimate rule of a tyrant.

352: "Yoke"—This word too is politically charged. See line 292 with note.

357: "The character to live in cities"—Literally, the untranslated phrase indicates the emotions that give order to cities. Probably the line refers to such virtues as reverence, justice, and a sense of shame, all of which civic life was widely thought to depend upon. See Plato's *Protagoras* 322c-d. But the word translated "character" can also mean "anger," as at line 875.

Except for Death: He's got himself no relief from that,
 Though he puts every mind to seeking cures
 For plagues that are hopeless.

[Antistrophe b]

- 365 He has cunning contrivance,
 Skill surpassing hope,
 And so he slithers into wickedness sometimes,
 Other times into doing good.
 370 If he honors the law of the land
 And the oath-bound justice of the gods,
 Then his city shall stand high.
 But no city for him if he turns shameless out of daring.
 He will be no guest of mine,
 He will never share my thoughts,
 375 If he goes wrong.

(Enter Watchman leading Antigone through the stage left wing.)

CHORUS:

Monstrous! What does this mean?
 Are gods behind it? I don't know what to think:
 Isn't this Antigone? I can't deny it.
 You miserable child of misery,
 380 Daughter of Oedipus,
 What have you done?
 Is it you they arrested?
 Are you so foolish?
 So disloyal to the laws of kings?

WATCHMAN:

Yes, she's the one that did the burial.
 385 We caught her in the act. Hey, where's Creon?

(Enter Creon through the great doors.)

CHORUS:

Here he is. Coming back from the palace.

376: "Monstrous"—The word refers to anything so foreign to common experience that it may be taken as a special omen from the gods.

CREON:

What's all this? Lucky I turned up now.

WATCHMAN:

Sir, there's no point swearing oaths if you're a mortal.

Second thoughts make any plan look bad.

I swore I'd never come to you again

390

Because those threats of yours gave me the shakes.

But you know: "Joy beyond hope

Surpasses every other pleasure."

I've come, though I swore on oath I wouldn't.

And I've brought this girl, arrested her at the grave

395

When she was tidying it up. No lottery this time.

The windfall's mine and no one else's.

Now it's up to you. Take her, question her,

Make your judgment. As for me,

The right thing is to let me off scot-free.

400

CREON:

Circumstances under which you arrested her? Location?

WATCHMAN:

She was burying that man. Now you know it all.

CREON:

Do you honestly know what you are saying?

WATCHMAN:

Well, I saw this girl burying the dead body.

The one you put off-limits. Clear enough for you?

405

CREON:

How did you see this? Caught her in the act?

WATCHMAN:

It was like this. We went back to the body

After all your terrible threats,

And we brushed off the dust that covered it,

So as to make the rotting corpse properly naked.

410

Then we settled down on the hill,

Upwind, so the stink wouldn't hit us.

We kept awake by yelling insults

At each other when a slacker nodded off.

That went on for a long time, till the sun

415

Stood bright in the center of the sky.
 And we were really getting cooked. Then,
 Suddenly, a tornado struck. It raised dust
 All over the plain, grief to high heaven.
 420 It thrashed the low-lying woods with terror
 And filled the whole wide sky. We shut our eyes
 And held out against this plague from the gods.

After a long while it lifted, and then we saw the girl.
 She gave a shrill cry like a bird when she sees her nest
 425 Empty, and the bed deserted where her nestlings had lain.
 That was how she was when she saw the corpse uncovered.
 She cried out in mourning, and she called down
 Curses on whoever had done this thing.
 Right away she spread thirsty dust with her hands,
 430 Then poured the three libations from a vessel of fine bronze.
 And so she crowned the corpse with honor.

As soon as we spotted her, we started to run.
 She showed no fear; it was easy to catch her.
 Then we questioned her about her past and present actions.
 435 She did not deny a single thing.
 For me, that was sweet, and agonizing, too.
 It's a great joy to be out of trouble,
 But bringing trouble on your friends is agony.
 Still I don't mind that so much. It's nature's way
 440 For me to put my own survival first.

CREON:

You there! With your head bowed to the ground—
 Are you guilty? Or do you deny that you did this thing?

ANTIGONE:

Of course not. I did it. I won't deny anything.

CREON: (*To the Watchman.*)

You're dismissed. Take yourself where you please;
 445 You're a free man, no serious charge against you.

419: "Grief to high heaven"—The phrase may mean "high as the sky."

430: The libations, pouring wine from a ceremonial vessel, form an essential part of ancient Greek burial ritual.

(To Antigone.)

As for you, tell me—in brief, not at length—
Did you know that this had been forbidden?

ANTIGONE:

I knew. I couldn't help knowing. It was everywhere.

CREON:

And yet you dared to violate these laws?

ANTIGONE:

What laws? I never heard it was Zeus
Who made that announcement. 450
And it wasn't justice, either. The gods below
Didn't lay down this law for human use.
And I never thought your announcements
Could give you—a mere human being—
Power to trample the gods' unfailing,
Unwritten laws. These laws weren't made now
Or yesterday. They live for all time,
And no one knows when they came into the light.
No man could frighten me into taking on
The gods' penalty for breaking such a law. 460
I'll die in any case, of course I will,
Whether you announce my execution or not.
But if I die young, all the better:
People who live in misery like mine
Are better dead. So if that's the way 465
My life will end, the pain is nothing.
But if I let the corpse—my mother's son—
Lie dead, unburied, that would be agony.
This way, no agony for me. But you! You think
I've been a fool? It takes a fool to think that. 470

CHORUS:

Now we see the girl's as wild by birth as her father.
She has no idea how to bow her head to trouble.

CREON: (To the chorus.)

Don't forget: The mind that is most rigid

473: Creon apparently does not think it worth his while to answer Antigone; instead, he responds to the chorus in a speech that consists

475 Stumbles soonest; the hardest iron—
 Tempered in fire till it is super-strong—
 Shatters easily and clatters into shards.
 And you can surely break the wildest horse
 With a tiny bridle. When the master's watching,
 Pride has no place in the life of a slave.

480 This girl was a complete expert in arrogance
 Already, when she broke established law.
 And now, arrogantly, she adds insult to injury:
 She's boasting and sneering about what she's done!
 Listen, if she's not punished for taking the upper hand,
 Then I am not a man. *She would be a man!*
 I don't care if she is my sister's child—
 Or closer yet at my household shrine for Zeus—
 She and her sister must pay the full price
 And die for their crime.

(*The chorus indicate their surprise that both must die.*)

490 Yes, I say they have equal guilt,
 Conniving, one with the other, for this burial.

Bring her out. I saw her in there a minute ago;
 She was raving mad, totally out of her mind.
 Often it's the feelings of a thief that give him away
 Before the crimes he did in darkness come to light.

(*Turning to Antigone.*)

495 But how I hate it when she's caught in the act,
 And the criminal still glories in her crime.

ANTIGONE:

You've caught me, you can kill me. What more do you want?

mainly of a ringing list of clichés about the risks attending arrogance and inflexible judgment—risks he is unconsciously taking himself. His opening image of hard, fragile iron prefigures Haemon's mention of stiff trees breaking in a flood, lines 712–4.

480–2: “Arrogance . . . injury”—The Greek word hubris includes the meanings of arrogance, insolence, outrage, and crime. Typically violating justice and reverence, hubris is practiced by the strong against the weak.

CREON:

For me, that's everything. I want no more than that.

ANTIGONE:

Then what are you waiting for? More talk?
 Your words disgust me, I hope they always will.
 And I'm sure you are disgusted by what I say.
 But yet, speaking of glory, what could be more
 Glorious than giving my true brother his burial?
 All these men would tell you they're rejoicing
 Over that, if you hadn't locked their tongues
 With fear. But a tyrant says and does
 What he pleases. That's his great joy.

500

505

CREON:

You are the only one, in all Thebes, who thinks that way.

ANTIGONE:

No. They all see it the same. You've silenced them.

CREON:

Aren't you ashamed to have a mind apart from theirs?

510

ANTIGONE:

There's no shame in having respect for a brother.

CREON:

Wasn't he your brother, too, the one who died on the
 other side?

ANTIGONE:

Yes, my blood brother—same mother, same father.

CREON:

When you honor the one, you disgrace the other. Why do it?

ANTIGONE:

The dead will never testify against a burial.

515

CREON:

Yes, if they were equal. But one of them deserves disgrace.

500: "Your words disgust me"—Although the literal translation is closer to "are not pleasing to me," ancient Greek understatement often imply powerful sentiments.

ANTIGONE:

He wasn't any kind of slave. He was his brother, who died.

CREON:

He was killing and plundering. The other one defended our land.

ANTIGONE:

Even so, Hades longs to have these laws obeyed.

CREON:

But surely not equal treatment for good and bad?

ANTIGONE:

Who knows? Down below that might be blessed.

CREON:

An enemy is always an enemy, even in death.

ANTIGONE:

I cannot side with hatred. My nature sides with love.

CREON:

Go to Hades, then, and if you have to love, love someone dead.

525 As long as I live, I will not be ruled by a woman.

(Enter Ismene under guard, through the great doors.)

CHORUS:

Now Ismene stands before the doors
And sheds tears of sister-love.

519: Hades is the god of death, his name is also used for the Underworld, to which the dead belong. See Introduction, p. x.

523: "I cannot side with hatred. My nature sides with love"—Antigone coins new words here for her extraordinary feelings. She means that even if her brothers hate each other, it is her nature not to join them in hatred, but in the family love (*philia*) they have for her. Note also that family love is natural, i.e., by birth, unlike any sort of enmity: "I have friends by birth, not enemies" (Lloyd-Jones 1994). See Introduction, p. xviii on Antigone's love.

527–30: Because the actor is wearing a mask, Ismene's expression must be described. What shows on her face is important because Creon takes it as a sign of guilt.

From her brows, a blood-dark cloud
Casts a foul shadow
And stains her lovely face.

530

CREON:

Now you. Hiding in my house like a snake,
A coiled bloodsucker in the dark! And I never realized
I was raising a pair of deadly, crazed revolutionaries!
Come, tell me: How do you plead? Guilty of this burial
As an accomplice? Or do you swear you knew nothing?

535

ISMENE:

I did it, I confess. That is, if we are partners, anyway.
I am an accomplice, and I bear responsibility with her.

ANTIGONE:

I will not permit this penalty to fall on you.
No. I never wanted to give you a share.

ISMENE:

But these are your troubles! I'm not ashamed;
I'll be your shipmate in suffering.

540

ANTIGONE:

I have witnesses: the gods below saw who did the work.
I won't accept a friend who's only friends in words.

ISMENE:

No, please! You're my sister: Don't despise me!
Let me die with you and sanctify our dead.

545

ANTIGONE:

No, you may not die along with me. Don't say you did it!
You wouldn't even touch it. Now leave my death alone!

ISMENE:

Why would I care to live when you are gone?

ANTIGONE:

Creon's the one to ask. He's the one you care for.

ISMENE:

Why are you scolding me? It won't help you.

550

ANTIGONE:

Of course not. It hurts me when my mockery strikes you.

ISMENE:

But I still want to help you. What can I do?

ANTIGONE:

Escape! Save yourself! I don't begrudge you that.

ISMENE:

O misery! Why am I cut off from your fate?

ANTIGONE:

555 Because you chose life, and I chose death.

ISMENE:

But I gave you reasons not to make that choice.

Antigone: (*Pointing to Creon and the chorus.*)

Oh yes, you are sensible; these men agree.

(*Pointing to the ground, speaking of the dead or the gods below.*)

But *they* agree with me.

ISMENE:

Yes, I know. And now the sin is mine as much as yours.

ANTIGONE:

Be brave. You are alive. Already my soul is dead.

560 It has gone to help those who died before me.

CREON:

What a pair of children! One of you lost her mind
Moments ago; the other was born without hers.

ISMENE:

That is right, sir. Whenever we commit a crime,
Our minds, which grew by nature, leave us.

CREON:

565 Yours did, when you deliberately joined a criminal in crime.

ISMENE:

Without her, why should I live? I'd be alone.

CREON:

Her? Don't speak of her. She is no more.

ISMENE:

But will you really kill the bride of your son?

CREON:

There's other ground for him to plow, you know.

ISMENE:

But no one is suited to him as well as she is.

CREON:

I loathe bad women. She's not for my son.

ANTIGONE (or possibly ISMENE, or possibly CHORUS):

O Haemon, dearest, what a disgrace your father does to you!

CREON:

Shut up! What a pain you are, you and your marriage!

CHORUS (or ISMENE, or ANTIGONE):

Will you really take away your son's bride?

CREON:

Not me. Death will put a stop to this marriage.

CHORUS (or ISMENE):

So she will die. Has it really been decided?

CREON:

Yes. By you and me. Now, no more delays.

572: The old manuscripts do not reliably tell us which character speaks which lines. In this case, modern editors are divided. Some think that Ismene speaks throughout the scene; others assign this line to Antigone. Sophocles does not elsewhere change speakers in mid-conversation; but in 573, Creon is more likely to be responding to Antigone than to Ismene, and in 577 he cannot be replying to Ismene. So the conversation is broken in any event. Besides, if any tragic character would break into a conversation, it would be Antigone.

The line does not imply sentimental love for Haemon so much as family-feeling; he is after all the sisters' cousin. On Antigone's love, see Introduction, p. xviii.

574, 576: Some editors assign these lines to Ismene, some to the chorus, and some to Antigone.

577: "By you and me"—Who has joined Creon in condemning Antigone

580

Servants! Take them inside. They are women,
And they must not be free to roam about.
Even a brave man flees from Death
When he sees his life in immediate danger.

(*Servants take Ismene and Antigone through the great doors.*)

Second Stasimon

CHORUS:

[Strophe a]

585

Happy are they that never taste of crime,
But once a house is shaken by the gods,
Then madness stalks the family without fail,
Disaster for many generations.
It is like a great salt wave
Kicked up by foul winds from Thrace,
It surges over the hellish depths of the sea,
Roils the bottom,
590 Churns up black sand,
And makes the screaming headlands howl
Against the gale.

590

to death? Not Ismene. The chorus support the decree at 211–4, and Antigone seems to accept her fate at 461–6; in a sense she has condemned herself by her actions. But only the elders of the chorus have the standing to ratify the ruler's decision.

582–625: Second Stasimon—Creon, who is present throughout the ode, must assume that the chorus are singing about the ruin of Antigone and, consequently, of the house of Oedipus; but the chorus may have the entire royal family in mind, including Creon's branch of it. See Introduction, p. xxv, and Else (1976) on the charge of madness against Antigone.

582: "Happy are they that never taste of crime"—The word translated as "crime" could mean simply "trouble," but line 622 shows that the chorus are thinking of serious wrongdoing.

584–5: "Madness . . . disaster"—*atē*. The ode revolves around the double meaning of this one word—blindness or madness on the one hand, ruin or destruction on the other. In lines 614 and 625, I have rendered it "disaster."

[Antistrophe a]

I see grief falling from old days on Labdacus' family:
New grief heaped on the grief of those who died.

And nothing redeems the generation that is to come:
Some god is battering them without relief.

Now I see a saving light

Rising from the sole remaining roots
Of the house of Oedipus. But this, too, falls

In a bloody harvest,

Claimed by the dust

Of the Underworld gods, doomed by foolish words
And frenzied wits.

595

600

[Strophe b]

O Zeus! Who could ever curtail thy power?

Not a man, never—

No matter how far he oversteps his bounds—

Not sleep, that weakens everyone,

Not the untiring months of gods.

No, Zeus, you do not grow weak with time,

You who hold power in the luminous glow of Olympus.

And this will be the law,

Now and for time to come, as it was before:

Madness stalks mortals who are great,

Leaves no escape from disaster.

605

610

[Antistrophe b]

Beware of hope! Far-reaching, beguiling, a pleasure—
For a lot of men.

But a lot are fooled by a light-headed love,

And deception stalks those who know nothing

Until they set their feet in fire and burn.

Wisdom lies in the famous proverb:

"Those who judge that crime is good,

615

620

601: See endnote.

605: "Man"—The Greek word *anér* picks out the male of the species more often than not; to mean "human being" Greek uses *anthrōpos* or one of several words for "mortal." Because of the importance of gender issues in the play, I have observed the distinction throughout this translation.

625

Are in the hands of a driving god
 Who is leading them to madness."
 Time is very short for them,
 Leaves no escape from disaster.

(Enter Haemon through the stage right wing.)

CHORUS:

Now, here is Haemon, the last of your children.
 Is he goaded here by anguish for Antigone,
 Who should have been his bride?
 Does he feel injured beyond measure?
 Cheated out of marriage?

630

CREON:

We'll know the answer right away, better than prophets:
 Tell me, son, did you hear the final verdict?
 Against your fiancée? Did you come in anger at your father?
 Or are we still friends, no matter what I do?

HAEMON:

635

I am yours, Father. You set me straight,
 Give me good advice, and I will follow it.
 No marriage will weigh more with me,
 Than your good opinion.

CREON:

640

Splendid, my boy! Keep that always in your heart,
 And stand behind fatherly advice on all counts.
 Why does a man pray that he'll conceive a child,
 Keep him at home, and have him listen to what he's told?
 It's so the boy will punish his father's enemies
 And reward his friends—as his father would.
 But some men beget utterly useless offspring:
 They have planted nothing but trouble for themselves,
 And they're nothing but a joke to their enemies.

624-5: See endnote.

626: Haemon would have been played either by the actor who represented Antigone or by the one who represented Ismene.

635: "I am yours"—your what? friend, child, enemy? Haemon is ambiguous here as elsewhere in this scene, careful not to criticize his father directly until he has been goaded out of decency.

Now then, my boy, don't let pleasure cloud your mind,
Not because of a woman. You know very well:

You'll have a frigid squeeze between the sheets
If you shack up with a hostile woman. I'd rather have
A bleeding wound than a criminal in the family.
So spit her out. And because the girl's against us,
Send her down to marry somebody in Hades.

You know I caught her in the sight of all,
Alone of all our people, in open revolt.

And I will make my word good in Thebes—
By killing her. Who cares if she sings "Zeus!"
And calls him her protector? I must keep my kin in line.
Otherwise, folks outside the family will run wild.

The public knows that a man is just
Only if he is straight with his relatives.

So, if someone goes too far and breaks the law,
Or tries to tell his masters what to do,

He will have nothing but contempt from me.

But when the city takes a leader, you must obey,
Whether his commands are trivial, or right, or wrong.
And I have no doubt that such a man will rule well,
And, later, he will cheerfully be ruled by someone else.

In hard times he will stand firm with his spear
Waiting for orders, a good, law-abiding soldier.

But reject one man ruling another, and that's the worst.
Anarchy tears up a city, divides a home,
Defeats an alliance of spears.

But when people stay in line and obey,
Their lives and everything else are safe.
For this reason, order must be maintained,
And there must be no surrender to a woman.
No! If we fall, better a man should take us down.
Never say that a woman bested us!

650

655

660

665

670

675

680

663–71: See endnote.

669: "And, later, he will cheerfully be ruled by someone else"—Creon had been appointed regent when the sons of Oedipus were young, but in the recent battle he served under Eteocles. See endnote to lines 663–71 for an alternative meaning.

CHORUS:

Unless old age has stolen my wits away,
Your speech was very wise. That's my belief.

HAEMON:

Father, the gods give good sense to every human being,
And that is absolutely the best thing we have.
But if what you said is not correct,
I have no idea how I could make the point.
Still, maybe someone else could work it out.

My natural duty's to look out for you, spot any risk
That someone might find fault with what you say or do.
The common man, you see, lives in terror of your frown;
He'll never dare to speak up in broad daylight
And say anything you would hate to learn.
But I'm the one who hears what's said at night—
How the entire city is grieving over this girl.
No woman has ever had a fate that's so unfair
(They say), when what she did deserves honor and fame.
She saved her very own brother after he died,
Murderously, from being devoured by flesh-eating dogs
And pecked apart by vultures as he lay unburied.
For this, hasn't she earned glory bright as gold?
This sort of talk moves against you, quietly, at night.

And for me, Father, your continued good fortune
Is the best reward that I could ever have.
No child could win a greater prize than his father's fame,
No father could want more than abundant success—

683 ff.: Haemon's speech is carefully worded; he guards himself, by means of a series of ambiguities, from openly criticizing his father's judgment.

687: Although Haemon modestly implies that he is not capable of refuting his father, he also suggests that his father might be refutable. See end-note on this and on the next two lines for alternative readings.

690a: A line has apparently dropped out of the manuscripts; I have supplied this one to suit the context, against the advice of Lloyd-Jones and Wilson (LJW).

693: "The entire city is grieving"—If so, Antigone has not heard about it (see lines 847, 881–2). Haemon may be too far gone in love to be a credible witness, but his claim that common people are afraid to speak to Creon is corroborated by the Watchman's scenes.

From his son.

And now, don't always cling to the same anger,
 Don't keep saying that this, and nothing else, is right.
 If a man believes that he alone has a sound mind,
 And no one else can speak or think as well as he does,
 Then, when people study him, they'll find an empty book.
 But a wise man can learn a lot and never be ashamed;
 He knows he does not have to be rigid and close-hauled.
 You've seen trees tossed by a torrent in a flash flood:
 If they bend, they're saved, and every twig survives,
 But if they stiffen up, they're washed out from the roots.
 It's the same in a boat: if a sailor keeps the footline taut,
 If he doesn't give an inch, he'll capsize, and then—
 He'll be sailing home with his benches down and his hull
 to the sky.

705

So ease off, relax, stop being angry, make a change.
 I know I'm younger, but I may still have good ideas;
 And I say that the oldest idea, and the best,
 Is for one man to be born complete, knowing everything.
 Otherwise—and it usually does turn out otherwise—
 It's good to learn from anyone who speaks well.

710

CHORUS:

Sir, you should learn from him, if he is on the mark. And you,
 Haemon, learn from your father. Both sides spoke well.

720

CREON: (*To the chorus.*)

Do you really think, at our age,
 We should be taught by a boy like him?

HAEMON:

No. Not if I am in the wrong. I admit I'm young;

715: A footline is the rope that runs from the foot of the sail, equivalent to what today's sailors call a sheet. Easing the sheet can save a boat from capsizing in a sudden gust of wind.

720-1: "The oldest idea"—The Greek word suggests precedence in rank in a way that would appeal to a conservative like Creon. Contrast this with Haemon's earlier and more democratic idea that every human being is endowed by nature with good sense (683), where "human beings" contrasts with "the man" at 721 and "good sense" (*phrenes*, intelligence) contrasts with "knowing everything." See endnote for an alternative reading.

That's why you should look at what I do, not my age.

CREON:

730 So "what you do" is show respect for breaking ranks?

HAEMON:

I'd never urge you to show respect for a criminal.

CREON:

So you don't think this girl has been infected with crime?

HAEMON:

No. The people of Thebes deny it, all of them.

CREON:

So you think the people should tell me what orders to give?

HAEMON:

735 Now who's talking like he's wet behind the ears?

CREON:

So I should rule this country for someone other than myself?

HAEMON:

A place for one man alone is not a city.

CREON:

A city belongs to its master. Isn't that the rule?

HAEMON:

Then go be ruler of a desert, all alone. You'd do it well.

CREON: (*To the chorus.*)

740 It turns out this boy is fighting for the woman's cause.

HAEMON:

Only if *you* are a woman. All I care about is you!

CREON:

This is intolerable! You are accusing your own father.

HAEMON:

Because I see you going wrong. Because justice matters!

CREON:

Is that wrong, showing respect for my job as leader?

744-5: Haemon holds that the respect Creon demands as leader cannot be separated from the wider virtue of reverence. By "the rights (or

HAEMON:

You have no respect at all if you trample on the rights of gods! 745

CREON:

What a sick mind you have: You submit to a woman!

HAEMON:

No. You'll never catch me giving in to what's shameful.

CREON:

But everything you say, at least, is on her side.

HAEMON:

And on your side! And mine! And the gods' below!

CREON:

There is no way you'll marry her, not while she's still alive. 750

HAEMON:

Then she'll die, and her death will destroy Someone Else.

CREON:

Is that a threat? Are you brash enough to attack me?

HAEMON:

What threat? All I'm saying is, you haven't thought this through.

CREON:

I'll make you wish you'd never had a thought in your empty head!

HAEMON:

If you weren't my father I'd say you were out of your mind. 755

CREON:

Don't beat around the bush. You're a woman's toy, a slave.

HAEMON:

Talk, talk, talk! Why don't you ever want to listen?

CREON:

Really? Listen, you are not going on like this. By all the gods, One more insult from you, and the fun is over.

honors) of the gods," Haemon means that Creon wants to deprive Hades of the dead man who belongs to them.

753: See endnote for an alternative reading.

(To attendants.)

760 Bring out that hated thing. I want her to die right here,
Right now, so her bridegroom can watch the whole thing.

HAEMON:

Not me. Never. No matter what you think.

She is not going to die while I am near her.

And you will never, ever see my face again. Go on,

765 Be crazy! Perhaps some of your friends will stay by you.

(Exit Haemon through the stage left wing.)

CHORUS:

Sir, the man has gone. He is swift to anger;

Pain lies heavily on a youthful mind.

CREON:

Let him go, him and his lofty ambitions! Good riddance!

But those two girls shall not escape their fate.

CHORUS:

770 Are you really planning to kill *both* of them?

CREON:

Not the one who never touched the crime. You're right.

CHORUS:

By what means will you have the other one killed?

CREON:

I'll take her off the beaten track, where no one's around,
And I'll bury her alive underground, in a grave of stone.

775 I'll leave her only as much food as religious law prescribes,
So that the city will not be cursed for homicide.

Let her pray to Hades down there; he's the only god

That she respects. Maybe she'll arrange for him to save her life;
Maybe she'll learn, at last, that she's wasting her time

780 Showing respect for whatever's in Hades.

780: What does Creon do during the choral passage that follows? Probably he goes offstage so that he may give detailed orders for Antigone's execution. Some editors, however, would have him remain backstage or in the wings.

(Exit Creon through the great doors.)

Third Stasimon

CHORUS:

[Strophe]

In battle the victory goes to Love;
 Prizes and properties fall to Love.
 Love dallies the night
 On a girl's soft cheeks,
 Ranges across the sea,
 Lodges in wild meadows.
 O Love, no one can hide from you:
 You take gods who live forever,
 You take humans who die in a day,
 And they take you and go mad.

785

790

[Antistrophe]

Destroyer Love, you seize a good mind,
 And pervert it to wickedness:
 This fight is your doing,
 This uproar in the family.
 And the winner will be desire,
 Shining in the eyes of a bride,
 An invitation to bed,
 A power to sweep across the bounds of what is Right.
 For we are only toys in your hands,
 Divine, unbeatable Aphrodite!

795

800

Kommos

(Enter Antigone under guard through the great doors.)

CHORUS:

Now I, too, am swept away,
 Out of bounds, when I see this.

798: See endnote for an alternative reading.

801: "I, too"—The chorus find themselves carried away by forbidden feelings, as they say happened earlier to Haemon.

805

I cannot contain the surge of tears:
 For now I see Antigone, soon to gain
 The marriage bed where everyone must sleep.

ANTIGONE:

See how I walk the last road,
 You who belong to my city,
 How I fill my eyes with the last
 Shining of the sun.
 810 There's no return: I follow death, alive,
 To the brink of Acheron,
 Where He gives rest to all.
 No marriage hymns for me.
 No one sounds
 815 A wedding march:
 I will be the bride of Acheron.

CHORUS:

But won't you have hymns of praise?
 So much glory attends you
 As you pass into the deep place of the dead.
 820 For you are not wasted by disease, not maimed by a
 sword.
 But true to your own laws, you are the only one,
 Of mortals, who'll go down to Hades while still alive.

ANTIGONE:

No. I hear Niobe was lost in utmost misery—
 Daughter of Tantalus, visitor in Thebes,

816: Acheron—a river in the Underworld.

821: "But true to your own laws"—The Greek is *autonomos*, rendered by some scholars as "of your own will"; but the word means more than that in ancient Greek, and the root word "law" (*nomos*) is clearly heard. See Introduction, p. xviii on Antigone's law.

822: "While still alive"—The chorus mean that she will be entombed while still alive.

823–38: Niobe—Antigone misunderstands the chorus to be saying that she will live forever underground and cites the case of Niobe, who was entombed alive and then turned to stone. Niobe had many children and boasted of them by comparison with Leto, who had only two children, Artemis and Apollo. For this she was punished by seeing her children die of disease.

Wasted on a Phrygian mountain.
 Rock sprouted up around her, firm,
 Erect as shoots of ivy,
 And it subdued her. So men say.
 Rain and snow pelted her
 Without a break, and she melted away,
 Dripping from her mournful brows,
 Tears streaming down her flanks.
 It's the same for me, exactly:
 Something divine lays me to sleep.

825

830

CHORUS:

Really! Niobe was a god; she had a god for a father.
 We are mortal, and our fathers pass away.
 But you—when you die, you will be great,
 You will be equal in memory to the gods,
 By the glory of your life and death.

835

ANTIGONE:

You're laughing at me.
 For the gods' sake, why now?
 You could have waited till I'm gone.
 But now you make insults to my face,
 You grasping, rich old men! What a city you have!
 I call on the rising of rivers in Thebes
 And on the great chariot-reaches of the plain.
 The rivers and the plain are on my side, at least.
 They'll testify that no friends wept for me,
 That the laws of Thebes sent me to prison
 In a rock-hollowed tomb.
 They see how unusual and cruel this is.
 But I have no place with human beings,
 Living or dead. No city is home to me.

840

845

850

CHORUS:

You've gone too far! You are extreme, impetuous.
 My child, you caught your foot and fell
 When you tried to climb against high justice.
 This is your father's legacy—pain and punishment.

855

ANTIGONE:

Now you raise the agony that hurts my mind the most:
 Grief for my father,

Like raw earth plowed three times,
 860 Grief for the whole huge disaster of *us*,
 Our brilliant family,
 Labdacus' descendants.
 I weep for the ruin in my mother's bed,
 The sexual intercourse and the incest
 865 My father had with our mother.
 Ill-fated parents make a miserable child.
 I am going to them now,
 Unholy and unmarried, to lodge with them.
 Oh, my brother, you were married once,
 870 But what a disaster it was:
 Your death snuffed out my life.

CHORUS:

You have one kind of reverence.
 But a man whose job it is to rule
 Will never let you trample on his power.
 875 You chose anger, and anger destroyed you.

ANTIGONE:

No tears for me, no friends, no wedding hymns.
 They are taking me away
 In misery by the road before me,
 Now and forever forbidden to see
 880 This blessed eye of light.
 No friends cry for me,
 No one is mourning.

(Enter Creon with his attendants through the great doors.)

CREON:

Singing and wailing? They would never end
 Before death, if they made any difference.
 885 Take her away immediately. And when she's locked up,
 In the embrace of her covered tomb—exactly as I said—
 Leave her alone, deserted. Let her die if she wants,
 Or else live there in her grave, if she feels at home there.

869: "You were married once"—Polyneices married the daughter of the king of Argos, and Argos provided the army that attacked Thebes.

We wash our hands of this girl. But either way,
Her permit to reside above the earth is canceled.

890

ANTIGONE:

My tomb, my marriage, my hollow, scraped in dirt,
I'm coming home forever, to be held in
With my own people, most of them dead now,
And gone where Persephone welcomes them.

I am the last of them that will go under, and my death—
It is the worst by far—so much before my time.

As I leave, even so, I feed this one strong hope:
That I will have a loving welcome from my father,
More love from you, my mother, and then, love
From you, dear heart, my brother. When you died,
I took you up, all three, and laid you out,
And poured libations at your graves.

And, Polyneices, look: This is my reward
For taking care of you. I was right, but wisdom knows
I would not do it for a child, were I a mother,
Not for a husband either. Let them lie, putrefied, dead;
I would not defy the city at such cost for their sake.

895

900

905

What law can I claim on my side for this choice?
I may have another husband if the first should die
And get another child from a new man if I'm a widow.
But my mother and my father lie in the land of death,
And there is no ground to grow a brother for me now.
That is the law I followed when I made you first in honor,
Even though Creon thought I did a terrible thing,
A rash and sinful crime, dear heart, my brother.

910

Now he has taken me by force, he is driving me down
Unmarried. I've had no man, no wedding celebration,
Shared nothing with a husband, never raised a child.
My friends and family have abandoned me in misery,
And I am going—alive—to the scraped hollow of the dead.
What have I ever done against divine justice?
How can I expect a god to help me in my misery?
To whom should I pray now? Do you see?
They are counting all my reverence to be

915

920

925 Irreverence. If the gods really agree with this,
Then suffering should teach me to repent my sin.
But if the sin belongs to those who condemned me,
I hope they suffer every bit as I do now.

CHORUS:

930 Still she is tossed by gusts of wind;
They tear through her soul as strongly as before.

CREON:

Listen, it's the guards who will weep
If they don't get a move on now.

ANTIGONE (or CHORUS): (*With a cry of pain.*)

That word—
It's almost death itself!

CREON:

935 I have no hope to give.
The death sentence stands.

ANTIGONE:

City of my fathers, Thebes!
Gods of my people!
They are taking me against my will.
Look at me, O you lords of Thebes:
I am the last remnant of kings.
Look what these wretched men are doing to me,
For my pure reverence!

Fourth Stasimon

CHORUS: (*To Antigone.*)

[Strophe a]

945 Courage! Danaë, too, endured
The exchange of heavenly light
For a bronze-bolted prison.
And there she was kept down

944–50: Danaë's father locked her away from men because of an oracle warning him against any son she might bear. But Zeus visited her in a shower of gold, and they conceived a child, Perseus.

947: "Kept down"—yoke motif, cf. line 955.

Secretly in a bedroom tomb.

She was of noble birth, too, my daughter, O my daughter,
And Zeus trusted her to mind his golden-rainfall child.

950

Fate has a terrible power
That nothing escapes, not wealth,
Not warfare, not a fortress tower,
Not even black ships beating against the sea.

[Antistrophe a]

Another case: Lycurgus was kept down,
And he was a king in Thrace.

955

But because of his angry jeering,
Dionysus had him jailed in a cell of rock,
And there the terrible flood-force
Of his madness trickled away, drop by drop, until he learned,
At last, that it was a god he had stung in his madness

960

With those jeering insults.
For he tried to quench the holy fire,
Reined in the god-filled women,
And drove flute-loving Muses into a rage.

965

[Strophe b]

At the Black Waters,
Where a thrust of land divides the Bosphorus from the Sea,

955–65: Lycurgus had tried to suppress the worship of Dionysus, which involved ecstatic rituals. In some versions of the story, he went mad and killed his son before being imprisoned.

958: Dionysus was believed by the ancient Greeks to have brought his worship to Greece from Asia, along with the practice of making wine. See Euripides' play, the *Bacchae*.

964: "God-filled women"—These women, variously called Maenads, Bacchae, and bacchants, are women who worship Dionysus through ecstatic dance and song in the mountains, away from their homes. "God-filled" means "inspired."

965: "Flute-loving Muses": The *aulos*, usually translated "flute," was a reed instrument; its music was considered to be the most exciting in ancient Greece.

966–87: Phineus, a king in Thrace (northern Greece), had two sons by

Lies a city of Thrace known as Salmydēssus.
 War god Ares was hard by and saw the cursēd blows
 When Phineus' two sons were blinded by the beast
 He called a wife. Darkness came
 Over the disks that had been eyes,
 That would have looked for vengeance
 To gashing hands, stained in blood,
 Shuttles torn from the loom
 And used as knives.

[Antistrophe b]

The boys melted away
 In misery, mourning their own sad fate
 And their mother's, for her marriage was hateful
 Although she was born to be a queen of the ancient line,
 Royal in Athens, and she was raised in distant caves
 Where her father's tempests blew.
 For he was North Wind, Boreas,
 And she was a child of gods,
 Swift as horses on a rocky slope.
 But the eternal Fates kept after her,
 Her too, O my daughter.

(As the chorus bring their ode to an end, the attendants lead Antigone out through the stage left wing. Enter Tiresias, led by a boy, through the stage right wing.)

his first wife, Cleopatra (no relation to the famous queen of Egypt). This Cleopatra was the daughter of an Athenian princess who had been stolen by Boreas, the North Wind, to be his bride. Cleopatra's sons were blinded by their stepmother after Phineus had imprisoned their mother and taken a new wife. The audience, probably knowing about the imprisonment of the mother, would have seen the analogy with the fate of Antigone.

966: "Black Waters"—The manuscripts are unclear. The phrase may refer to the Black Sea or the two Dark Islands at the mouth of the Bosphorus.

973: "Vengeance"—Had the boys not been blinded, they would have avenged the crime against their mother.

980: "Born to be a queen"—Here we follow the text as corrected by LJW.

TIRESIAS: (*To the chorus, indicating the boy who guides him.*)

Gentlemen of Thebes, we two have come by the same path;
He alone has eyesight, and we both see by this:
A blind man takes the way his guide directs.

990

CREON:

Why, old Tiresias! What brings you here?

TIRESIAS:

I will speak: I am the soothsayer, and you will learn.

CREON:

Well, I never have rejected your advice.

TIRESIAS:

That is how you've been steering the city straight.

CREON:

Yes, I know firsthand how helpful you are, and I can testify.

995

TIRESIAS:

Then know this: Once again, your fate stands on a
knife-edge.

CREON:

What is it? Your voice puts my hair on end!

TIRESIAS:

You'll see.

Listen to what I have read from the signs of my art.
I took my seat, the ancient seat for seeing omens—
Where all the birds that tell the future come to rest—
And I heard a voice I've never known from a bird:
Wild screeching, enraged, utterly meaningless.
But the thrashing of their wings told me the truth:
They were clawing each other to death with their talons.
I was frightened. Immediately, I tried burnt sacrifice.

1000

1005

988: Tiresias announces his own arrival. Unlike the previous entrances, this one is unexpected by both Creon and the chorus. During the fourth stasimon, Creon has evidently remained on stage, but without paying close attention to the chorus.

999: "I took my seat"—Tiresias read the omens of the birds from a seat in a sacred spot.

1005: "Burnt sacrifice"—Ancient Greeks offered thighbones wrapped in

The altar had been blazing high, but not one spark
 Caught fire in my offerings. The embers went out.
 Juice was oozing and dripping from thighbones,
 Spitting and sputtering in clouds of smoke.
 1010 Bladders were bursting open, spraying bile into the sky;
 Wrappings of fat fell away from soggy bones.

And so the ritual failed; I had no omens to read.
 I learned this from the boy who is my guide,
 As I am the guide for others. Now, it was *your* idea
 1015 That brought this plague down on our city.
 Every single altar, every hearth we have,
 Is glutted with dead meat from Oedipus' child,
 Who died so badly. Birds and dogs gnawed him to bits
 That is why the gods no longer hear our prayers,
 1020 Reject our sacrifice of flaming thighbones. And that is why
 The birds keep back their shrill message-bearing cries:
 Because they have fed on a dead man's glistening blood.

Take thought, my son, on all these things:
 It's common knowledge, any human being can go wrong.
 1025 But even when he does, a man may still succeed:
 He may have his share of luck and good advice
 But only if he's willing to bend and find a cure
 For the trouble he's caused. It's only being stubborn
 Proves you're a fool.

So, now, surrender to the dead man.

1030 Stop stabbing away at his corpse. Will it prove your strength
 If you kill him again? Listen, my advice is for your benefit.
 Learning from good words is sweet when they bring you
 gain.

CREON:

I hear you, old man: You people keep shooting arrows at me
 Like marksmen at a target. Do you think I don't know?
 1035 I have a lot of experience with soothsayers. Your whole tribe

fat to the gods, along with other inedible parts of a cow or sheep, by burning these parts on an altar.

1019–23: See lines 1042–4, with note.

Has made market of me from the start. "Benefit"? "Gain"?
 If you want to turn a profit, speculate in gold from India
 Or go trade with Sardis for electrum and traffic in that.
 You'll never put that man down in a grave,
 Not even if eagles snatched morsels of his dead flesh
 And carried them up to the very throne of Zeus. 1040
 I won't shrink from that. And don't you call it "pollution"
 Or tell me I have to bury him to fend off miasma—
 Surely no human power could pollute a god.

You're terribly clever, old man, but listen to me:
 Clever people tend to stumble into shameful traps
 When they make a wicked speech sound good
 For their personal gain. 1045

TIRESIAS:

This is very sad:
 Does any human being know, or even question . . .

CREON: (*Interrupting.*)

What's this? More of your great "common knowledge"?

TIRESIAS:

How powerful good judgment is, compared to wealth. 1050

CREON:

Exactly. And no harm compares with heedlessness.

TIRESIAS:

Which runs through you like the plague.

CREON:

I have no desire to trade insults with a soothsayer.

TIRESIAS:

But you're doing it. You implied that I make false prophecies.

1038: Electrum is an alloy of gold and silver made in Sardis, the city where Croesus, famous for his wealth, had ruled in the sixth century.

1042-4: Pollution, miasma—Either an unburied corpse or an unavenged murder was thought to infect the land with *miasma*, pollution. Creon dismisses this on rational grounds.

1045: "Terribly clever"—The Greek word *deinos* carries both positive and negative meanings. See line 332, with note.

CREON:

1055 Prophecies? All your tribe wants to make is money.

TIRESIAS:

And what about tyrants? Filthy lucre is all you want!

CREON:

Remember, you are speaking about your commander-in-chief.

TIRESIAS:

I haven't forgotten. It was by my powers that you saved the city.

CREON:

Cunning soothsayer! Yes, but you'd rather do what's wrong.

TIRESIAS:

1060 You are provoking me. I have a secret we have not touched.

CREON:

Well, touch it then. But do not speak as you've been paid to do.

TIRESIAS:

Do you really think that's why I've spoken out?

CREON:

You'll never collect your fee; I'm not changing *my* mind.

TIRESIAS:

So be it. But you must know this and know it well:

1065 You'll hardly see the sun race around its course

Before you'll make a trade with your own boy's corpse—

Your only child, born from your guts, traded for corpses.

You took one who dwells above and tossed her below,
You rejected a living soul and peopled a tomb with her.

1070 And you took one who belongs down there and kept him here,

Untouched by gods, unburied, unholy, a corpse exposed.

The dead are no business of yours; not even the gods above Own any part of them. You've committed violence against them.

1067: See line 626. Haemon is Creon's last surviving child.

For this, an ambush awaits you—slow, crippling avengers,
Furies sent by Hades and the gods above.
You will be tangled in the net of your own crimes.

1075

Now look carefully: Have I been paid to speak out?
No. The passage of a little time will prove the point;
Men and women will be wailing over death in your family.
And all the cities of our enemies are in a rage
For their dead, whose funeral rites were held by dogs
Or wild beasts or vultures, and for the stench of bodies
Carried by birds to defile their hearths at home.

1080

These are my arrows. You stung me, and I let fly,
In my anger, like a marksman aiming for your heart.
And I never miss. You can't outrun the pain.

1085

(To his guide.)

Take us home, boy.
Let him vent his anger on younger men;
May he learn to cultivate a gentler tongue
And a mind more cogent than he has shown today.

1090

(Exit Tiresias led by the boy through the stage right wing.)

CHORUS:

The man is gone, sir. His prophecies were amazing,
Terrible. Ever since my hair turned white
I'm quite certain he has never sung a prophecy,
Not once, that turned out to be false for the city.

CREON:

I know that, too. My mind is shaken.
Giving in would be terrible.
But standing firm invites disaster!

1095

1075: Furies—avenging spirits.

1080-3: These lines refer to the tradition, not otherwise mentioned in this play, that Creon left not just Polyneices but all the enemy troops unburied. See Introduction, p. ix. (Some editors reject these lines as spurious in order to maintain the consistency of the play.)

1091-2: "His prophecies were amazing, terrible"—same double-edged word (*deinos*) as in line 1045, here translated "amazing, terrible."

CHORUS:

Good judgment is essential, Creon. Take advice.

CREON:

What should I do? Show me. I'll do what you say.

CHORUS:

1100 Let the girl go. Free her from underground.
And build a tomb for the boy who lies exposed.

CREON:

Really? You think I should give in?

CHORUS:

As quickly as you can, sir, before you're cut off.
The gods send Harm racing after wicked fools.

CREON:

1105 It's so painful to pull back; it goes against my heart.
But I cannot fight against necessity.

CHORUS:

Go and do this *now*. Don't send others in your place.

CREON:

I'll go immediately. Come on, come on, everyone,
Wherever you are, grab a pick and shovel,
1110 Hurry up! Get over to the place you see.
It's up to me, now my mind has changed.
I put her away, I must be there to release her.
I'm afraid it is best to obey the laws,
Just as tradition has them, all one's life.

(Exit Creon, with his attendants, through the stage left wing.)

CHORUS:

Fifth Stasimon

[Strophe *a*]

1115 God of many names,

1115: "God of many names"—Dionysus is known by a number of names, including the ones the chorus use here, "Bacchus" and "Iacchus."

Glorious child of Thebes,
 Whose mother was bride
 To Zeus' deep thunder!
 It is you who guard the fame of Italy,
 You who look after the embrace, at Eleusis,
 Of Demeter, all-welcoming goddess.
 O Bacchus, your home is Thebes,
 Thebes, the mother of Maenads,
 Where River Ismenus gently flows,
 And the fierce dragon-teeth were planted.

1120

1125

[Antistrophe *a*]

Torches flash through smoke,
 Catch sight of you at Delphi
 High above the twin-peaked crag.
 The Castalian Stream has seen you
 By nymphs of the cave who dance for Bacchus.
 The Nysaean Mountains know you, too,
 The ivy-covered shores, the coasts,
 The green tangles of grapevines.
 They are sending you to Thebes: Watch over us,
 Hear our sacred hymns that sound for you.

1130

1135

1117: The line refers to the mother of Bacchus. Semélé was a princess of Thebes who became pregnant with Dionysus, after being visited by Zeus, and gave birth to the infant god when Zeus struck her with thunder.

1119: Italy—Dionysus was evidently honored in the Greek cities of southern Italy.

1123: "Maenads"—See the note on line 964.

1124–5: The Ismenus flows through Thebes. According to legend, Cadmus founded Thebes by killing a dragon and planting its teeth as seeds; where he planted them, the warriors of Thebes sprouted from the earth.

1127: Delphi—Though sacred mainly to Apollo, Delphi was also a principal site for the worship of Dionysus.

1129: The Castalian Stream flows from a sacred spring at Delphi.

1130: Nymphs were minor divinities believed to inhabit caves and other special places.

1131: Nysaean Mountains—probably refers to mountains on the long island of Euboea, separated from Attica by a narrow strait.

[Strophe b]

You hold Thebes in honor
 Above all cities;
 Your mother, too,
 Thunderstruck woman.

1140 And now we pray: Watch over us:
 The violence of plague
 Strikes all our people.
 Come, your presence is healing.

1145 Soar above Parnassus
 Or cross the howling straits of the sea.

[Antistrophe b]

O Leader in the dance of stars,
 That circle across the night,
 Breathing fire,
 O shepherd of dark voices,
 Child of Zeus, let us see you now.
 Come, O Lord, with your throng of Maenads
 Iacchus, steward of joy,
 Grant them ecstasy
 To dance all night for you.

(Enter Messenger through the stage left wing.)

MESSENGER:

1155 Listen, all you neighbors of Cadmus' family:
 The course of our lives never stops; it runs past good
 Or ill. I'll never declare success or failure for anyone.
 It's only chance that keeps your boat upright,
 And chance that sinks you—good luck or bad is all you have.
 1160 Soothsayers give no guarantees for human lives.
 This Creon—you know, I used to envy him.
 He saved the land of Cadmus from its enemies
 And took command as the only ruler of this ground.

1143: "Come, your presence is healing"—A more literal version would be "Come on cleansing foot." The chorus means that Dionysus' presence would purify Thebes and so save its people from the plague.

1144: Parnassus is the high mountain dividing Thebes from Delphi.

He set us straight, and he set his house ablaze
 With well-born sons. Now all of that is gone.
 When every source of joy deserts a man,
 I don't call him alive: he's an animated corpse.
 For my money, you can get as rich as you want,
 You can wear the face of a tyrant,
 But if you have no joy in this,
 Your life's not worth the shadow of a puff of smoke.

1165

CHORUS:

What's this new grief that weighs on the king's family?

MESSENGER:

Death. And the living are to blame for it.

CHORUS:

Who's the killer? Who's the victim? Speak up!

MESSENGER:

Haemon is dead, killed by his own flesh and blood.

1175

CHORUS:

What! His father? Some other relative?

MESSENGER:

He killed himself, in a rage with his father, for her death.

CHORUS:

That soothsayer! He had it right.

MESSENGER:

Those are the facts; the judgment is up to you.

(Enter Eurydice through the great doors.)

CHORUS:

Wait, I see her coming, Creon's wife.
 Poor Eurydice, has she heard about her son?
 Or did she leave her home by chance?

1180

EURYDICE:

Tell me, men of the city—I caught what you said
 As I was about to leave the house
 To pray for help to the goddess Athena.
 I was just sliding the bolt to unlock the door
 When word of disaster in the family struck my ears.

1185

I fell back into my servants' arms,
Terrified out of my mind.
1190 Please tell me again. What happened?
Speak freely. I am quite used to hearing bad news.

MESSENGER:

I will, beloved queen. I was *there*,
And I'll tell you everything, the whole truth.
No point taking off the rough edges;
1195 You'd soon find out I was lying. Truth's right,
Always.

Well, I went with your husband as his guide
To the upper field where the body was lying,
What was left of Polyneices—Cruel!—torn by dogs.
First we prayed to the goddess of passageways,
1200 Pluto also, and we begged that their good will attend us.
Then we performed the sacred cleansing of the corpse,
Gathered up the pieces we could find,
Burned them over fresh-cut boughs,
And heaped up the earth into a tomb,
A high-crested home for him.

1205 Then we went for the girl,
Toward her deadly marriage bed, blanketed with rocks.
There was a voice—you could hear it from far off—
It sliced through you, wailing around that unsanctified
tomb.
One of us got Creon to listen. He crept forward; cries of
misery
1210 Welled up around him, wordless, without meaning.
Suddenly he let out a groan of utter despair—
“Oh no! Now *I* am reading signs: Could this be the path?
The one that leads me to the worst disaster of my life?
My son! My son’s voice! Neighbors, be quick, please help.
1215 On the tomb, look, that gap in the mound—
Stones ripped out—can you slip in through those jaws?

1199–1200: Hecate, goddess of passageways (including the one to the Underworld), was honored along roads, especially at intersections. Pluto, also called Hades, is god of the Underworld.

1212: “Now *I* am reading signs”—Creon has taken on the role of Tiresias by finding meanings in inarticulate cries.

Tell me if I am right, that it is Haemon,
Unless the gods have robbed me of my mind."

That was the order our master gave, his courage gone.
We looked. In the last depth of the tomb,
1220
She was there, we saw her hanging by the neck
On a noose she'd twisted from her own fine clothes.
He was there, too, tumbled around her, hugging her waist,
Grieving for his marriage lost, gone under—

His father's doing—as he, in misery, kissed his bride.
When Creon saw them, he gave a horrible cry
And came up to them. He was in tears, sobbing:
"Poor soul," he said, "how could you do this?"

What were you thinking? Had you lost your mind?
O my child, come out, please, I beg you on my knees."
1225

The boy did not answer. His eyes were fierce.
He fixed them on his father, then spat in his face
And drew his two-edged sword. The father darted back,
Dodged the blow. Thwarted, the angry boy

Turned against himself. He took his blade
And leaned on it, drove it half through his lungs.

Then, still conscious, he pulled the girl into the curve
Of his sagging embrace. He gasped and panted,
Spattered blood on her white cheek, a spurt of scarlet.

Then he was dead. His body lay with hers;
They'd brought their marriage off at last in the house
of Death—
1235

Which proves the point: In a human life,
It's deadly for bad judgment to embrace a man.

(Exit Eurydice through the great doors.)

CHORUS:

What could it mean? The woman's gone inside.
She did not stay for a word, good or bad.
1245

1227: "And came up to them"—The manuscripts read "came up to him." Some editors prefer "came up to her" so that Creon's first two lines can be understood as spoken to Antigone's corpse. But Creon may well be using those lines to address Haemon for his desperate breaking into the tomb. I have chosen "them" in order to preserve the ambiguity. Let the reader choose.

MESSENGER:

I'm astonished, like you. But I feed on hope. Probably,
 When she heard her son was dead, she chose to mourn
 indoors,
 Rather than make a public display of grief.
 She'll have her servants join in the lament.
 1250 She's always planned ahead, to avoid mistakes.

CHORUS:

I don't know. If you ask me, a silence so extreme
 Is as dangerous as a flood of silly tears.

MESSENGER:

We'll know soon enough if she's holding something in,
 And hiding it secretly in a seething heart.
 1255 I'm going into the house. You may be right:
 Silence, when extreme, is dangerous.

(Exit Messenger through the great doors. Creon enters through the stage left wing; assisted by his attendants, he is carrying the body of Haemon.)

CHORUS:

Now here is the king himself. He carries in his arms
 A Reminder (I hope I'm right to be blunt)
 Pointing clearly to the madness that destroys,
 1260 And it's no one else's but his own. The sin was his.

[Strophe a]

CREON:

Oh, howl for the sins of a stubborn mind,
 Evil-minded, death-dealing! O you who are witnesses,
 You saw those who killed and those who died,
 All in one family,
 1265 Cry out against the sacrilege that I called strategy!
 Oh, howl, my son, my young son, for your young death.
 Ah! Ah!
 You were expelled from life
 By my bad judgment, never yours.

1259: "Madness that destroys"—*atē*. See note on lines 584–5.

CHORUS:

Yes, it is late, but you have seen where justice lies.

1270

[Strophe b]

CREON:

Oh yes:

I have learned, and it is misery.

Some god leapt full force onto my head

And steered me onto a wild path, shaking my reins,

And I have trampled joy with sharp hooves.

Oh weep, weep for the pain of human pain!

1275

(Enter Messenger through the great doors.)

MESSENGER:

You have so many troubles, master, troubles in hand—

You carry them yourself. And troubles at home—

You'll see them for yourself, soon enough, when you arrive.

1280

CREON:

What, after this, could be worse?

MESSENGER:

Your wife is dead, poor woman.

Fresh-killed, a mother to match this dead boy.

[Antistrophe a]

CREON:

Howl, howl! O Death, refuge that cannot be appeased,

Why me? Why me, Destroyer?

(To the Messenger.)

And you,

1285

What is this noise you're making? Your horrible message?

It is only grief.

I was a man in ruins, and you crushed me again.

Speak to me, my son, tell me, is there more killing?

Ah! Ah!

Is it a woman's sacrifice,

Her death piled on yours?

1290

(The great doors open, and Eurydice's body is brought out or revealed.)

CHORUS (or MESSENGER):

Look, she is here, brought out from the inner rooms.

[Antistrophe b]

CREON:

Oh yes:

1295 Here's the second disaster for my misery to see.
What could be worse? Does fate have more for me?
A moment ago, I took my dead son in my arms.
Now I see her face to face—my wife. And she is dead.
Oh weep, weep for the mother in torment, weep for the child.

MESSENGER:

1300 She died at the altar.
A sharp sword-thrust brought darkness to her eyes,
But first she grieved over Megareus, dead before his
wedding,
And then over Haemon.
Last of all she called out to you,
1305 "These are your crimes, Childkiller!"

[Strophe c]

CREON:

Ah! Ah!
I am on wings of fear.
Take a sharp sword, someone.
Why don't you kill me now?
1310 My misery is so huge,
I am dissolved in misery.

MESSENGER:

Yes, she brought this charge against you as she died:
"You're to blame for his death, and the other boy's, too."

1302: Megareus—Haemon's only brother, son of Creon and Eurydice. The audience probably knew that Megareus had been sacrificed earlier to ensure victory over Argos.

CREON:

Tell me, how was she killed?

MESSENGER:

Stabbed in the guts by her own hand,
As soon as she heard what horrors came over her boy.

1315

[Strophe d]

CREON:

The grief is mine, all mine.
I'll never pin the blame on anyone else that's human.
I was the one, I killed you, poor child.

I did it. It is all true.

1320

Now, my neighbors,
Please take me away,
Take me quickly.
I must not be underfoot;

I am worth less than a nobody.

1325

CHORUS:

A worthy request—if there's any value in suffering.
Shortest way is strongest way when trouble's afoot.

[Antistrophe c]

CREON:

Let it come! Let it come!
I look for the light
Of my last day.
My ultimate fate
Oh, let it come
I never want to face another day!

1330

CHORUS:

That lies in the future. Our duty is for the present.
Leave your death to the Ones whose concern it is.

1335

CREON:

But that's what I long for. I prayed for that.

CHORUS:

Then don't pray at all.

A mortal has no escape from fate.

[Antistrophe d]

CREON: (*Praying.*)

1340 Please take this useless man,
Put him out of your way. He killed you, my child,
Though that is not what he wished.
And you, too, my wife.

What a miserable wretch I am!
Never to see them again!
1345 On whom can I lean?
Everything I touch turns against me,
My head bows to the fate that has leapt on it.

CHORUS:

1350 Wisdom is supreme for a blessed life,
And reverence for the gods
Must never cease.
Great words, sprung from arrogance,
Are punished by great blows.
So it is one learns, in old age, to be wise.

-END-

1348: "Wisdom is supreme for a blessed life"—*Phronein* (wisdom, good sense) is essential for *eudaimonia* (flourishing, happiness in a broad sense).