SOPHOCLES

ANTIGONE

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>PROLOGUE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>PARODOS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>EPISODE 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>STASIMON 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>EPISODE 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>STASIMON 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>EPISODE 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>STASIMON 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX</td>
<td>EPISODE 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>STASIMON 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XI</td>
<td>EPISODE 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XII</td>
<td>HYPORCHEMA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIII</td>
<td>EXODUS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I||PROLOGUE

ANTIGONE

Ismene, sweet Ismene, my dear sister!
Will Zeus, in our lifetime, spare us
From the troubles of Oedipus?
You and I have already
Suffered every pain, every disaster,
Every shame, every dishonor in our own troubles.
Now—what’s this new decree
They say the general has imposed
Upon the city? Have you heard word of our brothers,
Or do the crimes of our enemies fall on deaf ears?

ISMENE

I’ve heard nothing new, Antigone, of our brothers,
Good or bad. No one has come
Since we two sisters lost our two brothers,
Dead on a single day, each by the other’s hand.
The Argive army disappeared in the night—
I know nothing more
Of what is to come of me.

ANTIGONE

That’s why I called you here with me,
Outside the gates, so only you would hear.

ISMENE

What is it? There seems to be a storm in you.

ANTIGONE

Hasn’t Creon honored one of our
Brothers in burial, but not the other?
Eteocles, they say, has been tucked away
Beneath the earth, honored among the dead below
With formal observation of rite and custom.
But Creon has proclaimed
That no one shall grieve nor lay to rest
That tortured corpse I still call Polyneices—
He shall be left unwept, unburied, a sweet treasure
For the vultures as they search for the grace of flesh.
Good Creon has denied you and me—
Even me!—this rite.
He’s coming here to proclaim it publicly
So none are ignorant, and these are not just words—he means to act.
The punishment shall be death by public stoning.
This is the trouble you’re in, and you will soon reveal
Whether the virtue of our ancestors runs through your veins.

ISMENE
Oh my poor sister, if this is true,
What’s the point in meddling?

ANTIGONE
Consider whether you’ll help me.

ISMENE
Help you with what? What are you thinking?

ANTIGONE
Will you lend this hand to bury his corpse?

ISMENE
Do you really mean to bury him, even though it’s against the law?

ANTIGONE
I will do my part—and yours, too, if you won’t—To bury our brother. I won’t be caught betraying him.

ISMENE
How can you be so stubborn? Creon forbids it.

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

ISMENE
Oh god! Sister, don’t forget
How our father died, raging and infamous!
How, when he discovered the sins of his past,
He tore his eyes to pieces, blinded by his own hand!
How that woman who was both his mother and his wife
Put an end to her life with a twisted noose!
How, finally, our two sad brothers
Slew each other on the same day, each one reaching
Their common demise at the hands of the other.

We’re alone in this world—open your eyes and see
How agonizing our deaths will be
If we defy this order and break the law,
Or step on the toes of tyrants in any way.
You’ve got to remember that we are women—
We aren’t meant to fight battles with men.
We are ruled by whoever’s stronger,
And as a result we must obey this order and worse.
I am bound by these circumstances—
Even as I beg the gods of death for mercy,
I will obey those in power; there’s no sense
In meddling where you don’t belong.

ANTIGONE

I’m not going to force you, but even if you change
Your mind, I won’t accept your help now.
Do what you think is right; I will bury him.
It’s a beautiful thing, to die in this act.
With him I will rest, beloved with beloved,
And I will be a god-fearing criminal. I need to please
The gods of death more than the men on Earth,
As I will rest below forever. But if you think it best,
Go ahead and dishonor what the gods honor.

ISMENE

I’m not dishonoring anyone! And even still, I’m just a woman!
Only men get a say in how the city’s run, you know that.

ANTIGONE

You can make that your excuse—
I will bury my brother.

ISMENE

Oh my poor sister, I’m so afraid for you!

ANTIGONE

Don’t fear for me! Sort your own fate out!

ISMENE

You mustn’t tell anyone what you’re doing—
Keep it secret, and I will, too.

ANTIGONE

Oh, on the contrary! Tell them all! If you don’t spread the word
To everyone, they will hate you even more for biting your tongue.
ISMENE
Your heart is hot for chilling deeds.

ANTIGONE
But I know that, to those who matter most, I’m doing the right thing.

ISMENE
If you even get that far! You’re bent on the impossible.

ANTIGONE
When my strength fails, I’ll stop.

ISMENE
You shouldn’t be chasing the impossible in the first place!

ANTIGONE
Say another word and you will earn my hatred.
When you’re laid to rest, you’ll find that even the dead hate you—
And rightly so. Leave me and my foolish plan
To suffer our terrible fate! There is no punishment horrible enough
To keep me from dying a beautiful death.

ISMENE
Go on then, if you think it best—you’re a fool
To go, but your loved ones still love you.
CHORUS

Beam of the sun, most beautiful light
To ever shine over seven-gated Thebes,
You have finally appeared!
O golden day’s eye,
Pouring over Dirce’s streams,
You spurred headlong
Into flight the white-shielded
Man from Argos,
Once advancing in full armor,
Now in swifter retreat—

Stirred by the disputes of Polyneices,
Like a screeching eagle
He flew above our land,
Covered with wing
As white as snowy winter,
With many a weapon
And horsehair helmet—

Perched above our rooftops
And in his gyre gaping
With bloodthirsty spears
At our seven-gated entrance,
He yielded before his jaws teemed
With our blood or the pine-fed flame
Of Hephaestus seized our crown of towers.
How Ares’ cry was stretched
Across his back, no easy task
To choke out the Theban dragon!

For Zeus despises the babblings of a boastful
Tongue, and as he watched them advance
In a vast torrent of men
With the arrogance of clanging gold,
He brandished a thunderbolt and hurled it
At the one already raising the cry
Of victory as he rushed up our walls.
He swung and fell hard upon the earth,
A torch in hand—the one who, just now
Raging with mad passion, was breathing
Fury and slaughter like the winds of a wild storm.

Yet these threats turned out otherwise,  
And to other foes great Ares  
Dealt other blows, workhorse of battle.  
For seven commanders stood at seven gates and  
Left behind in equal share their panoplies of brass  
To Zeus, turner of the battle’s tide—  

Except for those two wretched ones, born from  
The same mother and father, who stood and drove  
Their spears against each other, both striking victory,  
Both finding death in equal share.  

Since glory-granting Nike has come  
To Thebes of many chariots, a smile for a smile,  
Let’s make ourselves forgetful  
Of the wars of recent past;  
Let’s make our way to the temples of the gods  
To dance all through the night;  
Let Bacchus lead the dance as he shakes the earth of Thebes!

(DANCE INTERLUDE)

But, behold, the king of the land—  
Creon, son of Menoeceus, the new ruler  
By the recent fortunes which the gods  
Have sent his way—he comes!  
What new law does he so hastily intend,  
Since he’s sent word that the elders  
Are to gather and discuss a special issue?
CREON

Gentlemen, our ship of state, which the gods threatened to
Wreck in a sea of havoc, has returned to its proper course.
I sent messengers to summon you, out of everyone,
Since I’m quite aware that
You’ve stayed loyal to Laius’ mighty throne.
When Oedipus was at the helm, you were unwavering,
And even now that he’s gone, you stand by
That man and his children with hearts unchanged.
Since those two in a single day
Died by a double fate, each one
Stuck and skewered by the other’s bloody hand,
I now wield the full power of the throne
As next of kin to those fallen brothers.

But you never really know the heart,
Mind, and soul of a man until
The day you watch him rule.
In my eyes, the worst kind of leader
Is the one who rules without clear intentions,
Who holds his tongue whenever he’s afraid—
Now and always, that’s the lowest kind.
Likewise I have nothing to say for leaders who put
Their friends before their country.

Be my witness, all-seeing Zeus:
I would never stay silent if I saw trouble
Threatening the safety of our society.
I would never make friends
With my country’s enemies, for I know that
She is our common protector, and that we can consider
Only our fellow shipmates true friends.
According to these principles I will glorify our city.

With them in mind I’ve already made a public decree
To all the citizens regarding the children of Oedipus:
Eteocles, who died fighting
For this city—our greatest warrior by far—
Shall be buried and honored with all the proper rites
That are due when one of our best men has fallen;
As for his brother (Polyneices):
He was exiled from this city, but returned to burn
The land of his father and the gods of his family line
To the ground. He wanted to drink the blood
Of his kin and enslave the rest of us.
It has been proclaimed throughout the city
That no one shall mourn this man nor give him
A proper burial. He should be left for all to see, unburied,
His body ripped to shreds by vultures and wild dogs.

This is my intention: never will I allow
Criminals to be honored before law-abiding citizens.
But anyone who means well for this city
I will honor in death as in life.

CHORUS
Such is your will, Creon son of Menoeceus,
For the friends and the enemies of the state.
You have the power, I suppose, to enforce any law
Concerning the living and the dead.

CREON
Make sure my orders are enforced.

CHORUS
Set that burden on some younger man.

CREON
No, no—there are already guards watching the corpse.

CHORUS
To be clear, what else are you asking?

CREON
Don’t give an inch to those who disobey.

CHORUS
No one is foolish enough to love death.

CREON
You’re right, death is the reward; but greed
Will often crush a man beneath his own desires.

GUARD
Dread liege, I shall not say that I come
With breathless speed, lifting up nimble feet.
For I stopped many a time with pangs of thought,
And on the road did wheel myself around to return:
For my mind was speaking much to me, saying:
“Wretch, wherefore hiest thou to thy punition?
Dog, tarriest thou again? An Creon should know this
From some other man? Wilt thou not indeed grieve for’t?”

Thus debating, I was going in leisure slowly.
And thus a short road became long.
At last, however, the day prevailed when I should come
Hither to you. And if I shall say nought, I shall utter it the same:
For grasping one hope I arrive,
Not to suffer but that which is fated.

CREON
What’s got you so out of your wits?

GUARD
I wish first to tell you of myself: for neither
Did I the deed, nor know I who hath it done.
And it were not right that I should suffer for it.

CREON
You’re taking your aim and planting defenses
Around the matter; you must have something strange to say.

GUARD
Verily, for dread matters yieldeth great hesitation.

CREON
Just say what you need to say and be gone.

GUARD
Indeed, I tell you: the corpse, someone even now
hath honored its last rites and departed: sprinkling
thirsty dust upon the flesh in obsequies, as is enjoined.

CREON
What are you saying? Which man dared to do this?

GUARD
I wit not: for, neither are there marks of axe nor pitchfork,
The sodden turf sits dry and hard, neither are there the marks
Of a wagon: no trace hath the man left behind him.
And when the first watch did take its post, we were sore afraid
For the cold clay was hid from us nor was it in any sepulchre,
But the dust was upon him, done like one reckless of law,
Neither seemed it the beasts of the earth nor the dogs
Nor any other creature did come essaying to rend his flesh.

Yea, I tell you, all did cast their suspicions straightway
And all did accuse each other and everything—
They were poised to fight, indeed, none did restrain them.
For, looked they all guilty, but none were imprisoned,
And all spake that they wot not the doer of the deed.
Indeed, we were readied to endure ordeal by iron hot
And through the flame to walk
And swear upon the Holy Gods—
Yet we did it not, nor wit we anybody
Laying designs nor plotting nought.

At length, when inquiries seemed of no avail,
A man spake of great evil
And we did turn our countenances to the firmament
And were sore afraid, as we knew not
Whether to make argument or rest secure apart from this ill.
He spake, saying someone must among you hie
And make certain all is made manifest.
Cast we then our lots of chance,
And by great fortune I have won this trouble.
Lo, here am I: I would fain be not.
None would wish to be bearer of ill tidings.

CHORUS
Lord, deep in my mind I wonder again
if this isn’t something sent from the gods.

CREON
Shut up! Before your words fill me with rage
And we find out that you’re both old and stupid.
What you’ve said is unthinkable,
That the gods are protecting this corpse.

Did they bury this man
To honor his good deeds?
This man who came to burn
Their pillar-girded temples, their holy offerings, their land—
This man who threw the laws to the wind?
Do you see the gods honoring such wicked men?
I don’t. But from the beginning some men of this city
Have been muttering against me,
Throwing back their heads in secret, refusing to bring
Their necks under the yoke in just submission to me.

For this reason it is clear that
These men were bribed.
In all mankind there is no worse custom
Than money. It corrupts cities,
It drives men from their homes,
It seduces them and instructs their otherwise
Capable minds in the ways of savagery.
It taught mankind wickedness.
It makes every act ungodly.
But every man who accepts such bribery
Will pay price at some point or other.

As Zeus still has my prayers,
Mark my words—I swear to you that
If you do not bring before my eyes
The criminal who performed this burial,
You’ll have a fate worse than death:
You’ll be strung up alive until you confess your crime—
Then, as you steal, you’ll know where your income
Should be coming from, and you’ll finally learn that
More money isn’t always a good thing.
You know that you lose more than you gain
In such shameful pursuits.

GUARD
Might I speak or begone with me forthwith?

CREON
Can’t you see every word you say brings me pain?

GUARD
Do I pain your ears or your heart?

CREON
Why test the limits of my grief?

GUARD
The criminal pains your heart, I only pain your ears.

CREON
Now you’re just spewing nonsense.
GUARD
Mayhap, but I did not commit this crime.

CREON
You traded your soul for silver.

GUARD
Well now, ’tis a shame when the judge misjudges.

CREON
Grumble over this then: if you can’t track down
The criminal who’s done this, you’ll find that
Your ill-gotten gains bring you only misery.

GUARD
O ye gods, may this outlaw be found! Yet it is all one, whether he
Be caught or be he not—as such is solely in fate’s domain—
Surely, I shall not be seen here again! O ye gods,
Rescued so, I owe ye a great many thanks.
IV|STASIMON 1

CHORUS

There are many marvelous things,
Yet none more so than man.
This power traverses the sea
When it is grey with wintry wind,
Passing under the surging swells
As they nearly engulf him. And of the gods
The eldest, Gaia immortal, restless Gaia,
He wears out by turning her soil with plows
And the stock of horses, moving through and
Back and forth, year after year.

He leads by taking captive
The race of thoughtless birds,
The nations of wild beasts
And the aquatic life of the deep,
In twisted nets woven into meshed coils,
The very skilful human;
With contrivance he rules over
The field animals and the beast of the mountains,
As he restrains the horse by placing a yoke
Around its shaggy neck, and holds back
The untiring bull of the mountains.

He has taught himself
Speech and thought like wind
And city-maintaining moods,
And how to flee the frosty skies
And stormy bolts of places inhospitable:
All-inventive is he -
He proceeds unknowingly into
No impending matter:
Only Hades is inescapable,
Yet even against irresistible disease
He has contrived remedy.

Possessing a certain ingenious wisdom,
Skill unexpected, he veers sometimes towards evil,
Other times towards good;
While heeding the law of earth
And the sworn oath of the gods,
His city flourishes; stateless is he
Who boldly dares to commit sin.
May he who does these things
Neither share my hearth
Nor think like me!

CHORUS

I’m confused regarding
This blessed portent:
How could I deny
That this child is Antigone?
Oh Oedipus unfortunate,
Son of an unfortunate father,
What is this?
They’re certainly not taking you away,
Hauling you off in thoughtlessness
On the premise that you disobeyed
A royal decree, are they?
V|EPISODE 2

GUARD
Praise ye heavenly host! Lo, here is she who hath done the deed!
It is I who have apprehended her in the act! But, where is Creon? 385

CHORUS
Here he comes now.

CREON
What is it? What am I walking into?

GUARD
Let mortal men swear not against any thing,
For their minds are of a fickle mettle:
Yea, I swore unto God I would never
Return hither unto you and the threatening words
You bandy upon me, but—
As a pleasant surprise is pleasing unto all—
Behold! I am here, though I spoke otherwise,
With this maiden here, who was seen honoring the dead.
This time, no lots needs were cast,
For this hath befallen me alone. Now, dread liege,
Take you her, examine her, question her, as it pleaseth you, only
I am weary of the ado about this place.

CREON
Can you explain how and where you found this woman? 400

GUARD
She was burying the corpse—the rest you know.

CREON
Do you understand what you are saying? Is this the truth?

GUARD
Yes! I hath seen her burying the corpse
You had enjoined be not interred, there is no more, hear you? 405

CREON
How did you find her? How did you make your arrest?

GUARD
It occured in this way: when arrived we to the place—
with your threats o’erhanging our heads—
We swept away all the dust that was upon the corpse,
Nudified the oddly bedewed flesh,
And sat we down by the hill against the wind,
Thus ensuring no odor did strike us.

Every man did keep his watch, and did make each other keep theirs
With threats, lest any should prove a shirker.
Time passed, then high noon arose
With the sun directly o’erhead
And the land was hot and roasting.

Then arose a sudden a twisting wind,
Evil in the heavens, engendering a storm of dust,
Filling the plain, marking up the forest whole,
And choking up the air. We closed our eyes
And took we God’s wrath. It seems an eternity did pass,
But then we saw this maiden shrieking
Like a mother bird who findeth
her chicks gone from the nest.

She did see the corpse denuded,
Begain to wail in earnest,
And curst she whoever had done this.
Straightway she took dust into her hands,
Raised up the water pitcher,
And did anoint the dead.

Seeing this we did her arrest straightaway,
But she was unafraid.
We did make inquiry unto her about
What she had did and she denied not a thing.
It pleases me well, but also does me sorrow:
For, ’tis good to ‘scape the gallows,
But to cast another therein agrieves.
But, what is of import is
that I am saved: the rest troubleth not.

CREON

You... you with your head hung down to the earth,
do you admit to this or do you deny it?

ANTIGONE

I say that I did it and I do not deny it.
CREON
You’re free to go wherever you wish, guard,
Now that your name’s been cleared.
Now girl, speak to the point:
Were you aware of my decree?

ANTIGONE
I knew it. Why wouldn’t I have known it? It was well-known to all.

CREON
And yet you dared to disobey this law?

ANTIGONE
Yes, for Zeus did not make this decree,
And Dike, goddess of justice,
Did not ordain such a law for mortal men.
I didn’t think your decrees
Were strong enough to outweigh
The firm and unwritten laws of the gods.
For they live not today or yesterday, but for all time,
And no one knows how long ago they were revealed.

I was not about to pay the gods’ price
For fear of one man’s arrogance.
I knew very well that I would die one day. How could I not?
Even if you had not made your decree, it would still be so.
But if I die before my time, I count it as a gain.
When someone lives among as many evils as I do,
How could they not live better in death?
It won’t be painful at all for me to meet
This fate, but if I had allowed
The son of my own mother to die and remain unburied,
That would have tortured me, but this—this is nothing.
Am I the fool?
Or is it the fool that accuses me of folly.

CHORUS
It’s clear she’s the fierce child of a fierce father.
She never learned how to be flexible.

CREON
See how over-brittle minds are the first
To crack, and how the mightiest iron, tempered by fire,
Can still splinter and crumble
Into a million pieces. I know, too, how a great,
Passionate horse can be broken with just a tiny bit:
You can’t be proud of what you say
If you’re just a slave to your audience.

This girl knew full well how to commit a crime,
And she has transgressed the law that I established:
But she’s committed a second outrage
By being proud of what she’s done and laughing with self-congratulation.
Now either I’m no man, or she’s become one,
If she’s to win such a victory without any retribution.

I don’t care that she’s my sister’s child—
And even if she were closer to me than my own wife or son,
She and her sister will never avoid this horrible fate—
I think her sister holds an equal share
Of the blame for plotting this burial.

Go! Summon her! For I see her now,
Raving about in there like she’s lost her mind.
When someone’s concocting a villainous scheme,
Their mind will often betray
Their guilt before the act is done.
I hate it, too, when a criminal
Who’s been caught tries to glorify their crime.

ANTIGONE
What more do you want than my death?

CREON
Nothing: once I have that, I’ll have everything.

ANTIGONE
Why then do you delay? Nothing you say pleases me—
And I hope it never does—
And nothing I do pleases you.

What greater glory could I have gained
Than placing my own brother
In his grave. You could tell that everyone here
Is happy to hear this, if fear did not shut their mouths.
But tyranny has many blessings—
In particular it can do and say whatever it wants.

CREON
You’re the only one in Thebes who sees things this way.
ANTIGONE
They all see it but they hold their tongues for you.

CREON
Wouldn’t you be ashamed if they disagreed with you?  

ANTIGONE
There’s no shame in respecting one’s own flesh and blood.

CREON
Didn’t he die fighting his own flesh and blood?

ANTIGONE
A brother from the same mother and the same father, yes.

CREON
Then how can you heap praises on someone so godless?

ANTIGONE
The dead man would not agree with that.

CREON
If you honor him with equal fervor, you disgrace Eteocles.

ANTIGONE
It was his brother, not some slave who perished.

CREON
One ravaged this land. The other died defending it.

ANTIGONE
Nevertheless, Hades demands these rites.

CREON
But this man, good for nothing but evil, wants equal honor.  

ANTIGONE
Who knows what the gods consider holy?

CREON
Your enemy’s never your friend, not even when he’s dead.
I was born to join in love, not in hate.

CREON
Why don’t you love them when you’re down there yourself,
If you must love them! As long as I live, no woman shall rule me. 525

CHORUS
Behold! Ismene before the palace gates,
Letting her brother-loving tears flow:
A cloud over her brow disfigures her countenance
Red as blood, drenching her fair cheek. 530

CREON
You, sitting in the palace like a viper, lurking,
Sucking my blood dry while you went unnoticed—did I miss some sign
When I raised you two leeches, some sign that you’d be
Rebels against the throne? Come, say it to me! You’ll say you also
Had a hand in the burial... or will you swear you knew nothing of it? 535

ISMENE
I did the deed, if she’ll agree,
And I’ll share the blame.

ANTIGONE
But justice won’t let you, since you refused help,
And I did not consult with you.

ISMENE
I’m not ashamed to sail alongside you
Through your ocean of perils. 540

ANTIGONE
Hades and the dead below know whose deed this is.  
A friend in words alone is no friend of mine.

ISMENE
At least, sister, you should not strip me of the honor
Of both dying and cleansing the dead with you! 545

ANTIGONE
Don’t die for my sake, and don’t claim something
You never even tried to do. My death will suffice.

ISMENE
And what would my life be without you?
ANTIGONE
Ask Creon! Your concern clearly lies with him!

ISMENE
Why are you mocking me like this? It’s not helpful at all.

ANTIGONE
If I’m mocking you, it’s my loss.

ISMENE
But really! Even now, what can I do to help you?

ANTIGONE
Save yourself. I will not resent your escape.

ISMENE
Oh misery! Will I not share in your fate?

ANTIGONE
You chose to live, and I chose to die.

ISMENE
But not without hearing what I had to say.

ANTIGONE
Some people took your side, some people took mine.

ISMENE
But both of us have equal guilt!

ANTIGONE
Be strong! You are still living, but my life ended long ago,
So that I might serve the dead.

CREON
I gather so far that one of you has just gone mad,
While the other has been mad from the start.

ISMENE
Yes, my lord, the sanity we’re born with doesn’t stay
When things go badly. It wanders off.

CREON
Certainly for you, when you chose to do such evil things with such evil people.
ISMENE
What kind of life could I live, alone, separated from her?

CREON
Don’t speak of her. She’s yours no more.

ISMENE
You’re really going to kill your own son’s bride?

CREON
He can plow other fields.

ISMENE
No one is as well matched to him as she is.

CREON
I hate it when sons take horrid wives.

ANTIGONE
O Haemon dear, how your father insults you!

CREON
I’ve had enough of you and that marriage.

ISMENE
Will you really deprive your son of his own wife?

CREON
I won’t have to: Hades will to stop this marriage for me.

ISMENE
It’s settled, then. She is to die.

CREON
Yes, it’s settled… settled for both of us, so there’s no point in arguing any further. Bring her inside, slaves. From now on you are not to leave these women alone. For even brave men, I tell you, flee when they see Hades standing beside them so soon.
Blessed is the life of he
Who has never tasted evil.
For those whose abode is shaken by the gods,
No ruin is absent as it proceeds
Through the multitude of peoples,
Just as, when a swelling urged by
Stormy Thracian sea-winds
Surges over the gloomy deep,
It churns up the dark sand
From the seafloor,
And the wave-beaten coast
Roars and groans.

The ancient miseries of the
House of Labdacus, I see, fall
On top of the miseries of the dead.
One generation cannot set a people
Free, since some god will throw them down
With no release. For the bloody dust
Of the gods of hell, and folly, and frenzy of thought
Now cut down that ray of light
Which had shone itself over the furthest roots
Of the house of Oedipus.

Who of mankind can sustain,
O Zeus, a transgression of your power?
No one can take it away - neither sleep,
Which ensnares everything, nor even
Unwearying months of divine labor.
As lord for never-ending time
You hold fast Olympus’s sparkled, marbled glory.
Both then and now
Does this law hold strong:
Nothing grand comes
To a mortal’s life
Without ruin.

Behold that much-wandering hope,
To many a benefit as much as
To others a trick of thoughtless lust.
Its victim is unknowing, before crying out
From a foot blazing with fire.
With wisdom was the famous saying once revealed:
Evil can sometimes seem good to the one
Whose mind the gods are leading to ruin.
Yet free from ruin he goes about
For the shortest time.

CHORUS

Behold! It’s Haemon, the youngest
Of your children: does he come to mourn
The fate of his bride Antigone,
To grieve that he was
Cheated out of his marriage bed?
CREON
We’ll soon see more clearly than prophets.
O child, can it be that you come to your father, raving
About your bride-to-be? Did you not hear that the last vote has been cast?
Or am I ever yours, your ally through thick and thin?

HAEMON
Father, I am yours, and you know me well,
You set me on the right path, and I am following it.
I would not prioritize any marriage
Over the wise guidance you give me.

CREON
Good, because this is how I have to handle the situation,
And you must support your father’s judgement, always.
This is the very reason why parents pray
For their children to be obedient:
So they’ll go blow for blow with their enemies
And still honor their loved ones—just as their father would.

But for someone who raises hopeless children,
What else can you say they’ve done but make
More trouble for themselves, and give their enemies
An excuse to mock them. Now my son, don’t you ever
Lose your head for the pleasure of a woman:
You’ll watch this once-beloved grow cold to you,
A wretched woman in your bed and in your home.

What could carve a deeper wound than a false friend?
Dismiss this girl as though she were your enemy,
So she can be married off to someone in the house of Hades.
I caught her, openly disobeying
My commands (alone among of the whole city).
I will not have it said that in my city lies are confused with laws...
I will kill her. Let her sing a prayer to Zeus
Who rules over families. If I allow my own relatives
To walk all over me, everyone will follow suit:
Who would trust a man to run a city
If he can’t keep his own house in order?
Whoever breaks or cheapens the law or feels
That they can dictate their own laws to authority
Will never win praises from me.
Everyone must obey the city’s chosen leader,
In matters large and small, just and unjust.
I am confident that the man who can
Govern himself well can govern a city, too.
You can depend on the soldier who stays at his post
While a hail of spears rains down, a true and faithful man.

There is no greater crime than disobedience:
It topples cities, it makes fugitives
Out of families, it puts armies to flight.
When things are in good order,
Obedience to authority saves many lives.
One must defend the order of things in society,
And so we can’t let ourselves be seduced by women.
It’s a better legacy to be deposed, if it must be so,
By a man than to be rightly called weaker than women.

CHORUS

Unless old age is playing tricks on us,
You seem to be speaking wisely.

HAEMON

Father, the gods endow mankind with reason,
Supreme among all the traits man can hope to possess.
I couldn’t say, nor would I want to say, that
You are handling this situation incorrectly...
But there may be something profitable in a difference
Of opinions. Now, as your son, I am obliged to look out for you
Every time a person speaks or acts or points his finger at you.
For your eye is frightful to the common man when he must
Tell you things which he knows you won’t be pleased to hear.

But I listen under cover of darkness, and I hear
How the city mourns for this young girl,
Saying that of all women she deserves least of all
To die so disgracefully for her good deeds,
All because she wouldn’t allow her own brother,
Lying unburied in the gore where he fell, to be torn
To pieces by flesh-eating dogs and birds of prey.
Doesn’t she deserve to get a share of the gilded honor?
Dim whispers to this point circulate in the otherwise silent city.

I can think of no treasure more precious,
Father, than your success.
What greater honor can there be for a child than the fame
Of a prospering father, or for a father than the fame of his child?
Now don’t reserve just one way of thinking for yourself,
Saying that this is correct, and nothing else.

For the one who imagines he thinks without equal,
Or has a tongue or a soul like no other,
Shows only how empty his head really is.
But even if a man is wise, there’s no shame in him
Straying from the path and picking things up as he goes.

Look how one tree on the riverbank yields its smaller branches
To the stream that’s gorged with fresh snowmelt, and saves itself,
While another that’s just too rigid is washed away,
Roots and all. Likewise the captain who’s tied his ship’s sail
So tight that it cannot yield to the wind will have to sail
The rest of the way with oars once he’s snapped his mast in half.

So yield and let your wrath subside.
If I’m allowed to have an opinion (though I’m just a young man),
I think it would be best by far if every man
Were born full of wisdom and knowledge.
But if this is impossible, and it normally doesn’t happen this way,
It is still good to learn from a thought well spoken.

CHORUS
Your majesty, if he speaks suitably, it is right that you learn from him,
And you from him, Haemon: for both sides have spoken well.

CREON
Are we so rattled with age that
Young men must do the teaching now?

HAEMON
That’s not right at all: even if I am young,
It’s best to judge by my actions, not just by my age.

CREON
And is there any use in honoring rebels?

HAEMON
I wouldn’t even tell someone else to honor rebels.

CREON
And has she not come down with that very affliction?
HAEMON
All of Thebes disagrees with you.

CREON
Will the city now be telling me how to rule?

HAEMON
Can’t you see how childishly you’ve spoken?

CREON
Must I rule this land by someone else’s opinions?

HAEMON
It’s not a city if it only belongs to one man.

CREON
Is the city not ruled by the man in charge?

HAEMON
And I’m sure you’d rule very nicely in a wasteland.

CREON
It seems this one’s taken sides with the woman.

HAEMON
Yeah, if you’re a woman. I’m actually trying to help you.

CREON
You ungrateful child, putting your own father on trial!

HAEMON
Only because I can see that you’re making a mistake.

CREON
Is it a mistake to respect my own authority?

HAEMON
No, but you can’t worship yourself while you walk all over the gods.

CREON
You polluted creature, whipped by a woman!

HAEMON
You would never find emotions clouding my judgement.
CREON

Yet every word you say is in her defense.

HAEMON

And yours, and mine, and the gods’ below.

CREON

You will never marry this girl while she’s alive.  

HAEMON

Then she will die, and in death kill another.

CREON

You would really dare to make so bold a threat?

HAEMON

What threat is there in discussing your foolish plans?

CREON

You whine while you talk, since you lack wisdom.

HAEMON

If you weren’t my father, I’d say you were out of your mind.  

CREON

Oh don’t flatter me—you’re a slave to that woman!

HAEMON

So you want to do all of the talking and none of the listening?

CREON

Oh really? It’s clear, by Olympus,  

You’re happy to abuse me with these insults.  

Bring that wretched creature before his eyes at once,  

So she can die while her bridegroom stands idly by.

HAEMON

No, don’t hold your breath on that—  

She will not die beside me, and you will never  

Look upon this face again with your two eyes,  

As you rant and rave to whatever friends will let you.
CHORUS
The boy, your majesty, stormed out in anger.
At his age the mind grows resentful when it feels pain.

CREON
Let him go, let him concoct some superhuman plan:
He will not free these two girls from their fate.

CHORUS
Do you intend to kill them both?

CREON
You have a point. Not the one who kept her hands clean.

CHORUS
And how do you plan to kill the other?

CREON
I will lead her along a deserted path
And then seal her in a rocky cavern there,
Leaving her only as much food as is necessary
To clear the city's name of the charge of murder.
And at some point in that cave she will beg Hades
Not to let her die (since he's the only god she cares for),
Or at any rate she will realize then that there's
Excessive pain in worshipping the god of death.
Eros, o Eros, unvanquished in battle!
Who falls upon riches,
Who sleeps every night
On a young maiden’s tender cheeks,
Traversing both the depths and
The most rural of abodes:
From you indeed neither the deathless gods
Nor any man who lives but one day
Can ever hope to escape;
Your victim is always driven mad.

You lead the minds of the just
Astray towards disgraceful insult;
The one to have ignited this
Strife of mankind is you;
Yet desire wins out, shining
From the brow of a brilliant bride,
Desire sitting in the office
Of the great divine law.
For, while this battle is waged,
A god jests from afar—Aphrodite!

Yet, now, seeing these things,
I am forced to transgress justice,
No longer strong enough to restrain
The river of tears when I see Antigone
Proceeding to her final place of rest.
Look at me, o citizens
Of my fatherland, as I set out
On my last journey, as I gaze upon
My last sunlight,
And never again. But Hades,
Who puts all to sleep, leads me, still living,
To Acheron’s shore, without the bridal song
Which I was due. No song has been
Sung for me at my marriage,
But instead I shall wed Acheron.

And so in renown and with praise
You journey to the corpse-filled depths,
Neither lashed by flesh-wasting plague
Nor chancing upon death by sword;
Rather, living alone and self-determined,
You attain for yourself the Death of mortals.

I have heard
How our Phrygian guest, Niobe,
The daughter of Tantalus, died a miserable death
Near lofty Mount Sipylus. The growth of rock, like clinging ivy,
Subdued her,
Now—as the story goes—
She melts away. Rain and snow
Never leave her.
But with tears streaming down her face,
She dampens the ridges of the mountain. I am
Most like her, as the god leads me to my sleep.

Yet she was not only god-born but also a goddess herself,
While we are but mortals, born from mortals.
Still, it is great for one in the throes of death
To hear that she has obtained the luck of a god
In life and in death.

Oh, now you’re mocking me!
Why, by my father’s gods,
Do you insult me to my face,
And not wait until I’ve gone,
My city and you, her wealthiest citizens?
Ah! Springs of Dirce and
Grove of Thebes of many chariots,
You at least I can count on to witness
How I go, unwept by my loved ones,
To my rock-heap prison,
To my unknown tomb.
Ah! Unhappy one! I neither live
Among mortals nor shades,
Neither with the living nor the dead.

CHORUS
You rushed through the depths of recklessness
For the high throne of Dike,
But you have fallen, oh child, fallen very far.
Now you will pay for your father’s crimes.

ANTIGONE
You have touched upon
My most painful memory,
The thrice-told doom of my father
And our whole
Destiny, that of the
Famed Labdacids.
Oh, our mother’s disaster of a marriage
And my father’s incestuous intercourse
With his ill-fated mother!
From such people I, the miserable one, was born!
I go to them
To live, accursed, unmarried.
Ah, my brother who secured
An ill-fated marriage,
In your death you have slain me alive.

CHORUS
Your prayers may be reverent,
But they are in no way
Tolerable to those in power.
The rage you wished for has ruined you.

ANTIGONE
Unwept, unloved, unwed,
I am led in misery
Down this final path.
No more can I, unhappy girl,
Behold the sacred eye of the flaming sun.
No friend moans in grief
And no tears are wept for my fate.

CREON
Who would end their dying song
If they knew the final note would be their last?
Bring her as fast as you can, and leave her
Alone, sealed in that shadowy tomb—as I’ve ordered you to.
She’ll either die right then and there,
Or she’ll live entombed in that room—the decision is hers.
Our hands are clean as far as this girl is concerned.
Her place on this earth is gone.

ANTIGONE
O tomb, o bridal chamber, o deep-dug
Everlasting home, the place I go
To join my own, a greatest number of whom
Persephone has welcomed among the dead;
I am the last of them and I will descend most shamefully
Before my time on earth can be properly spent.

But when I go, I cherish the thought
That I will go dear to my father, and dear to you,
Mother, and dear to you, my brother.
Since when each of you died I washed you
With my own hands, and adorned you, and poured out
Funeral libations—and now, Polyneices,
This is my reward for burying you!

And yet, in the eyes of the wise, I honored you well.
If I were a mother of children,
Or if my husband rotted away dead,
I would never have taken on this burden without public support.
But what law am I saying all this for?
If my husband had died, I could’ve found another,
And if I had lost my first child, another man could’ve fathered my second,
But with my mother and my father both sealed away in Hades,
I can never have a new brother.

For such a law I honored you above all others,
But to Creon I seemed to act wrongfully
And to be terribly reckless, dear brother!
And now he leads me thus by the hands,
Without a marriage bed, without a bridal song, receiving no share
In marriage or the nurture of children,
But in this way, deserted by loved ones, ill-fated,
I come living to the graves of the dead.

What holy law did I violate?
Why must I, unhappy girl, still look to the gods?
Who should I call my ally, when pious behavior
Has incurred me the charge of impiety.
But if these things please the gods,
After my suffering I will come to know what I have done wrong.
But if my judges are found guilty, may they suffer no more greatly
Than I have suffered at their unjust hands.

CHORUS
The same brutal gusts of wind
Still grip her soul.

CREON
I'll give her guards reason
To weep for their sluggishness.

ANTIGONE
Oh no! These words
Are nearly death.

CREON
I cannot encourage you
To hope for a different outcome.

ANTIGONE
O city of my father, o land of Thebes,
Land of the ancient gods,
I am led away now without delay.
Behold, princes of Thebes,
The very last of the royal line!
See what things I suffer, and at whose hands,
All because I revered reverence!
CHORUS

Also did Danaë dare to trade away the sky’s
Light for the enclosure of bronze walls;
Though she was hidden,
Trapped as if in a grave.
Yet she was of noble lineage,
Oh child, darling, and kept safe
The gold-streamed seed of Zeus.
Destiny has a certain terrible power:
Nothing—neither wealth, nor Ares,
Nor lofty heights, nor dark sea-tossed ships—
Can ward off its grasp.

The sharp-tempered Edonian king, son of Dryas,
Was tempered and shut up
By Dionysus in craggy confinement.
In such a way did the terror of his madness
And brilliant might recede.
That man soon met that very same god
Whom he once pestered
In his mania with biting words.
For he kept trying to halt
The frenzied Bacchantes and the fire of Apollo,
Provoking the flute-loving Muses.

In the sea by the Black Rocks,
The double sea, are the Bosporus
And the Thracian city Salmydessus,
Where city-dwelling Ares observed
On the twin sons of Phineus
A cursed, blinding wound
From a savage wife,
A wound to their round eyes
Shattered and screaming
For vengeance, inflicted
By the edge of her shuttle
In her bloody hands.

Melting away miserably they lamented their
Unfortunate plight, their unmarried mother, too.
But she traced herself all the way back to the
Ancient house of the Erechtheus,
And she was raised in far-off caves
Amidst paternal whirlwinds, a child
Of Boreas, a swift-footed child who could dart
Beyond the horizon at a horse’s pace, a child
985
Born from the gods. But upon her as well,
Oh child, the Fates eternal descended.
TEIRESIAS
Lords of Thebes, we have come by a shared journey,
Two seeing from the eyes of one: indeed, for the blind,
This is life—living by the hand of a guide.

CREON
What is it, elder Teiresias? What news do you bring?

TEIRESIAS
I will explain. Now, obey the prophet.

CREON
I would not stray from your wisdom at a time like the present.

TEIRESIAS
And in so doing you’ve brought greatness to the city.

CREON
Yes, I am a witness to your benefits.

TEIRESIAS
Be wary; you are treading once again on fate’s razor edge.

CREON
What do you mean? Your voice is making me tremble.

TEIRESIAS
You will come to know as you learn the signs I have seen:
For as I was sitting in my old augur’s seat,
A spot for the birds to gather ‘round me,
I heard an unintelligible voice come from them,
Shrieking with a base and barbarous frenzy.

I realized that they were tearing at one another
With their talons in slaughter: but the beating
Of their wings was not meaningless.
In fear, I immediately tried lighting a fire on my fully-kindled altar:
But from my sacrifices Hephaestus, god of fire did not rise!
Rather, the dripping sacrificial juices of thigh fat melted
Onto the embers, raising smoke and sputtering.
And bile was scattered high into the air
And the thigh meat dripped down, and its coating of fat fell off.
I’ve learned of the omens of that
Perplexing sacrifice from this child here,
For he is my guide, just as I am a guide for others.

You are the reason your city is filled with plague.
For ill-fated Polyneices, son of Oedipus, lies as carrion,
And so all the altars and hearths
Are filled with vultures and hounds.
No longer do the gods receive sacrificial prayers
From us, nor do they acknowledge the scented flames of entrails.
No longer does the bird shriek auspicious cries
As it is now gorged on the fat of that slain brother.

Ponder these things, child!
For all men make mistakes.
When a man does wrong, if he makes amends
And moves forward after his mistake,
He is no longer unwise or unblessed—
But your stubbornness has made you clumsy!

Let the dead man rest—don’t kick at his corpse.
What good is there in killing the dead a second time?
I have your best interests in mind, and I speak the truth—
If you hear good advice, the best thing to do is learn from it.

CREON
Old man, like a whole team of archers taking aim
At a single man, I cannot escape the assault
Of your oracular art: I’m bandied about
By all these fortune-tellers, I’m bought and sold like cargo.

You’re making a good profit—earning your white gold
From Sardis, and, if you like, even gold from India—
But you will not seal that man in a tomb,
Not even if the eagles of heaven want to
Carry him off as food for Zeus’ throne—
Even if it meant wiping my hands of this pollution,
I will never let that man be buried, for I know well that
No mortal can pollute the gods.
Men fall, elder Teiresias, even clever men...
They fall far and in disgrace when they
Lie, however beautifully, for a little extra gold.

TEIRESIAS
Then does anyone know, does anyone consider...
CREON

What old saying is this?

TEIRESIAS

...That man’s greatest gift is reason?

1050

CREON

As surely as madness is our greatest curse..

TEIRESIAS

But you have clearly come down with that disease.

CREON

I won’t trade insults with a prophet.

TEIRESIAS

And yet you do, in saying that I prophesy falsely.

CREON

All prophets love money.

1055

TEIRESIAS

All tyrants love theft.

CREON

Do you realize that you’re speaking to your king?

TEIRESIAS

I do. You only saved the city because of me.

CREON

You’re a wise prophet, and yet you love doing the wrong thing.

TEIRESIAS

You will force me to utter the holy secret in my heart.

1060

CREON

Go on! Tell it, as long as you won’t be talking for profit.

TEIRESIAS

Hear my words, or no one will profit

CREON

You should know you won’t be paid for my decisions.
TEIRESIAS

You should know you won’t live through
Many more courses of the racing sun
1065
Before you’ll be handing over a corpse
Sprung from your own flesh, a corpse for corpses,
For casting down a god of heaven,
For lodging a living soul in a shameful grave,
And for keeping here on earth what belongs to the gods of hell,
A corpse unburied, unmourned, unholy.
Neither you nor the gods of heaven have a say
In these matters, and yet you have done them violence.

For these crimes the vengeful executioners,
The Furies of Hades, wait in ambush
1070
For you, ready to ensnare you in these same terrors.
And consider if I would say all this for a little extra silver.
It won’t be long now until the shrieks of
Women will rise from your home.

Wild with anger are all those cities
Whose butchered citizens were buried by dogs,
Beasts, or whirling buzzards, creatures that stained
Their homes and cities with polluting stench.

As you were harassing me, I was shooting, like an archer,
These arrows in anger at your heart—
1085
Steady arrows, whose sting you can’t outrun...
Boy, take me home, so this man
Can burden younger men with his anger,
And learn to keep a softer tongue
And a wiser mind than he does now.

CHORUS

The man, my lord, has left after speaking
Terrible prophecies: And yet, for all the time since
1090
My hair first grew on head (once dark, now white)
Our city has never heard him tell a lie.

CREON

I realize—it fills me with fear. It would be
A terrible thing to obey him, but no more terrible
Than to resist him, and curse my soul.
CHORUS
Tread carefully, son of Menoeceus.

CREON
What should I do? Tell me and I’ll obey.

CHORUS
Free the buried girl, 1100
And bury the unburied.

CREON
This is your advice? To give in to him?

CHORUS
As quickly as possible, my king: for the curses
Of the gods bring a swift end to foolish men.

CREON
Oh! It’s hard to deny the heart, but 1105
I can’t go on fighting so desperately against the gods.

CHORUS
Come on now, do these things and nothing more.

CREON
I will go straightaway. Go, go friends! 1110
One and all, hurry up and take your axes
To the tomb in plain sight!
My mind has changed.
As I myself bound her, so, too, shall I set her free.
I fear it’s best, in the end,
To preserve the laws of old.
HYPORCHEMA

CHORUS

Oh many-named one, glory of Cadmus’ wife
And offspring of thundering Zeus,
Who protects famous Italy
And rules over all,
Who cleaves the valley of Eleusis—
Bacchus!
Dweller of the mother city Thebes
By the flowing rivers of Ismenus
And the planting of the
Wild dragon’s teeth.
Flash ing smoke has seen you
Beyond the cliffs of the double ridge,
Where the Corycian nymphs
Proceed all frenzied about;
See you as well
Did the Castalian streams.
And it is you whom the ivied heights
Of the mountains of Nysa and the shore
Green with vines send, as you strive
To look upon the streets of Thebes,
The immortal words crying themselves out.
Of all cities
You honor Thebes the most,
Along with your petrified mother:
Now indeed, when the whole city is
Infected head to toe
By some noxious disease,
You hurry to pass over
With your cleansing foot
Mount Parnassus
And the sighing straits.

Oh come you chorus-leader, ushering the stars
Which breathe fire, you who supervise the
Incantations of the night, child born of Zeus,
Oh show yourself our Lord
With your trusty Thyiads,
Who rage ’till sunrise
And salute you in dance
As their master -
You, Bacchus!
Neighbors of the House of Cadmus and Amphion,
No life’s path is ever so straight that
I would dare speak well or ill of it.
For fortune is always lifting up and
Knocking down the lucky and the unlucky alike:
There is no prophet to tell mortal man his fate.

Creon was blessed, as far as I can tell—
He saved the land of Cadmus from its enemies,
He took sole dominion of this country, he ruled it well,
He fathered many noble children.
But now everything’s lost. When a man
Has kissed all his joy goodbye, I don’t consider him
Alive—he is a living corpse.

Fill your home with riches, if you wish!
Look to all the world like some great tyrant!
If there’s no joy in those things,
I wouldn’t even pay the shadow of smoke
For all of that—not in place of joy.

What’s the latest report on the royal family’s troubles?

They’re dead, and the living are to blame.

And who did the killing? Who lies dead? Say it!

Haemon is finished, bloodied by his own hand.

His father’s hand or his own?

His own, to spite his murderous father.

Oh prophet, how true your words ring now!
MESSENGER
With things the way they are, there’s more for you to consider.

CHORUS
Look, I see poor Eurydice nearby,
Creon’s wife—either she knows what her son has done,
Or she’s just leaving home by chance.

EURYDICE
People of Thebes, I heard the news
As I was about to leave to call upon
Pallas Athena with my prayers.
I happened to be loosening the bolts, to open
The gate, when the sound of disaster upon our house
Struck my ear. I fell terrified into the arms
Of my servant girls, paralyzed.
But whatever the news, tell it again.
I am no stranger to misfortunes—I will hear it.

MESSENGER
Dear mistress, I will tell you what I saw,
And I’ll leave out none of the truth.
Why would I soften you with words that
Would prove me only a liar? The truth is always best.
I followed your husband as his guide
To a distant field, where lay unpitied
The corpse of Polyneices, torn by dogs.

Begging Hades, god of the dead,
To restrain his anger in mercy,
We washed him with holy washing, and we burned him
Together with fresh-plucked branches
We found lying about, and we raised a high-roofed mound
Over the land. We then entered again
The girl’s stone-lined chamber, the bride of Hades.
But someone heard in the distance a loud, shrieking
Sound coming from the unhallowed room.

We went to tell Creon.
As he drew closer and closer, snippets of her
Wretched cry surrounded him, until he broke down
In tears, and began to wail aloud, crying:
“O wretched me, am I a prophet of doom?
Am I making my way
Down the most unlucky path of them all?
My son’s voice calls me. But, servants,
Go there quickly and when you get to the tomb,
Enter where the stones were taken out,
And tell me if I’m hearing Haemon’s voice,
Or if the gods are playing tricks on me.”

We went to investigate, as our disheartened master
Had ordered: In the very back of the tomb,
We saw her, hanging by the neck,
Dangling from a noose of fine thread,
And him, embracing her waist,
Bewailing the death of his bride,
The deeds of his father, and his cursed marriage bed.

When his father saw him, he cried out in horror
And rushed in, and wailing aloud he shouted:
“O wretched boy, what have you done?
What were you thinking? What misfortune has destroyed you?
Come on out, child, please—I beg you!”

The boy glared at him with fierce eyes,
Spat on his face, and said nothing. He drew
His double-edged sword. In a fit of rage
He swung and missed his fleeing father, and then
That poor, angry boy drove the sword between his ribs,
And sunk it half its length into his side. While he still had
Some sense of mind, he embraced the maiden.

Gasping for air, he sent a swift river of blood
Dripping down the maiden’s cheek.
Corpse lay by corpse, and that poor boy
Finally got his marriage rites in the house of Hades,
And showed all mankind that
The greatest sin is foolishness.

CHORUS
What do you make of this? The woman
Left without saying a word.

MESSENGER
I am astounded. And yet, I hope it’s that,
Upon hearing the pain of her son, she won’t allow herself
To weep in public, but only under her own roof,
and she’s going to order her servants to start lamenting there.
She’s just too modest to misstep like that.

CHORUS

I don’t know, but it seems to me that a long silence
Can mean as much trouble as the loudest wailing.

MESSENGER

Then I’ll go to the house and find out
If she’s concealing some secret plan
In her passionate, grief-stricken heart.
You’re right: too much silence does not bode well.

CHORUS

Behold! The king himself comes,
Holding a clear evidence that,
If it can be said, the mistake
Was his own, and no other’s.

CREON

Oh! The cruel and deadly mistakes
Of a thoughtless mind!
O elders, you watched kinsfolk
Kill and be killed.
Ah! The wretched ends of my plans!
Oh child, a young man with a young death!
Oh! Oh! You died, bound
Not by your own foolishness, but by mine!

CHORUS

Alas, how late you’ve come to see justice!

CREON

Ah me!
I’ve learned to be sorry. A god is
Is toying with my mind, pinning me with a crushing weight
Here and there, driving me down wild paths.
Ah me! Tripping over trampled joy!
Ah! Ah!
Oh the horrible pain of mortal man!

MESSENGER

My lord, it seems you’ve not come empty-handed,
But with a double load: you have one weight
In your arms now while the other waits for you at home.
CREON
What, is there something worse than this?

MESSENGER
Your wife is dead, the mother of that corpse,
Poor woman, dead just now by freshly opened wounds.

CREON
Oh!
Oh uncleansable swamp of Hades,
Why destroy me? Why me?
Oh you who sent the pain
Of ill-tidings my way, what word do you speak now?
Ah! You’ve slain a dead man twice over!
What do you have to say, boy? What have you seen?
Ah! Ah! What new slaughter, my wife’s demise,
Do you add on top of Haemon’s death?

CHORUS
You must know—it’s not hidden away any more.

CREON
Ah me! I see this second, this other evil! Wretch!
What... what fate awaits me now?
Just now I hold a child in my arms—
Wretch!—
Then I look upon a corpse beside it.
Ah! Ah miserable mother! Ah child!

MESSENGER
At the altar, with a sharp-edged sword,
She hacked until her black eyes shut,
Bewailed the noble fate of her son, Megareus,
Who died earlier, and then the fate of this boy,
And with her last breath she sang
Curses upon you as a child-killer.

CREON
Ah me! Ah me!
I am beside myself with fear!
Why hasn’t anyone struck me down
With their double-bladed sword?
I’m a misery! Ah me!
I’ve been bathed in wretched anguish!
MESSENGER

Blame for the death of both your sons
Was placed upon you by this corpse here.

CREON

How did she choose to end her life?

MESSENGER

By her own hand—she stuck herself in the liver
When she learned the sordid fate of her son.

CREON

Ah me! Ah me! For all my crimes
This suffering will never fix itself upon another!
Oh I killed you, I did! Oh miserable one!
I’m telling the truth! Oh servants,
Take me as fast as you can, take Creon away!
I might as well be nothing now!

CHORUS

You will profit by your plan,
If there’s any profit in committing evil.
The fastest plan is best when evil is
Gnawing at your feet.

CREON

Go! Go!
Say the most beautiful fate
Has befallen me,
Leading out
My final day,
The very last!
Go! Go!
So I may never see another day!

CHORUS

That will have to come later. We must tend to
The matters at hand, as they have fallen on our shoulders now.

CREON

But everything I hope for was in that prayer!

CHORUS

Then stop praying: mortals have no rest
From the troubles of fate.
CREON

Lead this empty man away,
Who, O child, did not kill you on purpose—
And you, too, my wife.
Ah me! I’m a misery!
I don’t know which body
I should look upon! Oh!
All the things I’ve got are at odds,
And an unbearable fate leaps upon my head!

CHORUS

Reason is by far the most important part of
Happiness. As for the gods, you
Must take care not to misstep in any way.
A boastful man’s mighty words
Are paid for by mighty blows.
In old age he teaches his wisdom.