

**SOPHOCLES**

# **ANTIGONE**



**TRANSLATED BY**

Ben Roy, Bliss Perry, Alejandro Quintana, Sam Puopolo,  
Benji Ho, Sasha Barish

**EDITED BY**

Muhua Yang, Dexter Summers, Adonica McCray, Sheridan Marsh, Phoebe Lindsay,  
Chloe Brooks, Mitch Polonsky, Alice Donnellan

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# 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, 5  
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? 10

## 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— 15  
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. 20

## 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. 25  
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. 30  
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. 35  
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? 40

**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— 45  
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 50  
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 55  
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. 60  
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— 65  
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. 70  
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, 75  
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— 80  
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. 85

**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.

90

**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.

95

**ISMENE**

Go on then, if you think it best—you're a fool

To go, but your loved ones still love you.



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. 140  
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 145  
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 150  
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— 155  
Creon, son of Menoecus, 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 160  
Are to gather and discuss a special issue?



### III | EPISODE 1

#### 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 165  
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 170  
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, 175  
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— 180  
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 185  
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. 190  
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— 195  
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 punishment?  
Dog, tarriest thou again? An Creon should know this  
From some other man? Wilt thou not indeed grieve for’t?” 230

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, 235  
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. 240

**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. 245

**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. 250  
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 255  
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, 260  
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 265  
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 270  
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. 275  
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  
280  
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 285  
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, 290  
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. 295  
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. 300  
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 305  
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 310  
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? 315

**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. 320

**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.

325

**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.

330

## 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, 335  
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 340  
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, 345  
In twisted nets woven into meshed coils,  
The very skillful human;  
With contrivance he rules over  
The field animals and the beast of the mountains,  
As he restrains the horse by placing a yoke 350  
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, 355  
And how to flee the frosty skies  
And stormy bolts of places inhospitable:  
All-inventive is he -  
He proceeds unknowingly into  
No impending matter:  
360  
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, 365  
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. 370  
May he who does these things  
Neither share my hearth  
Nor think like me!

**CHORUS**

I'm confused regarding  
This blessed portent: 375  
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, 380  
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 390

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, 395

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 occurred 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, 410  
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 415  
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, 420  
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. 425

She did see the corpse denuded,  
Began to wail in earnest,  
And curst she whoever had done this.  
Straightway she took dust into her hands,  
Raised up the water pitcher, 430  
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. 435  
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. 440

**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. 445  
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, 450  
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. 455  
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? 460  
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 465  
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. 470

**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 475  
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, 480  
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. 485

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. 490

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. 495  
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— 500  
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. 505  
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?

510

**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.

515

**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.  
520

**ANTIGONE**

Who knows what the gods consider holy?

**CREON**

Your enemy's never your friend, not even when he's dead.

**ANTIGONE**

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! 550

**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. 555

**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. 560

**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. 565

**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.

570

**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 stop this marriage for me.

575

**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.

580



## VI | STASIMON 2

### CHORUS

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 585  
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 590  
From the seafloor,  
And the wave-beaten coast  
Roars and groans.

The ancient miseries of the  
House of Labdacus, I see, fall 595  
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 600  
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? 605  
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. 610  
Both then and now  
Does this law hold strong:  
Nothing grand comes  
To a mortal's life  
Without ruin. 615

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. 620  
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. 625

**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? 630

## VII | EPISODE 3

### 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, 635  
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, 640  
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, 645  
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, 650  
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 655  
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: 660

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. 665

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  
670  
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. 675  
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. 680

#### 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. 685  
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 690  
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 695  
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. 700

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, 705  
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 710  
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 715  
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 720  
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. 725

**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? 730

**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?

735

**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.

740

**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.

745

**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.

750

**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.

755

**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.

760

**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.

765

**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?

770

**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.

775

780



## VIII | STASIMON 3

### CHORUS

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 785  
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. 790

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 795  
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! 800

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. 805

## IX | EPISODE 4

### ANTIGONE

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, 810  
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. 815

### CHORUS

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; 820  
Rather, living alone and self-determined,  
You attain for yourself the Death of mortals.

### ANTIGONE

I have heard  
How our Phrygian guest, Niobe,  
The daughter of Tantalus, died a miserable death 825  
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. 830  
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.

### CHORUS

Yet she was not only god-born but also a goddess herself,  
While we are but mortals, born from mortals. 835  
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.

### ANTIGONE

Oh, now you're mocking me!

Why, by my father's gods, 840  
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 845  
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. 850  
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, 855  
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 860  
And our whole  
Destiny, that of the  
Famed Labdacids.  
Oh, our mother's disaster of a marriage  
And my father's incestuous intercourse 865  
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 870  
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. 875

**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. 880  
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 885  
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. 890

**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 895  
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 900  
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, 905  
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, 910  
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! 915  
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. 920

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, 925  
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. 930

**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 935  
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, 940  
The very last of the royal line!  
See what things I suffer, and at whose hands,  
All because I revered reverence!

## X|STASIMON 4

### CHORUS

Also did Danaë dare to trade away the sky's  
Light for the enclosure of bronze walls; 945  
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. 950  
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, 955  
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 960  
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. 965

In the sea by the Black Rocks,  
The double sea, are the Bosphorus  
And the Thracian city Salmydessus,  
Where city-dwelling Ares observed  
On the twin sons of Phineus 970  
A cursed, blinding wound  
From a savage wife,  
A wound to their round eyes  
Shattered and screaming  
For vengeance, inflicted 975  
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 980  
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.

## XI | EPISODE 5

### 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. 990

### 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. 995

### 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, 1000  
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. 1005

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 1010  
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. 1015  
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. 1020  
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 1025  
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? 1030  
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 1035  
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 1040  
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... 1045  
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, 1070  
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 1075  
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 1080  
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. 1090

**CHORUS**

The man, my lord, has left after speaking  
Terrible prophecies: And yet, for all the time since  
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 1095  
A terrible thing to obey him, but no more terrible  
Than to resist him, and curse my soul.

	<b>CHORUS</b>	
Tread carefully, son of Menoecus.		
	<b>CREON</b>	
What should I do? Tell me and I'll obey.		
	<b>CHORUS</b>	
Free the buried girl, And bury the unburied.		1100
	<b>CREON</b>	
This is your advice? To give in to him?		
	<b>CHORUS</b>	
As quickly as possible, my king: for the curses Of the gods bring a swift end to foolish men.		
	<b>CREON</b>	
Oh! It's hard to deny the heart, but I can't go on fighting so desperately against the gods.		1105
	<b>CHORUS</b>	
Come on now, do these things and nothing more.		
	<b>CREON</b>	
I will go straightaway. Go, go friends! 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.		1110

## XII | HYPORCHEMA

### CHORUS

Oh many-named one, glory of Cadmus' wife 1115  
And offspring of thundering Zeus,  
Who protects famous Italy  
And rules over all,  
Who cleaves the valley of Eleusis—  
Bacchus! 1120  
Dweller of the mother city Thebes  
By the flowing rivers of Ismenus  
And the planting of the  
Wild dragon's teeth.  
Flashing smoke has seen you 1125  
Beyond the cliffs of the double ridge,  
Where the Corycian nymphs  
Proceed all frenzied about;  
See you as well  
Did the Castalian streams. 1130  
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. 1135  
Of all cities  
You honor Thebes the most,  
Along with your petrified mother:  
Now indeed, when the whole city is  
Infected head to toe 1140  
By some noxious disease,  
You hurry to pass over  
With your cleansing foot  
Mount Parnassus  
And the sighing straits. 1145

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, 1150  
Who rage 'till sunrise  
And salute you in dance  
As their master -  
You, Bacchus!

## XIII | EXODUS

### MESSENGER

Neighbors of the House of Cadmus and Amphion, 1155  
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. 1160

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 1165  
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 1170  
For all of that—not in place of joy.

### CHORUS

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

### MESSENGER

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

### CHORUS

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

### MESSENGER

Haemon is finished, bloodied by his own hand. 1175

### CHORUS

His father's hand or his own?

### MESSENGER

His own, to spite his murderous father.

### CHORUS

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, 1180  
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. 1185  
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. 1190  
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. 1195  
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, 1200  
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. 1205  
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: 1210  
"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, 1215  
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, 1220  
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. 1225

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!" 1230

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, 1235  
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 1240  
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. 1245

#### 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. 1250

**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 1255  
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. 1260

**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! 1265  
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! 1270

**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! 1275  
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. 1280

**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, 1285  
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? 1290  
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! 1295  
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! 1300

**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. 1305

**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! 1310  
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. 1315

**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, 1320  
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. 1325

**CREON**

Go! Go!  
Say the most beautiful fate  
Has befallen me,  
Leading out  
My final day, 1330  
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. 1335

**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— 1340  
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, 1345  
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 1350  
Are paid for by mighty blows.  
In old age he teaches his wisdom. 1352