

ANTIGONE

ANTIGONH

(c. 441 B.C.)

by

Sophocles

(c. 496-406 B.C.)

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28 November-2 December 2001

ANTIGONE

by Sophocles

Characters

Antigone, daughter of Oedipus ANTIGONH

Ismene, daughter of Oedipus ISMHNH

Eurydice, wife of Creon EURUDIKH

Creon, King of Thebes KREWN

Haimon, son of Creon AIMWN

Teiresias, A blind seer TEIRESIAS

Sentry FULAX

Messenger AGGELOS

Priest IEREUS

Chorus COROS

Scene: Before the palace of Creon, King of Thebes. A central double door, and two lateral doors. A platform extends the length of the façade, and from this platform three steps lead down into the orchestra, or dancing place. Or, simply, in front of the palace at Thebes.

Time: Dawn of the day after the repulse of the Argive army from the assault on Thebes, and the brothers Eteocles and Polyneices have killed each other.

Prologue

(Antigone and Ismene enter.)

ANTIGONE

You would think that we had already suffered enough for the curse on our father, Oedipus. I cannot imagine any grief that you and I have not gone through. And now--have they told you of the new decree of our uncle, King Creon?

ISMENE

I have heard nothing. I know that two sisters lost two brothers, a double death in a single hour; and I know that the Argive army fled in the night; but beyond this, nothing.

ANTIGONE

I thought so. And that is why I wanted you to come out here with me. This is something we must do.

ISMENE

Why do you speak so strangely?

ANTIGONE

Listen, Ismene: Creon buried our brother, Eteocles, with military honors, gave him a soldier's funeral, and it was right that he should--but Polyneices, who fought as bravely and died as miserably--they say that Creon has sworn no one shall bury him, no one mourn for him, but his body must lie in the fields, a sweet treasure for carrion birds to find as they search for food. That is what they say, and our good Creon is coming here to announce it publicly; and the penalty--stoning to death in the public square! There it is, and now you can prove what you are: a true sister, or a traitor to your family.

ISMENE

Antigone, you are mad! What could I possibly do?

ANTIGONE

You must decide whether you will help me or not.

ISMENE

I do not understand you. Help you in what?

ANTIGONE

Ismene, I am going to bury him.

ISMENE

Bury him! You have just said the new law forbids it.

ANTIGONE

He is my brother. And he is your brother, too.

ISMENE

But think of the danger! Think what Creon will do!

ANTIGONE

Creon is not strong enough to stand in my way.

ISMENE

Ah sister! Oedipus died, everyone hating him for what his own search brought to light, his eyes ripped out by his own hand, and Jocasta died, his mother and wife at once, our mother: she twisted the cords that strangled her life; and our two brothers died, each killed by the other's sword. And we are left. But, oh, Antigone, think how much more terrible than this our own death would be if we should go against Creon and do what he has forbidden! We are only women. We cannot fight with men, Antigone! The law is strong, we must give in to the law in this thing. I beg the Dead to forgive me, but I am helpless: I must yield to those in authority, and I think it is dangerous business to be always meddling.

ANTIGONE

If that is what you think, then I should not want you, even if you asked to come. You have made your choice; you can be what you want to be. But I will bury him, and if I must die, I say that this crime is holy. I shall lie down with him in death, and I shall be as dear to him as he to me. It is the dead, not the living, who make the greatest demands: we die forever. . .

ISMENE

I have no strength to break laws that were made for the public good.

ANTIGONE

That must be your excuse, I suppose. But as for me, I will bury the brother I love.

ISMENE

Antigone, I am so afraid for you!

ANTIGONE

You need not be: you have yourself to consider, after all.

ISMENE

But no one must hear of this, you must tell no one! I will keep it a secret, I promise!

ANTIGONE

O tell it! Tell everyone!

ISMENE

So fiery! You should be cold with fear.

ANTIGONE

Perhaps. But I am doing only what I must.

ISMENE

But can you do it? I say that you cannot.

ANTIGONE

When my strength gives out, I shall do no more.

ISMENE

Impossible things should not be tried at all.

ANTIGONE

Go away, Ismene: I shall be hating you soon, and the dead will, too. For your words are hateful. Leave me my foolish plan: I am not afraid of the danger; if it means death, it will not be the worst of deaths--death without honor.

ISMENE

Go then, if you feel that you must. You are unwise, but a loyal friend indeed to those who love you.

(Exit)

Parodos

Strophe 1

CHORUS

Now the long blade of the sun, lying

Level east to west, touches with glory

Thebes of the Seven Gates. Open, unlidded

Eye of golden day! O marching light

Across the eddy and rush of Dirce's stream,

Striking the white shields of the enemy

thrown headlong backward from the blaze of morning!

PRIEST

Polyneices their commander
Roused them with windy phrases
He the wild eagle screaming
Insults above our land,
His wings their shields of snow,
His crest their marshalled helms.

Antistrophe 1

CHORUS

Against our seven gates in a yawning ring
The famished spears came onward in the night;
But before his jaws were sated with our blood,
Or pine fire took the garland of our towers,
He was thrown back, and as he turned, great Thebes--
No tender victim for his noisy power--
Rose like a dragon behind him, shouting war.

PRIEST

For God hates utterly
The bray of bragging tongues;
And when he beheld their smiling,
Their swagger of golden helms,
The frown of his thunder blasted
Their first man from our walls.

Strophe 2

CHORUS

We heard his shout of triumph high in the air
Turn to a scream; far out in a flaming arc
He fell with his windy torch, and the earth struck him.
And others storming in fury no less than his

Found shock of death in the dusty joy of battle.

PRIEST

Seven captains at seven gates

Yielded their clanging arms to the god

That bends the battle-line and breaks it.

These two only, brothers in blood,

Face to face in matchless rage,

Mirroring each other's death

Clashed in long combat.

Antistrophe 2

CHORUS

But now in the beautiful morning of victory

Let Thebes of the many chariots sing for joy!

With hearts for dancing we'll take leave of war:

Our temples shall be sweet with hymns of praise,

And the long nights shall echo with our chorus.

SCENE 1

PRIEST

But now at least our new King is coming. Creon of Thebes, Menoeceus's son. In this auspicious dawn of his reign, what are the new complexities that shifting Fate has woven for him? What is his counsel? Why has he summoned us to hear him?

(Enter Creon from the palace, center. He addresses the Chorus from the top step.)

CREON

Gentlemen: I have the honor to inform you that our Ship of State, which recent storms have threatened to destroy, has come safely to harbor at last, guided by the merciful wisdom of Heaven.

(Cheers from the crowd.)

I have summoned you here this morning because I know that I can depend upon you: your devotion to King Laios was absolute; you never hesitated in your duty to our late ruler Oedipus, and when Oedipus died, your loyalty was transferred to his children. Unfortunately, as you know, his two sons, the princes Eteocles and

Polyneices, have killed each other in battle: and I, as the next in line, have succeeded to the full power of the throne.

I am aware, of course, that no Ruler can expect complete loyalty from his subjects until he has been tested in office. Nevertheless, I say to you at the very outset that I have nothing but contempt for the kind of Governor who is afraid, for whatever reason, to follow the course that he knows is best for the State: and as for the man who sets private friendship above the public welfare, --I have no use for him, either. I call God to witness that if I saw my country headed for ruin, I should not be afraid to speak out plainly; and indeed hardly remind you that I would never have any dealings with an enemy of the people. No one values friendship more highly than I; but we must remember that friends made at the risk of destroying the State are not real friends at all.

These are my principles, at any rate, and that is why I have made the following decision concerning the sons of Oedipus. Eteocles, who died as a man should die, fighting for his country, is to be buried with full military honors, with all the ceremony that is usual when the greatest heroes die,

(Positive reaction from crowd.)

but his brother Polyneices, who broke his exile to come back with fire and sword against his native city and the shrines of his fathers' gods,

(Boos from crowd.)

whose one idea was to spill the blood of his blood and sell his own people into slavery--

(More boos.)

Polyneices, I say, is to have no burial, no man is to touch him or say the least prayer for him.

(This is a surprise for the crowd, and they are shocked at the severity of the decree.)

He shall lie on this plain, unburied, and the birds and the scavenging dogs can do with him whatever they like.

(Utter silence from the crowd.)

This is my command, and you can see the wisdom behind it. As long as I am King, no traitor is going to be honored.

PRIEST

If this is your will, Creon, son of Menoecus,

You have the right to enforce it. We are yours.

(Chants of "WE ARE YOURS!" The crowd is back with him, maybe because of fear.)

CREON

That is my will. Take care that you do your part.

PRIEST

What is it that you would have us do?

CREON

You will give no support to whoever breaks this law.

PRIEST

Only a crazy man is in love with death!

CREON

And death it is; yet money talks, and the wisest have sometimes been known to count a few coins too many.

(Entry Sentry from left.)

SENTRY

I'll not say that I'm out of breath from running, King, because every time I stopped to think about what I have to tell you, I felt like going back. And all the time a voice kept saying, "You fool, don't you know you're walking straight into trouble?"; and then another voice, "Yes, but if you let somebody else get the news to Creon first, it will be even worse than that for you!" But good sense won out, at least I hope it was good sense, and here I am with a story that makes no sense at all; but I'll tell it anyhow, because, as they say, what's going to happen is going to happen and--

CREON

Come to the point. What have you to say?

SENTRY

I did not do it. I did not see who did it.

You must not punish me for what someone else has done.

CREON

A comprehensive defense! More effective, perhaps,

If I knew its purpose. Come, what is it?

SENTRY

A dreadful thing...I don't know how to put it--

CREON

Out with it!

SENTRY

Well, the-- the dead man--Polyneices--

(Pause. The Sentry is overcome, fumbles for words; Creon waits impassively.)

--out there--someone,--New dust on the slimy flesh! Someone has given it burial that way, and gone...

(Long pause. Creon finally speaks with deadly control.)

CREON

And the man who dared do this?

SENTRY

I swear I do not know! You must believe me! The ground was dry, not a sign of digging, no, not a wheeltrack in the dust, no trace of anyone. It was when they relieved us this morning, and one of them, the corporal, pointed to it. There it was, the strangest--Look: The body, just mounded over with light dust, you see? Not buried really, but as if they'd covered it Just enough for the ghost's peace. And no sign of dogs or any wild animal that had been there.

And then what a scene there was! Every man of us accusing the other. We all proved the other man did it. We all had proof that we could not have done it. We were ready to take hot iron in our hands, Walk through fire, swear by all the gods "It was not I! I do not know who it was but it was *not* I!"

(Creon's rage has been mounting steadily, but the Sentry is too intent upon his story to notice it.)

And then, when this came to nothing, someone said A thing that silenced us and made us stare down at the ground, you had to be told the news, And one of us had to do it! We threw the dice, and the bad luck fell to me. So here I am, no happier to be here than you are to have me. Nobody likes the messenger who brings bad news.

PRIEST

I have been wondering, King. Can it be that the gods have done this?

CREON

(Furiously.)

Stop! The gods"! Intolerable! The gods favor this corpse? Why? How had he served them? Tried to loot their temples, burn their images, Yes, and the whole State, and its laws with it! Is it your senile opinion that the gods love to honor bad men? A pious thought--No, from the very beginning There have been those who have whispered together, Stiff-necked anarchists, putting their heads together, Scheming against me in alleys. These are the men, And they have *bribed* my own guard to do this thing.

(He has figured it out, he thinks.)

Money! There's nothing in the world so demoralizing as money. Down go your cities, Homes gone, men gone, honest hearts corrupted, Crookedness of all kinds, and all for money!

(To Sentry)

But you--I swear by God and the throne of God. The man who has done this thing shall pay for it! Find that man, bring him here to me, or your death will be the least of your problems: I'll string you up alive! And the process may teach you a lesson you seem to have missed: a fortune won is often misfortune.

SENTRY

King, may I speak?

CREON

Your very voice distresses me.

SENTRY

Are you sure; that is my voice, and not your conscience?

CREON

By God, he wants to analyze me now!

SENTRY

It is not what I say, but what has been done, that hurts you.

CREON

You talk too much.

SENTRY

Maybe, but I've done nothing.

CREON

Sold your soul for some silver; that's all you've done.

SENTRY

How dreadful it is when the right judge judges wrong!

CREON

Your figures of speech may entertain you now. Bring me the man.

(Exit Creon into the palace.)

SENTRY

"Bring me the man!" I'd like nothing better than bringing him the man! But bring him or not, you have seen the last of me here. At any rate, I am safe!

(Exit Sentry.)

Ode 1

Strophe 1

CHORUS

Numberless are the world's wonders, but none

More wonderful than man; the storm gray sea

Yields to his prows, the huge crests bear him high;

Earth, holy and inexhaustible, is graven
With shining furrows where his plows have gone
Year after year, the timeless labor of stallions.

Antistrophe 1

The light-boned birds and beasts that cling to cover,
The lithe fish lighting their reaches of dim water,
All are taken, tamed in the net of his mind;
The lion on the hill, the wild horse windy-maned,
Resign to him; and his blunt yoke has broken
The sultry shoulders of the mountain bull.

Strophe 2

Words also, and thought as rapid as air,
He fashions to his good use; statecraft is his
And his the skill that deflects the arrows of snow,
The spears of winter rain: from every wind
He has made himself secure--from all but one:
In the late wind of death he cannot stand.

Antistrophe 2

O clear intelligence, force beyond all measure!
O fate of man, working both good and evil!
When the laws are kept, how proudly his city stands!
When the laws are broken, what of his city then?
Never may the anarchic man find rest at my hearth,
Never be it said that my thoughts are his thoughts.

Scene 2

(Re-enter Sentry leading Antigone.)

PRIEST

What does this mean? Surely this captive woman Is the Princess, Antigone? Why should she be taken?

SENTRY

Here is the one who did it! We caught her In the very act of burying him. Where is Creon?

PRIEST

Just coming from the house.

(Enter Creon, center.)

CREON

What has happened? Why have you come back so soon?

SENTRY

(Expansively.)

O King, A man should never be too sure of anything: I would have sworn That you'd not see me here again: your anger Frightened me so, and the things you threatened me with, But how could I tell then That I'd be able to solve the case so soon? No dice-throwing this time: I was only too glad to come! Here is this woman. She is the guilty one: We found her trying to bury him. Take her, then; question her; judge her as you will. I am through with the whole thing now, and glad of it.

CREON

But this is Antigone! Why have you brought her here?

SENTRY

She was burying him, I tell you!

CREON (severely)

Is this the truth?

SENTRY

I saw her with my own eyes. Can I say more?

CREON

Tell me quickly!

SENTRY

It was like this: After those terrible threats of yours, King, we went back and brushed the dust away from the body. The flesh was soft by now, and stinking, so we sat on a hill upwind and kept guard. No napping this time! We kept each other awake. And then we looked, and there was Antigone! I have seen a mother bird come back to a stripped nest, heard her crying bitterly a broken note or two for the young ones stolen, just so, when this girl found the bare corpse, and all her love's work wasted, she wept, and cried on heaven to damn the hands that had done this thing. And then she brought more dust and sprinkled wine three times for her brother's ghost. We ran and took her at once. She was not afraid, not even when we charged her with what she had done. She denied nothing.

CREON

(slowly, dangerously)

And you, Antigone, you with your head hanging, do you confess this thing?

ANTIGONE

I do. I deny nothing.

CREON

You may go.

(Exit Sentry.)

(To Antigone.)

Tell me, tell me briefly: had you heard my proclamation touching this matter?

ANTIGONE

It was public. Could I help hearing it?

CREON

And yet you dared defy the law.

ANTIGONE

I dared. It was not God's proclamation. That final Justice that rules the world makes no such laws. Your edict, King, was strong, but all your strength is weakness itself against the immortal laws of God. They are not merely now: they were, and shall be, operative forever, beyond man utterly.

I knew I must die, even without your decree: I am only mortal. Can anyone living, as I live, with evil all about me, think Death less than a friend? This death of mine

is of no importance; but if I had left my brother lying in death unburied, I should have suffered. Now I do not. You smile at me. Ah, Creon, think me a fool, if you like, but it may well be that a fool convicts me of folly.

PRIEST

Like her father, Oedipus, both head strong and deaf to reason! She has never learned to yield.

CREON

She has much to learn. The inflexible heart breaks first, the toughest iron cracks first, and the wildest horses break their necks at the pull of the smallest cart. Pride? In a slave? This girl is guilty of a double insolence, breaking the given laws and boasting of it. Who is the man here, she or I, if this crime goes unpunished? She and her sister win bitter death for this!

(To Servants)

Go, some of you, arrest Ismene. I accuse her equally. Bring her: you will find her sniffing in the house there.

Her mind's a traitor: crimes kept in the dark cry for light, but how much worse than this is brazen boasting of barefaced anarchy!

ANTIGONE

Creon, what more do you want than my death?

CREON

Nothing. That gives me everything.

ANTIGONE

Then I beg you: kill me. This talking is a great weariness; your words are distasteful to me, and I am sure that mine seem so to you. And yet they should not seem so: I should have praise and honor for what I have done. All these men here would praise me were their lips not frozen shut with fear of you. (Bitterly) Ah the good fortune of kings, licensed to say and do whatever they please!

CREON

You are alone here in that opinion.

ANTIGONE

No, they are with me. But they keep their tongues in leash.

CREON

Maybe, but you are guilty, and they are not.

ANTIGONE

There is no guilt in reverence for the dead.

CREON

But Eteocles--was he not your brother, too?

ANTIGONE

My brother, too.

CREON

And you insult his memory?

ANTIGONE

(softly) The dead man would not say that I insult it.

CREON

He would: for you honor a traitor as much as him.

ANTIGONE

His own brother, traitor or not, and equal in blood.

CREON

He made war on his country. Eteocles defended it.

ANTIGONE

Nevertheless, there are honors due all the dead.

CREON

But not the same for the wicked as for the just.

ANTIGONE

Ah, Creon, Creon. Which of us can say what the gods hold wicked?

CREON

An enemy is an enemy, even dead.

ANTIGONE

It is my nature to join in love, not hate.

CREON

(finally losing patience) Go join them then; if you must have your love. Find it in hell!

PRIEST

But see, Ismene comes:

(Enter Ismene, guarded)

Those tears are sisterly, the cloud that shadows her eyes rain down gentle sorrow.

CREON

You too, Ismene, snake in my ordered house, sucking my blood stealthily--and all the time I never knew that these two sisters were aiming at my throne! Ismene, do you confess your share in this crime, or deny it? Answer me.

ISMENE

Yes, if she will let me say so. I am guilty.

ANTIGONE

(coldly) No, Ismene. You have no right to say so. You would not help me, and I will not have you help me.

ISMENE

But now I know what you meant; and I am here to join you, to take my share of punishment.

ANTIGONE

The dead man and the gods who rule the dead know whose act this was. Words are not friends.

ISMENE

Do you refuse me, Antigone? I want to die with you: I too have a duty that I must discharge to the dead.

ANTIGONE

You shall not lessen my death by sharing it.

ISMENE

What do I care for life when you are dead?

ANTIGONE

Ask Creon. You're always hanging on his opinions.

ISMENE

You are laughing at me. Why, Antigone?

ANTIGONE

It's a joyless laughter, Ismene.

ISMENE

But can I do nothing?

ANTIGONE

Yes. Save yourself. I shall not envy you. There are those who will praise you; I shall have honor, too.

ISMENE

But we are equally guilty!

ANTIGONE

No more, Ismene. You are alive, but I belong to Death.

CREON (to the Chorus)

Gentlemen I beg you to observe these girls: one has just now lost her mind; the other, it seems, has never had a mind at all.

ISMENE

Grief teaches the steadiest minds to waver, King.

CREON

Yours certainly did, when you assumed guilt with the guilty!

ISMENE

But how could I go on living without her?

CREON

You are. She is already dead.

ISMENE

But your own son's bride!

CREON

There are places enough for him to push his plow. I want no wicked women for my sons!

ISMENE

O dearest Haimon, how your father wrongs you!

CREON

I've had enough of your childish talk of marriage!

PRIEST

Do you really intend to steal this girl from your son?

CREON

No; Death will do that for me.

PRIEST

The she must die?

CREON

(ironically) You dazzle me. --But enough of this talk!

(To Guards) You, there, take them away and guard them well: for they are but women, and even brave men run when they see Death coming.

(Exeunt Ismene, Antigone, and Guards)

Ode 2**Strophe 1**

CHORUS

Fortunate is the man who has never tasted God's vengeance!
Where once the anger of heaven has struck, that house is shaken
Forever: damnation rises behind each child
Like a wave cresting out of the black northeast,
When the long darkness under sea roars up
And bursts drumming death upon the wind-whipped sand.

Antistrophe 1

I have seen this gathering sorrow from time long past
Loom upon Oedipus's children: generation from generation
Takes the compulsive rage of the enemy god.
So lately this last flower of Oedipus's line
Drank the sunlight! But now a passionate word
And a handful of dust have closed up all its beauty.

Strophe 2

What mortal arrogance
Transcends the wrath of Zeus?
Sleep cannot lull him nor the effortless long months
Of the timeless gods: but he is young for ever,
And his house is the shining day of high Olympus.
And that is and shall be,
And all the past, is his.
No pride on earth is free of the curse of heaven.

Antistrophe 2

The straying dreams of men

May bring them ghosts of joy:

But as they drowse, the waking embers burn them;

Or they walk with fixed eyes, as blind men walk.

But the ancient wisdom speaks for our own time:

Fate works most for woe

With Folly's fairest show.

Man's little pleasure is the spring of sorrow.

Scene 3

PRIEST

But here is Haimon, King, the last of all your sons. Is it grief for Antigone that brings him here, and bitterness at being robbed of his bride?

(Enter Haimon.)

CREON

We shall soon see, and no need of diviners. Son, you have heard my final judgment on that girl: have you come here hating me, or have you come with deference and with love, whatever I do?

HAIMON

I am your son, father. You are my guide. You make things clear for me, and I obey you. No marriage means more to me than your continuing wisdom.

CREON

Good. That is the way to behave; subordinate everything else, my son, to your father's will. So you are right not to lose your head over this woman. Your pleasure with her would soon grow cold, Haimon, And then you'd have a hellcat in bed and elsewhere. Let her find her husband in hell! Of all the people in this city, only she has had contempt for my law.

The woman dies. I suppose she'll plead "family ties." Well, let her. If I permit my own family to rebel, how shall I earn the world's obedience? Show me the man who keeps his house in hand, he's fit for public authority. I'll have no dealings with lawbreakers, critics of the government: Whoever is chosen to govern should be obeyed--Must be obeyed, in all things, great and small, Just and unjust! O Haimon, the man who knows how to obey, and that man only, knows how to give commands when the time comes. You can depend on him, no matter how fast the spears come: he's a good soldier, he'll stick it out. Anarchy, anarchy! Show me a greater evil! This is why cities tumble and the great houses fall, this is what scatters armies! No, no: good lives are made good by discipline. We keep the laws then, and the lawmakers, and no woman shall seduce us. If we must lose, let's lose to a man, at least! Is a woman stronger than we?

PRIEST

Unless time has rusted my wits, what you say, King, is said with point and dignity.

HAIMON

(boyishly earnest) Father: reason is God's crowning gift to man, and you are right to warn me against losing mine. I cannot say--I hope that I shall never want to say!--that you have reasoned badly. Yet there are other men who can reason, too; and their opinions might be helpful. You are not in a position to know everything that people say or do, or what they feel: your temper terrifies--everyone will tell you only what you like to hear. But I, at any rate, can listen; and I have heard them muttering and whispering in the dark about this girl. They say no woman has ever, so unreasonably, died so shameful a death for a generous act: "She covered her brother's body. Is this indecent? She kept him from dogs and vultures. Is this a crime? Death?--She should have all the honor that we can give her!" This is the way they talk out there in the city. You must believe me: nothing is closer to me than your happiness. I beg you, do not be unchangeable: do not believe that you alone ! can be right. It is not reasonable never to yield to reason!

In flood time you can see how some trees bend, and because they bend, even their twigs are safe, while stubborn trees are torn up, roots and all. Forget you are angry! Let yourself be moved! I know I am young; but please let me say this: the ideal condition would be, I admit, that men should be right by instinct; but since we are all too likely to go astray, the reasonable thing is to learn from those who can teach.

PRIEST

You will do well to listen to him, King, If what he says is sensible. And you, Haimon, must listen to your father. --Both speak well.

CREON

You consider it right for a man of my years and experience to be schooled by a boy?

HAIMON

It is not right If I am wrong. But if I am young, and right, what does my age matter?

CREON

You think it right to stand up for an anarchist?

HAIMON

Not at all. I pay no respect to criminals.

CREON

Then she is not a criminal?

HAIMON

The City would deny it, to a man.

CREON

And the City proposes to teach me how to rule?

HAIMON

Ah. Who is it that's talking like a boy now?

CREON

My voice is the one voice giving orders in this City!

HAIMON

It is not a City if it takes order from one voice.

CREON

The State is the King!

HAIMON

Yes, if the State is a desert.

(Pause)

CREON

This boy, it seems, has sold out to a woman.

HAIMON

My concern is only for you.

CREON

So? Your "concern"! In a public brawl with your father!

HAIMON

How about you, in a public brawl with justice.

CREON

With justice, when all that I do is within my rights?

HAIMON

You have no right to trample on God's right.

CREON

(completely out of control) Fool, adolescent fool! Taken in by a woman!

HAIMON

You'll never see me taken in by anything vile.

CREON

Every word you say is for her!

HAIMON

(quietly, darkly) And for you. And for me. And for the gods.

CREON

You'll never marry her while she lives.

HAIMON

Then she must die.--But her death will cause another.

CREON

Another? Have you lost your senses? Is this an open threat?

HAIMON

There is no threat in speaking to emptiness.

CREON

I swear you'll regret this superior tone of yours! You are the empty one!

HAIMON

If you were not my father, I'd say you were perverse.

CREON

You girl-struck fool, don't play at words with me!

HAIMON

I am sorry. You prefer silence.

CREON

Now, by God--I swear, by all the gods in heaven above us, You'll watch it, I swear you shall!

(To the servants.)

Bring her out! Bring the woman out! Let her die before his eyes! Here, this instant, with her bridegroom beside her!

HAIMON

Not here, no; she will not die here, King. And you will never see my face again. Go on raving as long as you've a friend to endure you.

(Exit Haimon.)

PRIEST

Gone, gone. Creon, a young man in a rage is dangerous!

CREON

Let him do, or dream to do, more than a man can. He shall not save these girls from death.

PRIEST

These girls? You have sentenced them both?

CREON

No, you are right. I will not kill the one whose hands are clean.

PRIEST

But Antigone?

CREON

(somberly) I will carry her far away out there in the wilderness, and lock her living in a vault of stone. She shall have food, as the custom is, to absolve the State of her death and to escape pollution. And there let her pray to the gods of hell: They are her only gods: perhaps they will show her an escape from death, or she may learn, though late, that piety [pity] shown the dead is piety [pity] in vain.

(Exit Creon.)

Ode 3

Strophe

CHORUS

Love, unconquerable

Waster of rich men, keeper

Of warm lights and all-night vigil

In the soft face of a girl:

Sea-wanderers, forest-visitor!

Even the pure Immortals cannot escape you,

And mortal man, in his one day's dusk,

Trembles before your glory.

Antistrophe

Surely you swerve upon ruin

The just man's consenting heart,

As here you have made bright anger

Strike between father and son--

And none has conquered but Love!

A girl's glance working the will of heaven:

Pleasure to her alone who mocks us,

Merciless Aphrodite.

Scene 4

PRIEST

(As Antigone enters guarded.)

But I can no longer stand in awe of this,

Nor, seeing what I see, keep back my tears.

Here is Antigone, passing to that chamber

Where all find sleep at last.

Strophe 1

ANTIGONE

Look upon me, friends, and pity me

Turning back at the night's edge to say

Good-by to the sun that shines for me no longer;

Now sleepy Death

Summons me down to Acheron, that cold shore:

There is no bridesong there, nor any music.

CHORUS

Yet not unpraised, not without a kind of honor,

You walk at last into the underworld

Untouched by sickness, broken by no sword.

What woman has ever found your way to death?

Antistrophe 1

ANTIGONE

How often have I heard the story of Niobe,
Tantalus's wretched daughter,
they say
The rain falls endlessly
And sifting soft snow; her tears are never done.
I feel the loneliness of her death in mine.

CHORUS

But she was born of heaven, and you
Are woman, woman-born. If her death is yours,
A mortal woman's, is this not for you
Glory in our world and in the world beyond?

Strophe 2

ANTIGONE

You laugh at me. Ah, friends, friends,
Can you not wait until I am dead? Oh, Thebes,
O men many-charioted, in love with Fortune,
Dear springs of Dirce, sacred Theban grove,
Be witnesses for me, denied all pity,
Unjustly judged! and think a word of love
For her whose path turns
Under dark earth, where there are no more tears.

CHORUS

You have passed beyond human daring and come at last
Into a place of stone where Justice sits.
I cannot tell
What shape of your father's guilt appears in this.

Antistrophe 2

ANTIGONE

You have touched it at last: that bridal bed

Unspeakable, horror of son and mother mingling:

Their crime, infection of all our family!

O Oedipus, father and brother!

Your marriage strikes from the grave to murder mine.

I have been a stranger here in my own land:

All my life

The blasphemy of my birth has followed me.

CHORUS

Reverence is a virtue, but strength

Lives in established law: that must prevail.

You have made your choice,

Your death is the doing of your conscious hand.

Epode

ANTIGONE

Then let me go, since all your words are bitter, and the very light of the sun is cold to me. Lead me to my vigil, where I must have neither love nor lamentation; no song, but silence.

(Creon interrupts impatiently.)

CREON

If dirges and planned lamentations could put off death, men would be singing forever.

(To the Servants.)

Take her, go! You know your orders: take her to the vault and leave her alone there. And if she lives or dies, that's her affair, not ours: our hands are clean.

ANTIGONE

O tomb, vaulted bride-bed in eternal rock, soon I shall be with my own again where Persephone welcomes the thin ghosts underground: and I shall see my father again, and you, mother, and dearest Polyneices--dearest indeed to me, since it was my hand that washed him clean and poured the ritual wine: And my reward is death before my time!

And yet, as men's hearts know, I have done no wrong, I have not sinned before God. Or if I have, I shall know the truth in death. But if the guilt lies upon Creon who judged me, then, I pray, may his punishment equal my own.

PRIEST

O passionate heart, unyielding, tormented still by the same winds!

CREON

Her guards shall have good cause to regret their delaying.

ANTIGONE

Ah! That voice is like the voice of death!

CREON

I can give you no reason to think you are mistaken.

ANTIGONE

Thebes, and you my father's gods, And rulers of Thebes, you see me now, the last unhappy daughter of a line of kings, your kings, led away to death. You will remember what things I suffer, and at what men's hands, because I would not transgress the laws of heaven.

(To the Guards, simply.)

Come, let us wait no longer.

(Exit Antigone, left, guarded.)

Ode 4

Strophe 1

CHORUS

All Danaë's beauty was locked away

In a brazen cell where the sunlight could not come:

A small room still as any grave, enclosed her.

Yet she was a princess, too,

And Zeus in a rain of gold poured love upon her.

O child, child,

No power in wealth or war

Or tough sea-blackened ships

Can prevail against untiring Destiny!

Antistrophe 1

And Dryas's son also, that furious king,
Bore the god's prisoning anger for his pride:
Sealed up by Dionysos in deaf stone,
His madness died among echoes.
So at the last he learned what dreadful power
His tongue had mocked:
For he had profaned the revels,
And fired the wrath of the nine
Implacable Sisters that love the sound of the flute.

Strophe 2

And old men tell a half-remembered tale
Of horror where a dark ledge splits the sea
And a double surf beats on the gray shores:
How a king's new woman, sick
With hatred for the queen he had imprisoned,
Ripped out his two sons' eyes with her bloody hands
While grinning Ares watched the shuttle plunge
Four times: four blind wounds crying for revenge,

Antistrophe 2

Crying, tears and blood mingled.--Piteously born,
Those sons whose mother was of heavenly birth!
Her father was the god of the North Wind
And she was cradled by gales,
She raced with young colts on the glittering hills

And walked untrammelled in the open light:
But in her marriage deathless Fate found means
To build a tomb like yours for all her joy.

Scene 5

(Enter blind Teiresias, led by a boy. The opening speeches of Teiresias might be in singsong contrast to the realistic lines of Creon, or perhaps there is another way to establish that Teiresias is 'weird.')

TEIRESIAS

This is the way the blind man comes, Princes, Princes, Lockstep, two heads lit by the eyes of one.

CREON

What new thing have you to tell us, old Teiresias?

TEIRESIAS

I have much to tell you: listen to the prophet, Creon.

CREON

I am not aware that I have ever failed to listen.

TEIRESIAS

Then you have done wisely, King, and ruled well.

CREON

I admit my debt to you. But what have you to say?

TEIRESIAS

This, Creon: you stand once more on the edge of fate.

CREON

What do you mean? Your words are a kind of dread.

TEIRESIAS

Listen, Creon: I was sitting in my chair of augury, at the place where the birds gather about me. They were all a-chatter, as is their habit, when suddenly I heard a strange note in their jangling, a scream a whirring fury; I knew that they were fighting, tearing each other, dying In a whirlwind of wings clashing. And I was afraid. I

began the rites of burnt-offering at the altar but Hephaistos failed me: instead of bright flame, there was only the sputtering slime of the fat thigh-flesh melting: the entrails dissolved in gray smoke, the bare bone burst from the welter. And no blaze!

This was a sign from heaven. My boy described it, seeing for me as I see for others. I tell you, Creon, you yourself have brought this new calamity upon us. Our hearths and altars are stained with the corruption of dogs and carrion birds that glut themselves on the corpse of Oedipus's son. The gods are deaf when we pray to them, their fire recoils from our offering, their birds of omen have no cry of comfort, for they are gorged with the thick blood of the dead. O my son, these are no trifles! Think: all men make mistakes, but a good man yields when he knows his course is wrong and repairs the evil. The only crime is pride.

Give in to the dead man, then: do not fight with a corpse--What glory is it to kill a man who is dead? Think, I beg you: it is for our own good that I speak as I do. You should be able to yield for your own good.

CREON

It seems that prophets have made me their especial province. All my life long I have been a kind of butt for the dull arrows of doddering fortune-tellers. No, Teiresias, if your birds--if the great eagles of God himself should carry him stinking bit by bit to heaven, I would not yield. I am not afraid of pollution: no man can defile the gods. Do what you will, go into business, make money, speculate in India gold or that synthetic gold from Sardis, get rich otherwise than by my consent to bury him. Teiresias, it is a sorry thing when a wise man sells his wisdom, lets out his words for hire!

TEIRESIAS

Ah Creon! Is there no man left in the world--

CREON

To do what? --Come, let's have the aphorism!

TEIRESIAS

No man who knows that wisdom outweighs any wealth?

CREON

As surely as bribes are baser than any baseness.

TEIRESIAS

You are sick, Creon! You are deathly sick!

CREON

As you say: it is not my place to challenge a prophet.

TEIRESIAS

Yet you have said my prophecy is for sale.

CREON

The generation of prophets has always loved gold.

TEIRESIAS

The generation of kings has always loved brass.

CREON

You forget yourself! You are speaking to your King.

TEIRESIAS

I know it. You are a king because of me.

CREON

You have a certain skill; but you have sold out.

TEIRESIAS

King, you will drive me to words that--

CREON

Say them, say them! Only remember: I will not pay you for them.

TEIRESIAS

No, you will find them too costly.

CREON

No doubt. Speak: Whatever you say, you will not change my will.

TEIRESIAS

Then take this, and take it to heart! The time is not far off when you shall pay back corpse for corpse, flesh of your own flesh. You have thrust the child of this world into living night, you have kept from the gods the child that is theirs the one in a grave before her death, the other, dead, denied the grave. This is your crime: and the Furies and the dark gods of Hell are swift with terrible punishment for you.

Do you want to buy me now, Creon?

Not many days, And your house will be full of men and women weeping, and curses will be hurled at you from far cities grieving for sons unburied, left to rot before the walls of Thebes.

These are my arrows, Creon: they are all for you.

(to Boy.) But come, child: lead me home. Let him waste his fine anger upon younger men. Maybe he will learn at last to control a wiser tongue in a better head.

(Exit Teiresias.)

PRIEST

The old man has gone, King, but his words remain to plague us. I am old, too, but I cannot remember that he

was ever false.

CREON

That is true. It troubles me. Oh, it is hard to give in! But it is worse to risk everything for stubborn pride.

PRIEST

Creon, take my advice.

CREON

What shall I do?

PRIEST

Go quickly: free Antigone from her vault and build a tomb for the body of Polyneices.

CREON

You would have me do this!

PRIEST

Creon, yes! And it must be done at once: God moves swiftly to cancel the folly of stubborn men.

CREON

It is hard to deny the heart! But I will do it: I will not fight with destiny.

PRIEST

You must go yourself, you cannot leave it to others.

CREON

I will go. --Bring axes, servants: come with me to the tomb. I buried her, I will set her free. Oh quickly! My mind misgives--the laws of the gods are mighty, and a man must serve them to the last day of his life!

(Exit Creon.)

Paeon

Strophe 1

PRIEST

God of many names

CHORUS

O Iacchos

son
of Kadmeian Semele
O born of the Thunder!
Guardian of the West
Regent
of Eleusis's plain
O Prince of maenad Thebes
and the Dragon Field by rippling Ismenos.

Antistrophe 1

PRIEST

God of many names

CHORUS

the flame of torches

flares on our hills

the nymphs of Iacchos

dance at the spring of Castalia:

from the vine-close mountain

come ah come in ivy:

Evohe evohe! sings through the streets of Thebes

Strophe 2

PRIEST

God of many names

CHORUS

Iacchos of Thebes

heavenly Child

of Semele bride of the Thunderer!

The shadow of plague is upon us:

come

with clement feet

oh come from Parnasos

down the long slopes

across the lamenting water

Antistrophe 2

PRIEST

Io Fire! Chorister of the throbbing stars!

O purest among the voices of the night!

Thou son of God, blaze for us!

CHORUS

Come with choric rapture of circling Maenads

Who cry *Io Iacche!*

God of many names!

Exodos

(Enter Messenger from left)

MESSENGER

Men of the line of Cadmus, you who live Near Amphion's citadel, I cannot say

of any condition of human life "This is fixed, this is clearly good, or bad." Fate raises up, and Fate casts down the happy and unhappy alike: no man can foretell his Fate. Take the case of Creon: Creon was happy once, as I count happiness; Victorious in battle, sole governor of the land, fortunate father of children nobly born, and now it has all gone from him! Who can say that a man is still alive when his life's joy fails? He is a walking dead man. Grant him rich, let him live like a king in his great house: if his pleasure is gone, I would not give so much as the shadow of smoke for all he owns.

PRIEST

Your words hint at sorrow; what is your news for us?

MESSENGER

They are dead. The living are guilty of their death.

PRIEST

Who is guilty? Who is dead? Speak!

MESSENGER

Haimon. Haimon is dead; and his own hand has shed his blood.

PRIEST

His father's? Or his own?

MESSENGER

His own, driven mad by the murder his father had done.

PRIEST

Teiresias, Teiresias, how clearly you saw it all!

MESSENGER

This is my news: you must draw what conclusions you can from it.

PRIEST

But look: Eurydice, our Queen: Has she overheard us?

(Enter Eurydice from the palace, center.)

EURYDICE

I have heard something, friends: As I was unlocking the gate of Pallas's shrine, For I needed her help today, I heard a voice telling of some new sorrow. And I fainted there at the temple with all my maidens about me. But speak again: whatever it is, I can bear it: grief and I are no strangers.

MESSENGER

Dearest Lady, I will tell you plainly all that I have seen. I shall not try to comfort you: what is the use, since comfort could lie only in what is not true. The truth is always best. I went with Creon to the outer plain where Polyneices was lying, No friend to pity him, his body shredded by dogs. We made our prayers in that place to Hecate And Pluto, that they would be merciful, And we bathed the corpse with holy water, and we brought fresh-broken branches to burn what was left of it, and upon the urn we heaped up a towering barrow of the earth of his own land. When we were done, we ran to the vault where Antigone lay on her couch of stone. One of the servants had gone ahead, and while he was yet far off he heard a voice grieving within the chamber, and he came back and told Creon. And as the king went closer, The air was fully of wailing, the words lost, and he begged us to make all haste. "Am I am prophet?" He said, weeping, "And must I walk this road, the saddest of ! all that I have gone before? My son's voice calls me on. Oh quickly, quickly! Look through the crevice there, and tell me if it is Haimon, or some deception of the gods!"

We obeyed; and in the cavern's farthest corner we saw her lying: She had made a noose of her fine linen veil and hanged herself. Haimon lay beside her, his arms about her waist, lamenting her, his love lost under ground, crying out that his father had stolen her away from him.

When Creon saw him the tears rushed to his eyes and he called to him: "What have you done, child? speak to me. What are you thinking that makes your eyes so strange? O my son, my son, I come to you on my knees!" But Haimon spat in his face. He said not a word, staring--and suddenly drew his sword and lunged. Creon

shrank back, the blade missed; and the boy, desperate against himself, drove it half its length into his own side, and fell. And as he died he gathered Antigone close in his arms again, choking, his blood bright red on her white cheek. And now he lies dead with the dead, and she is his at last, his bride in the house of the dead.

(Exit Eurydice into the palace.)

PRIEST

She has left us without a word. What can this mean?

MESSENGER

It troubles me, too; yet she knows what is best, her grief is too great for public lamentation, and doubtless she has gone to her chamber to weep for her dead son, leading her maidens in his dirge.

(Pause.)

PRIEST

It may be so: but I fear this deep silence.

MESSENGER

I will see what she is doing. I will go in.

(Exit Messenger into the palace.)

(Enter Creon with attendants, bearing Haimon's body.)

PRIEST

But here is the king himself; oh look at him, bearing his own damnation in his arms.

CREON

Nothing you say can touch me anymore. My own blind heart has brought me from darkness to final darkness. Here you see the father murdering, the murdered son--And all my civic wisdom!

Haimon my son, so young, so young to die, I was the fool, not you; and you died for me.

PRIEST

That is the truth; but you were late in learning it.

CREON

This truth is hard to bear. Surely a god has crushed me beneath the hugest weight of heaven, and driven me headlong a barbaric way to trample out the thing I held most dear.

The pains that men will take to come to pain!

(Enter Messenger from the palace.)

MESSENGER

The burden you carry in your hands is heavy, but it is not all; you will find more in your house.

CREON

What burden worse than this shall I find there?

MESSENGER

The Queen is dead.

CREON

O port of death, deaf world, Is there no pity for me? And you, Angel of evil, I was dead, and your words are death again. Is it true, boy? Can it be true? Is my wife dead? Has death bred death?

MESSENGER

You can see for yourself.

(The doors are opened and the body of Eurydice is disclosed within.)

CREON

Oh pity! All true, all true, and more than I can bear! Oh my wife, my son!

MESSENGER

She stood before the altar, and her heart welcomed the knife her own hand guided, and a great cry burst from her lips for Megareus dead, and for Haimon dead, her sons, and her last breath was a curse for their father, the murderer of her sons. And she fell, and the dark flowed in through her closing eyes.

CREON

O God, I am sick with fear. Are there no swords here? Has no one a blow for me?

MESSENGER

Her curse is upon you for the deaths of both.

CREON

It is right that it should be. I alone am guilty. I know it, and I say it. Lead me in, quickly, friends. I have neither life nor substance. Lead me in.

PRIEST

You are right, if there can be right in so much wrong. The briefest way is best in a world of sorrow.

CREON

Let it come. Let death come quickly, and be kind to me. I would not ever see the sun again.

PRIEST

All that will come when it will; but we, meanwhile, have much to do. Leave the future to itself.

CREON

All my heart was in that prayer!

PRIEST

Then do not pray any more; the sky is deaf.

CREON

Lead me away. I have been rash and foolish. I have killed my son and my wife. I look for comfort; my comfort lies here dead. Whatever my hands have touched has come to nothing. Fate has brought all my pride to a thought of dust.

(As Creon is being led into the house, the PRIEST advances and speaks directly to the audience.)

PRIEST

There is no happiness where there is no wisdom; no wisdom but in submission to the gods. Big words are always punished, and proud men in old age learn to be wise.

CURTAIN