

# ANTIGONE

by Sophocles (c. 496-406 B.C.) .

Translated by Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald.

## Characters

Antigone, daughter of Oedipus

Ismene, daughter of Oedipus

Eurydice, wife of Creon

Creon, King of Thebes

Haimon, son of Creon

Teiresias, a blind seer

Sentry

Messenger

Priest

Chorus

**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.

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## 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. (Antigone and Ismene 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, unlidged  
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: Then 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.

(Exit 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.  
[Oh, the sins of my mother's bed  
And my ill-fated mother's  
Self-creating intercourse with my father!  
From such as these I was born miserable!  
I am going to live with them,  
Accursed, unwed.  
Oh, my brother, you struck  
An unlucky marriage,  
And dying you killed me, though I still lived.]

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:

O tomb, O bridal bower, O underground  
Home everlasting, whither I journey  
To my own people, whose great number—  
So many destroyed—Persephone has  
Received among the dead. To these I go down—  
The last of them all and worst by far,  
Before my allowance of life is spent.  
Nevertheless, as I go, I nurture  
The hope that I will come dear to my father,  
Dear to you, mother, and dear to you, my own  
Dear brother. When you died, with my own hands  
I washed and adorned your bodies, and I poured  
Libations at your tombs. But now, Polynices,  
After burying your body, I reap  
Rewards like these. Still, I honored you well  
In the eyes of the wise. No, if somehow  
Children whose mother I was or my husband  
Had died, I would not have undertaken  
This labor in defiance of the citizens.  
Shall I tell you the code I follow?  
I could get another husband when mine died,  
And a child from another man, if I  
Lost one from him, but since my mother and  
Father both lie in Hell, there is no field  
where I could grow another brother.  
With this as my law, I honor you above  
All others; to Creon I seemed to have  
Made a mistake and to have done something  
Terrible, my brother. Now he holds me  
Thus in his hand and leads me, without a  
Wedding, no bridal hymn. I have no share  
Of marriage or raising children, but,  
As I am, bereft of friends and unlucky,  
I am going alive into depths of the dead.  
Which of the gods' laws have I transgressed?  
Why should I still look to the gods in my  
Unhappiness? What ally can I call?  
In my case, by being pious, I have  
Won for myself the rewards of impiety.  
But, if these men have sinned, may they not suffer  
More evils than they unjustly inflict on me.]<sup>1</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> The bracketed excerpts from a different translation: <http://www.enotes.com/antigone-text/antigone>

(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: 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.)

**PAEAN:**

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 overhead 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**