

Antigone

A new adaptation of Sophocles' tragedy
by
Richard Engling

Dramatis Personae

ANTIGONE, daughter of Oedipus
ISMENE, daughter of Oedipus
CREON, King of Thebes
EURYDICE, his wife
HAEMON, his son
TEIRESIAS, the blind prophet
GUARD, set to watch the corpse of Polyneices
MESSENGER
CHORUS
A BOY, servant to TEIRESIAS

(see the glossary for pronunciations at the end of the script)

Revision: 10
December 19, 2005

© 2005 by Richard Engling. All rights reserved.
Arrangements for public performances must be made in advance with the author.

Uploading this file to any web site or emailing it to any other person is a violation of copyright laws. Single copies of this script may be downloaded and printed for personal reading or evaluation purposes, providing that each user registers at www.richardengling.com. All other duplication is prohibited.

Contact Richard Engling via www.richardengling.com or at the address below:
Richard Engling
135 Asbury Avenue
Evanston, IL 60202
847-475-1139

Dedication

I dedicate this play to those prisoners who are unjustly held by our nation and to the innocent Iraqis and faithful American soldiers maimed and killed for a President's lie. I write in the hope that Americans will be reunited in the dedication to decency and justice for all.

–Richard Engling

SETTING: An open space before the royal palace at Thebes.

MUSIC. The CHORUS enacts in dumb show the battle for Thebes and the fall of the two brothers, Eteocles and Polyneices. Eteocles is carried away with full honors. Polyneices is left behind on the battlefield.

CREON

(from forestage, or voice-over)

Therefore, Eteocles, who perished fighting for our city in all renown of arms, shall be entombed and honored with every rite. But for his twin, Polyneices, who conspired with our enemies, let no one grace him with funeral rites, on pain of death.

Daybreak, the morning after. ANTIGONE calls ISMENE forth from the palace, in order to speak to her alone.

ANTIGONE

Ismene! Ismene! Come, dear Ismene, my blood sister. Let me see your face. Do you not feel the weight of the troubles Zeus brings? It is as though our father never left us. The gods refuse to forget his sin. They send more dishonor. Have you heard the edict?

ISMENE

If my face shows nothing, the exhaustion of grief has wiped it clean. I can no longer see what lies before me, but only our brothers driving their spears through one another's hearts. The city rejoices over the enemy's defeat, but I can think only of that final, bloody embrace.

ANTIGONE

And yet there is more. I must speak with you in private.

ISMENE

What new grief could matter after this?

ANTIGONE

I, too, was like the trampled grasses after our brothers' deaths. To kill one another over the throne of Thebes! But now that Uncle Creon rules, he sets himself above the gods! He allows Eteocles to be buried with proper ceremony. His spirit can join the honored dead. But hapless Polyneices lies rotting. His dead eyes shall be plucked by crows. Dogs will tear and rip his flesh. His intestines make a feast for vultures. And because of this, his spirit will wander the land, never able to join the ancestors. Good Creon forbids anyone give Hades his due. Can we, born of a most noble family, allow our brother to rot on the ground?

ISMENE

What would you have us do?

ANTIGONE

We must bury him.

ISMENE

If anyone were to see us burying Polyneices, we would be put to death.

ANTIGONE

You would rather allow uncle to play politics with what we owe the gods?

ISMENE

What we owe the gods would now be the most political act in Thebes.

ANTIGONE

My brother will not lie on the ground to be dragged by dogs. If you will not assist me, I will go alone.

ISMENE

Antigone, wait. I am too heartbroken and terrified to think clearly. How can we be sure what is right? Must we walk straight into our deaths? Have you no fear of dying—or of being wrong?

ANTIGONE

Creon cannot interfere with the ceremonies of the dead.

ISMENE

You are just like father, always so certain. But think how he died, hated and disgraced. He would not rest until he discovered his own patricide and incest! Then the truth was so painful he tore out his eyes. Mother slipped a noose around her neck to choke out her shame. And now our brothers slaughter themselves, they who slept in one other's arms as babes. We two are all that is left: Two solitary women against the royal power. Must we add our deaths to those who died before us? Can we not honor our own womanhood and cast aside the family curse? Let us obey Creon's edict and live. To do otherwise is to conspire with the most horrible of fates. Or do you believe this is what we owe the gods? Must every one of us destroy ourselves?

ANTIGONE

The very thing that holds you back, urges me on. Why should we cling to this cursed life? We are here for a few breaths, and then death collects us. How could you stand the shame if you arrived at Hades' realm and Polyneices were not there! Should we linger here a few more miserable years and then feel his loss for eternity?

ISMENE

I want to do justice for Polyneices. I want to mourn over both our brothers' graves! But if they discover us, we will not be allowed our quiet prayers. They will uncover his body, and we will die for nothing!

ANTIGONE

You must choose: Either oppose injustice or accept it. If we do not act against this abomination, we endorse it. Even if we fail, what we attempt means something. I cannot answer for you, but I will go to heap earth on my brother.

ISMENE

Misery has been our companion for so long. Now you embrace it like a lover.

ANTIGONE

Stay behind then, sister. What I embrace is my obligation to family and the gods. My duty is clear.

ISMENE

At least take care. Tell no one. I will keep your secret.

ANTIGONE

I will not sneak like a thief. Go shout my deeds. Silence in the face of such depravity is hateful to me, and you will be hateful too if you cower before tyranny.

ISMENE

Your passion makes you reckless. I fear for you, Antigone.

ANTIGONE

Fear for Creon. It is he who thwarts the will of the gods.

ISMENE

But what if the only result of this is that Polyneices and you both lay unburied? Will you be satisfied to have both your spirits wander? I cannot allow that. You are more dear to me than anyone else.

ANTIGONE

I will do what I must. I know what offends the gods! I would rather die today than live a coward's life and suffer for eternity.

(ANTIGONE exits.)

ISMENE

I want to go with you, Antigone. How right it would feel to bury our brother! But if you are put to death, I must see to your funeral rites—even if that should mean my own death. For now, I must bear the disgrace in your eyes. It is my duty to watch over you.

(Exit ISMENE as CHORUS enters.)

CHORUS

Sun-blaze, fair light that awakens Thebes,
You shine at last, eye of golden day.
Your dazzling light embraces us.
Your searing eye shames our foes home.
They came against us with proud white shields,
Roused by the vengeance of traitor Polyneices.
Like shrill-screaming eagles they swooped
Into our land in snow-white pinion sheathed,
With arméd throng, and helms feathered high.

They circled all around our dwellings.
They ravened round our seven gates.
Their spears thirsted for Theban blood.
But we drove the invaders away!
So fierce was the battle raised against them,
The very tumult turned many on their heels,
Our force too mighty for them to conquer.
Our heroes too strong to meet defeat:
The blood of our ancestors raged within us,
They who were born from the teeth of dragons.

LEADER

To share our throne were the twin sons of Oedipus,
Equal in birth, each to rule a year by turn.
But wise Eteocles saw danger to the realm.
Oft-changing rule would make us weak.
He refused his brother when came his time.
Proud Polyneices gathered our foes.

But Zeus hates the boasts of a traitorous tongue.
He beheld them coming in clanging gold.
With brandished fire he struck them down
As they climbed heavy armed upon our walls.

CHORUS

They fell to earth, torches in hand,
Their frenzy stopped, fear choked their throats.
Almighty Zeus wreaked havoc upon them,
An ally in our need, their army put to rout.

LEADER

And so seven captains came to seven gates.
They offered single battle to decide the day.
Seven Theban heroes ran with sharpened steel.
Each dared death to conquer our foes.
They took their rivals' swords to the temples of our gods.
But wait! What is this? Two men stand still.
Twin brothers, twin kings, with twin spears and twin hate.
They face one another with murder in their hands.
Each the equal in birth and strength.
The champion each of rival, vengeful gods.
Each drives the spear through his brother's heart.

CHORUS

So fall the heirs to the throne of Thebes.
But put this sorrow behind us now,
Victory brings its glory to all.
Let joy forget the gore and blood,
The hated enemy upon our walls.
Dance us now in the glory of gods
With song and drum throughout the night.
Let Dionysos lead our way
With holy madness ecstasy,
His wild dancing shakes the land.

LEADER

But hear ye now, the new king comes,
Creon, uncle of the twin-killed sons.
Our ruler takes power through the twists of fate.

(Enter CREON and EURYDICE.)

CREON

Speaker of Thebes, distinguished justices, honored guests: This ship of state, wracked by the recent waves of terror, has once more come safe to harbor aided by the friendly winds of the gods. I have called ye, out of all Thebans, because I remembered how true and

constant was your reverence for the royal hand of Laius. You upheld his son Oedipus when he ruled our land, and when he perished, your loyalty continued with his sons. Now they have fallen, brother by brother murderously slain, and I ascend the throne with all its powers, by nearness of kinship to the dead.

(CREON turns to EURYDICE.)

We have lost many loved ones. No family has felt the harshness of fate more than our own. We lost not only our nephews, but Megareus, the elder son of your king and Queen Eurydice. Megareus, who would have been our heir to the throne of Thebes. Having heard the prophesy of Teiresias that a voluntary death would save our city, noble Megareus fell upon his sword in self-sacrifice. He died even before the battle began. My beloved eldest, nearest to my heart. Who can say that his act did not save us all?

(EURYDICE exits.)

The losses that we have borne bow us to the Earth. We must mourn, and we must give each other strength. No man knows himself until he be tested by both sorrow and power. But as Zeus is my witness, wherever the source of lawlessness, we will root it out, even if the source be our closest comrade. Our enemies embrace death as a cause and a creed. Only when our city stands protected can we prosper together.

We will honor the virtuous and condemn those who threaten our peace. Therefore, Eteocles shall be graced with the rites that follow the noblest dead to their rest. But for Polyneices, who sought to spill his kindred's blood and to drive the survivors into slavery, I proclaim to our people, on pain of death, that his body remain on the field of battle. He shall be left unburied, a corpse for birds and dogs to eat, a shameful sight upon the land. By this will our enemies learn the meaning of Theban justice.

LEADER

Creon King, we have heard your edict. Your word is law.

CREON

See then you execute what I ordain.

LEADER

Good King, this charge is better laid upon your men at arms.

CREON

Fear not, I have posted guards to watch the corpse.

LEADER

What duty, then, would you put on us?

CREON

That you do not side with those who break my law.

LEADER

Do you believe us mad enough to court our own deaths?

CREON

Bribery and ambition often lure men to ruin.

(A GUARD enters.)

GUARD

My lord, I will not pretend to pant and puff like some swift-footed messenger, for often did my thoughts make me pause, and wheel round in my path. The debate stormed in my mind: "Why hurry headlong to your fate, poor fool?" But on the other hand: "If Creon learn this from another, you will rue the day!" And yet again: "What am I to tell him?" For mystery indeed hangs over this happenstance. Thus with jerks and starts I hastened slowly on my road, with many tumbling thoughts extending a yard to a mile. But the advance voice won out, that I should come before you; and, though my tale may bring me to disaster, yet will I tell it; for I come knowing I can suffer nothing that is not my fate. For if it is my fate to suffer, than suffer I shall regardless.

CREON

Speak, please. What is your news?

GUARD

May I premise with one word more about myself? It is true that I have not solved the mystery—but then neither did I do the deed nor see it done, and therefore it would not be just that I should come to harm for the mere reporting of it.

CREON

Shall we dance until the morrow, or will you speak your message?

GUARD

The bearer of dread tidings must often quake. I beseech of you, skewer not the messenger.

CREON

Then, fool, tell your news and get you gone.

GUARD

My liege...the corpse of Polyneices is buried. Someone has besprinkled it with dust and performed other such rites as piety enjoins, and has gone.

CREON

Who dared do this thing?

GUARD

I know not, though we searched a half league around. There was no trace of pick or shovel. The ground was hard and unbroken—not a scratch or rut of chariot wheels—nor sign of human hands at work. When the first sentry of the morning watch gave alarm, we all stood terror-struck. The corpse was vanished! But on second look, it was not gone, nor interred in earth, but covered over with just enough soil so as to avert the curse that

haunts the unburied dead. Of vulture or jackal there was no sign. Recovered from the first shock, we investigated with a diligent thoroughness, but finding not a clue, we began to dispute. Guard railed against guard and bared fists. Each in turn we suspected of the deed, but each in turn offered his alibi. We challenged one another to handle red-hot iron, or pass through fire, affirming thus our oaths of innocence. We argued until one voice spoke the words that bowed us to the ground like quivering reeds: "King Creon must be told." After much silence, we cast the lots, and I drew the short straw: to be the bearer of bad news that no man welcomes.

LEADER

I must confess, I had misgivings from the first, my liege. Can this deed possibly be the direct work of gods?

CREON

Have you no more wit than this guard? The gods do not cherish this traitor. He came to set fire to their temples! We must vanquish those that conspire towards lawlessness. A sack of gold is more powerful than a thousand swords when it causes steady men to retreat their oaths. Clearly, my enemies corrupt my guards with bribes. Evil has power, and it must be opposed.

(to GUARD)

Hear me now: as I revere Zeus, by Zeus I swear, except that you find and bring me the man who carried out this lawless burial, death shall not suffice for your punishment. I will hang you on a cross, alive, until I hear confession of this outrage. Thus I will teach you the true reward of greed.

GUARD

My lord, may I speak?

CREON

Do you not realize that even your voice now offends?

GUARD

My good lord, is it your ears that suffer, or your heart?

CREON

Is it your bravery or your stupidity that keeps you here?

GUARD

Your pardon, my lord. But with leave: The guilty one vexes your heart. I am innocent, though I bother your ears.

CREON

If my enemies could be defeated by babble, you would be my greatest champion.

GUARD

So long as you judge me not guilty of this crime.

CREON

You judge riches more sweet than duty.

GUARD

Alas! That the judge most high should misjudge so badly.

CREON

Bring me the doer of this deed or pay the price with your life.

(CREON exits.)

GUARD

Well may he be found! But, be he caught or be he not, truly you will not see me here again. Saved now, beyond hope, lowly man that I am, I owe the gods my life.

(The GUARD exits.)

CHORUS

What do we know of the life of Man,
Most wondrous creature beneath the sky?
Even Earth, the oldest of gods,
Does the human being subdue.
We trap the sea-brood of the deep.
Caught in the meshes of our snares.
We hunt the forests for our meat.

We think thoughts as swift as wind,
And create the rules that make a state,
And cures to ease the dreaded plague,
And shelter from the sun and rain
All of these spring from the mind of Man,
Only Death brings us flat defeat.

Yet still our cunning, fertile minds
Go now to evil, now to good.
Cling we to the rule of law
And walk in rhythm with the gods,
Proudly then our city thrives.
Reject we he who dwells with sin,
And keep us on the narrow path!

(Enter the GUARD leading ANTIGONE with her wrists bound.)

LEADER

Hard-hearted gods, what means this? Antigone bound? You leave my soul amazed.
Hapless child of hapless father, did you recklessly conspire and madly brave the King's decree?

GUARD

Here is the culprit taken in the act. I discovered this girl spreading earth again on Polyneices. Where is the King?

(CREON enters.)

LEADER

Here comes he from the palace. His timing as inevitable as fate.

CREON

What is it? What has chanced, that makes my coming timely?

GUARD

No man, my lord, should make vows hastily, for on second thought, we oft repent. I had sworn never to show my face here again, having felt the dread of your wrath. And yet here I am, happy as a man with a skin full of wine. I do appear freely before you, bringing this maid who proves I took no part in breaking your decree. She is the one. She alone showed grace to the dead. And I, all eager to clear my name, bring her back to you. Take her. Examine her. But I beseech you now for a free and final quittance from your wrath.

CREON

How and where did you take her?

GUARD

She was in the act. She was sprinkling her brother with soil.

CREON

Do you know what you are saying? You accuse a daughter of the House of Laius?

GUARD

I accuse nothing. I just tell you what I saw.

CREON

Tell me exactly.

GUARD

It happened as such, Your Mercy. No sooner had I returned to Polyneices, flying from your awful threats, than straight we swept away all trace of dust, and bared the clammy body again to the elements. We sat us down on the brow of the hill to the windward of the stench, while each man kept his fellow alert and slapped the sluggard if he chanced to nap. So went it, until the sun's bright orb stood mid heaven, and the heat began to burn. A sudden whirlwind upraised a cloud of dust that blotted out the sky and swept the plain. It stripped the woodlands bare. We closed our eyes and waited till the plague should pass, not one of us suspecting that those gods—divine Helios or mighty Boreas—should desire to intercede. And yet, when sun and wind allowed us sight again, lo! there stood this

maid. She cried the cry of a mother bird that finds her nest robbed of chicks. Seeing the corpse bare, but not seeing us who watched, straightway she gathered handfuls of dust and crowned the dead. We rushed forward and seized our quarry, who made no attempt at flight. We questioned and accused her, but she denied nothing, Your Mercy. I was both happy and grieved, for it is sweet to escape threatened doom. Yet to bring disaster to one such as she is most grievous.

CREON

And you, girl. Do you avow or disavow this deed?

ANTIGONE

It is as he said.

CREON

(to GUARD)

You may go, free of guilt.

GUARD

All blessings on Your Worship. And may you find mercy in your heart for this girl.

(Exit GUARD)

CREON

Now answer plain: Had you heard my edict?

ANTIGONE

How could I not?

CREON

And yet you broke the law?

ANTIGONE

Let me ask you, Uncle: Are you more high than Zeus? More profound than holy Justice below? Your mortal breath cannot overrule the laws of Heaven. Their jurisdiction is forever. Should I prefer your laws, I provoke the wrath of Hades and doom my brother's soul to wander. I knew that I must die. Had you not proclaimed it? Yet when one lives surrounded by sorrow, death is bliss. To leave my brother unburied, I would rather be dead. If you judge me foolish in this, it may be you are the fool.

LEADER

Too proud your tongue, Antigone! Better to beg for mercy than to enrage those who love you.

CREON

Enough! Stubborn daughter of a stubborn sire, she glories in her wickedness. If she can flout the law unpunished, then she is king and I am the niece. Bring forth Ismene. I saw her in the palace, frenzied and distraught. A guilty mind oft betrays the doer. Go all and

bring her. I would have a word alone with my sister's child.
(Exit CHORUS.)

ANTIGONE

Would you do more, Uncle, than execute me?

CREON

It is because I do not wish to see you die that I sent the others away. And Haemon means to marry you. I do not care to disappoint my son, either.

ANTIGONE

Perhaps your law is not so absolute.

CREON

Perhaps you are not so stubborn when there is no audience.

ANTIGONE

What will you have of me, Uncle? In truth, I do not wish to be put to death.

CREON

Good. Then you must condemn your crime publicly and stay away from your brother's body.

ANTIGONE

I will do as you ask, but only if you allow Ismene or Haemon—or you yourself—to give Polyneices a burial.

CREON

I cannot show piety towards the one who attacked our city.

ANTIGONE

He is your nephew.

CREON

Did he show piety in killing his own brother?

ANTIGONE

It is not for us to judge his life. He deserves the rites of death.

CREON

Polyneices died our enemy. He killed Eteocles.

ANTIGONE

And what of Eteocles? What about his vow to share the throne? If he had not refused to give Polyneices his turn as king, neither one nor the other would lie low today. A year hence Eteocles would have been on the throne again.

CREON

Eteocles saw the weakness in divided power. And he was right. A leader must show strength. I offered Polyneices my counsel in this dispute: I told him to be the power behind the throne, as I once was to Oedipus.

ANTIGONE

You abetted the arrogance of Eteocles? Then their blood is on your hands, as well!

CREON

Eteocles was the stronger leader. A king makes decisions for the good of the realm.

ANTIGONE

Was it good for the realm that they are dead? I will not trade my brother's soul for the good of the realm. I will condemn my crime, as you ask, but only if Polyneices is buried.

CREON

Antigone. I do not want to condemn you.

ANTIGONE

I cannot sacrifice his soul for my life.

CREON

But after a crime like his, can you hope that he will enter the Elysian Fields? Is it not more likely that your brother be condemned to Tartarus? Is it so much worse that his soul wander here?

ANTIGONE

You cannot know my brother's fate. His journey through Hades' lands is his alone. The one thing we know for certain is that he will never reach the Elysian Fields if left unburied here.

CREON

Perhaps it could be done. Many have fallen in this squabble. We could drag in some slave's body to replace your brother. I will let you do your rites in secret. In exchange, you must publicly condemn your crime and your brother's crime. You must give public support to my law and pledge that no one ever hear of our secret dealings.

ANTIGONE

I will do what you ask, except I cannot condemn Polyneices at the same time I bury him.

CREON

You need not say his name. Merely gesture to the body of the slave.

ANTIGONE

I cannot take part in such a conjurer's trick.

CREON

Is your brother now so recognizable? My guards report he gives forth ripe odor.

ANTIGONE

That is not my objection.

CREON

I offer you life and your brother honor.

ANTIGONE

Public condemnation? A clandestine burial? Where is the honor in this?

CREON

The honor lies in doing the public good. Bury your brother in secret! It is our fate to rule. We cannot reveal everything we know! There are those in this city who would dispose of us now.

ANTIGONE

Words carry power. I cannot condemn him in public and bury him in private. Dark Hades would not accept his soul. Let me just condemn my crime. Let Ismene bury our brother.

CREON

Not even Ismene must know of this. And words do carry power. That is why you must condemn your act and your brother to the people. I cannot show a wavering hand.

ANTIGONE

I will not show a wavering heart.

CREON

Think again. I offer you life.

ANTIGONE

At the price of betraying my brother's soul forever.

CREON

The gods will know what is in your heart.

ANTIGONE

The gods will hear the words from my mouth.

CREON

I give you the chance to save your life. Take it!

ANTIGONE

You think everyone can lie so convincingly? I cannot do it!

CREON

It is not a lie to remain silent. I ask for a simple act, and then you can live and marry Haemon. Don't you want to taste the fullness of life and grow old? Or if your devotions have become so strong, devote your life to the temple of Hades. But first you must correct your defiance of the law.

ANTIGONE

We are the last of a family destroyed by the gods. They will not accept an approximation of their due. If I condemn him, it will contaminate his funeral rites. Then what will be our reckoning?

CREON

You sour the love I feel for you. Go with your brothers to the land of the dead if you must. While I live, I shall not be overthrown by the spawn of Oedipus.

(Enter ISMENE and CHORUS.)

CHORUS

Creon, King, we bring forth Ismene, shedding such tears as fond sisters weep. A shadow clouds her face, and sorrow staggers her graceful step.

CREON

And you, Niece, did you, too, slink like a viper in my house, to rise suddenly against my throne?

ISMENE

I have done the deed. I share the guilt.

ANTIGONE

Justice will not have this. You would not consent to the deed when I asked your help.

ISMENE

But you are my last love. I walked with you as we tended our blind and beaten father. I will not abandon you now.

ANTIGONE

Whose deed this was, Hades and the dead know well.

ISMENE

Do not scorn me. Let me die with you, and honor the dead.

ANTIGONE

You cannot share in a deed already done.

ISMENE

I feared this moment would come. I thought to remain behind. I pledged to decency that I would perform your funeral rites. But now that you are condemned, I haven't the strength. Forgive me, sister. I have no taste to remain in this world.

ANTIGONE

Live and see to my burial. Be a comfort to Haemon.

ISMENE

Please, sister.

ANTIGONE

Save yourself. Live and remember me.

ISMENE

This is too much sorrow!

ANTIGONE

We each made our choice.

ISMENE

That was before this final blow.

ANTIGONE

Be of good cheer and live. I was dead already.

CREON

Save yourself, Ismene. Your sister refuses to show the wit for self-survival.

ISMENE

When such misfortune comes, even the wisest lose their mother wit.

CREON

It takes not much wisdom to see how to stay alive.

ISMENE

But how can you execute Antigone? She is promised to your son.

CREON

She cannot be Death's handmaiden and Haemon's wife.

LEADER

Must you deprive your son of his bride?

CREON

What would you have me do?

LEADER

Let her repent and live.

CREON

Ask her yourself. She stands convicted and unrepentant, by her own mouth.

LEADER

Antigone, your gracious King asks you to repent. Will you not save your own life?

ANTIGONE

I would that I could. I cannot live at the expense of my brother's soul.

CREON

You hear with your own ears.

(To the two attendants)

Delay no more. Take them within and guard them. Even the bravest try to escape when Death draws near.

(Exeunt attendants, guarding ANTIGONE and ISMENE. CREON remains.)

CHORUS

Thrice blest are they who never taste evil.
When a house is heaven-shaken, sorrow
Attends forevermore. Hera cursed
Laius with a curse so everlasting,
Every generation suffers all the
More. The oracle told Laius that his
Future son would kill him. He took his love
With men and left his marriage bed cold.

Child-hungry Jocasta gave to Laius
A strong potion, addling his senses,
Putting fire in his loins. From this dark
Night was born the child Oedipus, whom
Laius cast out on a mountainside to
Die. A shepherd found the boy and carried
Him to Corinth where he grew up as the
King's son, proud and rash and strong. Laius
Met Oedipus, traveling for his fortune.
Stepping on a narrow bridge, neither
Man would yield. For a trick of pride, the
Two men came to blows. The son he killed his
Father, thinking him a stranger. He traveled
On to Thebes, strange city of his birth. The
Blood of Laius forever stained his hands.

Oedipus became King, and husband to
Jocasta. He sired on his mother sibling
Boys and girls. From this sin rose a curse
Upon the city Thebes. The plague afflicted
All till Oedipus found destruction, now his
Sons are dead. His daughters suffer. What can
Happen more? Oh Zeus, we pray you leave us.
Touch us not. Do not exalt us. Nothing
Of your power comes without a curse.

LEADER

Here comes one who has reason for grief.

(Enter HAEMON)

CREON

Haemon, my son, by now you have heard the pronouncement against the life of your
bride. Do you mean to rage against me? Or do I have still your good will, knowing that
whatever I have done has been out of love for our family and our state?

HAEMON

Father, you are the patriarch of us all. You govern the city as you govern my youth. No
marriage is more precious to me than your good guidance.

CREON

We have lost your brother Megareus. You are the last joy of my age, and it is for you that
I feel the strongest grief. Yet ill fares a husband mated with a shrew. This one glories in
disobedience. What the King ordains must be obeyed. The rule of law protects the city. I
cannot yield to my niece's will, and she will not yield to the law.

LEADER

To us, unless sorrow has dulled our wits, the King's words sound both reasonable and
wise.

HAEMON

Wisdom is the choicest gift of heaven. I would not challenge your wisdom, father, even if
I could. And yet wise thoughts may come to other men. But you, father, would never hear
them. The people would never tell you that which might offend. I overhear when they
speak plain and honest. The people mourn this maiden. They say a noble deed has
doomed her to her death.

CREON

(gesturing him to come away)

This news, my son, is better told in private.

HAEMON

And yet I believe your justices might confirm what I say. The people sympathize with this girl who saved her brother's body from defilement. For who would allow the eyes of their blood relatives to be plucked by vultures? Their spirit to wander, never to find its kin in the underworld? Would not you bury me, even if I had died in some act of foolish crime? This is not my voice, Father, but the people's, whom I hear in numbers. I take pride in you and your wisdom. It is for this reason that I ask you to reconsider. The trees that bend before a storm are saved, but those that resist are torn up root and branch. Relent then, Father, and free Antigone. The wisest man will listen to wise advice.

LEADER

Noble King, we deem there is reason in his words. And you, Haemon, can profit by your father's. Both have spoken well.

CREON

He knows little yet of the burdens of statecraft.

HAEMON

Then teach me, Father.

CREON

Would you honor those who undermine the state?

HAEMON

I offer no respect for traitors.

CREON

Except Antigone.

HAEMON

No one in Thebes believes her to be a traitor.

CREON

Shall I ask each man in Thebes to tell me how to rule?

HAEMON

Listen to those you can trust.

CREON

I listen to more than you know. I hear those who would have us fail—those who hate all descendants and relatives of Laius. I must stand firm and rule. We are the law.

HAEMON

We are also family. Can you not do this for your own son?

CREON

I would that I could. But here, in the public square, the city must come first.

HAEMON

No city belongs to one man.

CREON

It takes a firm ruler to protect the city.

HAEMON

The city that needs protection from its ruler is less safe yet.

CREON

You would do better not to chide me in public, boy.

HAEMON

The great ruler knows when to dispense mercy!

CREON

There will be no mercy if I allow chaos to rule.

HAEMON

Civic order will disintegrate if we incur the displeasure of the gods. You know that, Father.

CREON

I know things that you do not. Every man feels righteous when he says the name of God. My city is favored by one god. Their city by another. And because of this we throw spears through one another. I make my sacrifices to the gods. And I make sacrifices for the good of the city. Personal sacrifices! You have no idea what it means to rule!

HAEMON

Then teach me.

CREON

Let us speak in private.

HAEMON

I cannot speak quietly while Antigone is led away.

CREON

Will you give me no opportunity to guide you?

HAEMON

Will you take guidance from no one but yourself? Will you be as stubborn as Uncle Oedipus?

CREON

Then close your ears, fool, if you cannot come away! You will never marry this girl on this side of the grave.

HAEMON

If she must die, her death will destroy another.

CREON

Are you so bold as to make me threats?

HAEMON

How can I threaten ears that are shut tight?

CREON

Were you not my son, you would not still be speaking.

HAEMON

Are you the only man allowed speech in all Thebes? Glorious Thebes, where all are safe, except from the moods of our King!

CREON

I asked you to bring your griefs to me in private. But you cannot resist making speeches for my justices. Your promised bride taunted me, and so you must taunt me, too! In public. Now, by the gods, you can witness her death.

(To attendants.)

Bring forth my miserable niece that she may die in his presence, before his eyes, at her bridegroom's side!

HAEMON

I will not stay for your revolting exhibition. Save your speeches for your spineless justices. They are the only ones that can endure you.

(Exit HAEMON)

LEADER

Wait, Haemon! Call him, good King. A youthful mind, when stung, is fierce.

CREON

Let him go vent his fury! He will not save these two girls from death.

LEADER

Surely you do not mean to slay them both?

CREON

No. You are right. Not her whose hands are clean.

LEADER

And how is the other to die?

CREON

That demands consideration. We will not directly execute her and put that stain upon the state. She shall be taken to some desert place. There she will be sealed in a rock-hewn cave with food for as long as she cares to live. Let her call on Hades. Perhaps he will release her. Or perhaps she will learn too late that love is wasted when spent upon the dead.

(CREON exits.)

CHORUS

Invincible Love, no one can resist
Your glance, nor arms can fight you as you lie
In wait upon the tender cheek of a maid,
Or wander over land or sea or sky.
Mortal nor immortal can escape.
Yielding to your charm, we all run mad.

By Love, the will of the mighty is bent awry.
The just becomes unjust. So here we see
A love-stirred fight 'tween son and sire and fate
Against the loss of dark Antigone.
When Aphrodite is on the throne, every
Man bends his heart unto her will.

(ANTIGONE enters, led by attendants.)

LEADER

Not even I can remain on the side of justice
When I see this maid, nor keep dry my
Eyes from streaming tears. Antigone,
So young, so bold, passing thus from the bridal
Chamber to be married to her tomb.

(The following lines between ANTIGONE and the
CHORUS are chanted responsively.)

ANTIGONE

Friends, to you my last farewell. My life's
Short journey here is nearly done. I turn
My face now one long last lingering time
Into the sun's dear warmth. I feel already
Gone, for Death puts young and old to sleep.
He calls for me now, too, without a thought
For that which I will miss: Not to marry.
Not to hear the wedding song sung
For me nor see the petals upon my bridal

Bed. Instead, tis Hades I go to wed.

CHORUS

Great and glorious you go to the dead. Unmarkéd
By the wounds of war, withered not
By dread disease, freely you walk, healthy
And fair, like a goddess to the deep.

ANTIGONE

If glory you see, it is a trick of the eye.
I am more like the daughter of Tantalus' child.
As ivy grows upon a tree, so
To stone she slowly turned. And now she's drenched
By pelting rain, left there to pine. And from
Her eyes her tears do flow to frozen breast
Down cheeks of hard, unfeeling rock. That
Is the fate (long, slow death) that is more like mine.

CHORUS

Yet she was born of gods, divine. You are
Mortal, of mortal line. Oh, holy girl!
For one like you to share the doom of a goddess
Divine will bring you fame forever after.

ANTIGONE

You mock me now in my final hour? Instead
Cry out against this deed! Is justice served?
Dear friends, at least show pity now! Where
Was ever a fate like mine? To wither and fade
Entombed alive alone to the end to die?

CHORUS

Too bold, too proud you flaunt the law, and now
Her revenge is horrible, extreme. Yet tis more likely
Some older sin now brings this harsh and bitter
Doom: The curse that follows all your breed.

ANTIGONE

Here you touch on my bitterest thought. My grandfather's
Curse, my unfortunate father, unlucky siblings,
We four are fruit of incestuous sheets. Despised
By the gods, they suffer us not to walk long on the land.
And so I pass, accursed and unwed, to meet
My miserable sires below. How fateful: the acts
Of my brother twins deal me this final deathblow!

CHORUS

Yet do not cast aside all blame. Let rites
Be paid when rites are due. But kings cannot
Hold sway without obeisance to their laws.
All this you know. 'Tis by your act and not
Your fate you bring pronouncement of your doom.

ANTIGONE

All your words mean naught to me: unwept
Unwed, unloved. The day's bright eye will I
Miss most. Shut up away in dark for all.
No friend, no sight for comfort as I die.

(CREON enters from the palace.)

CREON

If lamentations could stave off death, we would never hear the end. Away with her,
please. Wall her up in a rock-vaulted tomb. Leave her at liberty to die, or, if she choose,
to live in solitude, the tomb her dwelling. In either case, we are guiltless of her blood. But
she will not again see the light of day.

ANTIGONE

Should I linger in a prison, surrounded by cold rock? I would rather join those that
Persephone has received among the dead. Most miserable fate. And yet I hope that I shall
find a welcome from my father, my mother, and my dear Polyneices. These three have
my hands washed in their deaths. I dressed their limbs. I poured libations on their graves.
And for these sacred duties, I am paid by death. Yet I honored them without fear, and the
wise will deem I did so rightly. But now all you, the people of my city, and my King:
You judge me guilty. You condemn me. My friends desert me, and I go to a living grave.

Can I look to any god for pity? Call on any man for help? Oh, that piety should be
deemed criminal. If such justice be approved by heaven, I shall be taught suffering for
my sin. But if the sin belongs to others, I wish them no harsher punishment than the
wrongs they do to me.

CHORUS

Such a tempest drives this maiden's soul. Cannot her life be spared even now, oh King?

CREON

Enough. Escort her away, for both our sakes.

ANTIGONE

Uncle, can you not spare me one moment more to look upon my city? Indeed, I would
not die. 'Tis bitter in the end, and I do not wish it. Is there no hope?

CREON

What hope can I offer that you do not already refuse?

ANTIGONE

I condemn my crime, Uncle! I condemn my pride. Only let my brother be buried, and let me live!

LEADER

You break your uncle's heart. You cannot condemn your crime and in the same breath ask it to be repeated.

ANTIGONE

Oh city of my home, Thebes divine! Oh ye gods! Eldest of our race, look upon me, the last of all your royal house! My people, do not forsake me. Understand this of my great and miserable family: Death is the realm of the House of Laius. Made powerful by the gods, we charted the course of our city's life. We carry the burden of rule. And our reward is most bitter. If there be recompense, it must be with Hades. How could I abandon my brother after his short and violent life? Hades is our master. Look what I suffer for his sake, because I would not forget his due! Never to embrace my husband as his wife. Never to feel my baby at my breast. Never again to taste of joy or feel the sun upon my face. Oh, miserable Antigone! I feel as though I have never been awake! How the breeze touches the flesh of my arms, as though this skin never felt sensation before. How bright the light illumines all around me. Your faces, my friends, shine forth. I smell the astringence of thyme on the hillside—and baking bread on a nearby hearth. Far off I hear children playing. All this to be shut away. No breeze, no light, no sounds but my own sobs. No aroma but damp rock. If this must be my fate, delay no longer, for the richness of this life breaks my heart.

(At a signal from CREON, ANTIGONE is led away by the guards.)

CHORUS (Group A)

Dreadful is the power of Fate. Not wealth,
Nor men at arms, nor walls, nor ships of wood
That breast the sea can stave her off. Thus can
Two men both firm and right stand face to face
With gods defending both, and doubt-free slay
The foe of god, no pity each to each.

CHORUS (Group B)

Where one is right, the other must be wrong.
Righteousness and single vision doth arm
The hand of Man. It takes no pause to see
The view that others hold so dear, and life
Itself is cheaply spent, small coins to throw
Into the font, the wishing well of Fate.

CHORUS (Group A)

Yet must the gods be always honored, this
We know is true. Above all else the gods
Do hold our fate within their hands. Their power
Alone protect us from foes at every
Hand. Therefore must we please them, else
Alone we all do stand.

CHORUS (Group B)

Madness, deafness,
Blindness, these the tools of gods that make
Us miss the haunted cries of fellow man.
What need we hear the truth when high we lift
Our holy righteous cause? Then cry we all:

(Alternating groups of CHORUS – A & B)

A: The gods are on our side!

B: The gods are on our side!

A: The gods are on our side!

B: The gods are on our side!

(Enter TEIRESIAS, led by a BOY.)

TEIRESIAS

The gods do speak, Justices of Thebes, but few have ears that open to their words. The
rest listen to voices of their own conception and say: I hear and do the will of God.
Behold two wayfarers of most sensitive ears, but who have betwixt us eyes for only one.

CREON

What are your tidings, aged Teiresias?

TEIRESIAS

I will tell you. And you must listen with open ears.

CREON

I have never ignored your counsel.

TEIRESIAS

Therefore did you pilot the ship of State aright.

CREON

I know it, and I gladly own my debt.

TEIRESIAS

Mark now you navigate once again the straits of peril.

CREON

What do you mean?

TEIRESIAS

You shall hear: Sitting at my seat of divination, as is my habit, I listened to the birds fly freely and sing. Every species of bird flies there. Their songs bring me both the harmony and the strife of nature, for birds, like humans, do not always live in peace. But then I began to hear weird cries, squawking. Some evil incited in them a frenzy. They tore at one another with beak and claw, wings whirring, suddenly murderous. It filled me with foreboding. Straightaway I lit the fire for sacrifice and bled the lamb. The flames raged on the altar, and we lay the creature atop. The fire embraced its body, but did not devour it as we expected. Instead a putrid slime dripped and sputtered in the ashes. Bladders cracked and spurting gall. The fat melted but would not burn. It peeled away and left the thighbones bare. Hephaistos, God of Fire, had refused to consume our offering.

These signs I saw, related to me by the boy, who wept as he saw the effect on my face. I was filled with terror, for all around the city, the gods reject our rituals. The State is sick, my King, and your new-made law is the worm. Our shrines are profaned, spattered with the regurgitations of vultures that glut themselves on the flesh of Oedipus's son. The birds, gorged with the carnival of human gore, go sick and mad. Therefore do the angry gods abominate our prayers.

Take heed, my lord: The displeasure of the divine is a mightier foe than ten thousand men at arms. A man's decree, though he be a mighty king, is naught but words writ in dust. The gods' laws are eternal. I speak frankly and for your own good.

CREON

You speak for my own good? It is not many days that your words deprived me of my eldest son, my most beloved. Would but one noble Theban give his life freely, so you said, the city would be saved. And so did my son Megareus, the comfort of my age, my heir.

TEIRESIAS

And so the city was saved.

CREON

And so the city was robbed of its best hope for its future king.

TEIRESIAS

I never suggested it need to be Megareus. He took this burden upon himself.

CREON

But he would not have done so had you told me your prophecy in private.

TEIRESIAS

I am a seer, my Lord. I am he who brings that which is secret into view. We have had enough die, my King. Let death disarm your vengeance. When someone has been killed, do you stab him again? You must show the full measure of the nobility shown by your noble son.

CREON

Shall I too fall upon my sword? Shall I throw up my rule? Shall I create laws and make them meaningless? Let it be heralded to the mob: Obey or disobey what law you will, for in Thebes the king is weak.

TEIRESIAS

You are but young in rule, my king, and do not yet understand the varieties of strength.

CREON

And you would instruct me aright. Right off my throne. Old man, let fly your shafts at me. I am a favorite target of soothsayers. Who pays you to undermine my reign? No matter how much you amass, you will never purchase this man's burial. Not even if monstrous eagles carry torn chunks of Polyneices to Zeus himself will I permit his internment. Be ashamed, Teiresias, to practice in deception for coin.

TEIRESIAS

Of all the fools, the greatest fool is he who will not save himself.

CREON

My concern is for my city.

TEIRESIAS

And yet you show pride in your stubbornness. Do you not remember what stubbornness brought Oedipus?

CREON

Oedipus was brought down by a curse of which I have no part.

TEIRESIAS

No part? Whose son do you refuse to bury? Whose daughter do you condemn? My blindness is nothing compared to yours, for yours is a prideful, self-willed stupidity.

CREON

I will not trade jibes with the seer.

TEIRESIAS

You have already accused me of selling my voice.

CREON

Soothsayers have always been fond of money.

TEIRESIAS

And what of tyrants? What love they?

CREON

Be careful, Teiresias. You speak to your king.

TEIRESIAS

I know it well. I put you on your throne.

CREON

I deny not your wisdom. But now you betray it for coin.

TEIRESIAS

I hoped to spare you, but there is more yet that you have not heard.

CREON

Speak away. Only expect no money from me.

TEIRESIAS

I expect none. Though indeed you shall pay.

CREON

Go stretch out your palm to my enemies. But tell them their gold succeeds only in transforming a trusted seer to a charlatan.

TEIRESIAS

Here, King of Fools: Receive your last prophecy. You shall not live long before you pay with the blood of your own blood in quittance of your blasphemy. You have entombed a living soul, sent below a citizen of the earth before her time. You have wronged the nether gods by leaving here a corpse unwept, unwashed, unsepulchered. Not even the gods in heaven dare refuse Hades' due. Therefore the avenging Furies of the darkest abyss already swirl in the air towards you, that you may taste of these self-same torments. Consider now whether my prophecy be falsified for gold. Wait for the proof, fool, for soon the sound of lamentation shall ring through your desolate halls. These are the shafts that, like a bowman provoked to anger, I loosen at your breast. You shall not dodge their heads. Boy, lead me home, that the king may vent his spleen on sycophantic men, and learn to curb his tongue when wisdom come to speak.

(The BOY leads TEIRESIAS out.)

CREON

Do not return, Teiresias, until you learn to give the honor a king is due.

(To the LEADER)

And yet do I feel a powerful unease at his words. What think you, old friend?

LEADER

Ever since his raven hair has turned to white, never have I known the prophet's warning to be false.

CREON

I know it too, and it unsettles the very ground beneath my feet. I remember now the screams of Oedipus: His bloody face, his eyes gouged out with my sister's brooch, by his own hand. The obstinate soul who fights with Fate suffers beyond the tolerance of man.

LEADER

King Creon, listen to advice.

CREON

What should I do? Speak. I will obey.

LEADER

Go, free the maiden from her rocky chamber and make a tomb for her unburied brother.

CREON

You would have me yield?

LEADER

The wise ship's pilot realigns his course when the storm comes. No man sees this as weakness.

CREON

How reluctant I have been to change my resolve. I should look like a fool to reverse my very first command as king. My enemies will see the weakness. But human enemies are nothing compared to the enmity of gods. Only a fool battles Fate. I will make it so.

LEADER

Go. Trust not these deeds to others, but oversee it yourself.

CREON

Everyone, my servants, my citizens, get the axes and tools! Away! It was I that bound her. I will set her free. Panic rises on my heels. How could I put myself above decency?
(CREON and his servants exit.)

LEADER

Who will cure the general sickness and blow the stain from our land?
Let us all invoke Thebes patron. Lord Dionysos, evoe!
He who dies and is reborn. He who blesses with holy madness.
He drives insane those who despise him. Let him never be ignored.

CHORUS
(singing, strophe 1)

Thou by many names adored,
Child of Zeus the God of thunder,
Fair Italia's guardian lord,
Of a Theban bride the wonder.
Dionysos, evoe!

In the deep-embosomed glades
Of the fair Eleusinian Queen
Haunt of revelers, men and maids,
Dionysos, thou art seen.
Evoe, evoe!

Where the Dragon's teeth were sown,
Where the Maenads are thy daughters
Round ye there we make our home.
Thebes, Oh Bacchus, drinks thy waters.
Dionysos, evoe!

Thou art seen where torches glare.
There to thee thy hymn rings out,
On dark crests of twin peaks bare,
And through our streets we Thebans shout,
Evoe, evoe!

CHORUS

As thou loves our city Thebes,
Home of Semele thy mother,
Listen to our dire needs.
See'st what a plague we're under.
Dionysos, evoe!

Harken now, thy help we crave.
Come, thy frenzied riot bring.
We'll shout and dance thy praises brave.
Refuse us not, but hear us sing:
Evoe, evoe!

(Enter MESSENGER)

MESSENGER

Attend, all you Thebans. After today, I will despise or envy no man. Fortune plays her games with us all. King Creon I thought a blessed man. He saved the land from enemies and ruled the state supreme—the glorious father of princely children. Now all is waste. What is a life without joys but a living death? He has wealth and praise and power, but if these give no pleasure, a happy peasant is his better.

LEADER

What new griefs have you to tell us?

MESSENGER

Both dead, and they who live deserve to die.

LEADER

Who is dead? And who has killed them? Speak your story plain.

MESSENGER

Haemon is dead. His blood shed by no stranger's hand.

LEADER

Not by his father?

MESSENGER

No. By his own, in fury with his father for the death of Antigone.

LEADER

Oh, Teiresias, how harshly have you proved your word!

MESSENGER

(Bowling to greet her as EURYDICE enters.)

Queen Eurydice.

EURYDICE

People of Thebes, I have heard rumor of news, but I cannot tell you what it is. I went to offer my prayer to Athena. I drew back the bar to open wide the door of her temple and upon my ears there broke a wail. A cry pertaining to some news. I was so stricken with terror, I fainted into my handmaid's arms. What I heard I cannot now remember. Please, if someone knows, tell me what has happened. Let me hear clearly. Do not fear to tell me the truth, for I am no stranger to sorrow.

MESSENGER

Dear mistress, I was there. I will tell you what you wish, though it breaks my heart to do so. I attended the King as we crossed the plain to its farthest edge. There the corpse of Polyneices, horribly mauled by carrion beasts, lay upon the earth. We offered a prayer to Hades and Hecate that they might accept his soul and be merciful to our state. We washed the corpse with proper ceremony. We laid it on a funeral pyre and burned his remains. Afterwards, we buried the ashes with a mighty mound of his native soil. All this we did with our desire for haste battling our need for proper ceremony. Then to the caverned rock, to the bridal chamber of Antigone, we sped. But as we drew near, a cry of lamentation broke on every ear. A sob broke in my throat, too, oh Queen, for I recognized your son's cry and the deep grief it carried. The king cried out in his anguish: "Oh, miserable! This is my son's cry."

EURYDICE

Haemon! What has he done?

MESSENGER

The King shouted: "Run! Make haste to the tomb. Tell me is that Haemon's voice, or is this some trick of the gods." We ran like those pursued by wolves and saw the most sorrowful sight I have ever seen. In the cavern's vaulted gloom, there hung the maiden Antigone, strangled, a noose of linen twined around her neck. I watched as Haemon drew forth his sword and cut her down. He cried her name aloud, as if he would call her back from Hades' realm. He put his ear to her mouth and to her heart, but no breath stirred, no pulse throbbed. Haemon clasped her cold form to him and bewailed the loss of his valiant bride. And then, grief turning to fury, he railed against his father's cold law.

EURYDICE

Oh, Haemon! Oh, my son!

MESSENGER

When the King saw him holding the pitiful body of poor Antigone, he let out a terrible groan. He rushed toward Haemon, crying: "My son, do not let this horrible mischance strip you of your reason. Come away from this wretched place. Let us make our prayers and sacrifices and make amends."

EURYDICE

But he did not go. My son would not loose his grip of her.

MESSENGER

No. The boy glared at him with terrible eyes, spat in his face, and then, without a word, he plucked his sword from the ground and swung, our king barely leaping out of the way—whereupon the royal guards leapt between them. But wretched Haemon, having missed his chance for vengeance, fell to wailing and staggered to the back of the cave. Then a sudden bitter resolve gripped him. Far too quickly for anyone to stop him, he set his sword's hilt to the ground and fell upon it with all his might...

EURYDICE

No!

MESSENGER

...driving the sword half its length into his side.

EURYDICE

No...

MESSENGER

While he yet breathed, he clasped the maid in his quivering arms, her pallid cheek spattered red with his dying gasps. Then they lay, two corpses, one in death. Now they consummate their marriage vows in the halls of Death. Our king fell to the ground and wept. He demonstrates to all, whatever sorrow befalls mankind, man's arrogance brings the worst.

(EURYDICE exits)

LEADER

What do you make of this? The Queen goes without a word.

MESSENGER

I would think she goes to lament these new deaths in private. She is a most noble woman. She will do nothing that ill-befits a queen.

LEADER

I am not so certain. Forced silence is no less ominous than excessive tears.

MESSENGER

Perhaps you are right. I will follow her. Unnatural calm may mean no good.
(MESSENGER exits. Enter CREON with attendants, carrying the shrouded body of HAEMON.)

CHORUS

Lo! The King approaches. He bears the evidence against himself. I fear to make such a charge against a king, but all must recognize, the guilt is his.

CREON

Witness your king, oh Thebes. I am destroyed by the perverse stubbornness of my own will. I abandoned decency to mistreat the dead. Gaze upon us, executioner and victim. Damned by the wretched foolishness of warfare! How could I choose a misguided vigilance over my own son! Look at him: dead, hardly past childhood, through no fault of his own. The fault was mine, mine alone. Oh my son!

LEADER

Miserable King, too late came your repentance to avert the horror of Fate.

CREON

I am most brutally schooled by sorrow. Dark Hades has struck me down, humbled my pride, and transformed my pleasure to pain. We mortals are but the playthings of the gods! All our labor comes to naught!

(Enter MESSENGER.)

MESSENGER

You are most grievously schooled by trials, my lord, and yet there is more to come, and yet even more sorrowful.

CREON

More sorrowful? It is not possible.

MESSENGER

Your wife, the mother of your sons, lies felled by a fresh inflicted wound.

CREON

What say you? Have I not felt the cold slashes of death already? My sons are dead. I am dead. Is it fit to slay anew a man already dead? Nay, I have heard these words before! Who plays tricks with me? My son, do you speak? What say we all? Are we not all already dead? Stroke upon stroke: first Megareus, then Antigone, then Haemon, now Eurydice slain?

CHORUS

Look for yourself. She lies for all to view.

(The corpse of EURYDICE is disclosed.)

CREON

Alas! What remains to crown my agony? I have only now held my blood-drained son in my arms. Unhappy mother, most unhappy son!

MESSENGER

Beside the altar of Athena she fell upon a keen-edged sword and closed her eyes. She mourned Megareus who gave his life for the sake of Thebes, and again for her most unhappy Haemon. I hesitate to speak more, but speak I must, for she made me promise to tell you: With her last breath she cursed you, my lord, whom she blamed for both their deaths.

CREON

More of this I cannot bear. Will no one end my suffering? Send for a sword and dispatch your wretched king. I want no more misery. Both son and mother died of their own hand?

MESSENGER

Hearing the lament begin for Haemon, she stabbed herself to the heart.

CREON

I am the killer. I did the deed, your murder. No one but I. Lead me away and end this miserable life. There is nothing left for your king.

LEADER

And yet you must carry on. Having no son, no heir, you must set your city to rights.

CREON

Come, vengeful gods, be a friend at last. When one lives surrounded by sorrow, death is bliss. Force me not to look upon another day!

CHORUS (Group A)

You must bear with heartbreak, oh King.

CREON

All my desires were summed in that prayer. I want only death.

CHORUS (Group B)

Pray no further. Duty demands you live. Of refuge there is none.

CREON

I know not where to turn. To live with myself, all loved ones gone, is the most bitter sentence of all.

CHORUS (Group B)

When life chooses to punish us, no limit does it set. Punished by Fate, punished by gods, punished by other men, all pains we must endure.

CHORUS (Group A)

And yet most bitter is the penalty we draw upon ourselves. When human strife puts us in conflict with the gods, most careful must we be.

CHORUS (Group B)

Fear of enemies shakes our dedication to the old laws. Fear blinds us to our need for reverence and decency.

LEADER

Fear blinds us to the true nature of our fellow man. He who cannot understand the dreams of his neighbors will live in blindness. Across the earth he will see only enemies. And yet in their hearts, all men are the same.

CHORUS (Group A)

They long for peace, and for the good of their children. They long to better their families, their cities and themselves. Looking far off, they fathom not what stirs in the hearts of other men.

CHORUS (Group B)

Better to slay them before they attack. Better to thwart the evil before it approaches.

LEADER

But evil sits in all hearts disguised. When we watch for the evil in others, we cease to see it in ourselves.

CHORUS (Group B)

The enemy is always evil, and we are always good. Our acts are always justified.

CHORUS (Group A)

But without reverence for all men, there can be reverence for none. Without reverence for all men, our fate is misery. Without reverence for all men...

LEADER

Antigone dies.

THE END

Glossary

Antigone /ann-TIG-uh-knee/: The elder daughter of Oedipus and Jocasta.

Aphrodite /af-rah-DIE-tee/: The goddess of love and beauty.

Athena /uh-THEE-nah/: The goddess of wisdom and warfare.

Boreas /BORE-ee-us/: The god of the north wind.

Creon /KREE-ahn/: Brother-in-law (and uncle) of Oedipus, brother of Jocasta.

Dionysos /die-oh-NIGH-suss/: God of wine, madness and inspiration; patron of Thebes and theatre.

Eleusinian /el-you-SIN-ee-an/: Relating to a city near Athens, site of the Eleusinian mysteries.

Elysian Fields /ill LIZH uhn/: The abode of the blessed after death. The 'heaven' of Hades.

Eteocles /eh-TEE-uh-cleez/: Antigone's brother who would not allow Polyneices his turn on the throne of Thebes.

Eurydice /you-RID-uh-see/: Wife of Creon; mother of Haemon.

Evoe /AY-voe-ay/: A cry of celebration.

Hades /HAY-deez/: God of the Underworld. Also the land of the Underworld.

Haemon /HAY-mahn/: Antigone's fiancé; Creon's son.

Hecate /HECK-ah-tee/: A goddess of the underworld.

Helios /HEE-lee-ahs/: The sun god.

Hephaistos /heh-FESS-tis/: God of Fire.

Ismene /IZ-muh-nay/: Antigone's younger sister.

Jocasta /joe-CASS-tah/: Mother (and wife) of Oedipus; sister of Creon.

Laius /LAY-uss/: Father of Oedipus, whom Oedipus killed.

Maenads /MEE-nads/: Woman members of the orgiastic cult of Dionysos.

Megareus /muh-GAIR-ee-uss/: Creon's oldest son who sacrificed himself before the battle in which Oedipus's sons died.

Oedipus /ED-uh-puss/: Father (and brother) of Antigone and Ismene.

Persephone /purr-SEFF-ah-knee/: wife-queen of Hades.

Polyneices /pol-uh-NIGH-sees/: The exiled brother who raised an army against Thebes.

Semele /SAME-ah-lee/: The human mother of Dionysos.

Tantalus /TAN-ta-lis/: A king who was 'tantalized' in Hades for eternity for his crimes.

Tartarus /TAR-ter-iss/: The lowest depths of Hades.

Teiresias /teer-EE-see-uss/: The blind prophet.

Thebes /THEEBZ/: The city.