



ANTIGONE¹ **BY: SOPHOKLES**

Translation by: **R. C. Jebb**

Editing, additions, corrections, and footnotes by Barry F. Vaughan

CAST:

- **ANTIGONE** - daughter of Oidipous
- **ISMENE** - daughter of Oidipous
- **KREON** - King of Thebes
- **EURUDIKE** - his wife
- **HAEMON** - his son
- **TEIRESIAS** - the blind seer
- **CHORUS** - Theban Elders
- **GUARD**
- **MESSENGER**

SCENE:

The same as in Oidipous the King; an open space before the royal palace, once that of Oidipous, at Thebes. The back scene represents the front of the palace, with three doors, of which the central and largest is the principal entrance into the house. The time is at daybreak on the morning after the fall of the two brothers, Eteokles and Poluneikes, and the flight of the defeated Argives. ANTIGONE calls ISMENE forth from the palace, in order to speak to her alone.



ANTIGONE

Ismene, sister, mine own dear sister, know you what ill there is, of all bequeathed by Oidipous, that Zeus fulfills not for us twain while we live? Nothing painful is there, nothing fraught with ruin, no shame, no dishonor, that I have not seen in your woes and mine.

And now what new edict is this of which they tell, that our Captain has just published to all Thebes? Know you [anything]? Have you heard? Or is it hidden from you that our friends are threatened with the doom of our foes?

ISMENE

No word of friends, Antigone, gladsome or painful, has come to me, since we two sisters were bereft of brothers twain, killed in one day by twofold blow; and since in this last night the Argive host has fled, know no more, whether my fortune be brighter, or more grievous.

¹ This text is adapted from the Project Gutenberg's *Antigone*, by Sophokles, www.gutenberg.org. For the full text visit the Project Gutenberg website. This edited version is intended for academic or personal use and may not be sold or used for profit.

I have changed spellings of proper names to more accurately match the Greek text as opposed to the more traditional Latinized spellings which are dominant in Jebb's translation. I have also changed UK spellings to US spellings where appropriate, as well as made clarifications in translation (noted with brackets) and have added explanatory footnotes.

ANTIGONE

I knew it well, and therefore sought to bring you beyond the gates of the court, that you might hear alone.

ISMENE

What is it? It is plain that you are brooding on some dark tidings.

ANTIGONE

What, has not Kreon destined our brothers, the one to honored burial, the other to unburied shame? Eteokles, they say, with due observance of right and custom, he has laid in the earth, for his honor among the dead below. But the hapless corpse of Poluneikes—as rumor says, it has been published to the town that none shall entomb him or mourn, but leave unwept, un[buried], a welcome store for the birds, as they [see his body], to feast on at will.

Such, it is said, is the edict that the good Kreon has set forth for you and for me, yes, for me, and is coming here to proclaim it clearly to those who know it not; nor counts the matter light, but, whoso[ever] disobeys in [done], his doom is death by stoning before all the [people]. You know it now; and you will soon show whether you are nobly bred, or the base daughter of a noble line.

ISMENE

Poor sister, and if things stand thus, what could I help to do or undo?

ANTIGONE

Consider if you will share the toil and the deed.

ISMENE

In what venture? What can be your meaning?

ANTIGONE

[Will] you aid this hand to lift the dead?

ISMENE

You would bury him, when it is forbidden to [the citizens of] Thebes?

ANTIGONE

I will do my part, and yours, if you will not, to a brother. False to him will I never be found.

ISMENE

Ah, over-bold! When Kreon has forbidden [it]?

ANTIGONE

No, he has no right to keep me from mine own.

ISMENE

Ah me! Think, sister, how our father perished, amid hate and scorn, when sins bared by his own search had moved him to strike both eyes with self-blinding hand; then the mother-wife, two names in one, with twisted noose did [end] her life; and last, our two brothers in one day,

each shedding, hapless one, a kinsman's blood, wrought out with mutual hands their common doom. And now we in turn—we two left all alone; think how we shall perish, more miserably than all the rest, if, in defiance of the law, we brave a king's decree or his powers. No, we must remember, first, that we were born women who should not strive with men; [second], that we are ruled [by] the stronger, so that we must obey in these things, and in things yet [more painful]. I, therefore, asking the Spirits Infernal to pardon, seeing that force is put on me herein, will [listen] to our rulers, for it is [unwise] to be [too involved].

ANTIGONE

I will not urge you. No, nor if you yet should have the [desire], would you be welcome as a worker with me. No, be what you will; but I will bury him: [it is good] for me to die in doing that. I shall rest, a loved one with him whom I have loved, sinless in my crime. For I owe a longer allegiance to the dead than to the living: in that world² I shall abide forever. [I will not] be guilty of dishonoring laws which the gods have established in honor.

ISMENE

I do them no dishonor; but to defy the State? I have no strength for that!

ANTIGONE

Such be your plea: I, then, will go to heap the earth above the brother whom I love.

ISMENE

Alas, unhappy one! How I fear for you!

ANTIGONE

Fear not for me: guide your own fate aright.

ISMENE

At least, then, disclose this plan to none, but hide it closely, and so, too, will I.

ANTIGONE

Oh, denounce it! You will be far more hateful for your silence, if you proclaim not these things to all.

ISMENE

You have a hot heart for chilling deeds.

ANTIGONE

I know that I please where I [ought] to please.

ISMENE

Yes, *if* you can! But you [intend to do] what you cannot.

ANTIGONE

Why, then, when my strength fails, I shall have done [what I should have done].

² Hades, the land of the dead.

ISMENE

A hopeless quest should not be made at all.

ANTIGONE

If thus you speak, you will have hatred from me, and will justly be subject to the lasting hatred of the dead. Leave me, and the folly that is mine alone, to suffer this dread thing; for I shall not suffer [anything] so dreadful as an ignoble death.

ISMENE

Go, then, if you must; and of this be sure, that though your errand is foolish, to your [loved] ones you are truly [loved].

[Exit Antigone on the spectators' left. Ismene retires into the palace by one of the two side-doors. When they have departed, the Chorus of Thebes enters.]

CHORUS

Beam of the sun, fairest light that ever dawned on Thebes of the seven gates, you have shone forth at last, eye of golden day, arisen above Dirke's streams! The warrior of the white shield, who came from Argos in his panoply, has been stirred by you to headlong flight, in swifter career;

LEADER

who set forth against our land by reason of the vexed claims of Poluneikes; and, like shrill-screaming eagle, he flew over into our land, in snow-white pinion sheathed, with an armed throng, and with plumage of helms.

CHORUS

He paused above our dwellings; he ravened around our sevenfold [gates] with spears [thirsty] for blood; but he went hence, or ever his jaws were glutted with our gore, or the Fire-god's pine-fed flame had seized our crown of towers. So fierce was the noise of battle raised behind him, a thing too hard for him to conquer, as he wrestled with his dragon foe.

LEADER

For Zeus utterly abhors the boasts of a proud tongue; and when he beheld them coming on [like a river], in the haughty pride of clanging gold, he smote with brandished fire one who was now hasting to shout victory at his goal upon our ramparts.

CHORUS

Swung down, he fell on the earth with a crash, torch in hand, he who so lately, in the frenzy of the mad onset, was raging against us with the blasts of his tempestuous hate. But those threats fared not as he hoped; and to other foes the mighty War-god dispensed their several dooms, dealing havoc around, a mighty helper at our need.

LEADER

For seven captains at seven gates, matched against seven, left the tribute of their weapons to Zeus who turns the battle; [all except] those two of cruel fate, who, born of one father and

one mother, set against each other their twain conquering spears, and are sharers in a common death.³

CHORUS

But since Nike [*Victory*] of glorious name has come to us, with joy responsive to the joy of Thebes whose chariots are many, let us enjoy forgetfulness after the late wars, and visit all the temples of the gods with night-long dance and song; and may Bakxos⁴ be our leader, whose dancing shakes the land of Thebes.

LEADER

But lo, the king of the land comes [here], Kreon, son of Menoeceus,⁵ our new ruler by the new fortunes that the gods have given; what counsel is he pondering, that he has proposed this special conference of elders, summoned by his general mandate?

[Enter Kreon, from the central doors of the palace, in the garb of king, with two attendants.]

KREON

Sirs, the vessel of our [City], after being tossed on wild waves, has once more been safely steadied by the gods: and [you], out of all the [people], have been called apart by my summons, because I knew, first of all, how true and constant was your reverence for the royal power of Laios.⁶ [And again], when Oidipous was ruler of our land, and when he had perished, your steadfast loyalty still upheld [his] children. Since, then, his sons have fallen in one day by a twofold doom, each smitten by the other, each stained with a brother's blood, I now possess the throne and all its powers, by nearness of kinship to the dead.

No man can be fully known, in soul and spirit and mind, until he has been seen versed in rule and law-giving. For if any, being supreme guide of the [City], cleaves not to the best counsels, but, through some fear, keeps his lips locked, I hold, and have ever held, him most base. And if any[one] makes a friend of more account than his fatherland, that man has no

³ After their father and king of Thebes, Oidipous, blinded himself for his crimes of pride and incest, Poulnekes and Etokles were supposed to rule Thebes in turn. But when Etokles refused to give up the throne as he promised, Poulnekes raised an army from Argos to force his brother to yield. The city of Thebes had seven gates and seven heroes from each side led the attack/defense at each gate. The two brothers faced each other at one of these gates, and in the fighting mortally wounded each other.

⁴ Bakxos (Bacchus) is an alternate name for the god Dionusos (Dionysus) who is associated with wine, celebration, and maddness.

⁵ Kreon was the brother of Jocasta and therefore uncle to Antigone, Ismene, Poulnekes, and Etokles. Upon the death of the brothers, Kreon was selected to be ruler of Thebes.

⁶ Laios (Laius) was the king of Thebes. He and his wife, Jocasta, received a message from the Oracle of Delphi warning them never to have a son as he would kill him and marry Jocasta. However, in a drunken stupor, Laios impregnated Jocasta who gave birth to a son. In order to cheat the prophecy they decided to kill the child by exposure (so as not to have blood on their hands). The baby was rescued by a passing shepherd and given to the barren king and queen of Korinth. The boy was raised as the prince of Korinth and would later hear of the prophecy that he was to kill his father and marry his mother. Again trying to cheat Fate, Oidipous (“the pierced one”) would flee his “home” only to meet Laios in the country of Thebes. After quarreling, Oidipous slew his real father and traveled on to Thebes where he would later marry Jocasta (his real mother). It was the cursed actions of Laios and Oidipous that set the stage for Sophokles’ *Antigone* which continues the story after the death of Oidipous’ and Jocasta’s sons in their struggle to rule Thebes.

place in my regard. For I—Zeus, who sees all things always, be my witness—would not be silent if I saw ruin, instead of safety, coming to the citizens. Nor would I ever deem the country's foe a friend to myself! Remembering this: that our country is the ship that bears us safe, and that only while she prospers in our voyage can we make true friends.

Such are the rules by which I guard this city's greatness. And in accord with them is the edict which I have now published to the [people] touching the sons of Oidipous: Eteokles, who has fallen fighting for our city, in all renown of arms, shall be entombed, and crowned with every rite that follows the noblest dead to their rest. But for his brother, Poluneikes, who came back from exile, and sought to consume utterly with fire the city of his fathers and the shrines of his fathers' gods, sought to taste of kindred blood, and to lead the remnant into slavery touching this man, it has been proclaimed to our people that none shall grace him with [burial] or [lamination], but leave him [uncovered], a corpse for birds and dogs to eat, a ghastly sight of shame.

Such the spirit of my dealing. And never, by deed of mine, shall the wicked stand in honor before the just; but whoso[ever] has good will to Thebes, he shall be honored of me, in his life and in his death.

LEADER

Such is your pleasure, Kreon, son of Menoeceus, touching this city's foe, and its friend; and you have power to take what [action] you will, both for the dead, and for us who live.

KREON

See, then, that you be guardians of the mandate.

LEADER

Lay the burden of this task on some younger man.

KREON

No, watchers of the corpse have been found.

LEADER

What, then, is this further charge that you would give?

KREON

That you side not with the breakers of these commands.

LEADER

No man is so foolish that he is enamored of death.

KREON

In truth, that is the [cost]; yet [profit] has [often] ruined men through their hopes.

[A Guard enters from the spectators' left]

GUARD

My lord, I will not say that I come breathless from speed, or that have plied a nimble foot; for

often did my thoughts make me pause, and wheel round in my path, to return. My mind was holding large discourse with me: "Fool, why do you go to your certain doom?"

"Wretch, tarrying again? [But] if Kreon hears this from another, must not you smart for it?"

So debating, I went on my way with lagging steps, and thus a short road was made long. At last, however, it carried the day that I should come here, to you; and, [even if] my tale be [nothing], yet will I tell it; for I come with a good grip on one hope: that I can suffer nothing but what is my fate.

KREON

And what is it that disquiets you thus?

GUARD

I wish to tell you first about myself—I did not do the deed—I did not see the doer, it were not right that I should come to any harm.

KREON

You have a shrewd eye for your [target]; well do you fence yourself round against the blame; clearly you have some strange thing to tell.

GUARD

Yes, truly, [terrible] news makes one pause long.

KREON

Then tell it, will you, and so get you gone?

GUARD

Well, this is it. The corpse; someone has just given it burial, and gone away, after sprinkling thirsty dust on the flesh, with such other rites as piety requires.

KREON

What [did you say]? What living man has dared this deed?

GUARD

I know not; no stroke of pickaxe was seen there, no earth thrown up by mattock⁷; the ground was hard and dry, unbroken, without track of wheels; the doer was one who had left no trace. And when the first day-watchman showed it to us, [great fear] fell on all. The dead man was veiled from us; not shut within a tomb, but lightly strewn with dust, as by the hand of one who shunned a curse. And no sign met the eye as though any beast of prey or any dog had come [near] him, or torn him.

Then [accusations] flew fast and loud among us, guard [suspecting] guard; and it would even have come to blows at last, nor was there any to hinder. Every man was the culprit, and no one was convicted, but all [denied] knowledge of the deed. And we were ready to take red-

⁷ A pick. A tool for breaking through hard soil.

hot iron in our hands, to walk through fire, to make oath by the gods that we had not done the deed, that we were not privy to the planning or the doing.

At last, when all our searching was fruitless, one spoke, who made us all bend our faces on the earth in fear. For we saw not how we could [oppose] him, or escape [punishment] if we obeyed. His counsel was that this deed must be reported to you, and not hidden. And this seemed best [to us all], and the lot doomed [me] to win this prize. So here I stand, [just] as unwelcome as unwilling, well I [know that] no man [welcomes] in the bearer of bad news.

LEADER

O king, my thoughts have long been whispering, can this deed, perchance, be even the work of gods?

KREON

Cease, before your words fill me utterly with wrath, lest you be found at once an old man and foolish! You say what [cannot be true]: that the gods have care for this corpse. Was it for high reward of trusty service that they sought to hide his nakedness? [The very one] who came to burn their pillared shrines and sacred treasures, to burn their land, and scatter its laws to the winds? Or do you [believe] the gods honor the wicked? It cannot be. No! From the first there were certain [people] in the town that muttered against me, chafing at this edict, wagging their heads in secret; and kept not their necks duly under the yoke, like men contented with my sway.

It is by them, well I know, that these have been beguiled and bribed to do this deed! Nothing so evil as money ever grew to be errant among men. [Greed] lays cities low, [it] drives men from their homes, [it] trains and warps honest souls till they set themselves to works of shame; [greed] still teaches [people] to practice villainies, and to know every [impious] deed.

But all the men who wrought this thing for hire have made it sure that, soon or late, they shall pay the price. Now, as Zeus still has my reverence, know this, I tell you on my oath: If you [do not] find the very author of this burial, and produce him before mine eyes, [one Hades] shall not be enough for you until hung up alive you have exposed this outrage. Henceforth you may [steal] with better knowledge [where] [profit] should be won, and learn that it is not well to love gain from every [one]. For you will find that ill-gotten wealth brings more men to ruin than to fame.

GUARD

May I speak? Or shall I just turn and go?

KREON

Know you not that now even your voice [gives] offence?

GUARD

Is [the pain] in the ears, or in the soul?

KREON

And why would you define the seat of my pain?

GUARD

[Because it is the] doer [that] vexes your [soul], but I, [only] yours ears.

KREON

Ah, you are a born babbler, it is well seen.

GUARD

[That may be], but [I was] never the doer of this deed.

KREON

Yes, and more! [You sold] your life for silver.

GUARD

Alas! It is sad, truly, that he who judges should misjudge.

KREON

Let your fancy play with 'judgment' as it will; but, if you show me not the doers of these things, you shall avow that dastardly gains work sorrows.

[Kreon goes into the palace]

GUARD

Well, may he be found! [That] 'twere best. But, be he caught or be he not—fortune must settle that—truly you will not see me here again! Saved, even now, beyond hope and thought, I owe the gods great thanks.

[The Guard goes out on the spectators' left]

CHORUS

Wonders are many, and none is more wonderful than [M]an; the power that crosses the white sea, driven by the stormy south-wind, making a path under surges that threaten to engulf him; and Gia [Earth], the eldest of the gods, the immortal, the unwearied, does he wear, turning the soil with the offspring of horses, as the ploughs go to and fro from year to year.

And the light-hearted race of birds, and the tribes of savage beasts, and the sea-brood of the deep, he snares in the meshes of his woven toils, he leads captive, [M]an excellent in wit. And he masters the beast whose lair is in the wilds, who roams the hills; he tames the horse of shaggy mane, he puts the yoke upon its neck, he tames the tireless mountain bull.

And speech, and wind-swift thought, and all the moods that mold a state, has he taught himself; and how to flee the arrows of the frost, when it is hard lodging under the clear sky, and the arrows of the rushing rain; yea, he has resource for all; without resource he meets nothing that must come: only against Thanatos [Death] shall he call for aid in vain; but from baffling maladies he has devised escapes.

Cunning beyond fancy's dream is the fertile skill which brings him, now to evil, now to good. When he honors the laws of the land, and that justice which he has sworn by the gods to

uphold, proudly stands his city: no city has he who, for his rashness, dwells with sin. Never may he share my hearth, never think my thoughts, who does these things!

[Enter the Guard on the spectators' left, leading in Antigone]

LEADER

What portent from the gods is this? My soul is amazed. I know her! How can I deny that yon maiden is Antigone? O hapless, and child of hapless father, of Oidipous! What means this? You brought a prisoner? You, disloyal to the king's laws, and taken in folly?

GUARD

Here she is, the doer of the deed: we caught this girl burying him. But where is Kreon?

[Kreon enters hurriedly from the palace]

LEADER

Lo, he comes forth again from the house, at our need.

KREON

What is it? What has [happened], that makes my coming timely?

GUARD

O king, against nothing should men pledge their word; for the after-thought belies the first intent. I could have vowed that I should not soon be here again, scared by your threats, with which I had just been lashed. But, since the joy that surprises and transcends our hopes is like no other pleasure, I have come! Though, it is in breach of my sworn oath, bringing this maid, who was taken showing grace to the dead. This time there was no casting of lots. No, this luck has fallen to me, and to none else! And now, father, take her yourself, question her, examine her, as you will; but I have a right to free and final [acquittal] of this trouble.

KREON

And your prisoner here? How and [where] have you [captured] her?

GUARD

She was burying the man; [that is all there is to it].

KREON

Do you mean what you say? Do you speak aright?

GUARD

I saw her burying the corpse that you had forbidden to bury. Is that plain and clear?

KREON

And how was she seen? How taken in the act?

GUARD

It happened in this way. When we had come to the place, with those dread menaces of yours upon us, we swept away all the dust that covered the corpse, and [exposed] the dank body

well. And then sat us down on the brow of the hill, to windward [side], heedful that the smell from him should not strike us. Every man was wide awake, and kept his neighbor alert with torrents of threats, if anyone should be careless of this task.

So it went, until the sun's bright orb stood in mid-heaven, and the heat began to burn. And then suddenly a whirlwind lifted from the earth [a] storm of dust, a trouble in the sky marring all the leafage of its woods; and the wide air was choked therewith. We closed our eyes, and bore the plague from the gods.

And when, after a long while, this storm had passed, the maid was seen. And she cried aloud with the sharp cry of a bird in its bitterness, even as when, within the empty nest, it sees the bed stripped of its nestlings. So she also, when she saw the corpse bare, lifted up a voice of wailing, and called down curses on the doers of that deed. And straightway she brought thirsty dust in her hands; and from a shapely [vessel] of bronze, held high, with thrice-poured drink-offering she crowned the dead.

We rushed forward when we saw it, and at once [pounced] upon our quarry, who was in no wise dismayed. Then we taxed her with her past and present doings; and she stood not on denial of [anything], [both] to my joy and to my pain. To have escaped from [troubles] one's self is a great joy; but it is painful to bring friends to ill. [No matter], all such things are of less account to me than mine own safety.

KREON

You. You whose face is bent to earth. Do you avow, or disavow, this deed?

ANTIGONE

I avow it; I make no denial.

KREON (to the Guard)

You can take you[rself wherever] you will, free and clear of a grave charge.

[Exit Guard]

(To Antigone) Now, tell me, not in many words, but briefly; knew you that an edict had forbidden this?

ANTIGONE

I knew it; could I help it? It was public.

KREON

And you did indeed dare to transgress that law?

ANTIGONE

Yes; for it was not Zeus that had published that edict; not such are the laws set among men by the Justice who dwells with the gods below; nor deemed I that your decrees were of such [authority], that a mortal could override *the unwritten and unfailing statutes of heaven*. For

their life is not of today, or yesterday, but from all time, and no man knows when they were first put forth.

Not through dread of any human pride could I answer to the gods for breaking these. Die I must, I knew that well (how should I not?) even without your edicts. But if I am to die before my time, I count that a gain: for when anyone lives, as I do, compassed about with evils, can such a one find [anything] but gain in death?

So for me to meet this doom is [a] trifling grief; but if I had suffered my mother's son to lie in death an unburied corpse, *that* would have grieved me; for this, I am not grieved [at all]. And if my present deeds are foolish in your sight, it may be that a foolish judge arraigns my folly.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

The maid shows herself [a] passionate child of [a] passionate father, and knows not how to bend before troubles.

KREON

Yet I would have you know that over-stubborn spirits are most often humbled; it is the stiffest iron, baked to hardness in the fire, that you shall often see snapped and [broken]; and I have known horses that show temper brought to order by a little curb; there is no room for pride when you are your neighbor's slave. This girl was already versed in insolence when she transgressed the laws that had been set forth; and, that done, lo, a second insult, to [enlarge] this, and exult in her deed.

Now [truly] I am no man—she is the man—if this victory shall rest with her, and bring no penalty. No! Be she [my] sister's child, or nearer to me in blood than any that worships Zeus at the altar of our house, she and her kinsfolk shall not avoid a doom most dire; for indeed I charge that other [one] with a like share in the plotting of this burial.

Summon her, for I saw her just now within, raving, and not mistress of her wits. So [often], before the deed, the mind stands self-convicted in its treason, when folks are plotting mischief in the dark. But [truly], this too is hateful, when one who has been caught in wickedness then seeks to make the crime a glory.

ANTIGONE

Would you do more than take and slay me?

KREON

No more, indeed; having that, I have all.

ANTIGONE

Why then do you delay? In your [words] there is [nothing] that pleases me, never may there be! And so my words must needs be displeasing to you. And yet, for glory, [where] could I have been nobler than by giving burial to mine own brother? All here would own that they thought it [good], were not their lips sealed by fear. But royalty, blest in so much besides, has the power to do and say what it will.

KREON

You differ from all these Thebans in that view.

ANTIGONE

These also share it; but they curb their tongues for you.

KREON

And are you not ashamed to act apart from them?

ANTIGONE

No; there is nothing shameful in piety to a brother.

KREON

Was it not a brother, too, that died in the opposite cause?

ANTIGONE

Brother by the same mother and the same father.

KREON

Why, then, do you render a grace that is impious in his sight?

ANTIGONE

The dead man will not say that he so deems it.

KREON

Yes, if you make him but equal in honor with the wicked.

ANTIGONE

It was his brother, not his slave, that perished.

KREON

Wasting this land; while he fell as its champion.

ANTIGONE

Nevertheless, *Hades desires these rites*.

KREON

But the good [do not deserve] a like portion with the evil.

ANTIGONE

Who knows but this seems blameless in the world below?

KREON

A foe is never a friend, not even in death.

ANTIGONE

It is not my nature to join in hating, but in loving.

KREON

Pass, then, to the world of the dead, and, if you must love, love them. While I live, no woman shall rule me.

[Enter Ismene from the house, led in by two attendants.]

CHORUS

Look there, Ismene comes forth, shedding such tears as fond sisters weep; a cloud upon her brow casts its shadow over her darkly-flushing face, and breaks in rain on her fair cheek.

KREON

And you, who, lurking like a viper in my house, [were] secretly draining my life-blood, while I knew not that I was nurturing two pests, to rise against my throne. Come, tell me now, will you also confess your part in this burial, or will you forswear all knowledge of it?

ISMENE

I have done the deed, if she allows my claim, and share the burden of the charge.

ANTIGONE

No! Justice will not suffer you to do that: you did not consent to the deed, nor did I give you part in it.

ISMENE

But, now that ills beset you, I am not ashamed to sail the sea of trouble at your side.

ANTIGONE

Whose was the deed, Hades and the dead are witnesses: a friend in words is not the friend that I love.

ISMENE

No, sister, reject me not, but let me die with you, and duly honor the dead.

ANTIGONE

[You will not share] my death, nor claim deeds to which you have not put your hand: my death will suffice.

ISMENE

And what life is dear to me, bereft of you?

ANTIGONE

Ask Kreon; all your care is for him.

ISMENE

Why vex me thus, when it avails you [nothing]?

ANTIGONE

Indeed, if I mock, it is with pain that I mock you.

ISMENE

Tell me, how can I serve you, even now?

ANTIGONE

Save yourself: I grudge not your escape.

ISMENE

Ah, woe is me! And shall I have no share in your fate?

ANTIGONE

[Your] choice was to live; mine, to die.

ISMENE

At least your choice was not made without my protest.

ANTIGONE

One world approved your wisdom; another, mine.

ISMENE

Howbeit, the offence is the same for both of us.

ANTIGONE

Be of good cheer; you live. But my life has long been given to death, that so I might serve the dead.

KREON

Lo, one of these maidens has newly shown herself foolish, as the other has been since her life began.

ISMENE

Yes, O king, such reason as nature may have given abides not with the unfortunate, but goes astray.

KREON

Yours did, when you chose vile deeds with the vile.

ISMENE

What life could I endure, without her presence?

KREON

No, speak not of her presence; she lives no more.

ISMENE

But will you slay the betrothed of yours own son?

KREON

No, there are other fields for him to plough.

ISMENE

But there can never be such love as bound him to her.

KREON

I like not an evil wife for my son.

ANTIGONE

Haemon, beloved! How your father wrongs you!

KREON

Enough, enough of you and of your marriage!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

[Will] you indeed rob your son of this maiden?

KREON

It is Death that shall stay these bridals for me.

LEADER

It is determined, it seems, that she shall die.

KREON

Determined, yes, for you and for me.

(To the two attendants) No more delay servants, take them within! Henceforth they must be women, and not range at large; for [truly] even the bold seek to fly, when they see [Thanatos] now closing on their life.

[Exit attendants, guarding Antigone and Ismene, Kreon remains]

CHORUS

Blest are they whose days have not tasted of evil. For when a house has once been shaken from heaven, there the curse fails nevermore, passing from life to life of the race; even as, when the surge is driven over the darkness of the deep by the fierce breath of Thracian sea-winds, it rolls up the black sand from the depths, and there is sullen roar from wind-vexed headlands that front the blows of the storm.

I see that from olden time the sorrows in the house of the Labdacidae⁸ are heaped upon the sorrows of the dead; and generation is not freed by generation, but some god strikes them down, and the race has no deliverance.

For now that hope of which the light had been spread above the last root of the house of Oidipous—that hope, in turn, is brought low—by the blood-stained dust due to the gods infernal, and by folly in speech, and frenzy at the heart.

⁸ Grandson of Cadmus the mythical founder of the polis of Thebes.

[Your] power, O Zeus, what human trespass can limit? That power which neither Hupnos [Sleep], the all-ensnaring, nor the untiring months of the gods can master; but you, a ruler to whom time brings not old age, dwell in the dazzling splendor of Olumpus.

And through the future, near and far, as through the past, shall this law hold good: Nothing that is vast enters into the life of mortals without a curse.

For that hope whose wanderings are so wide is to many men a comfort, but to many a false lure of giddy desires; and the disappointment comes on one who knoweth [nothing] till he burn his foot against the hot fire.

For with wisdom has some one given forth the famous saying, that evil seems good, soon or late, to him whose mind the god draws to mischief; and but for the brief space does he fare free of woe.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But lo, Haemon, the last of your sons. Comes he grieving for the doom of his promised bride, Antigone, and bitter for the baffled hope of his marriage?

[Enter Haemon]

KREON

We shall know soon, better than seers could tell us. My son, hearing the fixed doom of your betrothed, are you come in rage against your father? Or have I your good will, act how I may?

HAEMON

Father, I am yours; and you, in your wisdom, trace for me rules which I shall follow. No marriage shall be deemed by me a greater gain than your good guidance.

KREON

Yes, this, my son, should be your heart's fixed law, *in all things to obey your father's will*. It is for this that men pray to see dutiful children grow up around them in their homes, that such may requite their father's foe with evil, and honor, as their father does, his friend. But he who begets unprofitable children, what shall we say that he has sown, but troubles for himself, and much triumph for his foes? Then do not you, my son, at pleasure's beck, dethrone your reason for a woman's sake; knowing that this is a joy that soon grows cold in clasping arms, an evil woman to share your bed and your home. For what wound could strike deeper than a false friend? No, with loathing, and as if she were yours enemy, let this girl go to find a husband in the house of Hades. For since I have taken her, alone of all the city, in open disobedience, I will not make myself a liar to my people, I will slay her.

So let her appeal as she will to the majesty of kindred blood. If I am to nurture mine own kindred in naughtiness, needs must I bear with it in aliens. He who does his duty in his own household will be found righteous in the [City] also. But if any one transgresses, and does violence to the laws, or thinks to dictate to his rulers, such a one can win no praise from me. No, whomsoever the city may appoint, that man must be obeyed, in little things and great, in

just things and unjust; and I should feel sure that one who thus obeys would be a good ruler no less than a good subject, and in the storm of spears would stand his ground where he was set, loyal and dauntless at his comrade's side.

But *disobedience is the worst of evils*. This it is that ruins cities; this makes homes desolate; by this, the ranks of allies are broken into head-long rout; but, of the lives whose course is fair, the greater part owes safety to obedience. Therefore, we must support the cause of order, and in no wise suffer a woman to [beat] us. *Better to fall from power, if we must, by a man's hand; then we should not be called weaker than a woman.*

LEADER

To us, unless our years have stolen our wit, you seem to say wisely what you say.

HAEMON

Father, the gods implant reason in [humans], the highest of all things that we call our own. Not mine the skill—far from me be the quest!—to say wherein you speak not aright; and yet another man, too, might have some useful thought. At least, it is my natural office to watch, on your behalf, all that men say, or do, or find to blame. For the dread of your frown forbids the citizen to speak such words as would offend yours ear; but can hear these murmurs in the dark, these moaning's of the city for this maiden; "no woman," they say, "ever merited her doom less, none ever was to die so shamefully for deeds so glorious as hers; who, when her own brother had fallen in bloody strife, would not leave him unburied, to be devoured by carrion dogs, or by any bird: deserves not she the meed of golden honor?"

Such is the darkling rumor that spreads in secret. For me, my father, no treasure is so precious as your welfare. What, indeed, is a nobler ornament for children than a prospering father's fair fame, or for father than [a] son's? Wear not, then, one mood only in yourself; think not that your word, and yours alone, must be right. For if any man thinks that he alone is wise, that in speech, or in mind, he has no peer, such a soul, when laid open, is ever found empty.

No, though a man be wise, it is no shame for him to learn many things, and to bend in season. Look you, beside the wintry torrent's course, how the trees that yield to it save every twig, while the stiff-necked perish root and branch? And even thus he who keeps the sheet of his sail taut, and never slackens it, upsets his boat, and finishes his voyage with keel uppermost.

No, forego your wrath; permit yourself to change. For if I, a younger man, may offer my thought, it were far best, I [believe], that men should be all-wise by nature; but, otherwise—and [often] the scale inclines not so—it is good also to learn from those who speak aright.

LEADER

Father, it is [good] that you should profit by his words, if he speaks [anything] in season, and you, Haemon, by your father's; for on both parts there has been wise speech.

KREON

Men of my age are we indeed to be schooled, then, by men of his?

HAEMON

In nothing that is not right; but if I am young, you should look to my merits, not to my years.

KREON

Is it a merit to honor the unruly?

HAEMON

I could wish no one to show respect for evil-doers.

KREON

Then is not she tainted with that malady?

HAEMON

Our Theban [people], with one voice, deny it.

KREON

Shall Thebes prescribe to me how I must rule?

HAEMON

See, there you have spoken like a youth indeed.

KREON

Am I to rule this land by other judgment than mine own?

HAEMON

That is no city which belongs to one man.

KREON

Is not the city held to be the ruler's?

HAEMON

You would make a good monarch of a desert.

KREON

This boy, it seems, is the woman's champion.

HAEMON

If you are a woman; indeed, my care is for *you*.

KREON

Shameless, at open feud with your father!

HAEMON

No, I see you offending against justice.

KREON

Do I offend, when I respect mine own prerogatives?

HAEMON

You do not respect them, when you trample on the gods' honors,

KREON

O dastard nature, yielding place to woman!

HAEMON

You will never find me yield to baseness.

KREON

All your words, at least, plead for that girl.

HAEMON

And for you, and for me, and for the gods below.

KREON

You can never marry her, on this side the grave.

HAEMON

Then she must die, and in death destroy another.

KREON

How! Does your boldness run to open threats?

HAEMON

What threat is it, to combat vain [resolutions]?

KREON

You shall rue your witless teaching of wisdom.

HAEMON

Were you not my father, I would have called you unwise.

KREON

You woman's slave, use not wheedling speech with me.

HAEMON

You would speak, and then hear no reply?

KREON

Say you so? Now, by the heaven above us, be sure of it, you shall smart for taunting me in this opprobrious strain. Bring forth that hated thing, that she may die forthwith in his presence—before his eyes—at her bridegroom's side!

HAEMON

No, not at my side—never think it—shall she perish; nor shall you ever set eyes more upon my face: rave, then, with such friends as can endure you.

[Exit Haemon]

LEADER

The man is gone, O king, in angry haste; a youthful mind, when stung, is fierce.

KREON

Let him do, or dream, more than man, good speed to him! But he shall not save these two girls from their doom.

LEADER

Do you indeed intend to slay both?

KREON

Not her whose hands are pure, you say well.

LEADER

And by what doom mean you to slay the other?

KREON

I will take her where the path is loneliest, and hide her, living, in rocky vault, with so much food set forth as piety prescribes, that the city may avoid a public stain. And there, praying to Hades, the only god whom she worships, perchance she will obtain release from death; or else will learn, at last, though late, that it is lost labor to revere the dead.

[Exit Kreon, into the palace]

CHORUS

Love, unconquered in the fight, Love, who make havoc of wealth, who keep your vigil on the soft cheek of a maiden; you roam over the sea, and among the homes of dwellers in the wilds; no immortal can escape you, nor any among men whose life is for a day; and he to whom you have come is mad.

The just themselves have their minds warped by you to wrong, for their ruin: it is you that have stirred up this present strife of kinsmen; victorious is the love-kindling light from the eyes of the fair bride; it is a power enthroned in sway beside the eternal laws; for there the goddess Aphrodite is working her unconquerable will.

[Antigone is led out of the palace by two of Kreon's attendants who will take her to her tomb]

But now I also am carried beyond the bounds of loyalty, and can no more keep back the streaming tears, when I see Antigone thus passing to the bridal chamber where all are laid to rest.

[The following lines between Antigone and the Chorus are chanted responsively.]

ANTIGONE

See me, citizens of my fatherland, setting forth on my last way, looking my last on the sunlight that is for me no more; no, Hades who gives sleep to all leads me living to Axeron's

shore;⁹ who have had no portion in the chant that brings the bride, nor has any song been mine for the crowning of bridals; whom the lord of the Dark Lake shall wed.

CHORUS

Glorious, therefore, and with praise, you depart to that deep place of the dead: wasting sickness has not smitten you; you have not found the wages of the sword; no, mistress of yours own fate, and still alive, you shall pass to Hades, as no other of mortal kind has passed.

ANTIGONE

I have heard in other days how dread a doom befell our Phrygian guest, the daughter of Tantalos,¹⁰ on the Sipylion heights; I how, like clinging ivy, the growth of stone subdued her; and the rains fail not, as men tell, from her wasting form, nor fails the snow, while beneath her weeping lids the tears bedew her bosom; and most like to hers is the fate that brings me to my rest.

CHORUS

Yet she was a goddess, you know, and born of gods; we are mortals, and of mortal race. But it is great renown for a woman who has perished that she should have shared the doom of the godlike, in her life, and afterward in death.

ANTIGONE

Ah, I am mocked! In the name of our fathers' gods, can you not wait till I am gone, must you taunt me to my face, O my city, and you, her wealthy sons? Ah, fount of Dirce,¹¹ and you holy ground of Thebes whose chariots are many; you, at least, will bear me witness, in what fort, unwept of friends, and by what laws I pass to the rock-closed prison of my strange tomb, ah me unhappy! [I] who have no home on the earth or in the shades, no home with the living or with the dead.

CHORUS

You have rushed forward to the utmost verge of daring; and against that throne where justice sits on high you have fallen, my daughter, with a grievous fall. But in this ordeal you are paying, haply, for your father's sin.

ANTIGONE

You have touched on my bitterest thought, awaking the ever-new lament for my father and for all the doom given to us, the famed house of Labdakos. Alas for the horrors of the mother's bed! Alas for the wretched mother's slumber at the side of her own son, and my father! From what manner of parents did I take my miserable being! And to them I go thus, accursed, unwed, to share their home. Alas, my brother, ill-starred in your marriage, in your death you have undone my life!

⁹ The "river of sorrow", one of the five rivers of Hades.

¹⁰ A mythological figure who sacrificed his son and cooked his body to feed to the gods on Olumpos. He was punished by being cast into Tartaros, the outer most region of the other world where he was suspended between a river which always fell before he could drink, and a tree whose low hanging fruit was always out of reach.

¹¹ An eponymous name for Thebes.

CHORUS

Reverent action claims a certain praise for reverence; but an offence against power cannot be brooked by him who has power in his keeping. [Your] self-willed temper has wrought your ruin.

ANTIGONE

Unwept, unfriended, without marriage-song, I am led forth in my sorrow on this journey that can be delayed no more. No longer, hapless one, may I behold yon day-star's sacred eye; but for my fate no tear is shed, no friend makes moan.

[Enter Kreon, from the palace]

KREON

Know you not that songs and wailings before death would never cease, if it profited to utter them? Away with her, away! And when you have enclosed her, according to my word, in her vaulted grave, leave her alone, forlorn, whether she wishes to die, or to live a buried life in such a home. Our hands are clean as touching this maiden. But this is certain: she shall be deprived of her sojourn in the light.

ANTIGONE

Tomb, bridal-chamber, eternal prison in the caverned rock, whither go to find mine own, those many who have perished, and whom Persephone¹² has received among the dead! Last of all shall I pass thither, and far most miserably of all, before the term of my life is spent. But I cherish good hope that my coming will be welcome to my father, and pleasant to you, my mother, and welcome, brother, to you; for, when you died, with mine own hands I washed and dressed you, and poured drink-offerings at your graves; and now, Polunikes, it is for tending your corpse that I win such recompense as this.

And yet I honored you, as the wise will deem, rightly. Never, had been a mother of children, or if a husband had been moldering in death, would I have taken this task upon me in the city's despite. What law, you ask, is my warrant for that word? The husband lost, another might have been found, and child from another, to replace the first-born: but, father and mother hidden with Hades, no brother's life could ever bloom for me again. Such was the law whereby I held you first in honor; but Kreon deemed me guilty of error therein, and of outrage, ah brother mine! And now he leads me thus, a captive in his hands; no bridal bed, no bridal song has been mine, no joy of marriage, no portion in the nurture of children; but thus, forlorn of friends, unhappy one, I go living to the vaults of death.

And what law of heaven have I transgressed? Why, hapless one, should I look to the gods any more, what ally should I invoke, when by piety I have earned the name of impious? No, then, if these things are pleasing to the gods, when I have suffered my doom, I shall come to know my sin; but if the sin is with my judges, I could wish them no fuller measure of evil than they, on their part, mete wrongfully to me.

¹² Persephone, also known as Kore, was queen of Hades.

CHORUS

Still the same tempest of the soul vexes this maiden with the same fierce gusts.

KREON

Then for this shall her guards have cause to rue their slowness.

ANTIGONE

Ah me! That word has come very near to death.

KREON

I can cheer you with no hope that this doom is not thus to be fulfilled.

ANTIGONE

O city of my fathers in the land of Thebes! O you gods, eldest of our race! They lead me hence now, now they tarry not! Behold me, princes of Thebes, the last daughter of the house of your kings, see what I suffer, and from whom, because I feared to cast away the fear of Heaven!

[Exit Antigone, led by guards]

CHORUS

Even thus endured Danae in her beauty to change the light of day for brass-bound walls; and in that chamber, secret as the grave, she was held close prisoner; yet was she of a proud lineage, O my daughter, and charged with the keeping of the seed of Zeus, that fell in the golden rain.

But dreadful is the mysterious power of Fate: there is no deliverance from it by wealth or by war, by fenced city, or dark, sea-beaten ships.

And bonds tamed the son of Dryas, swift to wrath, that king of the Edonians; so paid he for his frenzied taunts, when, by the will of Dionusos, he was pent in a rocky prison. There the fierce exuberance of his madness slowly passed away. That man learned to know the god, whom in his frenzy he had provoked with mockeries; for he had sought to quell the god-possessed women, and the Bacxanian fire; and he angered the Muses that love the flute.

And by the waters of the Dark Rocks, the waters of the twofold sea, are the shores of Bosporus, and Thracian Salmydessus; where Ares, neighbor to the city, saw the accurst, blinding wound dealt to the two sons of Phineus by his fierce wife, the wound that brought darkness to those vengeance-craving orbs, smitten with her bloody hands, smitten with her shuttle for a dagger.

Pining in their misery, they bewailed their cruel doom, those sons of a mother hapless in her marriage; but she traced her descent from the ancient line of the Erechtheidae; and in far-distant caves she was nursed amid her father's storms, that child of Boreas, swift as a steed over the steep hills, a daughter of gods; yet upon her also the gray Fates bore hard, my daughter.

[Enter Teiresias, led by a Boy]

TEIRESIAS

Princes of Thebes, we have come with linked steps, both served by the eyes of one; for thus, by a guide's help, the blind must walk.

KREON

And what, aged Teiresias, are your tidings?

TEIRESIAS

I will tell you; and do you hearken to the seer.

KREON

Indeed, it has not been my [way] to slight your counsel.

TEIRESIAS

Therefore, did you steer our city's course aright.

KREON

I have felt, and can attest, your benefits.

TEIRESIAS

Mark that now, once more, you stand on Fate's fine edge.

KREON

What means this? How I shudder at your message!

TEIRESIAS

You will learn, when you hear what my warnings are. As I took my place on mine old seat of augury, where all birds have been wont to gather within my ken, I heard a strange voice among them; they were screaming with dire, feverish rage, that drowned their language in jargon; and I knew that they were rending each other with their talons, murderously; the whirr of wings told no doubtful tale.

Forthwith, in fear, I essayed burnt sacrifice on a duly kindled altar: but from my offerings the Fire-god showed no flame; a dank moisture, oozing from the thigh-flesh, trickled forth upon the embers, and smoked, and sputtered; the gall was scattered to the air; and the streaming thighs lay bared of the fat that had been wrapped round them.

Such was the failure of the rites by which I vainly asked a sign, as from this boy I learned; for he is my guide, as I am guide to others. And it is thy counsel that has brought this sickness on our [City]. For the altars of our city and of our hearths have been tainted, one and all, by birds and dogs, with carrion from the hapless corpse, the son of Oidipous: and, therefore, the gods no more accept prayer and sacrifice at our hands, or the flame of meat-offering; nor does any bird give a clear sign by its shrill cry, for they have tasted the fatness of a slain man's blood.

Think, then, on these things, my son. All men are liable to err; but when an error has been made, that man is no longer witless or unable who heals the ill into which he has fallen, and remains not stubborn.

Self-will, we know, incurs the charge of folly. No, allow the claim of the dead; stab not the fallen; what prowess is it to slay the slain anew? I have sought your good, and for your good I speak: and never is it sweeter to learn from a good counselor than when he counsels for yours own gain.

KREON

Old man, you all shoot your shafts at me, as archers at the butts; [You] must needs practice on me with seer-craft also; yes, the seer-tribe has long trafficked in me, and made me their merchandise. Gain your gains, drive your trade, if you list, in the silver-gold of Sardis and the gold of India; but you shall not hide that man in the grave, no, though the eagles of Zeus should bear the carrion morsels to their Master's throne—no, not for dread of that defilement will I suffer his burial: for well I know that no mortal can defile the gods. But, aged Teiresias, the wisest fall with shameful fall, when they clothe shameful thoughts in fair words, for lucre's [money's] sake.

TEIRESIAS

Alas! Do[es] any man know, does any consider...

KREON

Whereof? What general truth do you announce?

TEIRESIAS

How precious, above all wealth, is good counsel.

KREON

As folly, I think, is the worst mischief.

TEIRESIAS

Yet you are tainted with that distemper.

KREON

I would not answer the seer with a taunt.

TEIRESIAS

But you do, in saying that I prophesy falsely.

KREON

Well, the prophet-tribe was ever fond of money.

TEIRESIAS

And the race bred of tyrants loves base gain.

KREON

Know you that your speech is spoken of your king?

TEIRESIAS

I know it; for through me you have saved Thebes.

KREON

You are a wise seer; but you love evil deeds.

TEIRESIAS

You will rouse me to utter the dread secret in my soul.

KREON

Out with it! Only speak it not for gain.

TEIRESIAS

Indeed, methinks, I shall not, as touching you.

KREON

Know that you shall not trade on my resolve.

TEIRESIAS

Then know you—yes, know it well—that you shall not live through many more courses of the sun's swift chariot, before one begotten of your own loins shall have been given by you, a corpse for corpses; because you have thrust children of the sunlight to the shades, and ruthlessly lodged a living soul in the grave; but keep in this world one who belongs to the gods infernal, a corpse unburied, unhonoured, all unhallowed. In such you have no part, nor have the gods above, but this is a violence done to them by you. Therefore, the avenging destroyers lie in wait for you, the Furies of Hades and of the gods, that you may be taken in these same ills.

And mark well if I speak these things as a hireling. A time not long to be delayed shall awaken the wailing of men and of women in your house. And a tumult of hatred against you stirs all the cities whose mangled sons had the burial-rite from dogs, or from wild beasts, or from some winged bird that bore a polluting breath to each city that contains the hearths of the dead.

Such arrows for your heart—since you provoke me—have I launched at you, archer-like, in my anger, sure arrows, of which you shall not escape the smart. Boy, lead me home, that he may spend his rage on younger men, and learn to keep a tongue more temperate, and to bear within his breast a better mind than now he bears.

[Exit Teiresias, led by Boy]

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

The man has gone, O King, with dread prophecies. And, since the hair on this head, once dark, has been white, I know that he has never been a false prophet to our city.

KREON

I, too, know it well, and am troubled in soul. It is dire to yield; but, by resistance, to smite my pride with ruin. This, too, is a dire choice.

LEADER

Son of Menoeceus, it behooves you to take wise counsel.

KREON

What should I do then? Speak and I will obey.

LEADER

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

KREON

And this is your counsel? You would have me yield?

LEADER

Yes, King, and with all speed; for swift harms from the gods cut short the folly of men.

KREON

Ah me, it is hard, but I resign my cherished resolve, I obey. We must not wage a vain war with destiny.

LEADER

Go, you, and do these things; leave them not to others.

KREON

Even as I am I'll go: on, on, my servants, each and all of you, take axes in your hands, and hasten to the ground that you see yonder! Since our judgment has taken this turn, I will be present to unloose her, as myself bound her. My heart misgives me, *it is best to keep the established laws*, even to life's end.

[Exit Kreon and his servants]

CHORUS

O you of many names, glory of the Kadmeian bride, offspring of loud-thundering Zeus! You who watch over famed Italy, and reign, where all guests are welcomed, in the sheltered plain of Eleusinian Demeter! O Bacchoss, dweller in Thebes, metropolis of Bacchants, by the softly-gliding stream of Ismenus, on the soil where the fierce dragon's teeth were sown!

You have been seen where torch-flames glare through smoke, above the crests of the twin peaks, where move the Korukion nymphs, your votaries, hard by Kastalia's stream.

You come from the ivy-mantled slopes of Nusa's hills, and from the shore green with many-clustered vines, while your name is lifted up on strains of more than mortal power, as you visit the ways of Thebes.

Thebes of all cities, you hold first in honor, you and your mother whom the lightning smote; and now, when all our people is captive to a violent plague, come you with healing feet over the Parnassian height, or over the moaning strait!

O you with whom the stars rejoice as they move, the stars whose breath is fire; O master of the voices of the night; son begotten of Zeus; appear, O king, with yours attendant Thuiads, who in night-long frenzy dance before you, the giver of good gifts, Iacchus!

[Enter Messenger]

MESSENGER

Dwellers by the house of Kadmos and of Amphion, there is no estate of mortal life that I would ever praise or blame as settled. Fortune raises and Fortune humbles the lucky or unlucky from day to day, and no one can prophesy to men concerning those things which are established. For Kreon was blest once, as I count bliss; he had saved this land of Kadmos from its foes; he was clothed with sole dominion in the land; he reigned, the glorious father of princely children. And now all has been lost. For when a man has forfeited his pleasures, I count him not as living, I hold him but a breathing corpse. Heap up riches in your house, if you will; live in kingly state; yet, if there be no gladness therewith, I would not give the shadow of a vapor for all the rest, compared with joy.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And what is this new grief that you have to tell for our princes?

MESSENGER

Death; and the living are guilty for the dead.

LEADER

And who is the slayer? Who the stricken? Speak!

MESSENGER

Haemon has perished; his blood has been shed by no stranger.

LEADER

By his father's hand, or by his own?

MESSENGER

By his own, in wrath with his father for murder.

LEADER

O prophet, how true, then, have you proved your word!

MESSENGER

These things stand thus; you must consider of the rest.

LEADER

Lo, I see the hapless Eurudike, Kreon's wife, approaching; she comes from the house by chance, haply, or because she knows the tidings of her son.

[Enter Eurudike from the palace]

EURUDIKE

People of Thebes, I heard your words as I was going forth to salute the goddess Pallas¹³ with my prayers. Even as I was loosing the fastenings of the gate, to open it, the message of a household woe smote on mine ear: I sank back, terror-stricken, into the arms of my handmaids, and my senses fled. But say again what the tidings were; I shall hear them as one who is no stranger to sorrow.

MESSENGER

Dear lady, I will witness of what I saw, and will leave no word of the truth untold. Why, indeed, should I soothe you with words in which must presently be found false? Truth is ever best. I attended your lord as his guide to the furthest part of the plain, where the body of Poluneikes, torn by dogs, still lay unpitied. We prayed the goddess of the roads, and Plouton, in mercy to restrain their wrath; we washed the dead with holy washing; and with freshly-plucked boughs we solemnly burned such relics as there were. We raised a high mound of his native earth; and then we turned away to enter the maiden's nuptial chamber with rocky couch, the caverned mansion of the bride of Death. And, from afar off, one of us heard a voice of loud wailing at that bride's unhallowed bower; and came to tell our master Kreon.

And as the king drew nearer, doubtful sounds of a bitter cry floated around him; he groaned, and said in accents of anguish, 'Wretched that I am, can my foreboding be true? Am I going on the woeful way that ever I went? My son's voice greets me. Go, my servants, haste you nearer, and when you have reached the tomb, pass through the gap, where the stones have been wrenched away, to the cell's very mouth, and look. And see if it is Haemon's voice that I know, or if mine ear is cheated by the gods.'

This search, at our despairing master's word, we went to make; and in the furthest part of the tomb we [saw] her hanging by the neck, slung by a thread-wrought halter of fine linen: while he was embracing her with arms thrown around her waist, bewailing the loss of his bride who is with the dead, and his father's deeds, and his own ill-starred love.

But his father, when he saw him, cried aloud with a dread cry and went in, and called to him with a voice of wailing: "Unhappy, what deed have you done! What thought has come to you? What manner of mischance has marred your reason? Come forth, my child! I pray you—I implore!"

But the boy glared at him with fierce eyes, spat in his face, and, without a word of answer, drew his cross-hilted sword: as his father rushed forth in flight, he missed his aim; then, hapless one, struggled with himself, he straightway leaned with all his weight against his sword, and drove it, half its length, into his side; and, while sense lingered, he clasped the maiden to his faint embrace, and, as he gasped, sent forth on her pale cheek the swift stream of the oozing blood.

Corpse enfolding corpse he lies; he has won his nuptial rites, poor youth, not here, yet in the halls of Death; and he has witnessed to mankind that, of all curses which cleave to man, ill counsel is the sovereign curse.

¹³ A title for the goddess Athena. She is often referred to as Pallas Athena.

[Exit Eurudike]

LEADER

What would you [divine] from this? The lady has turned back, and is gone, without a word, good or evil.

MESSENGER

I, too, am startled; yet I nourish the hope that, at these sore tidings of her son, she cannot deign to give her sorrow public vent, but in the privacy of the house will set her handmaids to mourn the household grief. For she is not untaught of discretion, that she should err.

LEADER

I know not; but to me, at least, a strained silence seems to portend peril, no less than vain abundance of lament.

MESSENGER

Well, I will enter the house, and learn whether indeed she is not hiding some repressed purpose in the depths of a passionate heart. Yes, you say well: excess of silence, too, may have a perilous meaning.

[Exit MESSENGER, Enter Kreon with attendants, carrying the shrouded body of HAEMON on bier. The following lines between Kreon and the Chorus chant responsively]

CHORUS

Lo, yonder the king himself draws near, bearing that which tells too clear a tale, the work of no stranger's madness, if we may say it, but of his own misdeeds.

KREON

Woe for the sins of a darkened soul, stubborn sins, fraught with death! Ah, [you] behold us, the father who has slain, the son who has perished! Woe is me, for the wretched blindness of my counsels! Alas, my son, you have died in your youth, by a timeless doom, woe is me! Your spirit has fled, not by your folly, but by mine own!

CHORUS

Ah me, how all too late you seem to see the right!

KREON

Ah me, I have learned the bitter lesson! But then, methinks, oh then, some god smote me from above with crushing weight, and hurled me into ways of cruelty, woe is me, overthrowing and trampling on my joy! Woe, woe, for the troublous toils of men!

[Enter Messenger]

MESSENGER

Father, you have come, methinks, as one whose hands are not empty, but who has store laid up besides; you bear yonder burden with you, and you are soon to look upon the woes within your house.

KREON

And what worse ill is yet to follow upon ills?

MESSENGER

[Your] queen has died, true mother of yon corpse—ah, hapless lady by blows newly dealt.

KREON

Oh Hades, all-receiving whom no sacrifice can appease! Have you, then, no mercy for me? O you herald of evil, bitter tidings, what word do you utter? Alas, I was already as dead, and you have smitten me anew! What say you, my son? What is this new message that you bringest-woe, woe is me! Of a wife's doom, of slaughter headed on slaughter?

CHORUS

You can behold: it is no longer hidden within.

[The doors of the palace are opened, and the corpse of Euridike is disclosed.]

KREON

Ah me, yonder I behold a new, a second woe! What destiny, ah what, can yet await me? I have but now raised my son in my arms, and there, again, I see a corpse before me! Alas, alas, unhappy mother! Alas, my child!

MESSENGER

There, at the altar, self-stabbed with a keen knife, she suffered her darkening eyes to close, when she had wailed for the noble fate of Megareus who died before, and then for his fate who lies there, and when, with her last breath, she had invoked evil fortunes upon you, the slayer of your sons.

KREON

Woe, woe! I thrill with dread. Is there none to strike me to the heart with two-edged sword? Oh miserable that I am, and steeped in miserable anguish!

MESSENGER

Yes, both this son's doom, and that other's, were laid to your charge by her whose corpse you see.

KREON

And what was the manner of the violent deed by which she passed away?

MESSENGER

Her own hand struck her to the heart, when she had learned her son's sorely lamented fate.

KREON

Ah me, this guilt can never be fixed on any other of mortal kind, for my acquittal! I, even I, was your slayer, wretched that I am, I own the truth. Lead me away, O my servants, lead me hence with all speed, whose life is but as death!

CHORUS

[Your] counsels are good, if there can be good with ills; brief is best, when trouble is in our path.

KREON

Oh, let it come, let it appear, that fairest of fates for me, that brings my last day, yes, best fate of all! Oh, let it come, that I may never look upon tomorrow's light.

CHORUS

These things are in the future; present tasks claim our care: the ordering of the future rests where it should rest.

KREON

All my desires, at least, were summed in that prayer.

CHORUS

Pray you no more; for *mortals have no escape from destined woe*.

KREON

Lead me away, I pray you; a rash, foolish man; who have slain you, ah my son, unwittingly, and you, too, my wife—unhappy that I am! I know not which way I should bend my gaze, or where I should seek support; for all is amiss with that which is in my hands, and yonder, again, a crushing fate has leapt upon my head.

[Exit Kreon, into the palace]

LEADER

Wisdom is the supreme part of happiness; and reverence towards the gods must be inviolate. Great words of prideful men are ever punished with great blows, and, in old age, teach the chastened to be wise.