

Sophocles (c.496 B.C.–406 B.C.). *Antigone*.
The Harvard Classics. 1909–14.

Dramatis Personæ

Creon, *King of Thebes*
Hæmon, *son of Creon*
Teiresias, *a seer*
Guard
First Messenger
Second Messenger
Eurydice, *wife of Creon*
Antigone, Ismene, *daughters of Œdipus*
Chorus of Theban Elders

SCENE—Thebes, *in front of the Palace*.

Enter ANTIGONE and ISMENE

ANTIGONE ISMENE, mine own sister, dearest one;
Is there, of all the ills of Œdipus,
One left that Zeus will fail to bring on us, 4
While still we live? for nothing is there sad
Or full of woe, or base, or fraught with shame,
But I have seen it in thy woes and mine.
And now, what new decree is this they tell, 8
Our ruler has enjoined on all the state?
Know'st thou? hast heard? or is it hid from thee,
The doom of foes that comes upon thy friends?

ISM. No tidings of our friends, Antigone,
Painful or pleasant since that hour have come 12
When we, two sisters, lost our brothers twain,
In one day dying by each other's hand.
And since in this last night the Argive host
Has left the field, I nothing further know, 16
Nor brightening fortune, nor increasing gloom.

ANTIG. That knew I well, and therefore sent for thee
Beyond the gates, that thou mayst hear alone.

ISM. What meanest thou? It is but all too clear 20
Thou broodest darkly o'er some tale of woe.

ANTIG. And does not Creon treat our brothers twain
One with the rites of burial, one with shame? 24
Eteocles, so say they, he interred
Fitly, with wonted rites, as one held meet
To pass with honour to the gloom below.

But for the corpse of Polynices, slain
So piteously, they say, he has proclaimed 28
To all the citizens, that none should give
His body burial, or bewail his fate,
But leave it still unsepulchred, unwept,
A prize full rich for birds that scent afar 32
Their sweet repast. So Creon bids, they say,
Creon the good, commanding thee and me,
Yes, me, I say, and now is coming here,
To make it clear to those who knew it not, 36
And counts the matter not a trivial thing;
But whoso does the things that he forbids,
For him, there waits within the city's walls
The death of stoning. Thus, then, stands thy case; 40
And quickly thou wilt show, if thou art born
Of noble nature, or degenerate liv'st,
Base child of honoured parents.

ISM. How could I, 44
O daring in thy mood, in this our plight,
Or doing or undoing, aught avail?

ANTIG. Wilt thou with me share risk and toil? Look to it.

ISM. What risk is this? What purpose fills thy mind? 48

ANTIG. Wilt thou with me go forth to help the dead?

ISM. And dost thou mean to give him sepulture,
When all have been forbidden?

ANTIG. He is still 52
My brother; yes, and thine, though thou, it seems,
Wouldst fain he were not. I desert him not.

ISM. O daring one, when Creon bids thee not!

ANTIG. What right has he to keep me from mine own? 56

ISM. Ah me! remember, sister, how our sire
Perished, with hate o'erwhelmed and infamy,
From evils that he brought upon himself,
And with his own hand robbed himself of sight, 60
And how his wife and mother, both in one,
With twist and cordage, cast away her life;
And thirdly, how our brothers in one day
In suicidal conflict wrought the doom, 64
Each of the other. And we twain are left;

And think, how much more wretchedly than all
We twain shall perish, if, against the law, 68
We brave our sovereign's edict and his power.
For this we need remember, we were born
Women; as such, not made to strive with men.
And next, that they who reign surpass in strength, 72
And we must bow to this, and worse than this.
I, then, entreating those that dwell below,
To judge me leniently, as forced to yield,
Will hearken to our rulers. Over-zeal
In act or word but little wisdom shows. 76

ANTIG. I would not ask thee. No! if thou shouldst wish
To do it, and wouldst gladly join with me.
Do what thou wilt, I go to bury him;
And good it were, this having done, to die. 80
Loved I shall be with him whom I have loved,
Guilty of holiest crime. More time have I
In which to win the favour of the dead,
Than that of those who live; for I shall rest 84
For ever there. But thou, if thus thou please,
Count as dishonoured what the Gods approve.

ISM. I do them no dishonour, but I find
Myself too weak to war against the state. 88

ANTIG. Make what excuse thou wilt, I go to rear
A grave above the brother whom I love.

ISM. Ah, wretched me! how much I fear for thee.

ANTIG. Fear not for me. Thine own fate guide aright. 92

ISM. At any rate, disclose this deed to none:
Keep it close hidden. I will hide it too.

ANTIG. Speak out! I bid thee. Silent, thou wilt be
More hateful to me than if thou shouldst tell 96
My deed to all men.

ISM. Fiery is thy mood,
Although thy deeds might chill the very blood.

ANTIG. I know I please the souls I seek to please. 100

ISM. If thou canst do it; but thy passion craves
For things impossible.

ANTIG. I'll cease to strive
When strength shall fail me. 104

ISM. Even from the first,
It is not meet to seek what may not be.

ANTIG. If thou speak thus, my hatred wilt thou gain,
And rightly wilt be hated of the dead. 108
Leave me and my ill counsel to endure
This dreadful doom. I shall not suffer aught
So evil as a death dishonourable.

ISM. Go, then, if so thou wilt. Of this be sure, 112
Wild as thou art, thy friends must love thee still. [*Exeunt.*]

Enter Chorus

STROPH. I

Chor. Ray of the glorious sun,
Brightest of all that ever shone on Thebes,
Thebes with her seven high gates, 116
Thou didst appear that day,
Eye of the golden dawn,
O'er Dirke's streams advancing, 120
Driving with quickened curb,
In haste of headlong flight,
The warrior who, in panoply of proof,
From Argos came, with shield as white as snow; 124
Who came to this our land,
Roused by the strife of tongues
That Polynices stirred;
Shrieking his shrill sharp cry, 128
The eagle hovered round,
With snow-white wing bedecked,
Begirt with myriad arms,
And flowing horsehair crests.

ANTISTROPH. I 132

He stood above our towers,
Circling, with blood-stained spears,
The portals of our gates;
He went, before he filled 136
His jaws with blood of men,
Before Hephæstus with his pitchy flame
Had seized our crown of towers.
So loud the battle din that Ares loves, 140
Was raised around his rear,
A conflict hard and stiff,
E'en for his dragon foe.

For breath of haughty speech
Zeus hateth evermore exceedingly; 144
And seeing them advance,
Exulting in the clang of golden arms,
With brandished fire he hurls them headlong down,
In act, upon the topmost battlement 148
Rushing, with eager step,
To shout out, 'Victory!'

STROPH. II

Crashing to earth he fell,
Who came, with madman's haste, 152
Drunken, but not with wine,
And swept o'er us with blasts,
The whirlwind blasts of hate.
Thus on one side they fare, 156
And mighty Ares, bounding in his strength,
Dashing now here, now there,
Elsewhere brought other fate.
For seven chief warriors at the seven gates met, 160
Equals with equals matched,
To Zeus, the Lord of War,
Left tribute, arms of bronze;
All but the hateful ones 164
Who, from one father and one mother sprung,
Stood wielding, hand to hand,
Their doubly pointed spears;
They had their doom of death, 168
In common, shared by both.

ANTISTROPH. II

But now, since Victory, of mightiest name,
Hath come to Thebes, of many chariots proud, 172
Joying and giving joy,
After these wars just past,
Learn ye forgetfulness,
And all night long, with dance and voice of hymns
Let us go round to all the shrines of Gods, 176
While Bacchus, making Thebes resound with shouts,
Begins the strain of joy;
But, lo! the sovereign of this land of ours,
CREON, Menœkeus' son, 180
He, whom strange change and chances from the God
Have nobly raised to power,
Comes to us, steering on some new device;
For, lo! he hath convened, 184
By herald's loud command,
This council of the elders of our land.

Enter CREON

CREON. My Friends, for what concerns our commonwealth,
The Gods who vexed it with the billowing storms 188
Have righted it again; but I have sent,
By special summons, calling you to come
Apart from all the others, This, in part,
As knowing ye did all along uphold 192
The might of Laius' throne, in part again,
Because when Ædipus our country ruled,
And, when he perished, then towards his sons
Ye still were faithful in your steadfast mind. 196
And since they fell, as by a double death,
Both on the selfsame day with murderous blow,
Smiting and being smitten, now I hold
Their thrones and all their power of sov'reignty 200
By nearness of my kindred to the dead.
And hard it is to learn what each man is,
In heart and mind and judgment, till one gains
Experience in the exercise of power. 204
For me, whoe'er is called to guide a state,
And does not catch at counsels wise and good,
But holds his peace through any fear of man,
I deem him basest of all men that are, 208
Of all that ever have been; and whoe'er
As worthier than his country counts his friend,
I utterly despise him. I myself,
Zeus be my witness, who beholdeth all, 212
Will not keep silence, seeing danger come,
Instead of safety, to my subjects true.
Nor could I take as friend my country's foe;
For this I know, that there our safety lies, 216
And sailing in her while she holds her course,
We gather friends around us. By these rules
And such as these will I maintain the state.
And now I come, with edicts close allied 220
To these in spirit, for my subjects all,
Concerning those two sons of Ædipus.
Eteocles, who died in deeds of might
Illustrious, fighting for our fatherland, 224
To honour him with sepulture, all rites
Duly performed that to the noblest dead
Of right belong. Not so his brother; him
I speak of, Polynices, who, returned 228
From exile, sought with fire and sword to waste
His father's city and the shrines of Gods,
Yea, sought to glut his rage with blood of men,
And lead them captives to the bondslave's doom; 232

Him I decree that none should dare entomb,
That none should utter wail or loud lament,
But leave his corpse unburied, by the dogs
And vultures mangled, foul to look upon. 236
Such is my purpose. Ne'er, if I can help,
Shall the vile share the honours of the just;
But whoso shows himself my country's friend,
Living or dead, from me shall honour gain. 240

Chor. This is thy pleasure, O Menœkeus' son,
For him who hated, him who loved our state;
And thou hast power to make what laws thou wilt,
Both for the dead and all of us who live. 244

CREON. Be ye, then, guardians of the things I speak.

Chor. Commit this task to one of younger years.

CREON. The watchmen are appointed for the corpse.

Chor. What duty, then, enjoin'st thou on another? 248

CREON. Not to consent with those that disobey.

Chor. None are so foolish as to seek for death.

CREON. And that shall be his doom; but love of gain
Hath oft with false hopes lured men to their death. 252

Enter Guard

GUARD. I will not say, O king, that I am come
Panting with speed and plying nimble feet,
For I had many halting-points of thought,
Backwards and forwards turning, round and round; 256
For now my mind would give me sage advice:
"Poor wretch, and wilt thou go and bear the blame?"
Or—"Dost thou tarry now? Shall Creon know
These things from others? How wilt thou escape?" 260
Resolving thus, I came in haste, yet slow,
And thus a short way finds itself prolonged,
But, last of all, to come to thee prevailed.
And though I tell of naught, thou shalt hear all; 264
For this one hope I cling to steadfastly,
That I shall suffer nothing but my fate.

CREON. What is it, then, that causes such dismay?

GUARD. First, for mine own share in it, this I say, 268

I did not do it, do not know who did,
Nor should I rightly come to ill for it.

CREON. Thou tak'st good aim and fencest up thy tale
All round and round. 'Twould seem thou hast some news. 272

GUARD. Yea, news of fear engenders long delay.

CREON. Tell thou thy tale, and then depart in peace.

GUARD. And speak I will. The corpse ... Some one has been
But now and buried it, a little dust 276
O'er the skin scattering, with the wonted rites.

CREON. What say'st thou? Who has dared this deed of guilt?

GUARD. I know not. Neither was there stroke of spade,
Nor earth cast up by mattock. All the soil 280
Was dry and hard, no track of chariot wheel;
But he who did it went and left no sign.

But when the first day's watchman showed it us,
The sight caused wonder and sore grief to all, 284
For he had disappeared. No tomb, indeed,
Was over him, but dust all lightly strown,

As by some hand that shunned defiling guilt;
And no work was there of a beast of prey 288
Or dog devouring. Evil words arose
Among us, guard to guard imputing blame,

Which might have come to blows, for none was there
To check its course, and each to each appeared 292
The man whose hand had done it. As for proof,
That there was none, and so he 'scaped our ken.

And we were ready in our hands to take
Bars of hot iron, and to walk through fire, 296
And call the Gods to witness none of us
Had done the deed, nor knew who counselled it,

Nor who had wrought it. Then at last, when naught
Was gained by all our searching, some one says 300
What made us bend our gaze upon the ground
In fear and trembling; for we neither saw

How to oppose it, nor, accepting it,
How we might prosper in it. And his speech 304
Was this, that all our tale should go to thee,
Not hushed up anywise. This gained the day;

And me, ill-starred, the lot condemns to win
This precious prize. So here I come to thee 308
Against my will; and surely do I trow
Thou dost not wish to see me. Still 'tis true

That no man loves the messenger of ill.

Chor. For me, my prince, my mind some time has thought 312
That this perchance has some divine intent.

CREON. Cease thou, before thou fillest me with wrath,
Lest thou be found a dastard and a fool. 316
For what thou say'st is most intolerable,
That for this corpse the providence of Gods
Has any care. What! have they buried him,
As to their patron paying honours high, 320
Who came to waste their columned shrines with fire,
To desecrate their offerings and their lands,
And all their wonted customs? Dost thou see
The Gods approving men of evil deeds?
It is not so; but men of rebel mood, 324
Lifting their head in secret long ago,
Have stirred this thing against me. Never yet
Had they their neck beneath the yoke, content
To own me as their ruler. They, I know, 328
Have bribed these men to let the deed be done.
No thing in use by man, for power of ill,
Can equal money. This lays cities low, 332
This drives men forth from quiet dwelling-place,
This warps and changes minds of worthiest stamp,
To turn to deeds of baseness, teaching men
All shifts of cunning, and to know the guilt 336
Of every impious deed. But they who, hired,
Have wrought this crime, have laboured to their cost,
Or soon or late to pay the penalty.
But if Zeus still claims any awe from me, 340
Know this, and with an oath I tell it thee,
Unless ye find the very man whose hand
Has wrought this burial, and before mine eyes
Present him captive, death shall not suffice, 344
Till first, impaled still living, ye shall show
The story of this outrage, that henceforth,
Knowing what gain is lawful, ye may grasp
At that, and learn it is not meet to love 348
Gain from all quarters. By base profit won,
You will see more destroyed than prospering.

GUARD. May I, then speak? Or shall I turn and go?

CREON. Dost thou not see how vexing are thy words?

GUARD. Is it thine ears they trouble, or thy soul? 352

CREON. Why dost thou gauge my trouble where it is?

GUARD. The doer grieves thy heart, but I thine ears.

CREON. Pshaw! what a babbler, born to prate, art thou.

GUARD. And therefore not the man to do this deed.

356

CREON. Yes, that too; selling e'en thy soul for pay.

GUARD. Ah me!

How fearful 'tis, in thinking, false to think.

CREON. Prate about thinking; but unless ye show
To me the doers, ye shall say ere long
That evil gains still work their punishment. [*Exit.*

360

GUARD. God send we find him! Should we find him not,
As well may be, for this must chance decide,
You will not see me coming here again;
For now, being safe beyond all hope of mine,
Beyond all thought, I owe the Gods much thanks. [*Exit.*

364

STROPH. I

368

Chor. Many the forms of life,
Fearful and strange to see,
But man supreme stands out,
For strangeness and for fear.
He, with the wintry gales,
O'er the foam-crested sea,
'Mid billows surging round,
Tracketh his way across:
Earth, of all Gods, from ancient days, the first,
Mightiest and undecayed,
He, with his circling plough,
Wears ever year by year.

372

376

ANTISTROPH. I

380

The thoughtless tribe of birds,
The beasts that roam the fields,
The finny brood of ocean's depths,
He takes them all in nets of knotted mesh,
Man, wonderful in skill.
And by his arts he holds in sway
The wild beasts on the mountain's height;
And brings the neck-encircling yoke
On horse with shaggy mane,
Or bull that walks untamed upon the hills.

384

388

STROPH. II

And speech, and thought as swift as wind,
And tempered mood for higher life of states,
These he has learnt, and how to flee 392
The stormy sleet of frost unkind,
The tempest thunderbolts of Zeus.
So all-preparing, unprepared
He meeteth naught the coming days may bring; 396
Only from Hades, still
He fails to find a refuge at the last,
Though skill of art may teach him to escape
From depths of fell disease incurable. 400

ANTISTROPH. II

So, gifted with a wondrous might,
Above all fancy's dreams, with skill to plan,
Now unto evil, now to good,
He wends his way. Now holding fast the laws, 404
His country's sacred rights,
That rest upon the oath of Gods on high,
High in the state he stands.
An outlaw and an exile he who loves 408
The thing that is not good,
In wilful pride of soul:
Ne'er may he sit beside my hearth,
Ne'er may my thoughts be like to his, 412
Who worketh deeds like this.

Enter Guards, bringing in ANTIGONE

As to this portent which the Gods have sent,
I stand in doubt. Can I, who know her, say
That this is not the maid Antigone? 416
O wretched one of wretched father born,
What means this? Surely 'tis not that they bring
Thee as a rebel 'gainst the king's decree,
And taken in the folly of thine act? 420

GUARD. Yes! She it was by whom the deed was done.
We found her burying. Where is Creon, pray?

Chor. Forth from his palace comes he just in time.

Enter CREON

CREON. What chance is this with which my coming fits? 424

GUARD. Men, O my king, should pledge themselves to naught;
For cool reflection makes their purpose void.

I hardly thought to venture here again,
Cowed by thy threats, which then fell thick on me; 428
But since no joy is like the sweet delight
Which comes beyond, above, against our hopes,
I come, although I swore the contrary,
Bringing this maiden, whom in act we found 432
Decking the grave. No need for lots was now;
The prize was mine, no other claimed a share.
And now, O king, take her, and as thou wilt,
Judge and convict her. I can claim a right 436
To wash my hands of all this troublous coil.

CREON. How and where was it that ye seized and brought her?

GUARD. She was in act of burying. Now thou knowest
All that I have to tell. 440

CREON. And dost thou know
And rightly weigh the tale thou tellest me?

GUARD. I saw her burying that selfsame corpse
Thou bad'st us not to bury. Speak I clear? 444

CREON. How was she seen, detected, prisoner made?

GUARD. The matter passed as follows: When we came,
With all those dreadful threats of thine upon us,
Sweeping away the dust which, lightly spread, 448
Covered the corpse, and laying stript and bare
The tained carcass, on the hill we sat
To windward, shunning the infected air,
Each stirring up his fellow with strong words, 452
If any shirked his duty. This went on
Some time, until the glowing orb of day
Stood in mid-heaven, and the scorching heat
Fell on us. Then a sudden whirlwind rose, 456
A scourge from heaven, raising squalls on earth,
And filled the plain, the leafage stripping bare
Of all the forest, and the air's vast space
Was thick and troubled, and we closed our eyes 460
Until the plague the Gods had sent was past;
And when it ceased, a weary time being gone,
The girl was seen, and with a bitter cry,
Shrill as a bird's, she wails, when it beholds 464
Its nest all emptied of its infant brood;
So she, when she beholds the corpse all stript,
Groaned loud with many moanings. And she called
Fierce curses down on those who did the deed, 468

And in her hand she brings some sandlike dust,
And from a well-chased ewer, all of bronze,
She pours the three libations o'er the dead. 472
And we, beholding, started up forthwith,
And run her down, in nothing terrified.
And then we charged her with the former deed,
As well as this. And nothing she denied. 476
But this to me both bitter is and sweet,
For to escape one's-self from ill is sweet,
But to bring friends to trouble, this is hard
And bitter. Yet my nature bids me count 480
Above all these things safety for myself.

CREON. [*to* ANTIGONE] And thou, then, bending to the ground thy head,
Confessest thou, or dost deny the deed?

ANTIG. I own I did it. I will not deny.

CREON. [*to* GUARD] Go thou thy way, where'er thy will may choose, 484
Freed from a weighty charge. [*Exit* GUARD.
[*To* ANTIGONE] And now for thee,
Say in few words, not lengthening out thy speech, 488
Didst thou not know the edicts which forbade
The things thou ownest?

ANTIG. Right well I knew them all.
How could I not? Full clear and plain were they.

CREON. Didst thou, then, dare to disobey these laws? 492

ANTIG. Yes, for it was not Zeus who gave them forth,
Nor Justice, dwelling with the Gods below,
Who traced these laws for all the sons of men; 496
Nor did I deem thy edicts strong enough,
Coming from mortal man, to set at naught
The unwritten laws of God that know not change.
They are not of to-day nor yesterday, 500
But live for ever, nor can man assign
When first they sprang to being. Not through fear
Of any man's resolve was I prepared
Before the Gods to bear the penalty 504
Of sinning against these. That I should die
I knew (how should I not?), though thy decree
Had never spoken. And, before my time
If I should die, I reckon this a gain; 508
For whoso lives, as I, in many woes,
How can it be but death shall bring him gain?
And so for me to bear this doom of thine

Has nothing painful. But, if I had left
My mother's son unburied on his death, 512
I should have given them pain. But as things are,
Pain I feel none. And should I seem to thee
To have done a foolish deed, 'tis simply this,—
I bear the charge of folly from a fool. 516

Chor. The maiden's stubborn will, of stubborn sire
The offspring shows itself. She knows not yet
To yield to evils.

CREON. Know, then, minds too stiff 520
Most often stumble, and the rigid steel
Baked in the furnace, made exceeding hard,
Thou seest most often split and broken lie;
And I have known the steeds of fiery mood 524
With a small curb subdued. It is not meet
That one who lives in bondage to his neighbours
Should boast too loudly. Wanton outrage then
She learnt when first these laws of mine she crossed, 528
But, having done it, this is yet again
A second outrage over it to boast,
And laugh at having done it. Surely, then,
She is the man, not I, if all unscathed 532
Such deeds of might are hers. But be she child
Of mine own sister, nearest kin of all
That Zeus o'erlooks within our palace court,
She and her sister shall not 'scape their doom 536
Most foul and shameful; for I charge her, too,
With having planned this deed of sepulture.
Go ye and call her. 'Twas but now within
I saw her raving, losing self-command. 540
And still the mind of those who in the dark
Plan deeds of evil is the first to fail,
And so convicts itself of secret guilt.
But most I hate when one found out in guilt 544
Will seek to glaze and brave it to the end.

ANTIG. And dost thou seek aught else beyond my death?

CREON. Naught else for me. That gaining, I gain all.

ANTIG. Wilt thou delay? Of all thy words not one 548
Pleases me now, nor aye is like to please,
And so all mine must grate upon thine ears.
And yet how could I higher glory gain
Than giving my true brother all the rites 552
Of solemn burial? These who hear would say

It pleases them, did not their fear of thee
Close up their lips. This power has sovereignty,
That it can do and say whate'er it will. 556

CREON. Of all the race of Cadmus thou alone
Look'st thus upon the deed.

ANTIG. They see it too
As I do, but in fear of thee they keep 560
Their tongue between their teeth.

CREON. And dost thou feel
No shame to plan thy schemes apart from these?

ANTIG. There is no baseness in the act which shows 564
Our reverence for our kindred.

CREON. Was he not
Thy brother also, who against him fought?

ANTIG. He was my brother, of one mother born, 568
And of the selfsame father.

CREON. Why, then, pay
Thine impious honours to the carcase there?

ANTIG. The dead below will not accept thy words. 572

CREON. Yes, if thou equal honours pay to him,
And that most impious monster.

ANTIG. 'Twas no slave
That perished, but my brother. 576

CREON. Yes, in act
To waste this land, while *he* in its defence
Stood fighting bravely.

ANTIG. Not the less does death 580
Crave equal rites for all.

CREON. But not that good
And evil share alike?

ANTIG. And yet who knows 584
If in that world these things are counted good?

CREON. Our foe, I tell thee, ne'er becomes our friend,

Not even when he dies.

ANTIG. My bent is fixed, 588
I tell thee, not for hatred, but for love.

CREON. Go, then, below. And if thou must have love,
Love those thou find'st there. While I live, at least,
A woman shall not rule. 592

Enter ISMENE

Chor. And, lo! Ismene at the gate
Comes shedding tears of sisterly regard,
And o'er her brow a gathering cloud
Mars the deep roseate blush, 596
Bedewing her fair cheek.

CREON. [*to ISMENE*]. And thou who, creeping as a viper creeps,
Didst drain my life in secret, and I knew not
That I was rearing two accursèd ones, 600
Subverters of my throne: come, tell me, then,
Dost thou confess thou took'st thy part in it?
Or wilt thou swear thou didst not know of it?

ISM. I did the deed. Since she will have it so, 604
I share the guilt; I bear an equal blame.

ANTIG. This, Justice will not suffer, since, in truth,
Thou wouldst have none of it. And I, for one,
Shared it not with thee. 608

ISM. I am not ashamed
To count myself companion in thy woes.

ANTIG. Whose was the deed, Death knows, and those below.
I do not love a friend who loves in words. 612

ISM. Do not, my sister, put me to such shame
As not to let me share thy death with thee,
And with thee pay due reverence to the dead.

ANTIG. Share not my death, nor make thine own this deed 616
Thou hadst no hand in. Let my death suffice.

ISM. And what to me is life, bereaved of thee?

ANTIG. Ask Creon there. To him thy tender care
Is given so largely. 620

ISM. Why wilt thou torture me,
In nothing bettered by it?

ANTIG. Yes—at thee,
E'en while I laugh, I laugh with pain of heart.

624

ISM. But now, at least, how may I profit thee?

ANTIG. Save thou thyself. I grudge not thy escape.

ISM. Ah, woe is me! and must I miss thy fate?

ANTIG. Thou mad'st thy choice to live, and I to die.

628

ISM. 'Tis not through want of any words of mine.

ANTIG. To these thou seemest, doubtless, to be wise;
I to those others.

ISM. Yet our fault is one.

632

ANTIG. Take courage. Thou wilt live. My soul long since
Has given itself to Death, that to the dead
I might bring help.

CREON. Of these two maidens here,
The one, I say, hath lost her mind but now,
The other ever since her life began.

636

ISM. Yea, O my king. No mind that ever lived
Stands firm in evil days, but still it goes,
Beside itself, astray.

640

CREON. So then did thine
When thou didst choose thy evil deeds to do,
With those already evil.

644

ISM. How could I.
Alone, apart from her, endure to live?

CREON. Speak not of her. She stands no longer here.

ISM. And wilt thou slay thy son's betrothed bride?

648

CREON. Full many a field there is which he may plough.

ISM. But none like that prepared for him and her.

CREON. Wives that are vile, I love not for my son.

ANTIG. Ah, dearest Hæmon, how thy father shames thee! 652

CREON. Thou art too vexing, thou, and these thy words,
On marriage ever harping.

ISM. Wilt thou rob
Thine own dear son of her whom he has loved? 656

CREON. 'Tis Death who breaks the marriage contract off.

ISM. Her doom is fixed, it seems, then. She must die.

CREON. So thou dost think, and I. No more delay,
Ye slaves. Our women henceforth must be kept 660
As women—suffered not to roam abroad;
For even boldest natures shrink in fear
When they behold the end of life draw nigh. [*Exeunt Guards with ANTIGONE
and ISMENE.*

STROPHE. I 664

Chor. Blessed are those whose life has known no woe!

For unto those whose house
The Gods have shaken, nothing fails of curse
Or woe, that creepeth on,

To generations, far, 668

As when a wave, where Thracian blasts blow strong

On that tempestuous shore,
Up surges from the depths beneath the sea,

And from the deep abyss 672

Rolls the black wind-vexed sand,

And every jutting peak that drives it back

Re-echoes with the roar.

ANTISTROPHE. I 676

I see the ancient doom

That fell upon the seed of Labdacus,

Who perished long ago,

Still falling, woes on woes;

That generation cannot rescue this; 680

Some God still urges on,

And will not be appeased.

So now there rose a gleam

Over the last weak shoots 684

That sprang from out the race of Ædipus;

And thus the blood-stained sword

Of those that reign below

Cuts off relentlessly 688
Madness of speech, and fury of the soul.

STROPHE. II

Thy power, O Zeus, what haughtiness of man
Could ever hold in check?
Which neither sleep, that maketh all things old, 692
Nor the long months of Gods that wax not faint,
Can for a moment seize.
But still as Lord supreme,
Through time that grows not old, 696
Thou dwellest in thy sheen of radiancy
On far Olympus' height.
Through all the future and the coming years,
As through all time that's past, 700
One law holds ever good,
That nothing comes to life of man on earth,
Unscathed throughout by woe.

ANTISTROPHE. II

To many, hope may come, in wanderings wild, 704
A solace and a joy;
To many, shows of fickle-hearted love;
But still it creepeth on,
On him who knows it not, 708
Until he brings his foot
Within the scorching flame.
Wisely from one of old
The far-famed saying came 712
That evil ever seems to be as good
To those whose thoughts of heart
God leadeth unto woe,
And without woe, but shortest time he spends. 716
And here comes Hæmon, youngest of thy sons.
Comes he bewailing sore
The fate of her who should have been his wife,
His bride Antigone, 720
Sore grieving at the failure of his joys?

Enter HÆMON

CREON. Soon we shall know much more than seers can tell.
Surely thou dost not come, my son, to rage
Against thy father, hearing his decree, 724
Fixing her doom who should have been thy bride;
Or are we still, whate'er we do, beloved?

HÆMON. My father, I am thine. Do thou direct
With thy wise counsels, I will follow them. 728

No marriage weighs one moment in the scales
With me, while thou art prospering in thy reign.

CREON. This thought, my son, should dwell within thy breast,
That all things stand below a father's will: 732
For this men pray that they may rear and keep
Obedient offspring by their hearths and homes,
That they may both requite their father's foes,
And pay with him like honours to his friend. 736
But he who reareth sons that profit not,
What could one say of him but this, that he
Breeds his own sorrow, laughter to his foes? 740
Lose not thy reason, then, my son, o'ercome
By pleasure, for a woman's sake, but know,
A cold embrace is that to have at home
A worthless wife, the partner of thy bed. 744
What ulcerous sore is worse than one we love
Who proves all worthless? No! with loathing scorn,
As hateful to thee, let her go and wed
A spouse in Hades. Taken in the act
I found her, her alone of all the state, 748
Rebellious. And I will not make myself
False to the state. She dies. So let her call
On Zeus, the lord of kindred. If I rear
Of mine own stock things foul and orderless, 752
I shall have work enough with those without.
For he who in the life of home is good
Will still be seen as just in things of state;
While he who breaks or goes beyond the laws, 756
Or thinks to bid the powers that be obey,
He must not hope to gather praise from me.
No! we must follow whom the state appoints
In things or just and lowly, or, may be, 760
The opposite of these. Of such a man
I should be sure that he would govern well,
And know well to be governed, and would stand,
In war's wild storm, on his appointed post, 764
A just and good defender. Anarchy
Is our worst evil, brings our commonwealth
To utter ruin, lays whole houses low,
In battle strife hurls men in shameful flight; 768
But they who walk uprightly, these shall find
Obedience saves most men. Sure help should come
To what our rulers order; least of all
Ought we to bow before a woman's sway. 772
Far better, if it must be so, to fall
By a man's hand, than thus to bear reproach,
By woman conquered.

Chor. Unto us, O king, 776
Unless our years have robbed us of our wit,
Thou seemest to say wisely what thou say'st.

HÆM. The Gods, my father, have bestowed on man 780
His reason, noblest of all earthly gifts;
Nor dare I say nor prove that what thou speak'st
Is aught but right. And yet another's thoughts 784
May have some reason. I am wont to watch
What each man says or does, or blames in thee
(For dread thy face to one of low estate),
In words thou wouldst not much rejoice to hear.
But I can hear the things in darkness said, 788
How the whole city wails this maiden's fate,
As one "who of all women worthiest praise,
For noblest deed must die the foulest death.
She who, her brother fallen in the fray, 792
Would neither leave unburied, nor expose
To carrion dogs, or any bird of prey,
May she not claim the meed of golden crown?"
Such is the whisper that in secret runs 796
All darkling. And for me, my father, naught
Is dearer than thy welfare. What can be
A nobler form of honour for the son
Than a sire's glory, or for sire than son's?
I pray thee, then, wear not one mood alone, 800
That what thou say'st is right, and naught but that;
For he who thinks that he alone is wise,
His mind and speech above what others boast,
Such men when searched are mostly empty found. 804
But for a man to learn, though he be wise,
Yea, to learn much, and know the time to yield,
Brings no disgrace. When winter floods the streams,
Thou seest the trees that bend before the storm, 808
Save their last twigs, while those that will not yield
Perish with root and branch. And when one hauls
Too tight the mainsail sheet, and will not slack,
He has to end his voyage with deck o'erturned. 812
Do thou, then, yield. Permit thyself to change.
Young though I be, if any prudent thought
Be with me, I at least will dare assert 816
The higher worth of one who, come what will,
Is full of knowledge. If that may not be
(For nature is not wont to take that bent),
'Tis good to learn from those who counsel well.

Chor. My king! 'tis fit that thou shouldst learn from him, 820

If he speaks words in season; and, in turn,
That thou [*to HÆMON*] shouldst learn of him, for both speak well.

CREON. Shall we at our age stoop to learn from him,
Such as he is, our lesson? 824

HÆM. 'Twere not wrong.
And if I be but young, not age but deeds
Thou shouldst regard.

CREON. Fine deeds, I trow, to pay 828
Such honour to the lawless.

HÆM. 'Tis not I
Would bid you waste your honour on the base.

CREON. And has she not been seized with that disease? 832

HÆM. The men of Thebes with one accord say, No.

CREON. And will my subjects tell me how to rule?

HÆM. Dost thou not see that these words fall from thee
As from some beardless boy? 836

CREON. And who, then, else
But me should rule this land?

HÆM. That is no state
Which hangs on one man's will. 840

CREON. The state, I pray,
It is not reckoned his who governs it?

HÆM. Brave rule! Alone, and o'er an empty land!

CREON. Here, as it seems, is one who still will fight,
A woman's friend. 844

HÆM. If thou a woman be,
For all my care I lavish upon thee.

CREON. Basest of base, who with thy father still
Wilt hold debate! 848

HÆM. For, lo! I see thee still
Guilty of wrong.

CREON. And am I guilty, then, 852
Claiming due reverence for my sovereignty?

HÆM. Thou show'st no reverence, trampling on the laws
The Gods hold sacred.

CREON. O thou sin-stained soul, 856
A woman's victim.

HÆM. Yet thou wilt not find
In me the slave of baseness.

CREON. All thy speech 860
Still hangs on her.

HÆM. Yes, and on thee, myself,
And the great Gods below.

CREON. Of this be sure, 864
Thou shalt not wed her in the land of life.

HÆM. She, then, must die, and in her death will slay
Another than herself.

CREON. And dost thou dare 868
To come thus threatening?

HÆM. Is it then a threat
To speak to erring judgment?

CREON. To thy cost 872
Thou shalt learn wisdom, having none thyself.

HÆM. If thou wert not my father, I would say
Thou wert not wise.

CREON. Thou woman's slave, I say, 876
Prate on no longer.

HÆM. Dost thou wish to speak,
And, speaking, wilt not listen? Is it so?

CREON. No, by Olympus! Thou shalt not go free 880
To flout me with reproaches. Lead her out
Whom my soul hates, that she may die forthwith
Before mine eyes, and near her bridegroom here.

HÆM. No! Think it not! Near me she shall not die, 884

And thou shalt never see my face alive,
So mad art thou with all that would be friends. [*Exit.*

Chor. The man has gone, O king, in hasty mood.
A mind distressed in youth is hard to bear. 888

CREON. Let him do what he will, and bear himself
Too high for mortal state, he shall not free
Those maidens from their doom!

Chor. And dost thou mean 892
To slay them both?

CREON. Not her who touched it not.

Chor. There thou say'st well: and with what kind of death
Mean'st thou to kill her? 896

CREON. Where the desert path
Is loneliest, there, alive, in rocky cave
Will I immure her, just so much of food
Before her set as may appease the Gods, 900
And save the city from the guilt of blood;
And there, invoking Hades, whom alone
Of all the Gods she worships, she, perchance,
Shall gain escape from death, or else shall know 904
That all her worship is but labour lost. [*Exit.*

STROPHE.

Chor. O Love, in every battle victor owned;
Love, now assailing wealth and lordly state,
Now on a girl's soft cheek, 908
Slumbering the livelong night;
Now wandering o'er the sea,
And now in shepherd's folds;
The Undying Ones have no escape from thee, 912
Nor men whose lives are measured as a day;
And who has thee is mad.

ANTISTROPHE.

Thou makest vile the purpose of the just,
To his own fatal harm; 916
Thou stirrest up this fierce and deadly strife,
Of men of nearest kin;
The glowing eyes of bride beloved and fair
Reign, crowned with victory, 920
And dwell on high among the powers that rule,
Equal with holiest laws;

For Aphrodite, she whom none subdues,
Sports in her might divine. 924
I, even I, am borne
Beyond the bounds of right;
I look on this, and cannot stay
The fountain of my tears. 928
For, lo! I see her, see Antigone
Wind her sad, lonely way
To that dread chamber where is room for all.

ANTIG. Yes! O ye men of this my fatherland, 932
Ye see me on my way,
Life's last long journey, gazing on the sun,
His last rays watching, now and nevermore;
Alone he leads me, who has room for all, 936
Hades, the Lord of Death,
To Acheron's dark shore,
With neither part nor lot in marriage rites,
No marriage hymn resounding in my ears, 940
But Acheron shall claim me as his bride.

Chor. And hast thou not all honour, worthiest praise,
Who goest to the home that hides the dead,
Not smitten by the sickness that decays, 944
Nor by the sword's sharp edge,
But of thine own free will, in fullest life,
To Hades tak'st thy way?

ANTIG. I heard of old her pitiable end, 948
Where Sipylus rears high its lofty crag,
The Phrygian daughter of a stranger land,
Whom Tantalus begot;
Whom growth of rugged rock, 952
Clinging as ivy clings,
Subdued, and made its own:
And now, so runs the tale,
There, as she melts in shower, 956
The snow abideth aye,
And still bedews yon cliffs that lie below
Those brows that ever weep.
With fate like hers doth Fortune bring me low. 960

Chor. Godlike in nature, godlike, too, in birth,
Was she of whom thou tell'st,
And we are mortals, born of mortal seed.
And, lo! for one who liveth but to die, 964
To gain like doom with those of heavenly race
Is great and strange to hear.

ANTIG. Ye mock me, then. Alas! Why wait ye not?
By all our fathers' Gods, I ask of you, 968
Why wait ye not till I have passed away,
But flout me while I live?
O city that I love, O men that dwell,
That city's wealthiest lords, 972
O Dirke, fairest fount,
O grove of Thebes, that boasts her chariot host,
I take you all to witness, look and see,
How, with no friends to weep, 976
By what stern laws condemned,
I go to that strong dungeon of the tomb,
For burial new and strange.
Oh, miserable me! 980
Whom neither mortal men nor spirits own,
Nor those that live, nor those that fall asleep.

Chor. Forward and forward still to farthest verge
Of daring hast thou gone, 984
And now, O child, thou fallest heavily
Where Right erects her throne;
Surely thou payest to the uttermost
Thy father's debt of guilt. 988

ANTIG. Ah! thou hast touched the quick of all my grief,
The thrice-told tale of all my father's woe,
The fate which dogs us all,
The race of Labdacus of ancient fame. 992
Woe for the curses dire
Of that defiled bed,
With foulest incest stained,
Whence I myself have sprung, most miserable. 996
And now, I go to them,
To sojourn in the grave,
Bound by a curse, unwed;
Ah, brother, thou didst find 1000
Thy marriage fraught with ill,
And in thy death hast smitten down my life.

Chor. Acts reverent and devout
May claim devotion's name, 1004
But power, in one who cares to keep his power,
May never be defied;
And thee thy stubborn mood,
Self-chosen, layeth low. 1008

ANTIG. Unwept, without a friend,

Unwed, and whelmed in woe,
I journey on the road that open lies. 1012
No more shall it be mine (O misery!)
To look upon the holy eye of day,
And yet, of all my friends,
Not one bewails my fate,
No kindly tear is shed. 1016

Enter CREON

CREON. And know ye not, if men can vantage gain
By songs and wailings at the hour of death,
That they will never stop? Lead, lead her on,
And, as I said, without delay immure 1020
In yon cavernous tomb, and then depart.
Leave her, or lone and desolate to die,
Or, living, in the tomb to find her home.
Our hands are clean in all that touches her; 1024
But she no more shall sojourn here with us.

ANTIG. [*turning towards the cavern*]
O tomb, my bridal chamber, vaulted home,
Guarded right well for ever, where I go 1028
To join mine own, of whom, of all that die,
As most in number Persephassa owns;
And I, of all the last and lowest, wend
My way below, life's little span unfilled. 1032
And yet I go, and feed myself with hopes
That I shall meet them, by my father loved,
Dear to my mother, well-beloved of thee,
Thou dearest brother: I, with these my hands,
Washed each dear corpse, arrayed you, poured the stream, 1036
In rites of burial. And in care for thee,
Thy body, Polynices, honouring,
I gain this recompense. And yet 'twas well;
I had not done it had I come to be 1040
A mother with her children,—had not dared,
Though 'twere a husband dead that mouldered there,
Against my country's will to bear this toil,
And dost thou ask what law constrained me thus? 1044
I answer, had I lost a husband dear,
I might have had another; other sons
By other spouse, if one were lost to me;
But when my father and my mother sleep 1048
In Hades, then no brother more can come.
And therefore, giving thee the foremost place,
I seemed in Creon's eyes, O brother dear,
To sin in boldest daring. So himself, 1052
He leads me, having taken me by force,

Cut off from marriage bed and marriage feast,
Untasting wife's true joy, or mother's bliss,
With infant at her breast, but all forlorn, 1056
Bereaved of friends, in utter misery,
Alive, I tread the chambers of the dead.
What law of Heaven have I transgressed against?
What use for me, ill-starred one, still to look 1060
To any God for succour, or to call
On any friend for aid? For holiest deed
I bear this charge of rank unholiness.
If acts like these the Gods on high approve, 1064
We, taught by suffering, own that we have sinned;
But if they sin [*looking at CREON*], I pray they suffer not
Worse evils than the wrongs they do to me.

Chor. Still do the same wild blasts 1068
Vex her poor storm-tossed soul.

CREON. Therefore shall these her guards
Weep sore for this delay.

ANTIG. Ah me! this word of thine 1072
Tells of death drawing nigh.

CREON. I cannot bid thee hope
That other fate is thine.

ANTIG. O citadel of Thebes, my native land, 1076
Ye Gods of old renown,
I go, and linger not.
Behold me. O ye senators of Thebes,
The last, love scion of the kingly race, 1080
What things I suffer, and from whom they come,
Revering still where reverence most is due. [*Guards lead ANTIGONE away.*]

STROPHE. I

Chor. So Danæ's form endured of old, 1084
In brazen palace hid,
To lose the light of heaven,
And in her tomblike chamber was enclosed,
And yet high honour came to her, O child,
And on her flowed the golden shower of Zeus. 1088
But great and dread the might of Destiny:
Nor tempest-storm, nor war,
Nor tower, nor dark-hulled ships
That sweep the sea, escape. 1092

ANTISTROPHE. I

Bitter and sharp in mood,
The son of Dryas, king
Of yon Edonian tribes,
By Dionysus' hands, 1096
Was shut in prison cave,
And so his frenzy wild and soul o'erbold
Waste slowly evermore. 1000
And he was taught that he, with ribald tongue
In what wild frenzy, had attacked the Gods.
For fain had he the Mænad throng brought low,
And that bright flashing fire,
And roused the wrath of Muses sweet in song. 1104

STROPHE. II

And by Kyanean waters' double sea
Are shores of Bosphorus, and Thracian isle,
As Salmydessus known, inhospitable, 1108
Where Ares, God of all the region round,
Saw the accursed wound
That smote with blindness Phineus' twin-born sons
By a fierce stepdame's hand,— 1112
Dark wound, upon the dark-doomed eyeballs struck,
Not with the stroke of sword,
But blood-stained hands, on point of spindle sharp.

ANTISTROPHE. II

And they in misery, miserable fate
Lamenting, waste away, 1116
Born of a mother wedded to a curse.
And she who claimed descent
From men of ancient fame, 1120
The old Erechtheid race,
Daughter of Boreas, in far distant caves
Amid her father's woods,
Was reared, a child of Gods, 1124
Swift moving as the steed, o'er lofty crag,
And yet, my child, on her
Bore down the Destinies,
Whose years are infinite.

Enter TEIRESIAS, guided by a Boy. 1128

TEIR. Princes of Thebes, we come as travellers joined,
One seeing for both, for still the blind must use
A guide's assistance to direct his steps.

CREON. And what new thing, Teiresias, brings thee here?

TEIR. That I will tell thee, and do thou obey
The seer who speaks. 1132

CREON. Of old I was not wont
To differ from thy judgment.

TEIR. Therefore, well 1136
And safely dost thou steer our good ship's course.

CREON. I, from experience, bear my witness still
Of good derived from thee.

TEIR. Bethink thee, then, 1140
Thou walkest now upon a razor's edge.

CREON. What means this? Lo! I shudder at thy speech.

TEIR. Soon shalt thou know, as I unfold the signs 1144
Of my dread art. For sitting, as of old,
Upon my ancient seat of augury,
Where every bird has access, lo! I hear
Strange cry of winged creatures, shouting shrill,
In clamour sharp and savage, and I knew 1148
That they were tearing each the other's breast
With bloody talons, for their whirring wings
Made that quite clear; and straightway I, in fear, 1152
Made trial of the sacrifice that lay
On fiery altar. But the living flame
Shone not from out the offering; then there oozed
Upon the ashes, trickling from the bones,
A moisture, and it bubbled, and it spat, 1156
And, lo! the gall was scattered to the air,
And forth from out the fat that wrapped them round,
The thigh joints fell. Such omens of decay
From strange mysterious rites I learnt from him, 1160
This boy, who now stands here, for he is still
A guide to me, as I to others am.
And all this evil falls upon the state,
From out thy counsels; for our altars all, 1164
Our sacred hearths, are full of food for dogs
And birds unclean, the flesh of that poor wretch
Who fell, the son of Œdipus. And so
The Gods no longer hear our solemn prayers, 1168
Nor own the flame that burns the sacrifice;
Nor do the birds give cry of omen good,
But feed on carrion of a human corpse.
Think thou on this, my son: to err, indeed, 1172
Is common unto all, but having erred,

He is no longer reckless or unblest,
Who, having fallen into evil, seeks
For healing, nor continues still unmoved. 1176
Self-will must bear the guilt of stubbornness:
Yield to the dead, and outrage not a corpse.
What gain is it a fallen foe to slay?
Good counsel give I, planning good for thee; 1180
And of all joys the sweetest is to learn
From one who speaketh well, should that bring gain.

CREON. Old man, as archers aiming at their mark,
So ye shoot forth your venom'd darts at me; 1184
I know your augur's skill, and by your arts
Long since am tricked and sold. Yes, gain your gains,
Get precious bronze from Sardis, Indian gold,
That corpse ye shall not hide in any tomb. 1188
Not though the eagles, birds of Zeus, should bear
Their carrion morsels to their master's throne,
Not even fearing this pollution dire,
Will I consent to burial. Well I know 1192
That man is powerless to pollute the Gods.
But many fall, Teiresias, dotard old,
A shameful fall, who gloze their shameful words,
For lucre's sake, with surface show of good. 1196

TEIR. Ah, me! Does no man know, does none consider....

CREON. Consider what? What trite poor saw is this?

TEIR. How far good counsel heaped up wealth excels?

CREON. By just so far methinks the greatest hurt 1200
Is sheer unwisdom.

TEIR. Thou, at least, hast grown
From head to foot all full of that disease.

CREON. Loath am I with a prophet evil words 1204
To bandy to and fro.

TEIR. And yet thou dost so,
Saying that I utter speech that is not true.

CREON. The race of seers is ever fond of gold. 1208

TEIR. And that of tyrants loves the gain that comes
Of filthy lucre.

CREON. Art thou ignorant, then,
That what thou say'st, thou speak'st of those that rule? 1212

TEIR. I know it. 'Twas from me thou hadst the state,
By me preserved.

CREON. Wise art thou as a seer,
But too much given to wrong and injury. 1216

TEIR. Thou wilt provoke me in my wrath to speak
Of things best left unspoken.

CREON. Speak them out!
Only take heed thou speak them not for gain. 1220

TEIR. And dost thou, then, already judge me thus?

CREON. Know that my judgment is not bought and sold.

TEIR. Know, then, and know it well, that thou shalt see
Not many winding circuits of the sun, 1224
Before thou giv'st a quittance for the dead,
A corpse by thee begotten; for that thou
Hast trampled to the ground what stood on high,
And foully placed within a charnel-house 1228
A living soul. And now thou keep'st from them,
The Gods below, the corpse of one unblest,
Unwept, unhallowed. Neither part nor lot
Hast thou in them, nor have the Gods who rule 1232
The worlds above, but at thy hands they meet
This outrage. And for this they wait for thee,
The sure though slow avengers of the grave,
The dread Erinyes of the Gods above, 1236
In these same evils to be snared and caught.
Search well if I say this as one who sells
His soul for money. Yet a little while,
And in thy house men's wailing, women's cry, 1240
Shall make it plain. And every city stirs
Itself in arms against thee, owning those
Whose limbs the dogs have buried, or fierce wolves,
Or winged birds have brought the accursèd taint 1244
To city's altar-hearth. Doom like to this,
Sure darting as an arrow to its mark,
I launch at thee (for thou dost grieve me sore),
An archer aiming at the very heart, 1248
And thou shalt not escape its fiery sting.
And now, O boy, lead thou me home again,
And let him vent his spleen on younger men,

And learn to keep his tongue more orderly, 1252
With better thoughts than this his present mood. [*Exit.*

Chor. The man has gone, O king, predicting woe,
And well we know, since first our raven hair
Was mixed with gray, that never yet his words 1256
Were uttered to our state and failed of truth.

CREON. I know it too, 'tis that that troubles me.
To yield is hard, but, holding out, to smite
One's soul with sorrow, this is harder still. 1260

Chor. Much need is there, O Creon, at this hour,
Of wisest counsel.

CREON. What, then, should I do?
Tell me and I will hearken. 1264

Chor. Go thou first,
Release the maiden from her cavern tomb,
And give a grave to him who lies exposed.

CREON. Is this thy counsel? Dost thou bid me yield? 1268

Chor. Without delay, O king, for, lo! they come,
The God's swift-footed ministers of ill,
And in an instant lay the wicked low.

CREON. Ah, me! 'tis hard; and yet I bend my will 1272
To do thy bidding. With necessity
We must not fight at such o'erwhelming odds.

Chor. Go, then, and act! Commit it not to others.

CREON. E'en as I am I'll go. Come, come, my men, 1276
Present or absent, come, and in your hands
Bring axes. Come to yonder eminence,
And I, since now my judgment leans that way,
Who myself bound her, now myself will loose. 1280
Too much I fear lest it should wisest prove
To end my life, maintaining ancient laws. [*Exit.*

STROPHE. I

Chor. O thou of many names,
Of that Cadmeian maid 1284
The glory and the joy,
Child of loud-thundering Zeus,
Who watchest over fair Italia,

And reign'st o'er all the bays that open wide, 1288
Which Deo claims on fair Eleusis' coast:
Bacchus, who dwell'st in Thebes,
The mother city of thy Bacchant train,
Among Ismenus' stream that glideth on, 1292
And with the dragon's brood;

ANTISTROPHE. I

Thee, o'er the double peak of yonder height,
The flashing blaze beholds, 1296
Where nymphs of Corycus
Go forth in Bacchic dance,
And by Castalia's stream;
And thee the ivied slopes of Nysa's hills,
And vine-clad promontory, 1300
While words of more than mortal melody
Shout out the well-known name,
Send forth, the guardian lord 1304
Of all the streets of Thebes.

STROPHE. II

Above all cities thou,
With her, thy mother, whom the thunder slew,
Dost look on it with love;
And now, since all the city bendeth low 1308
Beneath the sullen plague,
Come thou with cleansing tread
O'er the Parnassian slopes,
Or o'er the moaning straits. 1312

ANTISTROPHE. II

O thou, who lead'st the band
Of stars still breathing fire,
Lord of the hymns that echo in the night,
Offspring of highest Zeus, 1316
Appear, we pray thee, with thy Naxian train,
Of Thyian maidens, frenzied, passionate,
Who all night long, in maddening chorus, sing
Thy praise, their lord, Iacchus. 1320

Enter Messenger

MESS. Ye men of Cadmus and Amphion's house,
I know no life of mortal man which I
Would either praise or blame. It is but chance
That raiseth up, and chance that bringeth low, 1324
The man who lives in good or evil plight,
And none foretells a man's appointed lot.
For Creon, in my judgment, men might watch

With envy and with wonder, having saved 1328
This land of Cadmus from the bands of foes;
And, having ruled with fullest sovereignty,
He lived and prospered, joyous in a race
Of goodly offspring. Now, all this is gone; 1332
For when men lose the joys that sweeten life,
I cannot count this living, rather deem
As of a breathing corpse. His heaped-up stores
Of wealth are large; so be it, and he lives 1336
With all a sovereign's state, and yet, if joy
Be absent, all the rest I count as naught,
And would not weigh them against pleasure's charm,
More than a vapour's shadow. 1340

Chor. What is this?
What new disaster tell'st thou of our chiefs?

MESS. Dead are they, and the living cause their death.

Chor. Who slays, and who is slaughtered? Tell thy tale. 1344

MESS. Hæmon is dead. His own hand sheds his blood.

Chor. Was it father's hand that struck the blow,
Or his own arm?

MESS. He by himself alone, 1348
Yet in his wrath he charged his father with it.

Chor. O prophet! true, most true, those words of thine.

MESS. Since thus it stands, we may as well debate 1352
Of other things in council.

Chor. Lo! there comes
The wife of Creon, sad Eurydice.
She from the house is come, or hearing speech
About her son, or else by chance. 1356

Enter EURYDICE

EURYD. My friends,
I on my way without, as suppliant bound
To pay my vows at Pallas' shrine, have heard
Your words, and so I chanced to slip the bolt 1360
Of the half-opened door, when, lo! a sound
Falls on my ears of evil near at hand,
And terror-struck I fell in deadly swoon
Back in my handmaids' arms; yet tell it me, 1364

Tell the tale once again, for I shall hear,
By long experience disciplined to grief.

MESS. Dear lady, I will tell thee: I was by,
And will not leave one word of truth untold. 1368
Why should we smooth and gloze, when all too soon
We should be found as liars? Truth is still
The best and wisest. Lo! I went with him,
Thy husband, in attendance, to the height 1372
Of yonder plain, where still all ruthlessly
The corpse of Polynices tombless lay,
Mangled by dogs. And, having prayed to her,
The Goddess of all pathways, and to Pluto, 1376
To look with favour on them, him they washed
With holy water; and what yet was left
We burnt in branches freshly cut, and heaped
A high raised grave from out the soil around, 1380
And then we entered on the stone-paved home,
Death's marriage-chamber for the ill-starred maid.
And some one hears, while standing yet afar,
Shrill voice of wailing near the bridal bower, 1384
By funeral rites unhallowed, and he comes
And tells my master, Creon. On his ears,
Advancing nearer, falls a shriek confused
Of bitter sorrow, and with grieving loud, 1388
He utters one sad cry: "Me miserable!
And am I, then, a prophet? Do I wend
This day the dreariest way of all my life?
My son's voice greets me. Go, my servants, go, 1392
Quickly draw near, and standing by the tomb,
Search ye and see; and where the joined stones
Still leave an opening, look ye in, and say 1396
If I hear Hæmon's voice, or if my soul
Is cheated by the Gods." And then we searched,
As he, our master, in his frenzy, bade us;
And, in the furthest corner of the vault, 1400
We saw her hanging by a twisted cord
Of linen threads entwined, and him we found
Clasping her form in passionate embrace,
And mourning o'er the doom that robbed him of her,
His father's deed, and that his marriage bed, 1404
So full of sorrow. When he saw him there,
Groaning again in bitterness of heart,
He goes to him, and calls in wailing voice,
"Ah! wretched me! what dost thou! Hast thou lost 1408
Thy reason? In what evil sinkest thou?
Come forth, my child, on bended knee I ask thee."
And then the boy, with fierce, wild gleaming eyes,

Glared at him, spat upon his face, and draws, 1412
Still answering naught, the sharp two-edged sword.
Missing his aim (his father from the blow
Turning aside), in anger with himself,
The poor ill-doomed one, even as he was, 1416
Fell on his sword, and drove it through his breast,
Full half its length, and clasping, yet alive,
The maiden's arm, still soft, he there breathes out
In broken gasps, upon her fair white cheek, 1420
A rain of blood. And so at last they lie,
Dead bridegroom with dead bride, and he has gained
His marriage rites in Hades' darksome home,
And left to all men witness terrible, 1424
That man's worst ill is stubbornness of heart. [*Exit EURYDICE.*]

Chor. What dost thou make of this? She turns again,
And not one word, or good or ill, will speak.

MESS. I, too, am full of wonder. Yet with hopes 1428
I feed myself, she will not think it meet,
Hearing her son's woes, openly to wail
Before her subjects, but beneath her roof
Will think it best to bear her private griefs. 1432
Too trained a judgment has she so to err.

Chor. I know not. To my mind, or silence hard,
Or vain wild cries, are signs of bitter woe.

MESS. Soon we shall know, within the house advancing, 1436
If, in the passion of her heart, she hides
A secret purpose. Truly dost thou speak;
There is a terror in that silence hard.

Chor. [*seeing CREON approaching with the corpse of HÆMON in his arms*] 1440
And, lo! the king himself comes on,
And in his hands he bears a record clear,
No woe (if I may speak) by others caused,
Himself the great offender.

Enter CREON bearing HÆMON'S body 1444

CREON. Woe! for the sins of souls of evil mood,
Strong, mighty to destroy;
O ye who look on those of kindred race,
The slayers and the slain, 1448
Woe for mine own rash plans that prosper not;
Woe for thee, son; but new in life's career,
And by a new fate dying.
Woe! woe! 1452

Thou diest, thou art gone,
Not by thine evil counsel, but by mine.

Chor. Ah me! Too late thou seem'st to see the right.

CREON. Ah me! 1456
I learn the grievous lesson. On my head,
God, pressing sore, hath smitten me and vexed,
In ways most rough and terrible (ah me!),
Shattering the joy, and trampling underfoot. 1460
Woe! woe! We toil for that which profits not.

Enter Second Messenger

SEC. MESS. My master! thou, as one who hast full store,
One source of sorrow bearest in thine arms,
And others in thy house, too soon, it seems, 1464
Thou need'st must come and see.

CREON. And what remains
Worse evil than the evils that we bear?

SEC. MESS. Thy wife is dead. Thy dead son's mother true, 1468
Ill starred one, smitten with a deadly blow,
But some few moments since.

CREON. O agony? 1472
Thou house of Death, that none may purify,
Why dost thou thus destroy me?
O thou who comest, bringing in thy train
 Woes horrible to tell,
Thou tramplest on a man already slain. 1476
What say'st thou? What new tidings bring'st to me?
 Ah me! ah me!
Is it that over all the slaughter wrought
My own wife's death has come to crown it all? 1480

Chor. It is but all too clear! No longer now
Does yon recess conceal her.
 [*The gates open and show the dead body of EURYDICE.*]

CREON. Woe is me! 1484
This second stroke I gaze on, miserable,
What fate, yea, what still lies in wait for me?
Here in my arms I bear what was my son;
And there, O misery! look upon the dead.
Ah, wretched mother! ah, my son! my son! 1488

SEC. MESS. Sore wounded, she around the altar clung,

And closed her darkening eyelids, and bewailed
The honoured bed of Megareus, who died
Long since, and then again that corpse thou hast; 1492
And last of all she cried a bitter cry
Against thy deeds, the murderer of thy son.

CREON. Woe! woe! alas!
I shudder in my fear: Will no one strike 1496
A deadly blow with sharp two-edgèd sword?
Fearful my fate, alas!
And with a fearful woe full sore beset.

SEC. MESS. She in her death charged thee with being the cause 1500
Of all their sorrows, his and hers alike.

CREON. And in what way struck she the murderous blow?

SEC. MESS. With her own hand below her heart she stabbed,
Hearing her son's most pitiable fate. 1504

CREON. Ah me! The fault is mine. On no one else,
Of all that live, the fearful guilt can come;
I, even I, did slay thee, wretched one,
I; yes, I say it clearly. Come, ye guards, 1508
Lead me forth quickly; lead me out of sight,
More crushed to nothing than the dead unborn.

Chor. Thou counsellest gain, if gain there be in ills,
For present evils then are easiest borne 1512
When shortest lived.

CREON. Oh, come thou, then, come thou,
Last of my sorrows, that shall bring to me
Best boon, my life's last day. Come, then, oh, come 1516
That nevermore I look upon the light.

Chor. These things are in the future. What is near,
That we must do. O'er what is yet to come
They watch, to whom that work of right belongs. 1520

CREON. I did but pray for what I most desire.

Chor. Pray thou for nothing more. For mortal man
There is no issue from a doom decreed.

CREON. [*looking at the two corpses*] Lead me, then, forth, 1524
vain shadow that I am,
Who slew thee, O my son, unwittingly,

And thee, too—(O my sorrow)—and I know not
Which way to look. All near at hand is turned 1528
Aside to evil; and upon my head
There falls a doom far worse than I can bear.

Chor. Man's highest blessedness 1532
In wisdom chiefly stands;
And in the things that touch upon the Gods,
'Tis best in word of deed
To shun unholy pride;
Great words of boasting bring great punishments; 1536
And so to gray-haired age
Comes wisdom at the last.

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