

THE ANTIGONE OF SOPHOCLES

translated by Andy Gaus

Place: Thebes, capital of Boeotia

Time: Legendary

Characters: Antigone  
Ismene  
Chorus of Theban Aristocrats  
Creon  
Haimon  
Teiresias  
Soldier  
Eurydice  
Messenger  
Teiresias's Assistant  
Creon's Attendants

THE ANTIGONE OF SOPHOCLES

(The courtyard of the palace in Thebes, capital of Boeotia. The Thebans, led by Eteocles, have just routed the attacking Argives, led by his ousted brother Polyneices, who claimed the throne. Both leaders were killed in hand-to-hand combat. It is early morning, just after the Argive retreat.)

ANTIGONE

My own, my very own sister, sweet Ismene!  
Is there any curse come down from Oedipus  
that Zeus does not fulfill for us two while we live?  
There is nothing painful, no seed of destruction,  
no shame and no dishonor,  
that I have not seen becoming yours and mine.  
And now what's this they say abroad in the city,  
the decree lately posted by our Great Commander?  
Have you heard? Or are you unaware  
how the hatred of our enemies is mounting toward our loved ones?

ISMENE

I have heard nothing, Antigone, about our loved ones,  
either good or painful news, since the hour  
when both our brothers were taken away from us,  
dying by their double hand in a single day.  
Since the Argive army retreated  
in the night, I know nothing further,  
either of new happiness or suffering.

ANTIGONE

I knew that; I called you to come outdoors  
so we could talk by ourselves.

ISMENE

What is it? You look full of some very dark word.

ANTIGONE

Don't you know that, of our two brothers, Creon  
has honored one with burial and excluded the other?  
For Eteocles, they say, he buried beneath the ground  
with due observance of justice and the law,  
dead with the honored dead.  
But the body of Polyneices, who died like a dog,  
has been proclaimed to the citizens, that none  
may either bury him or mourn for him,  
but are to leave him friendless and graveless there,  
for vultures to look down and spot the tasty treasure.  
And that's what they say our good friend Creon has proclaimed  
to you and even to me,  
and is coming here to proclaim expressly  
to any who have not clearly heard, and not as a matter  
of no account, but rather, if anyone does these things,  
that person to be executed by public stoning.  
That's where we stand, and you are about to show  
Whether you're of noble blood or only descended from it.

ISMENE

O reckless heart, if it has come to that, what more is there  
that I could either fasten or unloose?

ANTIGONE

Will you help me? Will you do the deed with me?

ISMENE

What deed? What are you getting at?

ANTIGONE

Will you lift the body with this hand? (She takes Ismene's hand.)

ISMENE

You're really...thinking...of burying him, as the city is forbidden to do?

ANTIGONE

Yes, I will bury my, and whether you like it or not, your brother.

I will never be caught betraying him.

ISMENE

Oh my poor sister! In the face of Creon's edict?

ANTIGONE

He has no standing to cut me off from my own kin.

ISMENE

Oh! Dear sister, think of our father,  
who died dishonored and despised  
after he caught himself in the sinful act  
and struck out both his eyes with his own hand.  
And how his wife and mother, to use two words for one,  
insulted her life with the twist of a noose.  
And then our two brothers in a single day  
sharing a miserable death at each other's hands.  
And now we, in our turn, the only ones left, consider  
what an evil death we will die, if we go against the law,

and disregard the power and the decrees of kings.  
You must consider two things: first, that we are women  
and not born to fight with men;  
second, that we are ruled by people stronger than ourselves,  
and we'd better obey in this and in other things even more painful.  
For my part, asking the dead to forgive me  
because I am acting under compulsion,  
I will obey those in power.  
For to make extra problems makes no sense at all.

ANTIGONE

I wouldn't press you; indeed, if you still wanted  
to take part, you could not be welcome at my side.  
So, be what seems best to you. But I  
will bury him, and I am proud to die doing it.  
I will die as a friend, and be with my loved ones,  
having done all the holy things. For I must get along  
for a much longer time with those below than those here above,  
since I'll be there forever. But if it seems good to you,  
go ahead and dishonor what the gods have honored.

ISMENE

I don't dishonor anything; I am only helpless  
to act against the will of the citizens.

ANTIGONE

You would have that excuse; but I am going now  
to heap up a grave for our beloved brother.

ISMENE

My poor sister! I'm so afraid for you!

ANTIGONE

Don't fear for me. See to your own fate.

ISMENE

Then at least try not to let anyone know.

Keep it a secret, and I will do the same.

ANTIGONE

Oh no: shout it aloud! You will be no friend of mine  
keeping it quiet when you should tell everybody.

ISMENE

You bring hot blood to a blood-chilling deed.

ANTIGONE

But I know I am approved by those whose approval I need.

ISMENE

If you can do it. You're trying something impossible.

ANTIGONE

Well then, whenever I really can't go on, I'll stop.

ISMENE

But from the beginning, you shouldn't try the impossible.

ANTIGONE

If you say that, you are my enemy,  
and by right you are the dead man's enemy too.  
But let me suffer all the terrible consequences  
of my indiscretion. I could never suffer  
anything nearly as bad as dying in shame.

ISMENE

If that's your decision, go. And I want you to know something:  
that you are not very rational,  
but to your dear ones, very dear indeed.

(Antigone exits. Ismene goes into the palace. Enter Chorus of Theban  
Aristocrats.)

ELDERS

Shaft of the sun! the most beautiful light  
that ever appeared to seven-gate Thebes before,  
you finally showed, O golden eye of day,  
rising above the Dirce's waters,  
as the White Shields, who came from Argos with all their armor,  
tightened their reins to fly head over heels.

For the Argive came upon our land, stirred up  
by Polyneices' celebrated dispute,  
screaming sharply,  
like an eagle swooping down to earth  
on snow-white wings,  
full of weapons and helmet crests of horsehair.

Standing above the rooftops, flashing in every direction  
his seven-gate jaws with rows of bloody spears,  
he then moved on, without ever filling  
his jaws with our blood, or Hephaestus' taking  
our city's walls as a burnt offering. For great Ares  
came clashing and clanging behind him,  
too much for the foes of the dragon-seed.

For Zeus hates the noise of a boastful tongue;  
and so, when he saw them streaming in,  
puffed up with the ringing sound of their gold,  
he threw down a bolt on the first in line,  
already at the top of his scaling-ladder,  
rehearsing his victory cry.

Swinging through the air, he crashed to earth,  
with his torch in hand, he who had come  
like a Bacchic madman, snorting  
with the gusts of an evil wind.  
But Fate had other ideas,  
and great Ares dealt with the rest of them, each in his way,  
our charger, our right-hand man!

For seven commanders ranged by seven gates  
left spoils of copper and brass behind  
for Zeus the trophy-gatherer,  
while two men and their hatred,  
born of one father and one mother,  
raising twin swords to divide their authority,  
found only one death, both of them.

But seeing that famous Victory has come  
to share the joy of Thebes, the Chariot City,  
now that these wars are over  
it is time to forget them,

and go up to the temples of all the gods  
for nights entire of singing and dancing.  
And Lord Bacchus who shakes the ground,  
let him be our ruler.

But now the country's king is approaching,  
Creon, son of Meneceus, a new  
ruler made by the gods' new rulings.  
What is he testing the waters with,  
sending out word to the oldest heads,  
calling them to assembly?

(Enter Creon.)

CREON

Gentlemen, it appears that the gods who rule our city,  
after shaking her roughly, set her on her feet again.  
I sent for you by messenger to come apart from the rest  
and gather here, firstly, knowing as I do  
how much you have always revered the throne of Laius,  
and also, both while Oedipus lived  
and since he died, how you have waited  
upon his sons with steadfast counsels.  
But since they died a twofold death  
on the same day, striking and stricken,  
staining each other with their kindred blood,  
I henceforth hold all power and the throne  
by nearness of relation to the departed.

Now of course one cannot know of any man  
his soul, his character and his beliefs, before  
he is shown to be versed in rulership and law.  
But for my part, whoever is in charge of an entire city  
and does not cleave to the very best course of action,  
but, out of whatever kind of fear, holds shut his tongue,  
that is the worst kind of ruler now and always was.  
And whoever holds any friend more dear to him  
than his own country, I call that man a nobody.  
For I, I swear by Zeus the ever-watching,  
would never keep quiet and watch destruction come  
to our citizens and take their security away.  
Nor would I ever call the country's enemy  
my own good friend, because I know too well  
that our country is what saves us, and when she  
is sailing upright, then we can make friends.  
By ruling thus, I make the city greater.  
And now, in a kindred spirit, I have proclaimed  
to the citizens, on the subject of the sons of Oedipus:  
that Eteocles, who died fighting on behalf  
of this our city, topping the field with his spear,  
shall be interred in a grave, with every consecration  
due to the noblest of the dead below.  
But that other, the brother of the first, I mean Polyneices,  
who came back from exile to his fatherland  
and native gods, intending first of all

to burn both to the ground, and then to drink  
deep of the public blood, and take the rest for slaves,  
him it has been proclaimed to all the city  
that none may bury him nor mourn for him,  
but instead must leave him unburied and watch his body  
be mangled and eaten by the birds and dogs.  
Such is my will, and never, at least by me,  
shall the evil be given honor over the just;  
whereas whoever means the city well  
shall be honored by me the same both living and dead.

ELDERS

Such is your pleasure, son of Meneceus, Creon,  
toward the state's enemy and toward her friend.  
And certainly any law is in your power to make  
both for the dead and for those of us who live.

CREON

Now you must be the enforcers of this edict.

ELDERS

Pick someone younger to take up that task.

CREON

There are already guards around the body.

ELDERS

Then what is this further thing that you command?

CREON

Not to go over to the unbelievers' side.

ELDERS

Surely none so foolish that he wants to die.

CREON

And that is indeed the penalty. But the lure  
of easy money has killed many men before this.

(Enter the Guard.)

GUARD

Your Majesty, I can't say as I come here short of breath  
from lifting my nimble feet too speedily.

No, there were stops to think along the way  
that almost made me turn round and go back.

I could hear my soul speaking to me, saying things like  
"You fool! Why are you going to somebody who will only punish you?"  
or "You wretch! Are you stopping again? What if Creon hears this  
from somebody else? How will you get out of that?"

Well, turning these things in my mind, I made  
slow time, with a lot of delays,  
and that's the way that short roads turn into long ones.

But finally I decided after all  
to come to you. And even if I can't say anything, I will speak.  
I figure I can't suffer anything worse  
than what Fate has decided for me already.

CREON

What is it that fills you with such discouragement?

GUARD

Well first, I want to tell you about myself: You see,  
I didn't do it and I didn't see who did it,  
so it wouldn't be right to punish me for it.

CREON

That's a nice try at building a hedge  
between yourself and the matter.  
You must have something very strange to say.

GUARD

Well, difficult things make a person hesitate.

CREON

Are you ever going to say what you have to say, and leave?

GUARD

I'll tell you right now. It's the body. Someone came  
along and sprinkled dry dust over it  
and executed all the rites of burial.

CREON

What did you say? What man has dared to do this?

GUARD

I don't know. For there were no dents of a pickaxe  
nor holes scooped out by a shovel. The ground was hard  
and dry, unbroken and untraveled on  
by carriage wheels; whoever did it left no tracks.  
So when the guard assigned to the first watch  
found out, we were amazed—we just couldn't grasp it.  
For he was covered over, not really buried, but just  
with dust, like somebody was trying to avoid the curse.  
And there were no signs of wild beasts or of dogs  
coming there, and no claw-marks or gashes.

So then our angry words came streaming out at each other,  
guard accusing guard, and they would have ended up  
coming to blows, if no one had showed up to stop them.  
Because everyone thought everyone was the one who did it,  
but no one was clearly guilty; they all said they knew nothing.  
And we were ready to lift hot iron with our two hands,  
and crawl through fire, and swear by the holy gods  
that we didn't do it and didn't know of anyone  
either suggesting such a thing or acting on it.  
Finally, when there was no point in questioning further,  
someone said something that made us hang our heads  
down to the ground with fear, because we didn't know how  
to contradict him, or how to get off alive  
doing what he said. His thought was that we had to bring this  
to your attention, and we couldn't hide it.  
Well, that carried, and I was so unlucky  
as to be chosen by lot to give you the good word.  
I have come against my will to people  
who don't want me here, I know it,  
for no one likes a messenger with bad news.

ELDERS

Sire, if you ask me, the thought that this might be the work of gods  
has been suggesting itself to my mind for some time now.

CREON

Stop, before you enrage me with your words,  
unless you wish to appear both witless and decrepit.  
I will not stand to hear it said that spirits

are concerned about the welfare of this body.

I suppose they buried him as a special honor  
to their great benefactor, who came here  
to burn their temples down pillar by pillar,  
and their treasures, and their grounds,  
and scatter the laws to the wind?

Or do the gods now honor evil men?

No, they don't! The fact is, certain men of this city,  
who took my edict hard, have been muttering ever since,  
shaking their heads on the sly, instead of loyally  
putting their necks to the yoke and bearing with me.

I see very clearly how they came to these fellows  
and persuaded them by paying them off to do this.

In all the world there never was a currency  
as bad as money. This is what sacks the cities.

This is what drives the men out of their homes.

This is the corrupt teacher of good human hearts  
that turns them aside to do disgraceful things.

It taught them how to practice treachery  
and not to stop at any form of godlessness.

But whoever did this with a view to money  
incurred a debt that sooner or later they will pay.

So if Zeus is still a god worth worshipping,  
then be very sure, I'm telling you under oath,

if you do not discover and produce  
before my eyes the author of this burial,

Death will not come to you or your friends before

you have first been hung up by the hands  
and the truth flogged out of you,  
that henceforth you may know what is to be gained  
by your rapaciousness, and finally learn  
that you mustn't try to turn a profit on everything.  
Just look around, and you'll see many more  
destroyed by their ill-gotten gains than saved.

GUARD

Do I get to say something, or do I just turn and go?

CREON

Do you have any idea how much it pains me to listen to you?

GUARD

Does it sting our ears, or in your soul?

CREON

What are you doing, diagnosing where my pain is?

GUARD

Whoever did it hurt your soul, but I only hurt your ears.

CREON

I see that you are a babbler by birth and station.

GUARD

But not the one who ever did this deed.

CREON

Oh yes you did, selling your soul for money!

GUARD

(Groans.) Oh!

It's wrong to go on suspicions, especially false ones.

CREON

You can talk of your false suspicions, but if you do not produce the one who did this, you will all talk about how servile money-grubbing ends in suffering.

GUARD

By all means let him be found. But either way, whether he's caught or not, as Fate decides, it won't be me that you see coming here to tell you. And now, saved beyond all hope and my own expectations, I owe the gods many many thanks. (Exit.)

ELDERS

Many the wonders and none more wondrous than humankind, who crosses the gray-haired sea on the back of the southern windstorm, darting through the eye of waves that engulf him; who wears away the highest of goddesses, Earth, the imperishable, the unwearied, turning his plough from year to year, yoking his horses, his mules.

He throws his net around the light-minded bird tribes; the brute races of beasts, the watery sea-fish natures are caught in the weave of his tangles:

the thought-spinner, Man.

He controls with his machines the primitive beasts at large in the mountains; he breaks the shaggy horse, yoking him round the neck, and the robust mountain-bull.

Speech and windy thought and civil behavior  
he has learned, and how to escape  
the drafty frost and the pounding rain:  
the all-provider, who faces the future lacking for nothing.  
Only the escape from Hades seems to elude him,  
and sickness beyond his cunning makes him a fugitive.

Possessing in his resourcefulness a skill beyond dreams,  
he turns it now to evil and now to good.  
Honoring the country's laws and the sworn justice of gods,  
he is the city's height.  
Or the city's shame, mixing himself in unworthiness  
for the sake of a dare. But let none who act that way  
ever share my hearth or share my mind.

(Enter Guard with Antigone.)

This is hard to believe,  
a stroke of the gods!  
But how shall we say this is not the child Antigone?  
O ill-fated daughter of ill-fated Oedipus,  
what in the world is this?  
Don't tell me they have brought you in  
for disregarding the king's decrees  
after catching you in some senseless act?

GUARD

Here she is. Here's the one who did it.  
We caught her burying him. Where's Creon?

ELDERS

He's coming back outside now, just in time.

CREON (re-entering)

What is it? What makes my arrival so timely?

GUARD

My lord, you should never say anything is impossible,  
not to the human sort:

A second look always proves you wrong. For instance,

I would have prayed not to come here again too soon  
after you blasted me with a storm of threats.

But since unhoped-for and unexpected joy

is of a greater magnitude than other pleasures,

I come, despite my sworn oaths to the contrary,

leading this girl here, who was caught performing

burial rites. This time there was no drawing of lots:

They all agreed the honor should be mine.

So now, your majesty, take her and do as you like,

judge her and sentence her, but I deserve

by right to be set free now of these charges.

CREON

Where are you bringing her from, and how did you catch her?

GUARD

She was burying the man, as simple as that.

CREON

Is this the truth? Do you understand what you're saying?

GUARD

We saw her giving burial to the body  
that you said not to bury. Is that a clear statement?

CREON

How did she happen to get caught in the act?

GUARD

This is the story. As we went back to our posts,  
threatened by you with all those terrible punishments,  
after brushing off all of the dust that covered  
the body, and removing all the dampness,  
we sat on the top of the hill upwind of him,  
trying to get where the smell of him wouldn't hit us,  
and busily urged each other on, with many vile curses  
on anyone who should neglect this task.  
And that went on until in the middle sky  
the bright globe of the sun stood still and burned  
the earth with its heat. When suddenly a storm,  
raising up gusts from the ground to trouble the heavens,  
covered the plain, brutalizing the foliage  
of all the trees around and filling the upper air.  
We squinted and bore up under this heavenly plague.  
And when it died down, after a long while,  
we see this girl, mourning bitterly,  
with the sharp cry of a bird when it returns  
to its nest and finds it orphaned of its young.  
So she, when she saw the body uncovered,  
broke into a wail, and wept, and then called down

an evil curse on the authors of the deed.  
And straightway with her hands she brought dry dust,  
and from a fine brass pitcher raised aloft  
honored the corpse with offerings of honey, wine and water.  
As soon as we saw that, we lunged at her  
and took her captive, which didn't seem to faze her.  
We charged her with the earlier deed as well as  
the one just now, and she made no denials,  
fortunately for me—and painfully too.  
For getting myself out of trouble is the greatest  
of pleasures, while getting my mistress into trouble  
is painful. But that's how I am: nothing can be  
quite as important to me as my own skin.

CREON

You there, hanging your head down to the ground,  
speak: did you do this, or will you deny it?

ANTIGONE

I admit the charge and I do not deny it.

CREON

(To the guard.)

You are free to take yourself wherever you like.  
I clear you of all charges. (Guard dances happily out.)  
Now as for you, tell me not at length, but briefly, please:  
Did you know of the proclamation forbidding what you did?

ANTIGONE

Of course. How could I not? It was public knowledge.

CREON

You actually dared to set aside these laws?

ANTIGONE

But Zeus was not the author of these decrees,  
and Justice the neighbor of the lower gods,  
never drew up such laws among mankind.  
Nor did I think that your laws, being mortal,  
had any such power as to overturn  
the unwritten and unfailing laws of gods,  
which live not just today or yesterday,  
but forever, and no one knows where they came from.  
And so, not fearing any man's opinion,  
I was not going to pay the penalty to the gods.  
I knew I was going to die. How could I not?  
Even without your proclamation. And if I die  
sooner rather than later, so much the better.  
To one who lives, as I do, amid many  
evils, how could death not be a benefit?  
In my own eyes, to meet with such a fate  
is no great loss. If my own mother's child  
died, and I were to leave the corpse unburied,  
that would hurt me. But this cannot hurt me.  
So if I seem to you now to be doing something foolish,  
why then, I stand convicted of foolishness by a fool.

ELDERS

She clearly is the tactless offspring of a tactless father.  
She doesn't know about bending to the wind.

CREON

Very well, but be sure that the most unbending spirits  
fall the hardest, and the most unyielding  
iron baked in the fire to a fine hardness  
is the most utterly cracked and shattered before your eyes.  
And I have seen the way unruly horses  
are curbed with a tighter rein. For no one has the right  
to act big, who is the slave of public opinion.

(To the Elders.)

This one went right to work at committing an outrage  
by overstepping the established laws,  
and having done so, commits a second outrage  
by boasting of her deeds and laughing about them.  
Now I am not a man any more, and she is,  
if she has power to do this with impunity.  
And whether she is my sister's child, or whether  
some closer relation to me than all my family,  
she will not escape an evil death—nor will  
her sister, for I hold her just as accountable  
as this one for the planning of this burial.  
Call her out now. I just saw her indoors  
acting like she had taken leave of her senses.  
For the guilty mind of those who plot their mischief  
in secret, often shows itself before the deed.  
But what I really hate is when someone  
caught in the act then tries to glorify it.

ANTIGONE

Do you mean to do something more than just kill me?

CREON

No, for my part that will be quite enough.

ANTIGONE

Then what are you waiting for? Nothing you say makes any sense to me, or ever could, while my side is by nature just as repellent to you. For in fact, what glory more completely glorious could I achieve than that of giving burial to my own brother? Everyone here would say that they approved, if fear didn't curb their tongues. But among the many blessings of dictatorship is that of being able to say and do whatever it likes.

CREON

Of all the Cadmeans, you alone see things that way.

ANTIGONE

(Indicates the Elders.)

They see it too! But before you, they bite their tongues.

CREON

Aren't you ashamed to see how they will not support you?

ANTIGONE

There is nothing shameful in paying respect to your next of kin.

CREON

And what of his opponent? Wasn't he your kin?

ANTIGONE

Of course he was, of one and the same father.

CREON

Then how can you pay respects that show contempt for him?

ANTIGONE

Eteocles himself will not say that below.

CREON

But you honor him the same as the godless one.

ANTIGONE

It wasn't a slave that died, it was my brother.

CREON

One died sacking the country, the other defending it.

ANTIGONE

Hades prescribes these customs either way.

CREON

But the just do not expect to be treated the same as the wicked.

ANTIGONE

Who knows if that is not considered good below?

CREON

No enemy ever, when he dies, becomes a friend.

ANTIGONE

I was not made to join in hate, but only in love.

CREON

Then go below, if you must love, and love them there.

But I, while I live, will never be ruled by a woman.

(Enter Ismene from the palace, escorted by guards.)

ELDERS

And now, before the gates, here is Ismene,

raining down the tears of sister-love.

The cloud above her brow  
tinges her lovely cheek,  
darkening and wetting the roses.

CREON

You there, lurking like an adder in my house,  
just waiting to suck me dry: I did not know  
I was raising two young subverters of the throne.  
Now tell me: do you also admit to taking part  
in the burial, or will you swear that you know nothing?

ISMENE

I did the deed, so far as she permits,  
and share and bear the blame along with her.

ANTIGONE

But justice will not allow that, seeing that  
you were not willing, nor did I include you.

ISMENE

But in your hour of need I am not ashamed  
to make myself the shipmate of your suffering.

ANTIGONE

Who did the deed, Hades and the dead will witness.  
I cannot use a friend who loves in word alone.

ISMENE

For love's sake, sister, don't exclude me now  
from dying with you and honoring the dead.

ANTIGONE

Don't die with me, and don't try to share in what  
you did not do. My death will be enough.

ISMENE

What life could be dear to me when you are gone?

ANTIGONE

Ask Creon. He is your kinsman.

ISMENE

Why do you taunt me? What good does that do you?

ANTIGONE

If I seem to laugh at you, it is a very painful laugh.

ISMENE

Tell me what more I can do now to help you.

ANTIGONE

Save yourself. I won't blame you for surviving.

ISMENE

Oh misery! I cannot share your fate?

ANTIGONE

You already chose to live. I chose to die.

ISMENE

But not before some words had passed between us.

ANTIGONE

You spoke well for your side, and I for mine.

ISMENE

But now we are both equally offenders.

ANTIGONE

Take heart. You are alive, but my soul long since died  
so as to be of service to the dead.

CREON

I'd say one of these girls just lost her mind,  
whereas the other one was born without it.

ISMENE

Milord, when people suffer, even the mind  
that they were born with will not stay, but takes its leave.

CREON

It certainly left you, when you chose to practice evil with evildoers.

ISMENE

What life can I have without her, if she is my life?

CREON

Don't say is anymore. She has already ceased to be.

ISMENE

You mean to kill the bride of your own son?

CREON

There are other fields to plow.

ISMENE

Not the way it was between her and him.

CREON

I hate bad wives for my sons.

ANTIGONE

My beloved Haimon, hear how your father dishonors you.

CREON

I am tired of hearing about you and your intended marriage.

ELDERS

You really will take her away from your own son?

CREON

Hades will be the canceler of this wedding.

ELDERS

Since, as it appears, it is settled that she shall die.

CREON

Settled for you and for me. And now, enough delays:

Slaves! Take her inside. This should teach women

to be women and not libertines.

Even the bravest of the lot retreat

when they see Hades getting close to them.

(Guards take Antigone and Ismene inside the palace.)

ELDERS

Blessed whose age has never tasted evil.

For whoever's house was shaken by gods, will never lack  
for any mischief, dragging on down the length of generations:

like when the sea-storm blows from Thrace

and the great wave rushes on the dark of the deepwater,

swirling up the black sand from the bottom,

and the wind-beaten shores groan load as the waves hit full.

The old grief of the house of Laius is what I see,

grief of the dead heaped upon grief.

Nor can one generation help the next:

some god strikes them down, there is no end.

And now what light was spread

over the last roots of the house of Oedipus

the bloody dust of the lower gods mows down,  
with rash words and a fury in the will.

Your power, Zeus—what mortal breach could hold it down,  
You whom Sleep never takes, the mankind-catcher,  
nor the relentless god-months, but unaged in time  
You reign the lord of Olympus and its marble radiance.  
And now, and in the hereafter, and in the past the same rule holds:  
nothing too large comes into the life of a man  
and brings no curse with it.

For hope in its multiform wanderings is a blessing to many,  
to others a lie, the lie of their own silly desires.  
It lights on a man suspecting nothing, until  
he burns his foot in the blazing fire.  
So there is wisdom in the well-known words of someone,  
that evil finally starts to look like good  
in the mind of a man whom the gods lead toward his destruction.  
He doesn't get very far at all before destruction comes.

(Enter Haimon.)

ELDERS

Now Haimon comes, of your children  
the youngest and the last. Has he come  
aching with the fate of his promised bride Antigone,  
pouring out the dashed hopes of his marriage?

CREON

We will soon know by better means than prophecy.  
My son, is it that you have not heard my final decision,

and are here in a rage about your intended bride?  
Or can we be friends, whatever I must do?

HAIMON

Father, I am yours, and you lay out before me  
good counsels, which I for my part will follow.  
For to me, no marriage will ever be esteemed  
a greater thing to have than your wise direction.

CREON

That, my son, is what must be in your heart:  
a father's word must outrank everything.  
That's why men pray the gods that they may bear  
obedient children to have in the house,  
who will wreak vengeance on a father's enemies  
and honor a father's friends just as their own.  
But whoso bears unserviceable children,  
what can you say except that he has borne  
pain to himself, and laughter to his enemies?  
My child, don't ever throw away good judgment  
for sake of women's pleasure, for you know  
that it becomes a cold comfort indeed  
sharing your bed and board with a bad wife.  
For what greater cancer than a treacherous loved one?  
Better to grimace at the evil taste of it  
and let the girl marry in Hades whom she will.  
After I caught her in an act of public  
defiance, her alone of all the city,

I will not prove myself false to the city.  
No: she shall die. So let her pray about it  
to Zeus of the homefires. If, in domestic cases,  
I breed disorder, outside the family I do so doubly.  
Whereas a decent man in family matters  
will also act with justice toward the city.  
But whoso uses force to breach the law  
or thinks to tell the rulers how to rule,  
that person will find no praise at my hand.  
For he whom the state appoints must be obeyed  
in small things, and in matters right-or wrong.  
And that is the kind of man that I would trust  
to rule well, to rule with the right intention,  
and in the storms of war to keep his post  
and be a good man in the ranks beside you.  
Than anarchy there is no greater evil:  
it loses cities; it leaves great estates  
turned upside down; it breaks the friendly spear  
of would-be allies. While it is obedience  
that does the most to save the lives of the governed.  
So one must rise to defend established law  
and above all, never be worsted by a woman.  
Better, if you must lose, to lose to a man,  
so that at least we are not called less than women.

#### ELDERS

To us, if our old age does not deceive us,  
you seem to be choosing your words very carefully.

HAIMON

Father, the gods give humankind their senses,  
which are of all possessions far the greatest.  
Now I do not say, and I could not say,  
that any of what you said is not true,  
but what occurs to others also might be good.  
I always look out for your interests in the things  
that people say or do or might complain about.  
For your glance strikes terror in the heart of commoners  
who might be saying things you would not rejoice to hear.  
But I can hear these things under cover of darkness:  
how all the city is up in arms about this girl,  
saying no woman ever less deserved  
to die, or for a deed more praiseworthy.  
She wasn't going to let her own dear brother  
who fell in battle, lie unburied, or  
become the food of dogs or passing birds.  
Shouldn't she be given the highest honor?  
Such is the dark rumble rolling through the silence.  
Father, your comfort and well-being is  
dearer to me than anything I own.  
What greater glory than a prosperous father  
could children wish, or fathers wish for them?  
But do not so keep counsel with yourself alone  
that nothing but what you say yourself is true.  
For whoso thinks he is the only thinker,

or has some type of tongue or soul that others don't,  
people like that when unwrapped are found empty.  
If someone knows something, to learn from him  
is not at all shameful—and not to try is very much so.  
Along the banks of swollen streams you see  
the trees that bend are the ones that save their branches.  
Those that stay rigid perish root and branch.  
Likewise, whoever holds tight to a tiller  
and does not yield at all, will very soon  
find himself navigating upside down.  
Yield in your heart now. Give us some ground.  
If one as young as I may have opinions,  
it would be that in every case whoever  
has greater understanding is the elder.  
If that is so—I don't say it is in this case—  
then it is good to learn from the good words of others.

ELDERS

Your Majesty, it is right that if he speaks to the point  
even you should listen. Good has been said on both sides.

CREON

Am I at my age really supposed to learn  
to think correctly from a man of this man's years?

HAIMON

Only if what I say is right. For if I am young,  
I ask you to consider my deeds and not my years.

CREON

What are your deeds? Aiding the cause of rebels?

HAIMON

I would never approve of giving aid to evildoers.

CREON

Was she not caught in a very evil act indeed?

HAIMON

That is not what the whole city of Thebes is saying.

CREON

And is the city going to tell me what I must do?

HAIMON

Do you see how you are talking like a very young person indeed?

CREON

Is someone other than me supposed to rule this country?

HAIMON

There never was a city consisting of one man.

CREON

Does not the power of the state reside in the ruler?

HAIMON

You could rule very well by yourself in a desert.

CREON

It looks like this fellow is in league with the woman.

HAIMON

Only if the woman is you: I am bound to you by blood.

CREON

What kind of son calls his father to justice?

HAIMON

The kind that sees his father doing wrong.

CREON

Is it really wrong to respect my own office?

HAIMON

You respect nothing. You trample on the honor of the gods.

CREON

Low and filthy creature. Less than a woman.

HAIMON

Perhaps, but you could never say, less than honorable.

CREON

But everything you say is on her side.

HAIMON

And yours, and mine, and that of the lower gods.

CREON

Well, you will never marry her alive.

HAIMON

Then she will die, and so will someone else.

CREON

Are you up to threats now? Very brave!

HAIMON

Is it a threat to attack your empty ideas?

CREON

You will soon find out to your cost whose ideas are empty.

HAIMON

If you weren't my father, I'd say you were out of your mind.

CREON

Oh, slave of a woman, stop your twittering.

HAIMON

You want to say something, but you don't want to hear anything?

CREON

That's right! And be very sure, I swear by Olympus,  
you will not take me to task with impunity.  
Bring me the creature. Now. And let her die  
right on the spot before the bridegroom's eyes.

HAIMON

Not only is she not going to die  
before my eyes—dismiss the thought from your mind—  
but you will never see my face again.  
You can rave on to those who wish to remain with you.  
(Exit.)

ELDERS

Milord, the man has left with angry speed,  
so keen is the resentment in his mind.

CREON

Let him do superhuman deeds and think immortal thoughts;  
he will not stand between those two girls and their fate.

ELDERS

Then you intend to execute them both?

CREON

No, you are right: not the one who took no action.

ELDERS

By what means do you plan to kill the other?

CREON

Leading her far from any mortal traces,  
I will inter her living in a tomb of stone,  
with just so much food as religious law prescribes  
for the whole city to avoid contamination.  
And there, by praying to Hades, the only god she worships,  
perhaps she will find some way to escape dying.  
If not, at least she will finally see that it is a waste  
to have such reverence for the underworld.

(Guards go in to get Antigone.)

ELDERS

O Love, unconquerable in battle,  
Love, swooping down on wealth and possessions,  
Laying your trap in the soft cheeks of a maiden,  
well known across the sea, in the most savage latitudes:  
from you no god has escaped, nor ever  
any of the May-fly humankind,  
but they ended up full of you at last.

You twist right minds the wrong way, to disgrace themselves;  
you have stirred up this fight of one blood amongst itself.  
Victory goes to the visible desire  
in a ripe bedmate's eyelids, coequal in the rule  
of law. For we are helpless toys for holy Aphrodite.

(Guards return with Antigone.)

And now indeed I am swept beyond  
the rule of law myself, to see this.

Nor can I stop my tears at their source any longer  
when I behold Antigone  
making her way to the chamber of all sleep.

ANTIGONE

You see me, citizens of my country, walking the last road,  
looking at the last light of the shining sun  
and then no more; but Hades, the universal hosteler,  
will lead me living down the banks of Acheron.  
No wedding march for me, no sweet serenade  
was sung at my chamber door, but Acheron is my bridegroom.

ELDERS

Famous indeed and widely praised,  
you go to that hiding-place of souls,  
not struck by wasting diseases,  
nor reaping the wages of the sword,  
but self-guided; and along among mortals  
you descend alive into Hades.

ANTIGONE

But I have heard before how the Phrygian queen Niobe  
dismally perished by the cliffs of Sipylus,  
her lithified flesh tying her tight as ivy tendrils;  
and how, as she wastes away, so goes the story,  
the rain and snow never leave her, dripping from her mournful brow  
onto her bosom. And I shall be laid down  
by the gods no differently from her.

ELDERS

But she was a goddess and godly born,  
while we are humans and mortally born.  
Still, it is a great name for the dying  
that your fate should be like the fate of goddesses  
in life and also in death.

ANTIGONE

I'm being laughed at! Why, by all the gods of Thebes,  
insult me, not when I'm gone, but to my face?  
O city, and you the city's aristocratic men,  
springs of the Dirce, sacred groves of chariot city Thebes:  
you at least shall be my witnesses,  
in what manner and by what laws I go,  
unwept by friends, to the stone-sealed closure of a new kind of grave,  
in agony, stripped of all citizenship  
above or below, with either the dead or the living.

ELDERS

Riding out to the edge of your courage  
you crashed against the lofty pillars  
of the law, my child, very hard.  
Perhaps you are paying off some debt of your father's.

ANTIGONE

You have touched my mind at its sorest point:  
a grief run into the ground, fate of my father  
and of us all, the famous house of Labdacus.  
Oh the destruction of my mother's bed,

Oh dismal and incestuous union with my father,  
from whom I had the evil luck of ever being born,  
toward whom I go unblest, unwed, to share their fate.  
O brother who sealed that evil-omened marriage,  
in death you struck me down while I still lived.

ELDERS

Reverence is a part of honor,  
but he with whom the power rests  
cannot look on and see it crossed.  
Your own chosen will has cut you down.

ANTIGONE

Unwept, unfriended and unmarried, I am led off in misery  
down the road prepared for me.  
Wretch that I am, I may not look  
on the sacred eye of the sun any longer.  
And for my fate no tears are shed,  
no loved ones mourn for me.

CREON

(To the guards.)

Don't you see that these swansongs and last words  
would never stop at all, if you let them speak?  
Will you not lead her off at once? And having  
enclosed her in a covered tomb, as I said before,  
leave her alone, and let her choose either to die  
or to live on entombed in such a dwelling.  
For we have been square with the gods about this girl.  
But now she loses the citizenship of the upper world.

ANTIGONE

My tomb, my bridal chamber, that will hold me  
in its eternal hollow, where I go now  
to meet my own, who have died in such great number  
and Persephone received them among the dead:  
Now I, the last and surely most abased of all,  
go under, without my lifespan being done.  
But I go nourished by the highest hope  
that I am going to my father as his dear daughter,  
and dear to you, mother, and to you: my brother's face.  
Since with my hands I took you when you died  
and laid you out, and having made a grave,  
poured drink-offerings. But now, O Polyneices,  
for laying your body out, this is my reward.  
Where have I overstepped heavenly justice?  
Why should a wretch like me ever look again  
up to the gods? Or pray them to favor me? When the truth is  
that practicing reverence brands me as a criminal.  
But if among the gods this is considered good,  
our suffering should show us where we were wrong.  
But if they are wrong, I could not wish them to suffer  
any worse fate than what they have wrongly done to me.

ELDER

Still these blasts of the soul that hold her: gusts of the same wind.

CREON

And on that account the persons leading her  
will have reason to regret their tardiness.

ANTIGONE

Oh! That is the word of Death itself  
standing before me.

CREON

I don't advise clinging to any hope  
that these things will not be fulfilled that way.

ANTIGONE

O land of Thebes, my father's city,  
gods I was born with:  
they're taking me now, they won't wait any longer.  
Look well, aristocrats of Thebes,  
at the last remains of a royal family:  
how I am treated, and by what sort of men,  
for giving religion all religion's due.  
(Guards lead her away.)

ELDERS

She suffered too, that beauty Danaë,  
giving up heaven's light for a chamber of beaten brass.  
Closed off in that gravelike room she was locked away.  
And she too was of noble birth, O child, child,  
and nurturing seed by Zeus's golden rain.  
But the power of Fate, what a terrible power!  
And no kind of wealth, and no weapons, no turrets,  
and no black sea-beaten ships can escape it.

They locked up that hot-tempered child Lycurgus,  
Edonian king, for his sharp-tongued outbursts.  
To please Dionysus they fenced him off with rock-hard boundaries.  
There he dribbles away the horror of madness  
and the first bloom of his fit. For he found out in his madness  
he was facing down a god with his sarcastic tongue.  
For he was keeping the god-women from their night-cries  
and their fire, and quarreling with the Muses in the field.

By the Dark Rocks, by the double water,  
the Bosphorus shores, the wilds of Thrace  
and Salmydessus: where Ares, who lives there,  
saw the two Phineus boys  
dealt their unspeakable wound,  
blinded by a brutal stepmother  
who killed the avenging circles of their eyes,  
pounding them hard with bloody hands  
and the point of a loom-shuttle.

The wretches withered slowly toward their wretched end,  
wailing for their mother's doom in marriage.  
But she went back to the original race of Erechtheus  
and in distant caves  
was raised amid her father's storms  
as the North Wind's daughter,  
swift as a steed across the high hill,  
child of the gods. But just the same,  
the long-lived Fates, my child, bore down upon her too.

(Enter Teiresias, led by his young assistant.)

TEIRESIAS

Lords of Thebes, you behold before you two  
seeing as one, and coming down a single road.  
For a blind man's road is that of his guide.

CREON

Good day, father Teiresias, what brings you here?

TEIRESIAS

I will tell you, and you listen to the prophet!

CREON

In the past I have never departed from your counsel.

TEIRESIAS

In those days you were a good captain for the state.

CREON

I have received many benefits at your hand.

TEIRESIAS

And now consider yourself on the razor's edge once more.

CREON

What is it? You make me shudder! What is it?

TEIRESIAS

You will understand, hearing the omens of my craft.

As I sat down on my old bird-watching seat,  
where I keep my stock of all the different birds,  
I heard a sound I had never heard from birds before:  
yelping as if stung, in a language not their own.

And I could tell they were ripping at each other with bloody claws,

for the sound of flying feathers was too great to ignore.  
Immediately suspecting something, I started taking omens,  
stoking the altars full. But the offerings  
would not catch the holy fire of Hephaestus. Instead,  
a clammy ooze from the thighs dripped down upon the embers,  
smoking and sputtering, and spitting drops of bile  
high in the air. And, melting away,  
the thighs were stripped of their fatty covering.  
In such a fashion, as this boy informed me,  
my auguries had dwindled away without a sign.  
(For he is my leader, and then I lead the others.)  
And this is how Thebes is suffering from the sickness in your heart.  
Our public altars and our private hearths, all of them,  
are full of contamination, carried by birds and dogs  
that have eaten the flesh of the fallen son of Oedipus.  
And so the gods are not accepting any more  
either our prayers or our burnt offerings,  
nor will the birds cry their auspicious cries,  
having eaten the fat and blood of the fallen man.  
Think about these things, my child. For what  
we all have in common is being wrong.  
But if one is wrong, that does not mean  
that he is either a foolish man or a doomed one,  
if, after taking a turn for the worse,  
he rights himself and doesn't refuse to move.  
But stiffness turns out to be stupidity.  
Yield to the dead man; don't keep stabbing a corpse.

What is the point of killing the dead again?

I speak as one who means you the best, and for you to learn should be a pleasure, if I speak to your benefit.

CREON

Old man, you are all archers,  
and this man (indicating himself) is the target,  
and having tried everything else, you now try prophecy!  
I can see myself being sold and delivered, free on board.  
Go ahead and make money, if you like,  
selling white gold from Sardis and red gold from India,  
but you will not put that man in a grave,  
even if Zeus's eagles take him  
and snatch him on high to the throne of Zeus himself;  
I am not afraid of the stain and I  
will not let him be buried. For I know  
that no mortal has power to defile the gods.  
And even very clever mortals, father Teiresias,  
can take a disgraceful tumble  
when they lend their eloquence to a disgraceful cause for a fee.

TEIRESIAS

Whew! Which of mortals knows...or who can express...

CREON

What? What is this great universality?

TEIRESIAS

How much good judgment is the greatest of all possessions.

CREON

As much, I should say, as not thinking is the greatest harm.

TEIRESIAS

But that is the very sickness from which you suffer.

CREON

I don't wish to trade insults with a holyman.

TEIRESIAS

You have already done so, saying I prophesy lies.

CREON

Prophets are palm-crossers by profession.

TEIRESIAS

Tyrants are in love with seizure and extortion.

CREON

Are you aware you are speaking to a ruler?

TEIRESIAS

Yes I am. I have helped you have this city.

CREON

You're a wise man, but you like to play with the law.

TEIRESIAS

You will make me stir up what is in the bottom of my heart!

CREON

Stir away, as long as it's not for profit.

TEIRESIAS

It will be no profit to you, I assure you.

CREON

Know this: my mind is not for sale.

TEIRESIAS

And you know this: you will not see the sun  
do many more laps around its heavenly track  
before you will give up a corpse out of your own guts  
in exchange for the other corpses, and to pay for the fact  
that you have thrust the upper world's citizen below,  
ruthlessly lodging a living soul in the grave,  
and also kept one of the lower world's number here,  
an unblest, unburied, unholy corpse  
that has no business with you or the upper gods  
except that you're forcing it on them.  
But the hounds of hell, who catch up slowly,  
and also the furies of the gods  
are waiting for you, to catch you in just such evils.  
Please consider if I am saying these things for a fee.  
For there will be, and not long coming,  
the wailing of men and women in your house.  
Also, the other cities are stirred up against you  
whose bodies you have also left to be buried  
by dogs or beasts, or else some winged bird  
who can carry the taint to all the hearths of the city.  
And so, in a way, since you complain, yes, I am an archer,  
and the arrows I have sent with a right good will at your heart  
are ones whose sting you will not outrun.  
And now, son, if you'll take us home, so that this man  
can vent his spleen on younger folks

and learn to keep a civiler tongue  
and a better brain in his head than now he bears.

(Teiresias and his young Assistant leave.)

ELDERS

Milord, he has left us, still predicting the worst.  
And what is more, we understand  
that in all the time that has turned my black hair white,  
he has never yet spoken falsely about the city.

CREON

I know that, and my guts are churning.  
To yield is terrible, but to stand your heart up  
so a curse can strike it down, is terrible too.

ELDERS

You need some good advice, son of Meneceus.

CREON

What in fact must I do? Speak. I will do what you say.

ELDERS

Go and release the girl from her covered tomb  
and make a grave for the dead man.

CREON

That's what you advise? It really is better to yield?

ELDERS

As fast as possible, my lord. The strokes of the gods  
are swift to cut down the evildoer.

CREON

Oh misery. It is hard to act where my heart will not go.  
But there is no fighting with necessity.

ELDERS

Go and act now. Don't trust it to someone else.

CREON

I will go as I am. Servants, servants, present and absent!  
Take axes in your hands and go  
to that part of the plain you can see from here.  
And I, now that my mind has been turned round this way,  
I imprisoned her, and I will personally set her free.  
For I am afraid that it is better for a man  
to respect established customs till the day he dies. (Exit.)

ELDERS

God of a thousand names, the Cadmean girl's delight,  
breed of the great Zeus Thunderer,  
on guard above the splendor of Italy,  
enthroned amid the universality of Eleusis,  
Bacchus! inhabiting the Bacchic capital city, Thebes,  
standing beside the Ismenus' waters, savage upon the dragon-seed.

Smoking and flashing, the torch-light saw you  
high above the twin-crested rock  
where the Corician nymphs come for their bacchanalia.  
So did the streams that plunge toward Pleistus,  
the Castalëan spring.  
The ivied crags of Nysean mountains,  
the tender grapelands along the shore  
send you along, crying immortal cries of joy,  
to visit a while upon the streets of Thebes.

For Thebes is your favorite city, you love her more than all others,  
you and your mother, the beholder of lightning.

And now, when our great municipal city  
is seized by a violent plague,  
come now on purifying feet across the heights of Parnassus  
or the heaving straits of Chalcis.

Oh fire, the dancing-master of the breathing stars,  
Lord of the night-cries, breed of Zeus,  
show forth yourself, great lord, and bring those frenzied women,  
the Bacchic army,  
high as a kite on you  
and dancing all night for the great steward Bacchus.

(Enter a Soldier, one of Creon's party.)

SOLDIER

Neighbors of Cadmus, members of the house of Amphion,  
there is nothing stable in the life of man  
that I could point to, whether in censure or in praise.  
For Fate stands up and Fate knocks down again  
the lucky and the unlucky forever,  
and there is no prophet who can see the present.  
For Creon was to be envied once, or so I thought:  
Saving the Cadmean country from its foes,  
receiving of his land unbounded sovereignty,  
he ruled, blooming with the first fresh growth of noble children.  
Now he has lost it all. For when a man  
gives up his pleasures, I don't call that living

any more, I call that being a walking corpse.  
He is, to be sure, still rich with great estate  
and matches the outlines of an emperor. But take  
the happiness away, and what is left  
isn't worth the shadow of a cloud, compared with pleasure.

ELDERS

What is this grief of kings that you come bringing us?

SOLDIER

They are dead, and the living are responsible.

ELDERS

Who was the murderer and who the victim? Speak!

SOLDIER

Haimon is dead, stained with the blood of his own blood.

ELDERS

By his own hand or that of his father?

SOLDIER

By his own hand, cursing his father for a murderer.

ELDERS

Prophet, we see how true you spoke.

SOLDIER

Knowing that this is so, you can take counsel.

(Enter Eurydice, wife of Creon.)

EURYDICE

My fellow townsmen, I heard the words  
as I was just going out to the temple of Pallas  
in order that I might bring my prayers before her.

I happened to be undoing the bolt on the door  
to open it, and the sound of evil in our house  
rang through my ears. I sank back in the arms  
of my handmaidens, dizzy and sick with fear.  
But whatever your story was, tell me again.  
I will listen like a person well versed in trouble.

SOLDIER

Dear mistress, I was there, and I will tell you  
and not leave out a single word of the truth.  
Why should I soothe you, and let you find out later  
it was a lie? The truth is the right way, always.  
I followed your husband as one of his guides  
up to the high plain, where still the pitiless  
dog-torn body of Polyneices lay.  
And there, praying to Hecate of the crossroads  
and Pluto to regard our deeds with favor,  
we bathed the holy bath, and in fresh-cut wood  
proceeded to burn what was left of him by then.  
And, having piled his grave up high with native earth,  
we headed for the girl and her stone bedside  
in the hell-hole appointed for her bridal chamber.  
From far off, someone heard a high-pitched wailing sound  
coming from the tomb of the unburied,  
and went to Master Creon to inform him.  
Coming closer and being surrounded by  
a muffled cry of despair, he groaned and let loose  
a most mournful word: Oh wretch that I am,

am I the prophet now, and do I see myself  
crawling down a harder road than any that went before?  
My child's voice is straining at me. Guards!  
Come here! Quickly! Stand around the tomb  
and look, tear away some stones from the opening  
and see if it is Haimon's voice I hear  
or if the gods have robbed me of my senses.  
We did as commanded by our disheartened leader,  
and there, in the farthest corner of the tomb,  
we saw her hanging by the neck,  
strung up on the delicate noose of a linen veil,  
with him beside her on his knees, clasping her about the middle,  
lamenting the passing of his bride below,  
his father's deeds, and his ill-fated marriage.  
Seeing him, Creon groaned in agony  
and stepped closer toward him, wailing and calling:  
Oh reckless heart, what have you done? What was  
your mind? Have you gone so far toward your own destruction?  
Come out, my child, I beg you, I pray to you on my knees.  
The son, glaring at him with eyes like animals,  
spat in his face without a word and drew  
his double-hilted sword, but missed, as his father  
fled from the spot. Then the unhappy creature,  
turning on himself in a fury, straightaway  
drove half the length of his sword into his ribs  
and fell, still conscious, into the maiden's lifeless arms

and, breathing hard, poured out on her white cheek  
a steady trickle of escaping blood.

And now they lie corpse beside corpse, having concluded  
their ghastly marriage in the house of Hades,  
and shown to all mankind by how great a margin  
the worst evil that falls on men is their own folly.

(Eurydice, without answering, turns and exits into the palace.)

ELDERS

What do you make of that? The woman turns  
and goes again, without a word for better or worse.

SOLDIER

I too am astonished, but feed on the hope  
that, hearing the doom of her child, she thinks it unworthy  
to weep before the town, but rather under her roof  
will set the grief before her slaves, to be mourned in private.  
She knows the public mind too well to be indiscreet.

ELDERS

I don't know, but for my part too much silence  
hangs just as heavy as too loud a cry.

SOLDIER

Well, we shall know if she has something hidden  
in the wild secrecy of her impassioned heart  
by going into the house. For you speak well:  
there is a heavy weight in too much silence. (Exit into palace.)

(Enter Creon with attendants, carrying Haimon's body on a stretcher.)

ELDERS

And now our ruler himself is here,  
bearing hard evidence in hand,  
if we may say so, that no other's  
fault destroyed him, but he himself fell.

CREON

Oh senseless senses and the falls they take,  
rock-hard and lethal!  
What do they see now? Murderers and victims,  
all of our own kind.  
Oh the woe of my own fatal misadvice.  
Ah, young child and fresh death,  
Help me!  
You died, you went away!  
And all my fault, and none of yours.

ELDERS

It looks as if you have learned the truth too late.

CREON

I have terribly learned. Some god or other  
struck my head with a heavy weight, and shook me,  
and hurled me down the road of savagery,  
pulling down and trampling on my joy.  
Oh bitter fruits of fruitless human labor!

SOLDIER (returning from the palace)

O ruler with much in hand and more to come,  
as you come bearing evil in hand, so evil  
is waiting to greet you in your house as well.

CREON

And now what is this evil worse than evil?

SOLDIER

A lady has died, true mother of this dead man,  
in despair, of blows just struck this very instant.

CREON

Oh!

O insatiable shores of Hades,  
why do you kill me?  
O bringer of bad news and pain,  
what are you shrieking in my ear?  
Have mercy! You have killed a dead man over again.  
What are you saying, child? What is the news?  
Another woman's bloodshed to be added  
to my destruction?

ELDERS

You shall see. They are bringing her from the women's quarters.  
(The body of Eurydice is brought out.)

CREON

Oh no!  
Another doom before my wretched eyes.  
What now? What further death is waiting for me?  
Just as I bring my son here in my hands,  
oh! another body lies before me.  
Oh wretched mother, miserable son!

SOLDIER

She, with a sharpened sword, at the family altar,  
released the light from her eyes, bemoaning first  
the well-known fate of Megareus who died before,  
then that of her son, and finally cursing you  
for your evil deeds, the deeds of a childkiller.

CREON

Aah !

I leap with fear! Why doesn't someone  
take a double-edged sword and slice me down the front?  
Oh! I am miserable,  
I am saturated with miserable pain.

SOLDIER

With her last words she blamed you as being guilty  
of both those deaths, the former one and this one.

CREON

How did she spill her blood?

SOLDIER

Striking below the liver with her own hand,  
so as to feel the sharp sufferings of her child.

CREON

Oh woe! The guilt of this will never  
be laid to anyone's account but mine.  
For I killed you. I did! Oh misery!  
I did, that is the truth. Guards,  
come take me quickly, take me out of the way,  
a man no more than nobody at all.

ELDERS

Yes, that is good advice in a bad time.  
Best not to dwell on the evil at your feet.

CREON

Come, let him come,  
let him show himself, Death, the sweetest in my eyes,  
bringing with him my last best day,  
the final one. Oh come, let him come:  
Let there be no more days for me to see.

ELDERS

That is the future. Something must be made  
of the present. The future rests with those who ordain it.

CREON

But what I speak now is my earnest prayer.

ELDERS

Don't pray any more. No mortal can escape  
an evil stroke of luck that is decreed for him.

CREON

Please take this useless man out of the way,  
who killed you, my child, without intending to,  
and you, my wife, as well, wretch that I am.  
And now where to look, which way to lean? I touch things  
and they go crooked in my hand, while on my head  
a hard pain to bear is driving down.

ELDERS

Happiness is our crown,  
wisdom our constitution.  
What the gods command,  
no mortal can defy.  
Our mighty words bring down  
their mighty retribution  
and teach a man to think  
as his years go by.

END