

# **SOPHOCLES**

## **ANTIGONE**

**A Translation  
by  
David Wulstan Myatt**

## Preface

The main aims of the present translation are to provide an accurate and poetic rendering in a style suitable for both reading and dramatic performance, and enable readers without a knowledge of ancient Greek to understand why Greek drama has been highly regarded for thousands of years. As often with Sophocles and Aeschylus, it is the Choral Odes which we most often admire and quote, as in:

By Cyanaei of the two-fold sea  
Are the Bosphorus shores  
And Thracian Salmydessus  
Where Ares, dwelling close by the citadel,  
Beheld the two sons of Phineas  
Blinded by ruinous wounds  
Dealt by that savage second wife -  
A blinding of orbs the seeing of which brought vengeance -  
By sticking at them with the points  
Of her weaver's spindle, blood staining her hands.

Antigone,  
v.966f

The layout of the translation generally follows the line structure of the Greek, although for grammatical and dramatic reasons I have sometimes rendered one line of Greek as two English ones, and occasionally written one English line for two Greek ones. The numbers in the margin refer to the Greek text and are given for guidance.

The text used is that of R.D. Dawe [*Sophoclis Tragoedia, Tom.II, Teubner, 1985*] although in a few places I have used other readings.

DW Myatt  
1990  
(Revised 1994)

## Introduction

The 'Antigone' of Sophocles - which follows his 'Oedipus the King' and 'Oedipus at Colonus' - seems, at first glance, to be concerned with the conflict between Antigone, the daughter of Oedipus, and Creon, the new ruler of the community at Thebes, who was the brother of Jocasta, the mother and wife of Oedipus.

Polynices and Eteocles, the two sons of Oedipus (and thus the brothers of Antigone, and her sister, Ismene), had quarrelled with Polynices leaving Thebes and returning with an attacking force which he hoped would take the fortified citadel, defended by Eteocles. In the ensuing battle, Polynices and Eteocles fought and killed each other, with the attackers routed and forced to flee.

One of Creon's first edicts, as ruler of Thebes, is to forbid anyone to bury or mourn for Polynices. This edict goes against the established custom which permitted those foes fallen in battle to be honoured by their relatives with the customary rites and then buried.

Antigone defies this edict even though she knows her disobedience will mean her own death. She believes that the ancient customs, given by the gods and which thus honour the gods, have priority over any edict or law made by a mortal, and that thus it is her duty to observe these customs.

The reality, however, is that the 'Antigone' is not a tragedy concerned with individual characters, with their motivations, feelings, ideas and so on. It is not, for instance, a drama about a conflict between two different personalities - Antigone and Creon - both of whom are self-willed and determined.

Rather, this tragedy deals with the relation between mortals and gods. The work is an exploration and explanation of the workings of the cosmos, and the answers given express the distinctive ancient Greek 'outlook' or ethos. This ethos is pagan, and its essence may be said to be that there are limits to human behaviour; that some conduct is wise, some conduct is unwise. Unwise conduct invites retribution by the gods: it can and often does result in personal misfortune, in bad luck.

This outlook does not therefore involve monotheistic notions like an abstract "good" and "evil". The Greeks strove to emulate a human ideal, and, through the pursuit of *arête*, to emulate and celebrate the best. Their ideals or 'archetypes' were those considered to be the most heroic, the most beautiful, the most excellent, individuals of their communities. But in their pursuit of this excellence they were careful not to "overstep the mark", to be excessive, to commit 'hubris', or 'insolence' toward the gods. Such insolence was a violation of the customs which created and maintained the warrior communities, with these customs being regarded as given by the gods. By honouring these customs, the gods themselves were honoured and the very fabric of the

communities maintained. Thus, a noble human balance was maintained.

Of course, there were times of excess, as there were individuals who were excessive. But it was recognized that such excesses were unwise, for they would, sooner or later, be paid for. In effect, this outlook or ethos was that of individuals aware of the power of Fate, of the gods, and created and maintained a certain personal character evident whenever one reads Homer, Sophocles, Aeschylus, and other Greek writers, or views any Greek sculpture or painting. The essentially archetypal Greek man, for instance, was an intelligent, reasoning, proud, vigorous, warrior who for the most part respected the gods, who believed in prophetic oracles, and who honoured the customs of their ancestors. Fundamentally, such a person was human, able to enjoy life and its pleasures, but aware (from personal experience) of death, suffering, the power of Fate and of the gods.

What many of us admire so much about the ancient Greeks was this balance between a pagan joy and enthusiasm, and an understanding and acceptance of Fate, of the power of the gods, and in the rightly-famed Choral Ode of the Antigone (vv. 332ff ) Sophocles calls such a man the "thinking warrior", the all-resourceful one who, however, was still mindful that their good fortune, their health, their victories, and their life, depended on the gods.

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*Characters:*

Antigone

Ismene

Chorus of Theban Elders

Creon

A Watchman

Haemon

Tiresias

A Messenger

Eurydice

*Scene:* Before the wealthy dwelling of Creon at Thebes

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## **Antigone**

*[ Antigone and Ismene enter ]*

### **Antigone**

Ismene, my own sister by blood,  
Do you see how Zeus fulfills in us  
While we live the woes of Oedipus?  
There is no pain, no affliction, no shame  
Nor dishonour that is not present  
Among your suffering and mine.

And what of this new proclamation  
By the General to all the people?  
Have you heard - and know what it means?  
Or do you not understand how the suffering  
Of our foe now comes to our clan?

### **Ismene**

I have heard of nothing told of our folk, Antigone,  
Whether grievous or good since we two  
Lost our two brothers killed in one day

By their own two hands.

And since the Argive army fled this same night

I have heard nothing to give me more sorrow or joy.

### **Antigone**

Such was my thought and thus I summoned you

Beyond the courtyard gate so only you can hear this.

### **Ismene**

20 What is it? For I see you colour changed.

### **Antigone**

It is that Creon has given burial honour

To only one of our brothers, leaving the other dishonoured!

Eteocles, it is reported, has with rightful justice

Been concealed in earth to thus be given tribute

By the dead below. But pitiful is the death of Polynices

For by royal decree no one may cover him,

Lament his death or weep

But must leave him unburied as a welcome feast

For carrion birds to eat as they will.

Such, they say, is the proclamation of Creon "*the noble*"

For you and me. For me! And soon shall he be here

To proclaim this directly to those who have not heard.

He does not hold this as of no worth

Since whosoever disobeys the edict  
Shall - by a public stoning in the citadel - be murdered!

Thus things are - and now you shall swiftly show  
If you are noble or will debase the race that gave you birth!

**Ismene**

But what, my grieving sister, can I do  
40 To loosen or make the knot?

**Antigone**

Will you work with me to do the deed?

**Ismene**

To attempt what? Where is your thought leading?

**Antigone**

With your hand help me raise the corpse.

**Ismene**

You intend to bury him though our folk forbid it?

**Antigone**

He is mine, as yours - though you wish he was not:  
*I shall never betray a brother.*

**Ismene**

How reckless, when Creon has spoken against it!

**Antigone**

He cannot keep me from my own!

**Ismene**

Have thought, sister, of how our father,  
Dishonoured and abhorred, was destroyed:  
He convicted himself of wrong and by his own hands  
With his own act struck out both his eyes.  
Then his mother and wife - two names for one -  
With a coiled rope made a failure of her life.  
And third - our two brothers in one day  
Slaughtered themselves when their own hands  
Were raised each against their kin.

Consider now that we alone remain -  
Pitifully shall we perish if we defy the decree  
60 Or the power of our King.  
Reflect that we are women, not disposed  
By our nature to strive against men -  
For the stronger rule, and therefore we should listen  
To such orders, and those that are worse.



I thus ask the pardon of those below  
Since in these things I have no power  
And must therefore obey those in authority.  
To be excessive is unwise.

### **Antigone**

No more shall I exhort you, and even if another day  
You wished it, I would not welcome your sharing  
In the deed! Be as you are; as for me, I shall bury him  
Since it is beautiful to die doing such a thing:  
I shall lie by he whom I love who loves me,  
I - the villain sanctioned by the gods. For I have  
More seasons to spend pleasing those below  
Than those here since I shall lie there forever.  
But if you deem it, then dishonour  
What the gods themselves honour.

### **Ismene**

I do not dishonour them: I have no strength  
And cannot act against the folk.

### **Antigone**

80 So you say; I shall go alone to raise  
A burial mound over my beloved brother.

**Ismene**

You unhappy woman! I fear for you.

**Antigone**

Have no anxiety for me. Follow your own Destiny.

**Ismene**

If you must - then do not announce the deed  
But keep it secret, as I shall.

**Antigone**

No, announce it! I shall detest you more  
If you keep silent and do not proclaim it to all.

**Ismene**

A hot heart you have for cold things.

**Antigone**

I appease those whom it is necessary to please.

**Ismene**

Indeed, if it can be done - but your desire is impossible.

**Antigone**

If so, I shall stop only when strength fails.

**Ismene**

But to begin a hopeless quest is not cunning.

**Antigone**

Do not speak so, or you will become my foe  
And then, justly, the lasting foe of the dead.  
Now leave me to my 'mistaken' counsel  
For I shall suffer nothing as terrible  
As a dishonourable death if I should die.

**Ismene**

Go then, if resolved: but know that although foolish,  
Those who love you will love you still.

*[Exit Antigone and Ismene;*

*Enter Chorus ]*

**Chorus**

Ray of the sun, most beautiful light  
Ever to shine upon seven-Gated Thebes -  
As a golden eye opening over Dirce's streams  
Have you revealed how the white-shielded Argive warrior

In full armour

Swiftly fled with bridle whistling.

Against our soil quarrelling Polynices

Came forth

Shrilly screaming

As an eagle soaring over our land

On wings white like snow;

With many weapons

And helmet of horse-hair crest

He lingered over roofs - blood-seeking and gaping wide -

To circle with spears the seven gates:

But then was gone

Before his jaws were stained by our blood

Or the pine-fire torches burnt the circle of our towers

Because the clash of Ares sounded against him

Since the dragon he found was a difficult foe

To subdue!

For Zeus greatly hates the over-boasting tongue

And watched them gushing forth -

Their gold clanging in pride -

Before He hurled the fire that He holds

At he shouting victory

As he rushed up to those posts

That were his prize!

Swaying then, he fell to beat against earth -

This fire-bearer who with madness

Rushed in Bacchic frenzy

To breathe against us winds of hate.

Thus, what he wished, was not

140 While to the others great Ares with vigour

Delivered his blows.

Their seven Chiefs were each at our seven gates opposed,

And forced to leave their bronze

As offerings to Zeus, router-of-foes:

Save for those two unhappy ones born

Of the same mother and father

Who levelled their spears for the double-kill

One against the other

To share then the same dying.

Yet since Nike - She giving glory - has come

To Thebes of the many chariots, adding joy to our joy,

Let the battles become forgotten

As there is the circle-of-the-dance all night

In all the Temples of the gods which Bacchus -

Shaker of the ground that is Thebes - shall lead!

*[Enter Creon]*

But now comes the Lord of this land,

Creon - son of Menoeceus - the new Commander

Whose new fate is given by the gods:

To where is he rowing

And why this special calling of Elders to assemble

By sending proclamation to them all?

### **Creon**

Men - our citadel which the gods greatly shook with storm

Has, by them, been made secure again.

Out of everyone I chose you, sending my escort

To bring you alone here because primarily you I know

Respected always the authority of the throne of Laius -

And also because when Oedipus raised up our clan,

As well as after his sons had died, your thinking was unchanged.

Now since through their two fates those two in one day

Were each struck down by their own hand and became thus defiled,

It is I who now possess the power and the throne

Because nearest in kin to those who were killed.

Although it is difficult to learn the soul, spirit or judgement

Of any man until his leadership and his laws

Have been seen because experienced -

I, for myself, believe now as before

That whoever, in ruling a whole clan,

Does not give noble counsel

Because some fear keeps his tongue still,

Is the vilest person of all,

Just as I deem those who consider some friend  
Before their own fatherland to be worthless.  
For I - and in this I invoke Zeus, the All-seeing -  
Would not keep myself from speaking should our people  
Move from safety toward some harm.  
Neither would I have as friend a man hostile  
To my soil since I know that it is she  
Who preserves us like a ship uncapsized  
Allowing us thus to have friends.

Thus shall I by such customs nourish this clan -  
And, as kin of these, I have made a proclamation  
To the people concerning the sons of Oedipus.  
Eteocles, who fought for his people and who died  
The most valiant warrior of them all,  
Shall be covered in a cairn and given  
All rites as befits the valiant who have died.  
But as for his blood-kin, called Polynices -  
He who returned from exile to seek  
200 To utterly destroy with fire  
The race of his ancestors, his gods and his clan,  
Who wanted to feast upon kindred blood  
And enslave what remained of his clan -  
As for him, it has been proclaimed to the clan  
That there shall be no cairn, no honours  
As due to the dead, no lamentation:

He shall be left unburied for all to watch  
The corpse mutilated and eaten by carrion-birds and by dogs!

Such is my judgement, for I shall never  
Honour the ignoble nor place them before the just:  
Yet whoever is friendly toward the clan I shall esteem  
While they live, and when they are dead.

**Chorus**

It is your delight, son of Menoeceus, so to deal  
With the friend and foe of our clan  
Since your will is surely law for all:  
Both the dead, and we who live.

**Creon**

Be then watchmen for my commands.

**Chorus**

Ask someone younger to bear that task.

**Creon**

Others are already watching the corpse.

**Chorus**

What other command of yours, then, is for us?



**Creon**

Not to agree with those who would disobey.

**Chorus**

Only a fool would love death.

**Creon**

Such indeed is the reward - but hope  
Of profit often drives men to ruin.

*[Enter Watchman]*

**Watchman**

Master - I shall not speak of how I swiftly  
And panting reached here on nimble feet,  
For many were the thoughts I had to stop me  
And turn me round in circling paths.  
My psyche spoke to me saying many things:  
'Unhappy one, why do you go to where you will be punished?'  
'Why, you wretch, do you stop? For if Creon learns  
Of this from another man you will surely suffer pain.'

In turning these around, I could not hasten  
But slowly lingered, making the short path long.  
Yet at last victory came to my coming here to you  
For although what I announce may be nothing,

I shall speak it, since I am seized by the belief  
That I can suffer only what my fate decrees.

**Creon**

What is it that has made you lose your courage?

**Watchman**

I want, first, to tell of myself -  
Since I did not do the deed nor see who did  
240 It is not just for me to suffer for it.

**Creon**

You aim well after barricading yourself by circling around  
The deed - revealing you have something strange to tell.

**Watchman**

Danger brings much delay.

**Creon**

So deliver what it is - then go.

**Watchman**

Then I shall speak it - just now the corpse  
Was covered by someone, since gone, for dry dust

Moistened the flesh, giving thus the necessary rites.

### **Creon**

Of what are you telling? For what man would risk this?

### **Watchman**

I did not see - and there were no cuts  
Of an axe, no soil thrown out. The earth  
Was hard and dry, unbroken by the travelling wheels  
Of a cart, for this workman left no marks.

When the first watchman of the day showed us,  
It was a distressing wonder for us all  
For we could not see the body - yet there was no cairn  
Only a covering of dust as if done to escape the disgrace.  
There were no signs of wild animals or of dogs  
Being there - nor of their tearing  
And, loudly, bad words went from one of us to another  
260 With guard accusing guard and with blows  
To end it, for there was no one to restrain us:  
Someone had done it, yet each of us was clear  
In turn that they had not, with no one convicted.  
We were willing to hold hot iron in our hands,  
To walk into fire, to before the gods take oath  
That we did not do the deed, nor consult before with  
Or help those who did perform it.

At last, when our seeking came to nothing  
One of us in speaking made us all lower our heads  
Toward the ground in fear since none of us  
Could speak against it nor say how we would stay  
Healthy if we agreed. He said we should not  
Conceal it but must bring an account to you.  
We, on this, agreed and by the casting of lots  
It was my unhappy fate to be condemned to that joy.  
Thus, as unwilling as you are to see me I approached here  
Since no one is pleased by the messenger heralding ill.

### **Chorus**

Master - from the first I considered  
That this deed might be the work of the gods.

### **Creon**

280 Cease your words or I shall become glutted with wrath  
And you revealed as both stupid and old!  
I cannot endure your words when you speak  
Of our guardian gods caring about this corpse!  
Did they esteem him as beneficent  
And thus bury him? - he who came to set on fire  
Their spacious Temples, their votive offerings, their land,  
And to break their customs! Have you beheld

The gods honouring the bad? There is no such thing!

Yet just now there were among our clan

Men hostile to my edict who in secret whispered

Against me, rearing their heads instead of keeping their necks

Under the yoke as and when I deem it fitting.

For, indeed, I well understand it is they who hired

These others and by such means caused this deed to be done:

For, among men, it is silver as coins

That brings forth base customs - that thing ravages clans,

Drives men from their homes, trains honest mortals well

How to turn from reason and practice dishonest deeds!

It instructs men in cunning arts, making them

To know all kinds of acts of destruction.

Yet all hirelings

Finally pay by having to yield to what is right.

*[Creon turns to speak to the Watchman]*

Since I, at least, still hold Zeus in awe,

Then understand this - and I speak an oath -

If you do not discover he who by his own hands

Did this burial and reveal him before my own eyes,

Then not even Hades by itself will suffice for you

For first you will be strung up alive

Until you reveal your insolence -

This will be a lesson as to where profit may be obtained

For such a plundering will have taught you

Not to love gain from wherever it comes.

And it will be seen that from such dishonourable receiving  
More are injured than are safe.

**Watchman**

Can I speak - or may I turn and go?

**Creon**

Have you not seen how your words pain me?

**Watchman**

Where is your wound - in your ears, or in your soul?

**Creon**

Do you instruct me as to how I am injured?

**Watchman**

The doer assaults your reason - I, your ears.

**Creon**

It is clear that you grew to be a babbler.

**Watchman**

Even if so, I did not do this deed.

**Creon**

You did: and abandoned your soul for silver!

**Watchman**

How fearful - to assume when such assumption is false!

**Creon**

What elegant opinions you have! But if you do not reveal  
To me those who did it, you will be gushing forth  
That cowardly gains injure those who make them!

*[Exit Creon]*

**Watchman**

Before all may he be discovered - but whether caught  
Or not, it is fate which chooses.  
Whatever, I shall not come here again  
For I beyond my hope and reason am kept safe  
And for this have a duty to give to the gods many favours.

*[Exit Watchman]*

**Chorus**

There exists much that is strange, yet nothing  
Has more strangeness than we human beings:

For this being crosses the gray sea of Winter  
Against the wind, through the howling sea swell,  
And the oldest of gods, ageless Earth -  
She the inexhaustible -  
He wearies, turning the soil year after year  
By the plough using the offspring of horses.

He snares and captures the careless race of birds,  
The tribes of wild beasts, the natives of the sea,  
In the woven coils of his nets -  
This thinking warrior: he who by his skill rules over  
The wild beasts of the open land and the hills,  
And who places a yoke around the hairy neck  
Of the horse, taming it - and the vigorous mountain bull.

His voice, his swift thought,  
The raising and ordering of towns:  
How to build against the ill-winds of the open air  
And escape the arrows of storm-rain -  
All these things he taught himself,  
He the all-resourceful  
From whom there is nothing he does not meet  
Without resources - except Hades  
From which even he cannot contrive an escape  
Although from unconquered disease  
He plans his refuge.



365 Beyond his own hopes, his cunning  
In inventive arts - he who arrives  
Now with dishonour, then with chivalry:  
Yet, by fulfilling his duties to the soil,  
His oaths to the customs given by the gods,  
Noble is his clan although clan-less is he who dares  
To dwell where and with whom he please -  
Never shall any who do this  
Come to my hearth or I share their judgement.

*[Enter Antigone and Watchman]*

Now this sign from the god  
I cannot speak against  
For I see that the girl brought here  
Is Antigone.  
Unfortunate daughter of Oedipus the unfortunate -  
What is this?  
Can it be that you are brought here  
For being faithless to the Chief's law -  
Caught in an act lacking reason?

**Watchman**

Here is the one who did the deed:  
We captured her burying him. But where is Creon?

## **Chorus**

From his dwelling he now fittingly arrives.

*[Enter Creon]*

## **Creon**

What is it that makes my arrival fortunate?

## **Watchman**

Master - we mortals should never swear not to do anything  
For an advance in thought cheats our former judgement:  
I might have vowed for my desire to return to be weak  
Because of your threats - that tempest I went through before.  
Yet since that delight which is beyond hope is,  
In extent, beyond other pleasures,  
I - despite taking oath - have come here,  
Leading this maiden whom I captured giving rites  
Of burial. There was then no need to cast and draw lots  
For this chance was mine and mine alone.

So now, Master, take hold of her yourself  
And examine and question her according to your will.  
Thus it is fitting that I go  
400 Completely free of these troubles.

**Creon**

This maiden you lead - how and where was she caught?

**Watchman**

Burying that man. Now all by you is known.

**Creon**

Do you clearly hear what your words announce?

**Watchman**

I saw her giving forbidden burial rites to that corpse.

Are these words of mine plain and clear?

**Creon**

Was she seen and seized doing the deed?

**Watchman**

Thus it was: when I returned there

After those terrible threats you made against us,

All the dust covering the corpse we swept away

To leave the putrid body bare while we sat,

Wind-sheltered, by the top of the hill

To escape the hurling smell.

We kept awake by shaking and loud threats

Those men who did not attend to their work,  
And long this continued until Helios with his radiant circle  
Had established himself in middle-sky, burning us.  
Then suddenly from the earth as a thunderbolt through air  
A whirlwind came afflicting the heavens:  
Filling the plain, beating all the leaves  
420 From the trees of the fields and vomiting them high in the sky  
While we closed our eyes against this sickness sent by a god.  
And when after much waiting our deliverance came,  
We saw this girl who loudly wailed  
With the sharp shrill voice of a bird when it beholds  
There is nothing lying in the empty nest.

So it was that she on seeing the corpse bare  
Loudly wailed and made bad wishes  
Against those who had done that deed.  
Then suddenly she with her hands brought dry dust  
And raised a well-crafted bronze ewer to honour  
The corpse with the three-fold libation.  
Seeing this, we rushed down to trap her  
But she was not surprised and we accused her  
Of that act and the one before. She did not deny it -  
And this pleased me, yet also gave me pain,  
For while it is pleasing to escape suffering oneself  
It is painful to bring suffering to a member of one's folk.  
Yet all such things are for me less important

440 Than my own escape and survival.

**Creon**

You there - inclining your head to the ground -

Do you affirm or do you deny doing these things?

**Antigone**

I did them - and do not deny it!

**Creon**

*[To Watchman:]*

As for you, you can convey yourself

Where you will, free from the burden of blame.

*[Exit Watchman]*

Now, not at great length but briefly, tell me

If you knew of the proclamation made in this case?

**Antigone**

Certainly I knew - it was clear.

**Creon**

So even then you dared to violate these laws?

## **Antigone**

It was not Zeus who proclaimed them to me,  
Nor did she who dwells with the gods below - the goddess, Judgement -  
Lay down for us mortals such laws as those.  
Neither did I suppose that your edicts  
Had so much strength that you, who die,  
Could out-run the unwritten and unchanging  
Customs of the gods: for the life of these things  
Is not only of yesterday or today, but eternal,  
No one remembering their birth.

I did not seek - because I feared any man's pride -  
To be punished by the gods for breaking their laws:  
For I clearly saw I would die even before your proclamation.  
That my death is now sooner, I say is a gain  
Since how can he who lives among so many cowards as I  
Not find a gain in dying?  
There is thus for me no sorrow in this  
My destined fate. Yet had I left the corpse  
Of my own mother's son unburied  
Then I would have sorrow, as I have no sorrow now!

And if you believe I from stupidity performed the deed  
Then it is the stupid exposing his own stupidity!

## **Chorus**

Clear it is that this child is the savage offspring  
Of a savage father - suffering does not bend her.

## **Creon**

It is known that those too hardened in their thinking  
Assuredly fall, for it is the strongest iron,  
Baked hard by fire, that is often seen to suddenly shatter,  
And a small bridle restrains the angry horse.  
It is not allowed for a servant to possess pride.

480 She is well-practised in insolence, in going beyond  
The prescribed laws - for after the first, her further  
Insolence was to boast of it, and laugh!  
Now she would be a man, and I would not  
Were she to be master in this and uninjured:  
For even were she a child of my sister  
Or closer in blood than all in my home -  
Who are bound whole by Zeus -  
She and her sister would not escape their miserable fate  
For I indeed accuse her as well of sharing  
In the planning of this burial.

Summon her here! For just now I saw her inside,  
Frenzied and not possessing any judgement.  
For often the thoughts of those desiring dark deeds

Become revealed before such deeds are done.  
And, further, I hate those who when caught  
Seek to beautify their baseness and their deeds.

**Antigone**

Do you will more than herding me to my slaughter?

**Creon**

Nothing more - when I have that, it is over.

**Antigone**

Then why delay? Your speech does not please me  
500 Nor can ever please me, just as my own is displeasing to you.  
For what greater renown could I obtain  
Than the renown gained by giving burial to my own brother?  
By all these men would this be said  
Were their tongues not stopped through fear.  
But a King has much wealth  
And can speak and act as he himself desires.

**Creon**

You alone of all the Cadmeans see this.



**Antigone**

They see: but you stop their mouths from opening.

**Creon**

But are you not ashamed because alone in such thinking?

**Antigone**

There is no shame in honouring womb-kin.

**Creon**

Yet was it not your brother who was killed by the hostile side?

**Antigone**

A brother, born of my mother and father.

**Creon**

How then by being dis-honourable to him can you show him respect?

**Antigone**

He who is dead and below would not bear witness to that!

**Creon**

He will when your respect is his dis-honour.

**Antigone**

It was not a slave, but a brother who died.

**Creon**

He died trying to rape this land which the other one protected!

**Antigone**

Yet Hades longs for these rites.

**Creon**

520 But what the decent inherit is not the same as what is given to the bad.

**Antigone**

Who can see if such things are acceptable to those below us?

**Creon**

Even in death an enemy is never a friend.

**Creon**

I came forth not to return hate but to love friends.

**Creon**

Then when you go into earth, love them, if love them you must.

I, while living, will not be commanded by a woman.

*[Enter Ismene]*

### **Chorus**

Certain it is that here before the door is Ismene  
A cloud above her eyes casting down tears in love  
For her sister, drop by drop  
To moisten her beauty of face  
And shadow her blood-red cheeks.

### **Creon**

You! - who stayed lurking like a snake in my home  
Secretly sucking at me for I did not see  
I was feeding two destructions and subverters  
From my throne -  
Tell me, do you say you shared in this burial  
Or will you make oath and say you did not know?

### **Ismene**

I did the deed - if she agrees -  
And share with her the burden and the blame.

### **Antigone**

But it is not fair to allow you this  
Since you did not desire it and I gave you no share.

**Ismene**

540 Now maledictions assail you, I would be ashamed  
Not to sail with you toward misfortune.

**Antigone**

Of that act, Hades and those below are witness:  
As to words, I do not love those who care for them.

**Ismene**

Sister, do not dishonour me  
But let me die with you and so purify his death.

**Antigone**

My death is not for sharing; do not claim to have touched  
What you have not - my dying is sufficiency itself.

**Ismene**

What life have I to love without you?

**Antigone**

Ask Creon since you care for him.

**Ismene**

Why hurt me when it does not profit you?

**Antigone**

If I laugh, it is from pain that I laugh.

**Ismene**

How then can I help you?

**Antigone**

Save yourself - I shall not blame you for escaping.

**Ismene**

This hurts me! And I then to be deprived of your fate?

**Antigone**

You chose life: I, my dying.

**Ismene**

Yet I did not keep silent but spoke.

**Antigone**

To some, your intentions were right; to others, mine.

**Ismene**

Why, then, is the fault both yours and mine?

**Antigone**

Be trusting; you live, but my psyche long ago  
560 Perished that I might aid the dead.

**Creon**

In this, one child now reveals herself without reason  
While the other has been without from her beginning.

**Ismene**

So it is, sir, that sometimes such reason as grows  
Is displaced when misfortunes arise.

**Creon**

Yours was, when you ignobly arose to aid the ignoble.

**Ismene**

How would I, alone, live without her?

**Creon**

Do not speak of her as being here - she is nothing!

**Ismene**

Will you then slay her betrothed to your son?

**Creon**

There are other furrows for him to plant his plough in.

**Ismene**

570 But for them it was so fitting.

**Creon**

I would detest my son having an ignoble wife!

**Ismene**

Dear Haemon - your father dishonours you!

**Creon**

You annoy me - you and this marriage!

**Ismene**

Would you deprive your son of his wife?

**Creon**

It is Hades who will relieve me of that wedding.

**Ismene**

So it seems, then, that she will die.

## **Creon**

So it is - by both you and I. No more delay now!

You slaves - take them within!

For they now must be women and thus be constrained.

Even the bold flee when they behold Hades

Very close to their life.

*[Exit Antigone and Ismene]*

## **Chorus**

Favoured by a divinity are those never tasting badness

Since when a clan is shaken by the gods

There is no misfortune that is missed for generations to come

As when the heavy-breathing sea of Thrace attacks

The deep darkness to roll from the bottom

The black sands

590 And there are sighs and shouts at the ill-winds

As the sea breaks against and over-runs the shore.

I watch those ancient sufferings of the clan of Labdacus

Fall upon the suffering of those dead -

Generation after generation captive

Since a god casts them down,

Giving no release.

The light cast upon the last root of the family of Oedipus



Has become dimmed by the red dust of the gods below,  
By speech lacking understanding  
And by frenzied judgements.

Zeus - what mortal can transgress and hold back your strength  
Which even sleep, subduer of all, cannot seize  
Nor even the inexhaustible months of the gods;  
You, who are master of gleaming radiant Olympus!  
And so now, as thereafter and in the past, this custom prevails:  
In mortal life, there is no prosperity without misfortune.

Far-ranging hope delights many mortals  
While many are tricked because deprived  
Of their judgement by desires -  
For what is to come, is not seen,  
Until the foot is burnt  
In the heat of the fire.

620 And there is wisdom in this renowned saying:  
Sometimes the bad has appearance of nobility  
To those whose reasoning is damaged by the god,  
And only for a short season is there exemption  
From misfortune.

But here is Haemon, youngest and last of your sons:  
Is he in grief at the fate of the nubile maiden,  
Antigone, promised to him in marriage  
And in great anguish because cheated

Out of that wedding?

*[Enter Haemon]*

**Creon**

Soon we will see - and more than some prophet would have done.

My son, have you heard of that decision that brings to an end

Your promised bride, and so come in rage at your father -

Or, whatsoever that I do, are we still friends?

**Haemon**

You are my father and your opinions

Possess worth and correctly guide me.

For me, no wedding is of greater value

Than the noble lead you give.

**Creon**

640 Yes, my son, you must be so directed by your heart

And in all things stand behind your father's opinion.

It is for this that a man prays to have his offspring grow

Hearing and obeying him in his home:

That they treat his enemies as worthless

While esteeming his friends as they do his father.

But of those who sow unprofitable children,

You can only say that they have breed toil for themselves

And provided their enemies with much laughter.

Do not, my son, cast out your reason  
For the pleasures of a woman,  
For embraces become cold when a bad woman  
Is your bed-partner:  
And a bad relative is a large festering wound.  
Now, with loathing, spit on that girl  
And let her marry someone in Hades!  
Since, from all of our folk she alone  
I have caught in visible disobedience,  
I will not show myself false to these folk -  
Thus, I shall put her to death.

So let her chant to Zeus, guardian of kinsfolk!  
Were I to nourish disorder in my own blood-relations  
Then I would most certainly be doing so within our clan.  
Any man who is honest within his own family  
Will, by the folk, be seen to be fair -  
And whomsoever by force transgresses the customs  
And presumes to command his master  
Will never be applauded by me,  
Since those whom the folk appoint, must be obeyed  
In what is small, what is fair, and what is not.  
I have confidence that such a man  
Would nobly rule as he would be willing to be ruled  
And would, in a storm of spears, be steadfast

And stand his ground - a valiant comrade at one's side.

The worst ill is to have no leader:

It is this which destroys clans,

Which causes families to disperse,

Which makes a spear-alliance to turn and break

Just as of those who do stand firm

The greater number are saved due to obeying commands.

Therefore, we must defend the rule-givers

And never let a woman overcome us:

If we must be thrust down, it is better done by a man

680 So that we are not called weaker-than-a-woman.

### **Chorus**

To me, unless the seasons have cheated me,

Your sayings appear to be wise sayings.

### **Haemon**

Father, it is the gods who root reason in mortals

And, of all our possessions, it is the greatest.

Of your sayings, I could not, even had I the experience,

Say wherein they are not correct

Although another might, with fairness, differ.

For me, it is natural to watch, for you,

All that others say or do or blame you for:

Your eyes awe the common man  
So that they say only what you delight in hearing.  
But I have heard how under cover of darkness  
The clan grieve for this girl -  
For, of all women, she is the most undeserving  
To perish, dishonoured, for so honourable a deed:  
With her very own brother slaughtered,  
She did not leave him unburied  
To be eaten by carrion dogs or any bird.  
Does she not merit a golden honour?  
700 Such is the talk spread in secret.

For myself, there is no possession I value higher  
Than your prosperity, father:  
What, for a youngster, can have greater glory  
Than a father's prospering fame -  
Or, for a father, that of his children?  
Do not keep only a single mask for yourself  
In that what you say, and nothing else, is correct.  
For whosoever supposes that he alone is wise  
Or that his words or his nature are above all others  
Will, when split open, be revealed as empty.  
Certainly a man, clever though he be,  
Can without shame learn many things  
And so still stretch himself.  
See how beside the torrents of Winter

The trees whose branches yield are kept safe  
While those that resist are laid waste to their roots  
Just as whomever holds, taut and unyielding,  
The sail of a ship will overturn it,  
Completing the voyage with the deck downturned.

Thus, give way and so permit your anger to change.  
If I, though young, may put forth my understanding  
I would say it would be excellent if men by nature  
Knew about everything - but if not, and seldom are they  
So inclined, it is noble to learn  
From those who speak what is honourable.

### **Chorus**

Master - it is reasonable, if his words are in season,  
That you are instructed, as he has been by you. Both your words are fortunate.

### **Creon**

Is it natural that those of such an age as me  
Be taught how to reason by men of such an age as he?

### **Haemon**

It is only fair. Although I am young,  
Behold my acts not the seasons I have seen!

**Creon**

730 Can respect be given to those who work mischief?

**Haemon**

I would never entreat anyone to respect what is bad.

**Creon**

But is she not attacked by that sickness?

**Haemon**

The whole clan of Thebes deny it.

**Creon**

Is the clan to tell me what I ought to do then?

**Haemon**

Observe - you are speaking as though very young.

**Creon**

Am I then to rule this land as I deem, or as others do?

**Haemon**

It is not a clan if it is the possession of any one man.

**Creon**

It is the custom for a clan to have a master.

**Haemon**

You would make a good ruler - alone in the wilderness!

**Creon**

740 So - he is fighting for that woman!

**Haemon**

My concern is for you - so you are the woman!

**Creon**

Totally shameful - to dispute so with your father!

**Haemon**

Not when I see you missing your duty.

**Creon**

Do I err in respecting my own authority?

**Haemon**

You do not respect it when you tread on the offerings due to the gods.



**Creon**

You stain your character by coming second - to a woman!

**Haemon**

You will never find me overcome by dishonour.

**Creon**

But all your words are for that girl.

**Haemon**

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

**Creon**

750 While she lives you will never marry her.

**Haemon**

Then she will die and in dying destroy another.

**Creon**

Are you so bold that you make threats?

**Haemon**

Is it a threat to speak against hollow thoughts?

**Creon**

Suffering shall instruct you - for your own hollow reasoning!

**Haemon**

Were you not my father, I would say you could not judge things correctly.

**Creon**

You slave of a woman! Do not babble at me!

**Haemon**

You like speaking - but not hearing a reply!

**Creon**

Is that so? By Olympus know

That you will soon suffer for reviling me with insults!

760 Bring that hated thing here so that she will die

Now beside her bridegroom and before his eyes!

**Haemon**

No - do not believe that she will perish beside me

Or that you with your eyes will ever see my face again.

So, rage on then at such kinsfolk as can endure it!

*[Exit Haemon]*

**Chorus**

Master - that man, hurled by anger, has swiftly gone.

Someone of such an age as he, when injured, has a strong resolve.

**Creon**

Let him experience and understand more than other men.

But, whatever, the two girls shall not escape their fate.

**Chorus**

So you still intend to slay them both?

**Creon**

Your words are well taken. Not she whose hands are clean.

**Chorus**

What fate had you planned for the other's death?

**Creon**

She will be led to where the paths are desolate of mortals

And be concealed alive in a rock-hewn tomb

With as much food before her as is required for expiation

So that the whole clan escapes pollution.

There she may if she asks have success from dying  
By giving reverence to Hades, the only god she reveres -  
Or she will learn at last though late by this  
780 That it is useless toil to so revere Hades.

*[Exit Creon]*

### **Chorus**

Eros - unconquered in battle:

Eros - despoiler of wealth

Who at night keeps vigil by the soft lips

Of a young girl

And who widely roams over sea and land

To even the wildest dwellings!

No immortal can escape you

Nor any mortals while they live:

You possess them all with your frenzy.

Those who are fair become unfair

And are disgraced

As you wrest aside their reason -

You who now trouble these kinsmen with strife!

Passion is victorious - for a comely, clear-eyed, bride -

And this power is seated there beside the ancient lawgivers,

800 There where the goddess Aphrodite mocks us,

With no resistance.

But now, as I look there, I am carried beyond that decree  
And cannot from their source block these burgeoning tears  
As I see Antigone passing to that inner chamber  
Wherein we will all be quiet.

*[Enter Antigone]*

**Antigone**

You see me, fathers of our clan,  
Go forth on my last journey  
By the light of this sun that hereafter  
I shall not see again.  
Hades - he who makes all of us quiet -  
Leads me while I live  
To the banks of Acheron  
And there shall be no bridal songs for me  
To share in,  
No nuptial hymns in praise -  
Since I shall be bride to Acheron.

**Chorus**

With renown, and praised, you depart  
For the tomb of the dead:  
No wasting sickness struck you,

No sword of punishment was your fate;  
Instead - you who were independent of the decrees of others  
Shall, alone among mortals, descend while you live  
Down into Hades.

### **Antigone**

I have heard of the sorrowful death  
Of that Phrygian guest who was Tantalus' daughter,  
Who on the highest part of Sipylus was overpowered  
By sprouting rock clinging to her like ivy.  
There, heavy rain and snow - such are men's stories -  
Never departs as she lamenting moistens with tears  
Her brows and ridges.  
In the same way some god shall lay me down to sleep.

### **Chorus**

Yet she was a goddess, born of gods  
While you and I are mortals, born of mortals.  
So it is a great thing to perish so  
Since it will be said you are equal to the gods  
Having shared in such a fate:  
While living, and afterwards in your dying.

### **Antigone**

I am laughed at! By the gods of our fathers

840 Could this not wait - must I be insulted here in this light?

My clan! You - wealthy kinsmen;

You, springs of Dirce, and you, sacred-groved Thebes of the beautiful chariots!

I have you, at least, to bear witness

How and by what decree I go with no lamentations from my kin

To be placed in that fresh cairn

Which shall be my grave:

I, the unfortunate one,

Who shall be among neither mortals nor corpses

But instead a foreigner to the living and the dead.

### **Chorus**

You approached the boundary of boldness

And, at the high altar of the goddess, Judgement,

You, my child, heavily stumbled.

Perhaps your ordeal is retribution because of your father.

### **Antigone**

You touch that concern which pains me -

The often-ploughed lamentations made for my father

860 And the whole destiny of the famed clan of Labdacus.

That bane of a mother's bed

Where she lay in ill-fated intercourse

With her own child, my father!

From such was I, who endures, brought forth  
And now I, cursed and unwed,  
Go forth to stay with them  
Since you my brother who found your ill-fortune  
By your marriage, in your death  
Killed my being.

### **Chorus**

To honour is honourable  
But he who has authority cannot allow  
Anyone to overstep his authority:  
Your obstinate character ruined you.

### **Antigone**

Without friends, without lamentations,  
With no bridal songs am I, suffering, taken  
To what lies prepared for me.  
No more, it is decreed, shall I the unfortunate see  
The sacred eye that is the sun:  
And there are no tears for my destiny,  
No kin who lament.

*[Enter Creon]*

### **Creon**

If songs and wailings were before death



They would never stop, if it was useful to say them!  
Swiftly, lead her away! And, as I have said, enclose her  
Within her embracing cairn then leave her alone  
And desolate if necessary to die  
Or to live buried and concealed.  
We are then pure concerning this maiden.  
Whatever! - she shall be deprived of residing here on earth.

### **Antigone**

My bridal-chamber is a carved-out tomb,  
A chamber always to guard me, wherein I shall pass  
To my own, of whom the greater number have perished already -  
Received by Persephone to be among the dead.  
Last and most ill-fated of all I shall descend down  
Before my portion of living has expired.

But I have within the strong hope that this my setting out  
Will be welcome to you my father; pleasing to you  
My mother; and pleasing also to you my brother -  
900 For when death came, with my own hands  
I moistened and dressed you and poured libations  
Over your graves. Now, Polynices, it for covering your body  
That I have won such as this.

Yet, to the wise, I rightly honoured you  
Although I might not - had it been my own child

Or my husband who had died and was putrid -  
Have taken up that task against the folk.  
To what custom do I do homage in speaking thus?  
My husband dead, I might have had another  
And a child by this other man in place of the first-born  
But with my mother and father hidden in Hades  
No brother could ever come forth again.  
Such was the custom by which I honoured you,  
My own brother - but Creon believed it wrong  
And dangerously reckless:  
So now by his hands he forcibly leads me away.  
There are no nuptials in bed, no bridal songs,  
No wedding, no share in nurturing children  
920 As I pass while living to my grave and my death.

What divine decree have I transgressed?  
Shall I, the unfortunate, look again to the gods?  
What ally can be invoked  
Now I for my respect am said to be dis-respectful?  
Yet if these things are fair to the gods  
Then I will experience my mistake  
While if it is these others who are mistaken  
Then may they experience in retribution  
No greater ills than those they give to me.

**Chorus**

The same spirit, gusting stormfully, still sways  
In the same way this girl.

**Creon**

And because of that, trouble will befall  
Her guards over their slowness!

**Antigone**

This therefore brings closer  
That death!

**Creon**

I do not encourage you to believe  
That that will not be fulfilled.

**Antigone**

Community of my fathers on this Theban soil!  
You elder gods!  
No longer do they delay.

940 Behold me, you Theban lords,  
The solitary descendant of your nobility  
And how I can be treated and by what kind of man  
For so respecting honour!

*[Exit Antigone]*

### **Chorus**

So endured Danaë - for whom the light of heaven

Was bartered for a chamber wrought in bronze

And where, in that enclosing tomb,

She was shut in.

She also, my child, was of noble birth:

She to whom Zeus dispensed his wet golden seed.

But numinous is the power of destiny -

It cannot be escaped from by wealth, by combat,

By ramparts, by taking to a ship upon a black-storming sea.

Thus was the son of Dryas - he of the swift anger

And Chief of the Edonians - tamed

By Dionysus for his wrothful taunts

And confined, bound by rock,

Where in his strange frenzy

His bursting fierceness trickled from him.

He came to know the god who had touched him,

With frenzy, for his taunting tongue -

For he had sought to stop the god-possessed women

And their Bacchic fire, provoking thus

The flute-loving Muses.

By Cyanaei of the two-fold sea  
Are the Bosphorus shores  
And Thracian Salmydessus  
Where Ares, dwelling close by the citadel,  
Beheld the two sons of Phineas  
Blinded by ruinous wounds  
Dealt by that savage second wife -  
A blinding of orbs the seeing of which brought vengeance -  
By sticking at them with the points  
Of her weaver's spindle, blood staining her hands.

Anguished by this anguish they cried aloud  
980 Their misfortune - those born from a mother's unhappy marriage:  
She of the fabled seed of Erechtheus,  
Reared in faraway caves  
Amid her father's storms -  
She of Boreas, swift as horse over steep hill,  
Who, though child of a god,  
Was, my child, by those long-living Fates  
Attacked.

*[Enter Tiresias, guided by a boy]*

**Tiresias**

Theban lords, I come here sharing another's steps,  
This one seeing for us both - for the blind

Should be guided along their path.

**Creon**

Well, venerable Tiresias, what that is new brings you here?

**Tiresias**

I shall instruct you. Do oracles persuade you?

**Creon**

Never in the past have I dismissed your judgement.

**Tiresias**

And thus have you straightly steered this clan.

**Creon**

I can testify to how I have profited from you.

**Tiresias**

Know then that fate is ready to cut you down.

**Creon**

What? I shiver at your words!

**Tiresias**

Learn by hearing of these signs of my art.

Just now as at the place of augury I sat,  
1000 Where all kinds of birds gather,  
I heard voices of birds I did not know -  
A bad feverish foreign screeching -  
And sensed they were tearing at each other  
With their deadly claws:  
And the rushing of their wings left no doubt.

In awe, I went straight to rouse a blazing  
Altar-fire to burn sacrifice. But Hephaestus  
Did not seize the offering by flames.  
Instead, puss oozed from the thighs down to the embers  
To spit and smoke while the gall-bladder swelled  
To burst open and the fat covering the thighs dripped out.

Such I learnt from this boy here  
Of the sign-less divination from the failed sacrifice -  
He gives me a lead, as I give a lead to others.  
And it is your judgement that brought sickness to our clan.  
The altar, the hearths - all of them -  
Have been soiled by the suppurating food torn  
By birds and by dogs from the ill-fated son of Oedipus.

1020 Wherefore the gods do not accept our sacrificial supplications  
Nor our burnt-offerings:  
And no bird in its screeching cry gives favourable signs  
Since they have devoured the blood-soaked fat of a slain warrior.

Understand these things, my son. All mortals have in common  
That sometimes they aim wrong, and miss - but after an error  
A man is no longer luckless or thoughtless  
If he wills to cure the ill he has fallen into  
By not remaining idle:  
Obstinacy and awkwardness bring reproaches.  
Give way to the dead: do not goad those who have fallen.  
Is it courageous to kill the dead again?  
Carefully have I judged this; carefully have I spoken - for it is pleasing  
To learn from such careful words from such words  
Are profitable to you.

### **Creon**

Old man - all of you like archers shoot arrows at me as target,  
And not even by your divinations am I left  
Unassailed by you and your breed  
To whom I am the customer who buys your goods!  
Gain profits and customers, if you so design,  
By the electrum of Sardis and Indian gold  
But you shall not conceal that person in a grave.  
1040 Not even if the eagles of Zeus tear him  
For food and carry it away to Zeus' throne -  
Not even then in dread of such defilement  
Will I submit to him being buried!  
For I know well that no mortal



Has the strength to defile the gods.

Even the cleverest of mortals, old Tiresias,

Are cast down in dishonour

When they for profit grace dishonourable words with elegance.

**Tiresias**

But can any man see, or any explain -

**Creon**

What? Is this to be some common saying?

**Tiresias**

- why wise counsel is superior to all other possessions?

**Creon**

Why? I suggest lack of judgement is the greater mischief.

**Tiresias**

Your nature is full of that disease.

**Creon**

I have no desire - in answer - to contradict a prophet!

**Tiresias**

Yet you spoke of me saying false prophecies!

**Creon**

Yes - because the breed of prophets loves silver!

**Tiresias**

And that of Kings loves shameful gain!

**Creon**

Can you see that when you speak you are speaking to your master?

**Tiresias**

I see! This citadel of yours you saved because of me.

**Creon**

You are skilled in divination but love to do harm!

**Tiresias**

1060 You stir me to express what is inviolate and hidden in my heart!

**Creon**

Bring it forth! Do not speak it only for profit.

**Tiresias**

Were there any, I would not expect you to have any share of it.

## **Creon**

You will see that you cannot buy my heart!

## **Tiresias**

Know then that there will not be, for you, many more  
Loops which the swift sun will complete  
Before you see one born from your own loins a corpse  
In exchange for corpses because you have cast down  
One of those from above  
By dishonourably settling one, alive, in a tomb.  
And also because you held here from the gods below  
A corpse, bereft, profaned, because without funeral rites.  
Not you, not any of the gods above  
Can overpower him now -  
For this is outrage by you to them and shall destroy you  
Since the Furies, of Hades and the gods, will ambush you  
To catch you by those same ills.

Observe if I speak laden with silver  
For there will not be a long delay hereafter  
Before such things are visible and the men and women of your abode  
1080 Will shriek, when hatred casts into disorder all those clans  
Whose own were mangled and buried by dogs or wild beasts  
Or birds of prey carrying away a profane stench  
To those sacred clan sanctuaries.

Since you grieved me, as an archer these  
Are the sure arrows I in anger direct at your heart  
And from whose burns you cannot escape.

So, boy, take me away to my dwelling  
And let him loose his anger on those who are younger  
And nurture his thought by keeping his tongue quiet  
So he obtains better judgement  
Than the judgement he now possesses.

*[Exit Tiresias]*

### **Chorus**

My Lord, that person has left hurling fearful prophecies!  
I am certain that ever since hair - once black  
Now white - crowned me, he has never  
Given false utterances for the clan.

### **Creon**

This also I know and my heart is troubled.  
on one side, I fear to yield; on the other,  
I fear opposition and thus misfortune striking.

**Chorus**

Son of Menoeceus, you should accept good counsel.

**Creon**

What, then, do I need to do? Speak, and I shall consider it.

**Chorus**

1100 Go, and loosen the maiden from her cavern  
And build a tomb to lay within it he who lies exposed.

**Creon**

And that is your advice? You believe I should give way?

**Chorus**

Yes, my Lord, and swiftly. For those swift-footed wretches  
Of the gods cut down the misguided.

**Creon**

It is hard to give up what it is the desire of my heart to do -  
But yet I cannot fight against those forces.

**Chorus**

Go and do these things - do not turn them over to another.

## **Creon**

As I am so shall I go - now! Have follow those here,  
And those others - grasping axes in their hands -  
To rush to that place overlooking here!  
Since I have turned my opinion around  
I, who bound her, should also release her.  
I am anxious because it seems that it is best  
Throughout one's life to keep to what is ancient custom.

*[Exit Creon]*

## **Chorus**

You of the many names! Glory of the Cadmean bride  
And kin to Zeus of the roaring thunder!  
You, who enclose illustrious Italia  
And who rule over the public Eleusinian plain  
Of Deo!  
1120 Bacchus! - Whose frenzied Bacchants dwell  
In your clan-mother Thebes,  
She seeded by the savage dragon  
Near the smooth water of Ismenus!  
  
Above that two-crested rock you are glimpsed  
Through the smoke of flaming-torches -  
There where your frenzied Corycian Nymphs go,  
By Castile's Spring!

You who came from the ivy-covered hills of Nysa  
And that green shore of the many grapes  
To visit the community of Thebes  
Amid that immortal cry: E-U-A-I!

Of all the clans, ours you honour above all others -  
Your mother, stricken by lightning.  
So now, since a strong sickness overcomes  
All of our clan, pass here with your healing feet,  
Over the cliffs of Parnassus or over the Strait of Sighs!

You who dance with the fire-breathing stars,  
Who overshadows the voices of the night,  
The son born of Zeus -  
My Lord, appear! -  
With your Thyiad followers  
Who in frenzy dance through the night  
For you, their Master, Iacchus!

*[Enter Messenger]*

**Messenger**

You who reside by this dwelling of Cadmus and of Amphion,  
There is no way of mortal living  
Which I would either praise or blame,  
For frequently fate raises the unfortunate  
And brings down those of good fortune

1160 And no one can divine the actual being of mortal things.

Creon was once I believe to be envied

For he saved this land of Cadmus from those hostile to it

And guided it well: he who flourished in his nobly born children.

But now, all this is gone - for if a man betrays

What is delightful to him, I do not hold him as living

Since he is but an animated corpse.

Have an abundance of property if such is your aim:

Live in the manner of a great King;

But if they provide no pleasure, I would not obtain them

From any man for such things are as a covering of smoke

Compared to what delights.

### **Chorus**

What grief do you carry for the Chieftains here?

### **Messenger**

Death. And the dead accuse the living.

### **Chorus**

What? Who the killer? Who the slain? Speak!

### **Messenger**

Haemon has died. Bloodied by a kindred hand.



**Chorus**

Was it by his father's hand - or his own?

**Messenger**

By his own in wrath at his father for his killing.

**Chorus**

You - our prophet! How perfect was your skill!

**Messenger**

So the thing is - as to the rest, you must decide.

**Chorus**

1180 I see, nearly here, a sorrowing Eurydice,  
Creon's wife - perhaps fate brings her from her dwelling.  
Or has she heard about her child?

*[Enter Eurydice]*

**Eurydice**

You clansmen - I felt your words  
As I departed to greet and offer supplication to the goddess Pallas.

As I drew back the bolts to open the gate  
A voice - woeful for my family - struck my ears  
And in fear I crouched backwards into the arms  
Of my servant, unable to move.

So, you, tell again what message you brought  
And I shall hear it since I am not without experience of misfortune.

### **Messenger**

My Lady - I who was present shall tell  
What passed and disclose all what was said.  
Why should I soften you with lies  
Which will soon be revealed? Disclosure is straightforward.

As a guide I attended your husband  
To where the plain ends at that place where, unlamented,  
Was the dog-torn body of Polynices.  
1200 To the goddess of the crossing-trackways and to Pluton  
We prayed for them to with-hold their frenzy and be friendly  
And with pure libations washed what had been left,  
Gathering them together to burn them with newly-plucked boughs  
And raise over them a high tumulus of his native soil.

Next, we went toward to enter the stone-lined cavern  
Of the maiden - that bridal-chamber for Hades -  
When, still far off, one of us heard a voice loudly wailing  
Beside that nuptial chamber bereft of funeral rites,

And came to inform Creon our Master  
Who as he went near was ambushed by a wretched strange cry  
And who, mournfully lamenting, said:  
Wretch that I am, is that what I divine it to be?  
Shall I go along the most unpleasant track I have ever taken?  
Is that the pleasing voice of my son? Servants! - swiftly go  
Nearer there in the gap where the earth has been dug  
And the stones torn away, and enter that mouth to see  
If it is Haemon's voice that I heard or if the gods have deceived me.

This order by our despairing Master we obeyed  
1220 And at the end of the tumulus we beheld her  
Hanging by the neck, a noose of threaded fine linen  
Fastening her and he embracing her around her middle,  
Wailing for his bride - destroyed and now below -  
At his father's deeds and his own ill-fated marriage.  
Seeing him, his father gave a fearful cry  
And, loudly lamenting, went within to call to him -  
Unfortunate one! Why have you done this deed?  
What resolve possessed you? What misfortune overpowered you?  
My son - I in supplication beseech you to come out!

The boy gave no answer but looked at him  
With wild eyes then spat on his face  
And drew his double-edged sword.  
But his father hastened to retreat

And then the ill-fated one enraged at himself forthwith  
Stretched himself to lean on that point  
Until half the length was in his side.  
Then, still breathing, he with but feeble arms  
Embraced the maiden to gasp and spurt forth a swift stream  
Of his dripping blood upon her white cheek.  
1240 Corpse lay upon corpse as he the unfortunate completed his rites  
Of marriage in the dwelling of Hades.  
Thus, this shows to mortals that of the ills conferred upon men  
The greatest is privation of wisdom.

*[Exit Eurydice]*

### **Chorus**

To what is this like? For now the lady goes away  
Without speaking of honour or dishonour.

### **Messenger**

I also am amazed. Yet my own hope is nourished  
Since having heard about her unfortunate child it would not be dignified  
For her to lament before her people.  
Rather, she will in the concealment of her dwelling appoint her servants

To lament with her in grief.

She is not so lacking in experience that she would err.

### **Chorus**

About this - I do not know, since an excessive silence  
Is no less of a portent than an abundance of wailing.

### **Messenger**

We will be certain whether she keeps a secret  
Shrouded in her passionate heart since I shall enter the dwelling.  
Your words may indeed be fortunate - for this excessive silence  
Could well portend something.

*[Exit Messenger]*

### **Chorus**

Here comes our Lord, himself -  
In his hands a memorial as a token,  
If it is fitting for me to say it, of his own error  
1260 And not that of some stranger.

### **Creon**

I lament -  
For those bad errors of judgement  
Which condemned others to death!  
You see here the killer

And he of the same family whom he killed.  
I cry because of my own ill-fated plans  
And for my young son who died so young.  
You - who perished, who left us,  
Not because your plans were wrong, but because mine were.

### **Chorus**

Thus, too late, you see the meaning of customs.

### **Creon**

A dreadful learning! It was a god who, attacking me  
On my head with a great weight, made me to wander wildly  
And who overturned and stamped on my joy!  
I lament - for wearisome are the toils given to mortals.

*[Enter Messenger]*

### **Messenger**

Master - you came bearing that grief in your hands,  
Seeing that one, but you will soon see  
1280 These others stored within your dwelling.

### **Creon**

What further ills could follow ills such as these?

## **Messenger**

That your wife has died - mother in every way to that corpse,  
And unfortunate - from fresh wounds.

## **Creon**

Ah!

How can I purify that haven of Hades?

I am destroyed!

You who convey the sorrow of these bad tidings -

What message can you speak?

You, there - do you pursue me to kill me again?

What misfortune is mine! Speak your message of a wife's fate:

Of this new sacrifice heaped upon those killed!

## **Messenger**

See - it is no longer concealed.

*[The doors to Creon's dwelling open, to reveal  
the body of Eurydice ]*

## **Creon**

I behold this second grief!

What fate still awaits me now -

Me, who has held in my hands our child

And who in misery looks upon her, a corpse.

1300 I lament for you - the ill-fated mother, and you, her child.

**Messenger**

By the altar with a keen-edged knife

She released her eyes to darkness, lamenting

For the death of Megareus - he renowned for his fate -

Who went before him, there: her last deed

To invoke ills upon you, the killer of her children.

**Creon**

Fear rises within me!

Will no one strike me

In the chest with a cutting sword?

Me - in misery

Whose misery is mixed with anguish.

**Messenger**

She denounced you as being guilty

Both of the death of he who died before, and of this other one.

**Creon**

She who is gone - how was her blood shed?



## **Messenger**

She was stricken by her own hand  
As there was loud lament made at the fate of her son.

## **Creon**

No other mortals but me can be denounced  
For this. It was I, and no other, who killed.  
I, who here disclose this. You servants -  
Lead me swiftly away!  
For I am no more than nothing.

## **Chorus**

There is something to be gained from this - if troubles are a gain -  
Since it is excellent to shorten our ills.

## **Creon**

Let it appear - that fate  
Which brings me to my end:  
This is the best and highest of all  
Since then I shall never behold another day!

## **Chorus**

Such things are yet to arrive. Before then, it is necessary to be practical.  
What is to arrive shall be attended to by they who order it.

**Creon**

But all that I desire was contained within that vow.

**Chorus**

Then do not make another vow.

Mortals cannot be delivered from the misfortunes of their fate.

**Creon**

Lead this foolish man away!

1340 My child - and you, also. Wretch that I am,

It was not my purpose to slay you.

Now there is nothing for me to look upon,

Nothing to hold onto:

In my hands, everything went wrong

As a heavy fate I could not carry

Leapt upon me.

*[Exit Creon]*

**Chorus**

Judgement is the greater part of good fortune

Just as it is necessary not to be disrespectful to the gods -

For the great words of the excessive boaster

Are repayed by great blows

And this, as one grows old, teaches judgement.

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First Published 1990

**cc David Wulstan Myatt 1990, 2018**

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