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THE ANTIGONE

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SOPHOCLES
THE ANTIGONE

Translated into English rhyming verse
with Introduction and Notes

by

GILBERT MURRAY

O.M., D.C.L., LL.D., LITT.D., F.B.A.
*Formerly Regius Professor of Greek in the
University of Oxford*

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WOKING

INTRODUCTION

THE ANTIGONE, like other Greek plays, has suffered from being constantly interpreted and commented upon by critics whose main interests were not in the drama nor even in the poetry but in something quite different, such as grammar, history, philosophy, or the *stemmata* of MSS. Of course for any adequate understanding of the play much preliminary study of those subjects is necessary; but a time comes when all that scaffolding must be cleared away and attention concentrated on the two elements that matter most; on the poetry, with its severe form, its delicately exact metre, and its conventional poetic diction, quite different from the language of everyday prose, qualities which to the Greek artist seemed absolutely essential; and secondly, on the drama as drama, the play as an acting play.

Of the first I will not speak; I happen to like the Greek convention, and the method of my translation is a dutiful attempt to represent it. On the second some comment may be useful to English readers. Sophocles, as compared with the other two tragedians, was more of a dramatist and less of a prophet. He loved the clash of characters and the clash of moods inside a character. Also he had a wonderful gift for the *coup de théâtre*, the sudden flashing line that transforms a situation. One may think of the ironic answer to Jocasta's prayer in the *Oedipus* (l. 924), or to Clytemnestra's prayer in the *Electra* (l. 660); of the announcement in the *Electra* of Orestes' death to the two women, to whom it means respectively deliverance and despair (*El.* ll. 674, 675); or in this play of Ismene's unexpected "Yes, I did it" (l. 536). Such effects remind one not of Aeschylus nor even of Shakespeare, but of the great French dramatists. The very first scene of THE ANTIGONE, with its secret hurried opening, and the eager trust of Antigone in her sister, followed by its swift reversal, plunge us into the heart of the drama with an impetus quite foreign to the stately exposition scenes of Aeschylus and Euripides.

Again, Sophocles always keeps in his tragedies the atmosphere of a dark heroic past. He likes to have themes with a touch of the mysterious and unearthly about them. In THE ANTIGONE the plot centres upon a point where, according to tradition, the Theban custom roused horror in the rest of Greece. The other Greeks after a battle always allowed the enemy to collect and bury their dead. If necessary they even buried the enemy dead themselves. The Thebans buried their own dead, but if they were masters of the field, deliberately prevented the burial of their enemies. In THE ANTIGONE, Creon proclaims Polynices an enemy, and follows the barbarous Theban custom in leaving his body to dogs and birds. What happened to the other dead is not directly mentioned in the play (see, however, l. 1080), but in Euripides' *Suppliant Women* we hear that Theseus first interceded with the Thebans and at last made war on them in order to recover the bodies of the Seven and give them religious burial in Attic soil.

Any ill treatment of the dead rouses strong feeling even now. It certainly did so among Sophocles' contemporaries. But the horror was far graver and more awful in earlier ages, which attached superstitious sanctity to these last rites. The natural human horror at a barbarity is projected, as it were, on to Zeus or the Gods of the Underworld. It is they, it is the powers beyond death, who condemn and abhor such impiety. When Creon accuses Antigone of wasting her pains in "thinking always of the dead," it does not mean that she likes thinking about graves and corpses. She is caring for things beyond this world.

The character drawing is admirable. Critics have complained that both Creon and

Antigone behave with some inconsistency. The answer is that all real people do, and the good dramatist likes them for it. As for Creon, it was of course preposterous of Hegel to suggest that he was as much in the right as Antigone and that our sympathies should be evenly divided. Creon is a tyrant; but a good playwright makes even his tyrants intelligible and Creon has a case. His first speech is excellent on the sacredness of public duty, but he shows the tyrant's temper in his interpretation of it. Polynices is an enemy and, though a king and Creon's own nephew, must be treated as an enemy. Anyone disobeying this order is a rebel and shall be treated as a rebel. So far so good: but the exposure of the body and the punishment of death for anyone who attempts to remedy that outrage are "tyrannic." Yet as soon as Creon has pronounced this judgement he is trapped. He cannot unsay it merely because the rebel proves to be his own niece. His rage and threats are in character; so is his obstinacy; but I think one can see more than once that he would escape from the necessity of carrying out his sentence if he could do so without loss of face. Perhaps if Antigone were contrite and begged for pardon there might be an opportunity; but she is utterly defiant and hostile. At one moment he thinks he has pledged himself to put Ismene to death also; and shows undisguised relief at finding that he has not. He will spare Ismene; but even so everyone is against him; unless possibly his son, always so dutiful, and now so urgently wanted, will stand at his side? But Haemon, after a would-be tactful opening, leaves the stage threatening either murder or suicide. Creon can never yield after that, but his inward trouble increases. Perhaps at the last moment, when death actually stares her in the face, this insane girl may give way. She was to have been stoned; but that can be changed. She shall be left in a rock chamber, with a little food and drink, to die, no doubt, in the long run, but not immediately. That will give her a chance to think again.

It seems curious that he does not at once yield to Tiresias, whose counsels he had always followed. But Sophocles gets an added effect from the last flare of Creon's obstinacy and suspicion. These prophets! It is his unknown enemies at work again, bribing guards, bribing corrupt "medicine men." He must add to his other offences this blasphemy against the Prophet, just as Oedipus did, before his cup is full. But his inner mistrust of himself has deepened. The surrender was bound to come, and when it comes it is as sudden and impulsive as his bursts of fury were. It is worth noticing that, if he had gone straight to Antigone's prison, he might still have saved her; but the prophet had said little about her. He was entirely occupied with the unburied corpse, the ritual pollution of altars, the sins against the Gods of Death. So naturally Creon goes first to remedy those.

Antigone herself is a very Sophoclean figure. We may compare her with Electra, the most ferocious of his heroines, and at the same time perhaps the most tenderly loving. Electra loses all self-restraint, and knows it. When Clytemnestra cries shame upon her, she answers (ll. 616 ff.): "Do you think I am not ashamed? Do I not know that I am behaving horribly and unlike myself?" And so she is. Sophocles cares more for the real and faulty human being than for the ideally sympathetic heroine. He has no character like some of Euripides' heroic virgin martyrs, such as Macaria or Polyxena.

Antigone is confident of her sister's love, and claims from her the same devotion as from herself, but at the first sign of refusal she turns fierce. She "hates" Ismene, and would not accept her help if she offered it. In the later scene, where Ismene only begs to be allowed to die with her, she is cruelly scornful except for one moment of softening and self-blame (l. 557). On Creon she declares immediate war. She expects no mercy or understanding and will show none. She treats the Elders as mere enemies, since they are not clear and wholehearted friends. One is surprised by her verse (l. 523): "It is not my nature to join in hating, only to join in love." She had

shown herself such a good hater. But Ismene thought much the same of her. She was τοῖς φίλοις ὁρθῶς φύλη, "A true friend to those she loved" (l. 99). It is that very quality that makes her so fierce. The loving, generous, but not quite heroic, Ismene forms a splendid foil to her.

Critics have suggested that she is very young. That would explain her vehemence and her changes of mood, from love to anger, from readiness to die to lamentation over all that she is losing. And certainly there seems to be some emphasis laid both upon her youth and upon Haemon's.

Acute characterization of this kind, if carried far, heightens the intellectual interest of any play at the expense of its emotional intensity. But the religious atmosphere of Greek tragedy is strong, and Sophocles' own inspiration overcomes his critical observation of character. In her greatest moment Antigone rises above her moods, above even her personal love for her brother, above mere rituals and taboos about dead bodies. She puts her faith simply in that eternal law of right of which Greek thought, from Aeschylus to Plato, is so abidingly conscious; a law whose ordinances are beyond death, beyond man and his anthropomorphic gods, unwritten and never failing. Through this scene Antigone has become, almost against her creator's wish, the most famous ideal virgin martyr of Greek tragedy.

The Guard is admirable. A man of the people, racy and half comic, he reminds one of the Nurse in the *Choëphoroe* but of no other character in our extant Greek tragedies. The Chorus of Elders remains for the most part impersonal. Their lyrics are among the finest in Sophocles, often difficult and enigmatic, yet with a strange untranslatable magic of language and rhythm. Only through the spoken words of the Leader does the Chorus express itself as a character in the play, and then it is a somewhat characterless character. The Elders venture twice a tentative protest against Creon, but are promptly crushed, and afterwards are afraid to champion Antigone or Haemon. They think her ἄβουλος "unwise," as by ordinary standards she undoubtedly is. Their failure to give her open support adds to the dramatic value of her last appearance, innocent, friendless and alone against the world. I think, however, that in certain passages (particularly ll. 853 ff., 872 ff.) where their words seem intentionally obscure one is bound to choose the interpretation which favours the condemned prisoner; had they meant to support the tyrant there would have been no need for obscurity.

THE ANTIGONE

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

| | |
|--|---|
| ANTIGONE | daughter of Oedipus and Jocasta, the late King and Queen of Thebes. |
| ISMENE | her sister. |
| CREON | their uncle, Jocasta's brother, now ruling over Thebes. |
| HAEMON | Creon's son, betrothed to Antigone. |
| TIRESIAS | a blind prophet. |
| EURYDICE | wife of Creon, mother of Haemon. |
| A GUARD. | |
| A MESSENGER | a Henchman of Creon's. |
| CHORUS OF THEBAN ELDERS with their LEADER. | |

The date of the first performance is nowhere recorded but is conjectured to have been 441 B.C. or slightly earlier.

THE ANTIGONE

[Scene: in front of the Palace at Thebes. Enter hurriedly ANTIGONE from a side door, drawing ISMENE with her.]

ANTIGONE.

My own, my sister, O beloved face,
Tell me—of all the curses of our race,
What curse shall God not heap on thee and me?
Surely there is no pain, no misery,
No vileness or dishonour, that we two
Have not already seen; and now this new
Edict, proclaimed by our new Prince's word
On all our people . . . knowst thou? Hast thou heard?
Or is it hid from thee? There comes a fate
On one we love meet for the worst we hate.

ISMENE.

No word, Antigone, of tidings new
Touching our house, hath reached me, since we two
Were left deserted, and our brothers twain
Both in one day in mutual fury slain.
Last night, I know, the Argives fled; I know
Nought further that hath passed for weal or woe.

ANTIGONE.

I knew it; and for that I summoned thee
Beyond the gate alone, to speak with me.

ISMENE.

What is it? Some dark cloud is o'er thy thought.

ANTIGONE.

'Tis for our brothers. Hath not Creon wrought
Honours for one, on the other foul despite?
'Tis told that, with all customary rite,
He layeth Eteocles in earth, full fed
With honours, like a prince among the dead;
But Polynices' corpse, cast out in shame,
No man in Thebes—so hath he made proclaim—
Shall give him tomb nor tear; there he shall lie
Unwept, unburied, lovely to the eye
Of staring vultures, hungry for their prey.
Such law on thee doth our good Creon lay,
Aye, and on me, on me! And soon, I hear,
He cometh hot-foot hither, to make clear
His will to them that know not. Nothing light
He counts it. Whoso disobeys ere night
Shall die the death . . . by stones, without the wall.

So runs his order. Now thou knowest all.
Now is the day to show thee nobly brave,
Or born a princess but at heart a slave.

ISMENE.

If it has come to this, unhappy one,
What is there I can do or make undone?

ANTIGONE.

Think. Wilt thou share my labour and my deed?

ISMENE.

Some deed of desperate daring? Oh, take heed.

ANTIGONE.

Wilt lift that corpse with me, hand helping hand?

ISMENE.

Thou thinkst to bury, though the deed is banned. . . .

ANTIGONE.

My flesh, and thine, whom thou deniest: Yes.

ISMENE.

When Creon hath forbid? 'Tis lawlessness.

ANTIGONE.

What right hath he to bar me from mine own?

ISMENE.

Think, Sister, how our father died, alone
In shame and hatred, self-convicted he
And self-avenged for that old misery,
Till his own will, his own hand, drew the night
Down on the bleeding orbits of his sight.
Remember her, his mother and his wife,
And that dim swinging rope that broke her life.
Oh, think how our two brothers on one day,
Self-driven toward their doom to die and slay,
Made them one death, hand against violent hand.
And now it is you and I: alone we stand
And friendless; 'gainst the voice and majesty
Of Kings if we rebel, most miserably
Of all we two shall die. Oh, think again.
We are women; who are we to fight with men?
We are subjects, and must needs obey our king
In this, aye or in many a bitterer thing.

For me, I will go pray the dead, and sue
For pardon, seeing that I am forced thereto,
Then yield me to my master's word. To press
Beyond our strength is naught but foolishness.

ANTIGONE.

I ask thee not; nor, shouldst thou come to me
With offers, would I welcome aid from thee.
Be what thou wilt! My brother's burial I
Will make, and if for making it I die
'Tis well. I shall but sleep with one I love,
One who loves me, and my offence shall prove
Blessed. I need the love of Them Below
More than of earthly rulers, for, I know,
There I shall lie for ever. Get thee gone;
Despise what God counts holy, and live on.

ISMENE.

I despise nothing; but I have no skill
Nor strength, thus to defy the City's will.

ANTIGONE.

Thou hast thy plea. I go to heap above
My brother's corpse some covering. Him I love.

ISMENE.

Unhappy sister! How I fear for thee.

ANTIGONE.

For me fear not. Guide thine own destiny.

ISMENE.

At least, then, open to no mortal eye
Thy plan. Be secret, and so too will I.

ANTIGONE.

Oh God, proclaim it! Speak of it before
The whole of Thebes; I shall not hate thee more.

ISMENE.

Thy heart is fiery, but ice-cold thy deed.

ANTIGONE.

I know it hath their praise whose praise I need.

ISMENE.

Thou canst not reach the things thou strivest for.

ANTIGONE.

When my strength fails, then, I will strive no more.

ISMENE.

'Tis wrong to strive for ends so desperate.

ANTIGONE.

Must thou so speak? Thou shalt but earn my hate
And the just hate long-lasting of the dead.
Oh, leave me and my own ill-counsellèd
Heart to endure the worst. I shall not die
Dishonoured, howsoe'er my doom may lie.

[*Exit ANTIGONE right.*

ISMENE.

Go then, if go thou must.—She has no heed
Whither. Ah, where she loves she loves indeed.

[*Exit ISMENE into the house. Enter CHORUS of Elders.*

CHORUS. [Strophe 1

Ray of the sun, O fairest ray
That ever the Seven-fold Gates have seen,
Lifted lid of the Golden Day,
At last thou dawnest, from where the green
Glimmer of Dirce stirreth,
Scattering him of the harness bright
Who rode from Argos with shield so white;
Headlong, fugitive, fast in flight,
Over the plain he spurreth.

Whom Polynices, raging loud
For rights denied, against us drew;
An eagle, shrieking in the cloud
And snowy-winged, to Thebes he flew;
White-shielded was the host he led,
With horsehair plumage helmeted.

Poisèd over our homes he stood; [Antistrophe 1
Round all of our gates from north to south
Ravened his lances athirst for blood;
But away all hungry, with empty mouth,
Or ever his hurlèd fire
Had hold of our crown of towers, he fled.
So fierce a rattle of war was sped,
Too hard to handle, about his head
Who bearded the Dragon's ire.

For Zeus a vaunting tongue doth hold

Abhorred; there he saw them pass
In arrogance of clanging gold,

A long loud river. One there was
Scaled our great wall, but ere he cried
His triumph by God's fire he died.

[*Strophe 2*

Swung to the crashing earth he lay,
With firebrand blazing, who so late
Had raged, a madman in the fray,
Borne on some rushing wind of hate.
He went his way.
And others other ways were flung,
Trod down by Ares, like some strong
War-horse, our Ares Thêbê-sprung,
To whom we pray.

Seven chieftains at our portals seven,
Man against man, were made to yield;
Their brazen harness stript and given
To Zeus, the Holder of the Field.
Only those twain, unfortunate,
Born of one mother and one sire,
With each 'gainst each their lances set,
Both won the prize of their desire,
One death, one equal fate.

[*Antistrophe 2*

So came proud Victory from afar
With answering joy to meet the smile
Of marshalled Thebes on many a car;
But now, Oh, let us rest the while
And forget war.
Now let us to the Temples throng
Guided by Him who all night long
Shaketh glad Thebes with dance and song,
Bacchus, our star.

LEADER.

But lo, the Monarch of the land,
Creon, Menoikeus' son, I see;
By these new fortunes which the hand
Of God hath laid on us, 'tis he
Now holdeth Thebes beneath his yoke.
Methinks he cometh pondering
Some weighty purpose, to convoke
Hither by public heralding
The Elders of the folk.

[*Enter CREON.*

CREON.

Elders of Thebes, the vessel of our state,

Though shaken in wild storms, by God's good fate
Stands upright once again, and you from all
The folk of Thebes are here by separate call
Summoned to council. For I know full well
The reverence constant and unshakeable
Ye bore toward Laius' crown; and later, when
King Oedipus first saved the land and then
Perished, ye still upheld in fealty true
The children of your kings. But since they too,
By twofold visitation in one day,
Each stained with brother's blood, have passed away,
Slaying and slain, it falleth now to me
To hold their powers and seat of royalty
By right of nearest kindred to the throne.

So be it. Yet no man can be truly known,
In heart and hopes and purpose, till the test
Of power and government make manifest
His nature. For that prince who, holding sway
O'er a great City, cleaveth not alway
Firm to his country's welfare, but from fear
Of man or fortune speaks not firm and clear,
I hold him, and shall hold him to the end,
A craven. Aye, and him who counts some friend
Or favoured kinsman dearer to his thought
Than his great City, I hold a thing of naught.
For this I swear. . . . Be Zeus my witness, who
Beholdeth all things and beholdest true. . . .
Never will I be silent when these eyes
See hurt to Thebes approaching in the guise
Of service; never shall my country's foe
Be friend to me; for this I surely know,
Our City is our lifeboat; only while
She safely floats can private friendship smile.

Such are the rules whereby I shall ensue
This City's greatness; in accord whereto
By general proclamation I have thus
Decreed touching the sons of Oedipus:
To Eteocles, who, for this land and town
Fighting hath fallen and won him great renown,
Be burial granted and all requiems said
That follow to their sleep the noblest dead.
But for his brother, who, from banishment
Returned, like fire his angry purpose bent
To wreck the land that bore him, to o'erthrow
His father's gods, to glut him with the flow
Of kindred blood, and whom he could not kill
Cast out to slavery: such was his will:
Lo, Polynices . . . let my people hear! . . .
Shall have no rite of death, no funeral tear,
But lie, a thing of scorn, unsepulchred
And foul, to be devoured by dog and bird.

Thus have I spoke. Never before my throne
Shall the evil and the righteous rank as one.
Only to him who loved this City true,

Living or dead, are rites of honour due.

LEADER.

Son of Menoikeus, such is thy command
Touching the friend and foe of this our land.
And thou hast power, methinks, all rules to give
O'er them that lie dead and o'er us that live.

CREON.

Keep watch then that this order be obeyed.

LEADER.

On younger men, sire, let that task be laid.

CREON.

A guard already by the corpse is set.

LEADER.

What wouldst thou then? What task remaineth yet?

CREON.

Be firm, if any 'gainst my law may cry.

LEADER.

Who but a madman, sire, so seeks to die?

CREON.

Death it shall be. But many a man hath fain
Gone deathward, blinded by some hope of gain.

[Enter GUARD.

GUARD.

My Lord, I can not say I have much taste
For this affair, or come with breathless haste.
Oft on my way I stopped to think, and then
Turned in my tracks and half went home again.
My heart within kept talking to me: "Friend,
Why haste? There's trouble waiting at the end."
"Stupid, why standing still? If Creon learn
This news from someone else, your back will burn."
Swithering like this, slowly I struggled on
And made a long road of a little one,
Till now the end has come, and I am brought
To thee to tell all . . . 'Tis a thing of naught,
The tale I bring.—Ah, well, at any rate
Nothing can touch me that is not my fate.

CREON.

What is it that so weighs upon thy heart?

GUARD.

I want to tell thee first of my own part.
I neither did the thing, nor did I see
The doer. 'Twere unjust to punish me.

CREON.

Carefully aimed thy words, and guarded well
Thy doings. Clearly thou hast news to tell.

GUARD.

To bear a dangerous message makes one slow.

CREON.

For God's sake, get thy message told and go!

GUARD.

I tell you then. That corpse . . . some man has just
Buried it and escaped. He strewed dry dust
To cover it and performed due offering.

CREON.

How now! What man hath dared to do this thing?

GUARD.

Who knows? No mark of pickaxe could be found,
No earth turned by the shovel. All the ground
Is hard, dry, trackless, rutted by no wheel,
And he who did the deed untraceable.
When the first watchman showed it us, surprise
Caught us and fear. Quite vanished from our eyes
Was that dead man, not buried but below
A coverlet of dust well hid, as though
To avoid pollution. No sign met the eye
That any dog or wild beast had come nigh
Or torn his flesh.—Oh, evil words and hard
Flew fast between us, guard accusing guard.
It nearly came to blows at last, and none
Was there to keep the peace. 'Twas every one
Accused and none convicted. Each could swear
That he knew nothing. Ready enough we were
To carry red hot iron with a bare hand,
To walk through fire, or by God's altar stand
And take sworn oaths we had not done the thing,
Nor knew who had, nor shared its compassing.
At last, when all our searches reached no end,

One spoke the fatal word that made us bend
Our heads to the earth in fear. We saw no way
To oppose the thing he said, nor yet to obey
Without sore trouble. All must be revealed
To thee, he said, forthwith, and not concealed.
At last it was agreed. So lots were thrown
For who should go, and by bad luck I won.
I am sorry to be here, and you, I know,
To have me. With bad news 'tis always so.

LEADER.

Sire, while he spoke, deep in my heart a fear
Was whispering lest the hand of God be here.

CREON.

Silence, before my anger break its bound
'Gainst one so old and eke so foolish found!
Intolerable, to feign that gods in bliss
Should stoop to care for such a corpse as this.
Perhaps to reward him for a virtuous life
They gave him burial?—Him who came in strife
To burn their pillared temples, wreck their store
Of hallowed offerings, and confusion pour
On their own land and laws? Or did they see
Him wicked, and admire his villainy?

I think not. Nay, but certain of the town
'Gainst me and 'gainst the laws I have laid down
Have alway whispered, alway darkly shook
Their heads, nor bowed their shoulders to the yoke
To make their King's way easy. Well I knew
'Twas they who duped and bribed my guards to do
This mischief. Never did the human soul
Coin a device so dangerous and so foul
As money. This lays cities in the dust,
Drives men to exile, trains and traps the just
To do injustice, leads men to profess
Knavery, and learn all forms of wickedness.

These watchers who for lucre stole away
That corpse made one thing certain, that one day
Their treason shall be paid.—Now this I swear,
As Zeus yet holds me in his royal care,
Unless the culprit who this deed hath wrought
Be found, and hither to my presence brought,
No simple death awaits you: ye shall hang
Alive upon a cross and, pang by pang,
Confess all that ye plotted. Then ye may
Learn from what hands 'tis safe to earn your pay.
'Tis not from every giver. False increase
Leadeth more men to trouble than to peace.

GUARD.

May I reply? Or must I turn and go?

CREON.

Thine every word offends me, dost not know?

GUARD.

Where do they hurt thee, in the ears or brain?

CREON.

How, trickster? Wouldst thou try to place my pain?

GUARD.

The doer hurts thy mind and I thine ear.

CREON.

Thou art a chatterer born, that much is clear.

GUARD.

Maybe, but not a doer of this deed.

CREON.

A doer, too, who sold his soul for greed!

GUARD.

Odd, so determined to determine wrong!

CREON.

Oh, quibble with thy "determines," but ere long
Ye shall or find the culprit, or confess
That scurvy gains gain but unhappiness.

[*Exit* CREON to the House.]

GUARD.

May he be found by all means: that were best.
But be he caught or no—for that must rest
With Fortune—one thing you can swear and vow:
No one shall catch me here again. Even now
I never hoped I should get safe away.
I praise God for his care of me this day!

[*Exit* GUARD right.]

CHORUS. [Strophe 1

Wonders are many, but none there be
So strange, so fell, as the Child of Man.
He rangeth over the whitening sea,
Through wintry winds he pursues his plan:
About his going the deeps unfold,

The crests o'erhang, but he passeth clear.
Oh, Earth is patient, and Earth is old,
And a mother of Gods, but he breaketh her,
To-ing, froing, With the plough-teams going,
Tearing the body of her year by year.

[*Antistrophe 1*

Light are the birds and swift with wings,
But his hand is round them to quell and keep;
He prisons the tribes of wild-wood things,
He snares the brood of the briny deep.
The nets of his weaving are cast afar,
And his thought in the midst of them circleth full,
Till his engines master all beasts that are:
Where the wild horse drinks at the desert pool
That mane that shaketh For his slave he taketh,
And the tireless shoulder of the mountain bull.

[*Strophe 2*

Speech he hath taught him and wind-swift thought,
And the temper that buildeth a city's wall,
Till the arrows of winter he sets at naught,
The sleepless cold and the long rainfall.
All-armèd he; Unarmèd never
To front new peril he journeyeth;
His craft assuageth Each pest that rageth
And defence he hath gotten against all save Death.

[*Antistrophe 2*

With craft of engines beyond all dream
He speedeth—is it to good or ill?
For one is the City's Law supreme,
And the Truth of God in his inmost will;
High-citied he; but that other citiless
Who rageth, grasping at things of naught,
Upon roads forbidden; From him be hidden
The hearth that comforts and the light of thought.

LEADER.

What portent of the gods . . . I see
—Yet wonder, do mine eyes say true—
The royal maid Antigone.
O hapless child, and hapless too
Thy father! Do they carry thee
A prisoner hither? Thee, confessed
A rebel to the King's decree
And caught in madness manifest!

[Enter GUARD with ANTIGONE prisoner.]

GUARD.

We have her here, the doer of the thing.

We caught her in the act.—Where is the King?

LEADER.

The King? Lo, where he comes at point of time.
[Enter CREON.]

CREON.

How? With what issue doth my coming chime?

GUARD.

Sire, there is nothing in the world a man
Should promise not to do. Some second plan
Will make the first a liar. I swore amain
No man should ever catch me here again,
So battered by thy threats and rage was I.
But, luck unhop'd for and outrageous, why,
There is nothing like it; no joy half so deep.
So here, 'gainst all the oaths I swore to keep,
I come again, and bring this maid withal.
I found her making the man's burial.
No lots were thrown about it. I alone
Caught her. This bit of luck is all my own.
So here she is, Sire. Take her as thou wilt,
And question and convict. I have no guilt
Upon me, and I trust I can go free.

CREON.

Thou hast ta'en this girl? What doing? Where was she?

GUARD.

Burying the dead man, just as thou hast heard.

CREON.

Dost understand, dost verily mean that word?

GUARD.

That corpse thou hast forbid; this maiden here
Was burying it. I saw her. Is that clear?

CREON.

How was she seen? How was she caught and found?

GUARD.

It came like this. Soon as we reached the ground,
Dazed with thine awful threats, at once we swept
The body clear of all the dust that kept
It covered. We made naked to the sky

That oozing flesh, and squatted on some high
Ridges to windward, safe from the foul smell.
Each nagged his neighbour to keep vigil well,
And woe to him who left his task undone.

And so it lasted while the noonday sun
Stood overhead and the heat grew and grew.
Then, all asudden, up a great wind blew,
A lifted scourge, an anguish of the air.

It swept the plain; it savagely stript bare
The level forest leaves, till all the sky
Was solid dust. With close-shut mouth and eye
We endured that plague; 'twas what the gods had sent.

A long time all was dust. At last it went,
And there we saw this maiden. Have ye heard
The high sad wail of some heart-broken bird
Seeing the empty nest, the nurslings ta'en?

Just so, seeing that corpse upon the plain
Naked, she lifted up her voice in long
Lament, and spoke on him who did that wrong
A dire curse. Then she gathered covering dust,
And lifted a bronze urn, and thrice in just
Division poured libations on the dead.

When we saw that, we made one rush and led
Her captive. Calm she stood and undismayed.
And when we charged her with the attempt she made
Aforetime, and with this ourselves had seen,
She denied nothing. . . . Oh, I have never been
So happy and grieved at once. 'Tis simply bliss
To escape from fear of death . . . though pain it is
To push a friend there. . . . But all gain and loss
Compared with my own life I count as dross.

CREON.

Thou, thou with drooping head and downcast eye:
This deed: dost thou confess it or deny?

ANTIGONE.

I deny nothing. I avow my guilt.

CREON.

Thou Guard! Betake thee wheresoe'er thou wilt,
A free man and absolved, away from here.

[*Exit GUARD.*

And now, thou answer me. Be brief and clear.
Didst know this burial was by law forbid?

ANTIGONE.

I knew. How could I help it? 'Twas not hid.

CREON.

And that law, knowing, thou didst dare to break?

ANTIGONE.

I deemed it not the voice of Zeus that spake
That herald's word, not yet did Justice, she
Whose throne is beyond death, give such decree
To hold among mankind. I did not rate
Thy proclamations for a thing so great
As by their human strength to have overtrod
The unwritten and undying laws of God:
Not of to-day nor yesterday, the same
Throughout all time they live; and whence they came
None knoweth. How should I through any fear
Of proud men dare to break them and then bear
God's judgement?—As for death, some day no doubt
I am sure to die. I knew that even without
Thy laws; and if I now shall die before
My time, that grace shall I be thankful for.
For one who lives ringed round by griefs, as I
Am living, is it not pure gain to die?

I tell thee, 'tis a trifling hurt or none
To die thus. Had I left my mother's son
Dead and unburied in that field to rot,
That would have hurt me. These things hurt me not,

Ye call this madness? Madness let it be,
For surely 'tis a madman judgeth me.

LEADER.

Stubborn, and from a stubborn sire begot,
This maiden. To the storm she bendeth not.

CREON.

Know this. It is the proudest hearts that fall
The deepest, and the hardest iron withal,
Stark-tempered in the furnace, that ye see
Most broken and shivered. Yet quite easily
By a small curb I have seen a fiery steed
Taught reason. Little use to be stiff-kneed
Before a master's eye, being a slave.

This girl showed insolence before, to brave
The ordainèd law; and now, new insolence,
She mocks us and hath pride in her offence.
No man were I, more of a man were she,
Should she now triumph and be gone scot-free.
Be she my sister's child, be she by birth
Closest of all who worship at my hearth,
I vow that shall not save her, nay, nor yet
Her sister from full payment of their debt.
I know she is guilty too. She had a share
In plotting for this burial. . . . Call her there! . . .
I saw her in the house but now, all wild
With weeping, from all caution grief-beguiled.

'Tis oft so. Their own passion will betray
Plotters who hide them from the light of day.
But worse are they who, caught in crime, profess
No shame, but glory in their frowardness.

ANTIGONE.

What wouldst thou with me, save to take and kill?

CREON.

Nothing; when I have that I have my will.

ANTIGONE.

Why then delay? In all thy words to me
There is not—and God grant there never be!—
One word not hateful to me. I know too
To thee is hateful all that I hold true.
Yet, to see true, what praise could I have won
More high than to have saved my mother's son
From dogs and birds?—Aye, all these Elders here
Would praise me, were their lips not sealed by fear.
Oh, kings are fortunate; whate'er they please
They say unhindered; but no kings are these.

CREON.

And this truth none but thou in Thebes can see?

ANTIGONE.

They see it too, but trim their mouths for thee.

CREON.

Art not ashamed to be so unlike them?

ANTIGONE.

To have done a sister's duty brings no shame.

CREON.

No brother, then, was he whom this man slew?

ANTIGONE.

That was he; by both sides my brother true.

CREON.

Him thou dost outrage, honouring thus his foe.

ANTIGONE.

The peaceful dead will scarce regard it so.

CREON.

One with a traitor's thou wilt make his grave?

ANTIGONE.

A brother 'twas that smote him, not a slave.

CREON.

One fought to wreck, and one to save, this land.

ANTIGONE.

Still holy Death doth his due rite demand.

CREON.

The same rite for the dastard and the brave?

ANTIGONE.

Who knows what finds forgiveness in the grave?

CREON.

Not hate like theirs; no death can that abate.

ANTIGONE.

I shared their love. I cannot share their hate.

CREON.

Love, is it? Then go down and love thy slain.
While Creon lives, no woman here shall reign.

CHORUS.

But lo, Ismêne at the door
Shedding a sister's tear, dark-browed
With sorrow; and a blood-red cloud
Staineth that cheek so fair of yore.

[Enter ISMENE.

CREON.

Thou lurking snake, beneath my roof to lie
Sheltered, and drain my life-blood secretly!
I little knew that I was cherishing
Two seeds of death, two plotters 'gainst their king.
Make answer. Dost confess this burial
Was thy work too, or wilt deny it all?

ISMENE.

'Twas my work too. My sister here will bear
Witness. Her burden I uphold and share.

ANTIGONE.

The truth denies thee that. Thou wast afraid
To help, nor would I ever ask thine aid.

ISMENE.

But now in thine affliction 'tis my pride
To sail the storms with thee, what'ever betide.

ANTIGONE.

Death and the dead know who it was that wrought
The deed; the love that loves in words is naught.

ISMENE.

Sister, reject me not. Oh, take me too
To die with thee and give the dead his due.

ANTIGONE.

Thou shalt not share my fate. Thou shalt not try
To claim what is not thine. None else need die.

ISMENE.

What life have I, when thou art here no more?

ANTIGONE.

Ask Creon that. 'Tis he thou carest for.

ISMENE.

Why to no profit art thou hurting me?

ANTIGONE.

Am I? I hurt myself if I hurt thee.

ISMENE.

What can I do? How can I help thee still?

ANTIGONE.

Save thine own life; I bear thee no ill will.

ISMENE.

Woe's me! No portion in thy fate have I.

ANTIGONE.

It was thy choice to live, and mine to die.

ISMENE.

That must not be till I have said my say.

ANTIGONE.

Why not? Some thy way think, and some my way.

ISMENE.

No, no. We both share the same crime at last.

ANTIGONE.

Have courage. Thou shalt live. My life is past
Long since, free given in service to the dead.

[*She turns away.*

CREON.

I swear they are both mad! One hath lost her head
To-day, the other since her life began.

ISMENE.

My lord King, in great grief the heart of man
Loses its hold of wisdom, and runs mad.

CREON.

Thine does, to seek bad friends for schemes as bad.

ISMENE.

How could I live without her, I alone?

CREON.

Without? None shall be with her. She is gone.

ISMENE.

Wouldst kill thy son's betrothed? What meanest thou?

CREON.

Why not? He can find other fields to plough.

ISMENE.

Never a heart like hers, so near his own.

CREON.

I want no evil women for my son.

ISMENE.

Haemon, beloved! Thy father wrongs thee sore.

CREON.

Thou and thy loves. . . . Oh, prate of them no more.

LEADER.

Wilt doom to death thine own son's bride, O King?

CREON.

Hades belike will stop their love-making.

LEADER.

The doom is fixed then? She must die this day?

CREON.

By my will—and by thine!—No-more delay.
Take them within, thralls. Hold them as is meet
For maidens and not wanderers in the street.
Bold are they, but the boldest turn in fear
And seek to fly when visible death is near.

[*The GUARDS lead off the SISTERS. CREON sits brooding.*

CHORUS. [Strophe 1

Right blessed are they whose life hath tasted not
The power of Evil; for surely if once God's hand
Is lifted against a House, there lacks not aught
In a long moving stream of tribulation,
On, on, from generation to generation,
As waves upon the sand,
When the whole great ocean swells,
And the wind blows cold from Thrace,
And the dark of the deep sea-wells
Steals over the water's face,
Weeds and black oozes sweep
Up from the ocean floor,
And loud against the storm the steep
And wind-racked headlands roar.

[Antistrophe 1

Have I not seen, from ages long since fled,
Hurled on the House of the proud Labdacidae,
Doom after doom of the unforgotten dead?
No one generation redeemeth another's debt;
Some god still casts them down, and none may set
Those age-long prisoners free.

From the root of Oedipus
One branch yet lived to glow
As Light in the House, and thus
In blood 'tis stricken low;
The Gods below have stirred
A dust impenetrable,
And there is madness in man's word,
And in his bosom Hell.

[*Strophe 2*]

Thy power, O Zeus, no trespass of man can shake,
The power, which neither Sleep the all-ensnaring,
Nor the longmoons of heaven the never-wearying,
Beguile nor overtake.
Thou, Lord of ageless life, shalt ever hold
The reign of Olympus, throned in dazzling light,
While the eve and the morrow, yea, and the days of old
Show this Law clear to sight;
In the life of mortals naught that is passing great
Escapeth the hand of Fate.

[*Antistrophe 2*]

Wide-wandering hope to many hath comfort brought,
But to many the blindness of light-winged desire;
She trappeth the foot of man in a ring of fire
While still he knoweth naught.
For an ancient word yet shineth for all to see:
That soon or late, as he waxeth in hardihood,
To him whose mind God draws to calamity
An evil thing seems good.
For a moment, scarce a moment, he stands elate,
Ere closes the hand of Fate.

LEADER.

See, Haemon, thy last living son!
In wrath, methinks, for the decree
Which dooms the young Antigone,
And anguish for his hopes undone.

[Enter HAEMON.]

CREON.

Soon we shall know, surer than seers can tell.
Son, thou hast heard our doom immutable
On thy betrothed. Comest thou in fury wild
Against thy father, or have I still one child
Mine always, through all troubles at my side?

HAEMON.

Thine always, father. Thy good counsels guide
My path. No marriage is for me so great
A joy as thy wise ruling of the state.

CREON.

My son! Let this fixed purpose rule thy life,
To stand behind thy father in all strife.
Why else do men crave children? That a band
Of faithful sons may round their table stand,
Quick to give battle to their father's foes,
And help his allies, as their father does.
He who hath children that obey him not,
How say ye? For himself he hath begot
Grief, and loud laughter for his enemies.

Oh, do not thou, my son, in days like these
Subdue thy reason to a woman's lure.
An armful bitter cold, of that be sure,
Is a false woman in thy house and bed;
Beloved and false! That ulcer lays men dead.
Spit on her as a thing abominable,
And leave her kisses to the lords of Hell.

Since I have taken her with mine own hand,
Convicted, the one traitor in the land,
I will not break the sworn pledge that I gave
My people; she shall die. Oh, let her rave
Of kith and kindred and their patron Zeus;
If mine own kin must practise such abuse
As this unpunished, what will strangers do?
The man who keepeth his own household true
In loyalty, he only in the state
Is loyal, full-willed either to be great
And rule, or to be humble and obey:
And, if the storm of battle comes, to stay
True and unflinching at his comrade's side.
I praise not him who, flown with idle pride
Does violence to the laws, who seeks to fling
Defiance and give orders to his King.
This disobedience of all human ills
Is deadliest. This it is that surely kills
Strong cities; this makes houses desolate;
This amid allied armies soweth hate
And fear. Wherever cities safely stand,
Be sure Law is obeyed and saves the land.
Therefore to uphold the Law I fight, and still
Must fight, and never shall a woman's will
Break me. If fall I must, some man must hurl
Me down. Call me not weaker than a girl.

LEADER.

Perchance our age misguides us; else it seems
Thou hast spoken with much thought on these high themes.

HAEMON.

Father, the gods have planted in our kind,
As man's peculiar prize, a reasoning mind,
And in thy words to find aught reasoned ill

Passes my power—far from me be the will!
Yet others too might some addition make
With wisdom. 'Tis my duty for thy sake
To watch the City, mark what things are done
Or said, or spoken in blame. The eye of one
Like thee strikes dread into the folk; they fear
To utter aught that might offend thine ear.
But I can hear their whisperings in the shade,
How the whole City mourneth for a maid
Most guiltless of all women, by a doom
Most undeserved, sent to a traitor's tomb,
For deeds, they say, most honourable. "Her own
Brother in battle slain she dared alone
To bury, and would not leave as carrion there
For ravening dogs or prowlers of the air.
Oh, honour, golden honour, should be hers!"
So runs the rumour of these whisperers.

No treasure, father, is so dear to me
As thy fair fortune. Nay, what can there be
To sons more precious than their father's fame,
A son's fame to his father? Must the same
Unchanging mood stay ever at its height,
And a word, spoken once, be always right?
A man who claimed that he alone had clear
Vision and power of speech without a peer—
Lay his soul bare, and little would ye find
But emptiness. They of the wisest mind
Learn gladly many lessons, and will bend
In season. Mark when swollen torrents rend
Their banks, the plants that yield save every shoot;
The stiff-necked tree falls riven from the root.
Aye, and the mariner who keeps his sheet
For ever taut, and never slackens it
For any wind, will soon be overtossed
And end his pleasant voyage keel uppermost.

Oh, cling not to thy wrath. Change that hard mood.
If I, being young, may yet speak aught of good
Counsel, 'twere best that men by their own sight
Should know all things and judge them always right.
But seeing that in this world things fall not so,
'Tis wise to learn what other men may know.

LEADER.

Sire, where he speaks in season, be not loath
To learn; and thou too, Haemon. Wise are both.

CREON.

Shall I then at the fulness of my age
Be tutored by this stripling to be sage?

HAEMON.

Nay, only to be just. 'Tis not my youth

That asks thee to reflect. 'Tis the bare truth.

CREON.

To praise the disobedient is Truth's task?

HAEMON.

For evil-doers nothing would I ask.

CREON.

Doth not this girl that very evil show?

HAEMON.

The whole of Thebes with one voice answers No.

CREON.

Does Thebes think to dictate our laws to us?

HAEMON.

Only the very young would argue thus.

CREON.

By whose will should I govern save mine own?

HAEMON.

No City is that which is one man's alone.

CREON.

The City is the King's. That law doth stand.

HAEMON.

A king like thee would suit an empty land.

CREON.

The woman's champion this man seems to be.

HAEMON.

Art thou a woman? I am protecting thee.

CREON.

Wrangling against thy father, thou bad son!

HAEMON.

Against false thoughts and deeds unjustly done.

CREON.

False, to uphold the honour of my crown?

HAEMON.

False, if thereby God's laws are trampled down.

CREON.

Sick for a woman! Pah, 'tis infamy.

HAEMON.

No shameful passion wilt thou find in me.

CREON.

Thou art pleading for this girl in every breath.

HAEMON.

For her, thee, me, and the holy rites of Death.

CREON.

Enough. She shall not live to be thy wife.

HAEMON.

Know then her life shall cost another life.

CREON.

Comes it to that? Thou dar'st to threaten me?

HAEMON.

'Tis no threat to confute a vain decree.

CREON.

Curse thy vain preaching and its wisdom vain!

HAEMON.

I dare not speak ill of my father's brain.

CREON.

Thou woman's thrall, spare me thine irony.

HAEMON.

Wouldst alway speak and list to no reply?

CREON.

Thou dar'st? By Heaven above, 'tis not for thee
To upbraid me, blame me, mock me, and go free.
Bring forth that hated thing, that she may die
Here where we stand, beneath her bridegroom's eye.

HAEMON.

I will not see her die. Conceive thou not
Such infamy. And never more, from now,
Madman, till death, shalt thou set eyes on me.
They that abhor thee not can rave with thee.

[*Exit* HAEMON.]

LEADER.

Most fierce and swift, O King, he hath fled from us.
A young heart's agony is dangerous.

CREON.

Fled? With his dreams and rages? Let him fly.
But those two girls he saves not. They shall die.

LEADER.

How? Is it thine intent to slay the two?

CREON.

Ah no. The sister never touched him. True.

LEADER.

What form of death for the other hast thou planned?

CREON.

First I will lead her to some lonely land,
And, living, in a rock-fast sepulchre,
Leave her imprisoned. Food and drink for her,
A little, shall be set, lest it be said
We have sinned and on all Thebes a curse be laid.
Hades, the one god whom she worshippeth,
May hear her prayers and rescue her from death.
Else she may learn at last, when all is said,
'Tis waste toil to think always of the dead.

[*Exit* CREON.]

CHORUS. [Strophe

Erôs, invincible in fight,
Who ragest in the flocks, Erôs,
Who hauntest, tender in repose,
A maiden's cheek at night;
Past the deep sea thy pinion flies,
Past where the hidden forest lies;

And none of gods immortal may
Escape thee; how shall humans, they
Whose breath endureth scarce a day?
The Madman grasps his prize.

[*Antistrophe*

Though man be just, by thee his mood
Is warped to wrong and wrecked his life;
'Tis thou, even here, hast wakened strife
'Tween kinsmen of one blood.
All-conquering is thy spell soft-eyed
That yearneth from the waiting bride;
Beside the eternal laws thy will
Is throned, where, irresistible
And deathless, Aphrodite still
Mocketh her prisoners' pride.

LEADER.

I too beyond the laws am borne,
And can no more. Who would not weep
To see this maiden, how forlorn
She moves before us to the deep
Bride-chamber of eternal sleep?

[Enter ANTIGONE guarded.

ANTIGONE. [Strophe 1

Behold, O Land of Thebes, O ye
My countrymen; I go my last
Journey; and never more shall see
The sunlight. All is past.
Hades, the Sleep-compeller, goes before
To guide me, living, to the lifeless shore;
No chant of trooping comrades leads me here,
No music for a human bridegroom's ear;
The bride of Acheron I for evermore.

CHORUS.

Therefore in glory and high praise
To yon dead vault thou goest thy ways;
No wasting sickness shalt thou fear,
No wages of the sword are here.
Alone and mistress of thy fate
Thou walkest living to the gate
Of Death, from all men separate.

ANTIGONE. [Antistrophe 1

I have heard how perished piteous
That Phrygian stranger, once our own,
'Gainst a high crag on Sipylus.
As ivy climbs, the stone

Climbed and subdued her, and there wasteth she—
So still abides the ancient history—
And the rains never leave her, nor the snow,
And the dim crown weeps on the breast below;
To stone go I, most like to Niobe.

CHORUS.

A goddess she and child of Heaven;
We born to die, of mortal blood;
Is it not grace surpassing, given
To one like thee, of human breath,
To have shared the suffering of a god,
In life, in death?

ANTIGONE. [Strophe 2

Ah, do ye mock me? Nay,
By your forefathers' gods and mine I pray,
Will ye not wait till I have gone my way,
Not taunt me to my face?
O banks of Dirce, holy place
Of Thêbê crowned and charioted;
O mine own City, men of my City, ye
Who are so rich; be witnesses for me,
How poor I go, how all uncomforted
Of friends, by how unjust a doom,
To this rock prison that shall be my tomb,
From night and day alike disherited,
Homeless on earth, homeless among the dead.

CHORUS.

My daughter, to the extreme height
Of daring thou hast climbed, and prone
Flung thee before the Altar-stone
Of Justice.—Ah, must thou requite
Wrongs by thy fathers done?

ANTIGONE. [Antistrophe 2

That stirs my bitterest thought,
My thrice-told aching sorrow for the lot
Of mine own father and all the travail-fraught
Line of our ancient kings.
Alas, alway the memory clings
Of evil to my mother's bed,
Of ignorance sent from heaven, and infamy
Wrought on her own son—and my father he . . .
How can my thought endure it? . . . Am I not bred
And born from them? Away to them I go,
Childless, accurst, to share their homes below.
O brother, not unloved but most ill-wed,
Thou hast slain me, thou has reached me from the dead.

CHORUS.

For man to be not merciless
Is a great part of godliness;
But never Power—so speaks the throne
Which guardeth power—may be defied.
'Tis for the passion of thine own
Resolve thou wilt have died.

ANTIGONE.

Alone, alone,
Unwept, unfriended, with no escort song,
They lead me. All is ready for the long
 Road that is all my own.
Ah, never more this holy Sun shall spread
 His light before mine eyes,
Unhappy! Yet for me no tears are shed,
 No comrade sighs.

CREON. [Enter CREON.

Think ye these songs and wailings before death
Will ever cease? They are but wasted breath.

Away with her; and in that vaulted tomb,
Alone and lost, obedient to my doom,
Let her go free, whether she wish to die
Or live in that rock grave. Untouched am I
Of blood-guilt from this girl. I take from her
Only her right to dwell in the upper air.

ANTIGONE.

O grave, O bridal chamber; O thou deep
Eternal prison house, wherein I keep
Tryst with my people, the great multitude
Below to Queen Persephone subdued.
To them I take my way, of all the last
And lowliest, ere my term of life is past;
And when I am there, my father—that is now
My one sure hope—will welcome me; and thou,
My mother; and thou love me, Eteocles.
For when ye all lay dead, what hands but these
Washed and adorned your bodies, and the due
Drink offerings poured above you? For thee too
Dead Polynices, that same office I
Sought to fulfil; and 'tis for this I die.
What law of Heaven have I offended? Yet
How dare I look to Heaven, and hope to get
Pity or help from there? I sought to ensure
Our purity, and lo, I am found impure!
If these things be God's pleasure, before long
By pain I shall be taught mine was the wrong;
But if the wrong lies with my judge, may he

Meet no worse pain than he has wrought on me.

LEADER.

Ah, still the same wind holdeth true
Within her, the same breezes blow.

CREON.

Aye, and for that her guards shall rue
The slowness of the gait they go.

ANTIGONE.

Ah, very near that word hath come
To my last breath.

CREON.

No hope I give thee, that this doom
Means aught but death.

ANTIGONE.

O City of our fathers, O
Ye gods ancestral, he doth lay
His hand upon me, and I go;
Enough, I ask no more delay.
Oh, of our Princes is there one who sees
Me, the great King's last daughter, deathward driven,
What wrongs I suffer—and from men like these—
Because I am faithful to the Laws of Heaven.

[*The Guards lead Antigone away, right.*

[*Exit Creon.*

CHORUS. [Strophe 1

So Danaë from sunlight was forbidden,
In that brass-walled prison-house immured;
Tomb-dark was her marriage chamber hidden,
And a yoke upon her neck; yet she endured;
Though her lineage was of honour manifold,
And her womb held a God's rain of gold.
(My child, O my child!)
For unknown and passing great Is the mystery of Fate;
There is naught that can protect from her nor save,
Not wealth nor armèd powers, Not walled City towers,
Nor the black ships that battle on the wave.

[Antistrophe 1

To the same yoke that Man of Wrath was broken,
The Edonian King, aflame to gibe and mock,
When the doom of Dionyse on him was spoken,
To lie bound in the bondage of the rock;
Till the stone his hot fury did allay,

And his pride withered, flower-like, away.
So changed he, O my child,
And knew his wild tongue Had wrought blasphemy and wrong,
When he strove the Maidens' Worship to abate,
To subdue the Maenad Choir, And to quench the mystic fire,
And the love-song of the Muses turn to hate.

[*Strophe 2*

Beyond the Dark Rocks and the sea twofold
Lie Bosphorus shores and Salmydessus old,
Where Ares marked the blow, the blinding pain,
Wrought on the sons of Cleopatra twain

By Phineus' evil wife:
Accursed blow, which shed from sudden skies
Darkness upon those vengeance-craving eyes,
Struck by a bloody hand, struck woman-wise
Deep with the weaver's knife.

[*Antistrophe 2*

There pining they bewailed their evil fate,
Sons of a prisoned mother, wooed in hate:
Yet sprung was she of high Erechtheus' race,
And midst her father's storms, in loneliness,
Reared among caverns wild,
A North-Wind's daughter, courser-fleet to flee
O'er gulf and crag; a child of Heaven was she.
Yet even on her the eternal Fates' decree
Bore down, O Child, my Child!
[Enter the blind Seer TIRESIAS, led by a Boy.

TIRESIAS.

Lords of the land, with steps in unison,
We move, the twain served by the eyes of one.
So guided go the journeys of the blind.

[CREON comes from the Palace.

CREON.

Tiresias grey, what care is on thy mind?

TIRESIAS.

That will I show. 'Tis thine to obey thy seer.

CREON.

To thee I have always turned a heedful ear.

TIRESIAS.

And thereby wisely steered our City's oar.

CREON.

Thy truth I have felt, and know.

TIRESIAS.

Know then, once more
Thou art standing on the razor edge of doom.

CREON.

How so? I tremble at thy words, thy gloom.

TIRESIAS.

List to the warnings of my craft, and thou
Shalt know all. When I took my place but now
At my old seat of augury, that fair
Harbour for every wanderer of the air,
I marked in the birds' voices an unknown
Turmoil, an evil and bejargoned tone;
And in the air felt blood, with claw and beak
Bird tearing bird. That whirr of wings could speak.

Much fearing, to burnt sacrifice I turned.
The altar was full-kindled; but there burned
No flame upon my gifts; only a dank
Humour came oozing from the victim's flank,
And smoked and sputtered; and the lobe and gall
Were scattered bursting, and the bones withal,
Bared of the fat that wrapped them round, writhed back.
All signs had failed me: all were dim with lack
Of answer, as I learned from this boy's sight,
Who giveth me, as I give others, light.

'Tis thou hast brought this sickness on the land.
Through thee our hearthstones and our altars stand
Polluted, one and all, with carrion torn
By dogs and birds from that dead corpse thy scorn
Leaves naked, the slain son of Oedipus.
Wherefore the gods no more accept from us
Due prayers of sacrifice, nor heed the flame
Of our burnt offering; nor will birds proclaim
By voice or wing their message, who for food
Are gorged with a slain man's polluting blood.
Ponder these things, my Prince, and know that none
Lives from all error free. When wrong is done,
I count that man not witless nor unblest
Who striveth to redeem a fault confessed,
And changes. 'Tis the stubborn, cleaving fast
To their own mood, show witless at the last.
Oh, yield thee to the dead. Stab not again
Them that are fallen. To re-slay the slain
Is scarce a deed of valour. Lord, I prize
Thy welfare, and I know wherein it lies.
Therefore think well. Surely 'tis little pain
To heed a lesson that brings naught but gain.

CREON.

Old man, ye all must shoot your bolts at me,
Like archers at the butts. Even augury
Must have its practice. Augurs! Nay, I know
Your tribe has bought and sold me long ago.

Go, chase your bargains; make your profits sure
With gold alloy of Sardis, aye, and pure
Gold, if ye list, from India; but for all
Your bribes that man shall not have burial.
Not though the carrion by our Father's own
Eagles were borne to the Olympian throne,
Not even for fear of that would I bestow
Burial on that man's flesh. Besides, I know
Earth has no stain to touch the gods withal.

Not so, my aged seer; an ugly fall
Waits even the subtlest of us, when they make
Smooth words and treacherous for lucre's sake.

TIRESIAS.

Alas!
Doth any of mortals know, doth any muse . . .

CREON.

Know what? Speak out. Let all men hear thy news.

TIRESIAS.

How precious is good counsel, more than gold.

CREON.

And lack of it great mischief, so I am told.

TIRESIAS.

Yet with that mischief sick thou standest here.

CREON.

I care not to speak insult to a seer.

TIRESIAS.

Insult it is, to call my warnings vain.

CREON.

These prophets always had a lust for gain.

TIRESIAS.

The lust of tyrants is a baser thing.

CREON.

Know'st thou that speech is spoken of thy King?

TIRESIAS.

Yes; 'twas I taught him how to save this land.

CREON.

Good seecraft hast thou, but a greedy hand.

TIRESIAS.

Peace! Lest I say the word I must not say.

CREON.

Speak freely; but this time 'tis not for pay.

TIRESIAS.

These things in truth thou canst believe of me?

CREON.

Yes, never think I am befooled by thee.

TIRESIAS.

Then list and know. Above thine head shall run
Scarce one course of the chariot of the Sun,
Ere thou from thine own flesh one living head
Shalt give to death as payment for the dead.
A thing of light thou hast hurled to eternal gloom,
A soul held prisoned living in the tomb;
Yet holdest in the light, Death's law denied,
Unharboured, unbewailed, unpurified,
A corpse, not thine nor to the world above
Pertaining; thou hast forced the gates thereof.
Wherefore pursuing slow, implacable,
From Heaven Avengers seek thee and from Hell,
Till all thou hast wrought thou suffer. Wouldst thou gauge
If this a hireling speaks, and no true sage?
Thou hast not long to wait ere wailing cries
From man and woman in thy house shall rise.
Yea, hate of thee rends many cities, all
Whose slaughtered sons from dogs had funeral
Or beasts or birds, who then polluted came
Back to their City's hearth, and fouled its flame.

These words—for thou hast wronged me—I have shot
Like arrows; thou shalt not forget how hot
Their flame is. . . . Child, let us go home again.
Let this king spend his rage on younger men,
And learn to keep a gentler tongue, and bear
In his heart's core more ruth than now is there.

[*Exit TIRESIAS and the Boy.*

LEADER.

He hath gone, O King. Most dire his bodings were.
And well I wot that never since this hair,
Now white and old, from sable turned its hue,
Has aught which that voice uttered proved untrue.

CREON.

I know it, and am shaken in my mind.
'Twere hard to weaken. Yet, if pride be blind,
To let pride foul the rocks, that too were hard.

LEADER.

Son of Menoikeus, think; be well on guard!

CREON.

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

LEADER.

Free from her tomb that maiden. Go straightway.
Then make due burial for that outcast dead.

CREON.

This is thy counsel? I must bow my head?

LEADER.

Yes, Lord, and with all speed. Too swiftly press
The strokes of God upon man's tardiness.

CREON.

Ah me, 'tis hard. Against my cherished will
I yield. The thing must be; why struggle still?

LEADER.

Go, leave it not to others. Do the deed.

CREON.

Even as I am, I go.—Up with all speed,
My servitors. Take axes, one and all,
Gather to yonder hill. There wait my call.

My judgement is reversed. Since it was I
Who tied this knot I also shall untie.
Yet, Oh, I fear. The wise are they who wend
The ways of law even to their being's end.

[*Exit* CREON.]

CHORUS. [Strophe 1]

Many-namèd One, thou the delight of Cadmus' daughter,
Thou the high Thunderer's Son,
Lord of Icaria and the all-welcoming water
That leads to Dêo's throne;
O Mystery, She of the mystic virgin band,
Thêbê, is all thine own,
And the rippling flow of Ismenus and that deep land
Where Dragon's teeth were sown.

[*Antistrophe 1*

Thou art seen by an Eye in the smoke of the brands above thee
Where peaks two-crested gleam;
Seen by the dancing Corycian nymphs, who love thee,
And low Castalia's stream.
And the ivied slopes of Nysa, with all her long
Green capes of clustered vine,
Have sent thee with jubilance of unearthly song
To watch o'er Thebes divine.

[*Strophe 2*

Her of all cities ye twain hold first in honour,
Thou and the Lightning's Bride;
Be near to her now, while this strong plague is on her,
Come, healing feet, over Delphi's mountain side
Or the gulf's moaning tide.

[*Antistrophe 2*

Thou leader of circling stars, whose breath is fire,
God of the midnight Voice,
Zeus-child, Iacchos, appear, and let the choir
Of Maenads, night-enchanted about thy lyre,
O Treasure of Life, rejoice!

[*Enter MESSENGER from right.*

MESSENGER.

O ye who dwell beside the wall divine
Of Cadmus and Amphîon's ancient shrine
There lives not one whose fortunes I would dare
Call sure, for good or evil, anywhere.
'Tis Chance upraises, Chance hurls down again
The lowly and the exalted among men,
And what seer knoweth aught that shall abide?
Creon was blest, high-praised on every side,
Who saved the City of Cadmus from her foes
And kinglike to her sole dominion rose,
Holding straight course, by stalwart sons upstayed;
And now 'tis all lost! One who hath betrayed
His own bliss, him I count, whate'er be said,
No living man. He breathes but he is dead.
Heap high your house with gold, live with the pride
And pomp of kings; but if ye be denied
The power of joy, all else I count as less
Than shadow of smoke compared with happiness.

LEADER.

What new grief for our king hast thou to tell?

MESSENGER.

Death; though he lives through whom the death befell.

LEADER.

Who is the slayer? Speak. And who the dead?

MESSENGER.

Haemon. His blood no stranger hand hath shed.

LEADER.

No stranger hand? His sire's then, or his own?

MESSENGER.

His own, wroth with that sire for murder done.

LEADER.

O prophet, how thine every word was true!

MESSENGER.

Even so. Bethink ye what remains to do.

LEADER.

But lo, 'tis Creon's Queen, Eurydice:
Unhappy! At the portal standeth she
Haply by chance; or hath she of Haemon heard?

[Enter EURYDICE from the house.

EURYDICE.

People of Thebes, I caught some spoken word
Just as from home I started, to implore
Pallas with prayer. My hand was on the door
Lifting the bars, when on mine ear was thrown
Noise of a sorrow that was all my own,
And suddenly fear caught me, and I fell
Back in my handmaids' arms insensible.
But speak again; say what your tidings were.
As one well versed in sorrows I shall hear.

MESSENGER.

Naught will I hide from thee, beloved Queen,
Nor speak of aught save what these eyes have seen.
Why seek for soothing words, when any test

Would prove the words false? Truth is alway best.

I was thy lord's attendant on his way
To the plain's edge, where still unpitied lay
That body, torn by dogs. To Pluto there
And Her of the Three Ways we made our prayer,
In mercy to withhold their wrath; then turned
With cleansing waters to the dead, and burned
With new-plucked boughs such torn flesh as we found
Scattered, in one poor heap, and raised a mound
Of Theban earth above him. On we sped
Seeking the maiden's deep rock-carpeted
Chamber, where Death lay waiting for his bride;
Till one man heard a sound, something that cried
In anguish, circling round that shrine unblest,
And ran to tell the King. He quickly pressed
Onward, and lo, again there floated by,
As he drew near, faint phantoms of a cry
Of desperate sorrow. With a sudden groan
He cried aloud: "What evil have I done!
Art thou a prophet, O my heart? This road
Will be the bitterest that I e'er have trod.
That voice speaks to my heart. On; no delay.
Make entrance where the stones are wrenched away
Yonder beside the portal. Look within
The cell itself. See if mine ear hath been
Mocked by the gods, or did I hear too true
The voice of Haemon?" At his word we flew
To search, and in the cavern's most remote
Corner we saw her, hanging; round her throat
Her flaxen zone entwined; and by her young
Haemon, his arms about her body flung,
Wailed for his bride rapt from the light above,
His father's fury and his blasted love.

The King saw all, and with a dreadful groan
Rushed on into the cave: "Unhappy son,
What is it thou hast done? What evil thought
Possessed thee or what anguish so distraught?
Forgive me, child! Come forth. Thy father prays."
With burning eyes the boy flung back his gaze,
Spat in his face and spoke no word, but drew
His sword twice-stabbing. Back his father flew
And his stroke missed its aim. Then, wroth with fate,
Wroth with himself, he flung with all his weight
His body on the sword, till through his side
'Twas driven for half its length. Yet, as he died,
He turned again with groping arms, and pressed,
Ere all sense fled, the maiden to his breast,
And, as he gasped his life away, there flowed
Across her pale cheek a red stream of blood.

Dead on the dead he lies, his marriage rite
Fulfilled not here but in the realms of night.
Surely, of all the perils God hath cursed
Mankind with, man's own folly is the worst.

[*Exit EURYDICE.*

LEADER.

How read you that? The Queen so suddenly
Vanished without a word. What meaneth she?

MESSENGER.

I too am full of wonder; yet I wait
On hope, that hearing thus of Haemon's fate
She deigns not here in public to begin
The mourning. She will charge her maids within
To aid her private sorrow. Firm and true
Her judgement is; no folly would she do.

LEADER.

Who knows? On my heart heavy both would lie,
Too deep a silence or too wild a cry.

MESSENGER.

Oh, we must know. I fear some thought apart
And secret lies in that indignant heart.
I will go seek her. Aye, thou counselest well;
Silence can be too great, and terrible.

[Exit MESSENGER. Enter CREON from right with
the body of HAEMON in his arms.

CHORUS.

But lo, the King himself draws near,
His arms with a strange burden fraught,
Which—dare I speak it?—showeth clear
Its story of blind evil wrought
By his own hand, his thought.

CREON. [Strophe 1

O sins of a darkened brain
Hard and death-fraught! At one
Ye see us, father and son,
Slayer and slain.
Woe for my counsels high,
Unblessèd! So young to die,
So young; art verily dead
And the spirit within thee fled;
The madman not thou, but I?

LEADER.

Methinks thou hast looked on Justice, all too late.

CREON.

Ah me, I have learned my lesson. But the weight

Of God's wrath then, I trow,
Was heavy upon my brow
And hurled me to harsh ways and desperate.
Gone is my happiness
And cast behind;
Alas for the sore stress
Of poor mankind. [Enter MESSENGER.]

MESSENGER.

O Master, rich in woes and grief-possessed,
One sorrow in thine arms thou carriest,
And lo, another waiteth in thine home.

CREON.

How? Is there worse affliction yet to come?

MESSENGER.

The Queen is dead, true mother of the dead
Thou holdest. This new blow hath bowed her head.

CREON. [Antistrophe 1]

O Haven of Hades, thou
Unclean, insatiable,
Is there no mercy now?
Alas, herald of ill,
Caster abroad of woe,
What tiding bringest thou? Oh,
The cry of a woman slain,
Life given where life was ta'en,
Clingeth, and will not go.

[The Body of EURYDICE is borne in.]

CHORUS.

'Tis no more hidden; all thou canst behold.

CREON.

I see a new dire grief upon me rolled:
Ah me, what stroke of fate
Still can my heart await,
Even as my dead son in my arms I fold.
Death upon death I see
Before me piled.
Mother, alas for thee!
Alas, thy child!

MESSENGER.

There at the altar kneeling, suppliant-wise,
Pierced through with sudden grief, her darkling eyes

She raised, and lifted up her voice to mourn
That elder son, of old to glory borne,
Then cried on Haemon, then with her last breath
She cursed thy name, who wrought her children's death.

CREON. [Strophe 2

Aiai, O wingèd fear!
Why am I living? Why
Did ye not slay me? I
Am guilty. The sword was here.
Fearful am I and in a world of fear.

MESSENGER.

Yea, both for Haemon and his brother dead
Her dying breath laid guilt upon thy head.

CREON.

'Mid all that death how did her soul depart?

MESSENGER.

When Haemon's fate, by wild tears heralded,
She heard, her own hand struck and found her heart.

CREON.

Surely this heavy deed
Shall never lift, Ah me,
Nor lie on another's head
To leave me free.
'Twas I, even I, who slew
My son; that word is true.
Ye thralls, away, away, and beyond the press
With one who is now no more than nothingness.

LEADER.

Well counsellest thou, if ought can here be well:
Briefest is best where all is miserable.

CREON. [Antistrophe 2

Come to me, come in power
O thou sweet destiny,
Bringer of my last hour,
Fairest of hours that be,
That ne'er another dawn these eyes may see.

LEADER.

Such thoughts be for the morrow; this day's call
Sufficeth; and God's eye shall care for all.

CREON.

All that I crave is gathered in that prayer.

LEADER.

Ah, pray no more. From that which must befall
No man escapeth. Each his lot must bear.

CREON.

Away with a life most vain!
My son, thee have I slain,
Unwitting, and thee, O dear
Woman who liest here.
From which of you should I best
Seek pardon? Where find rest?
All that was in my hands awry hath fled,
And left a moveless doom to crush my head.

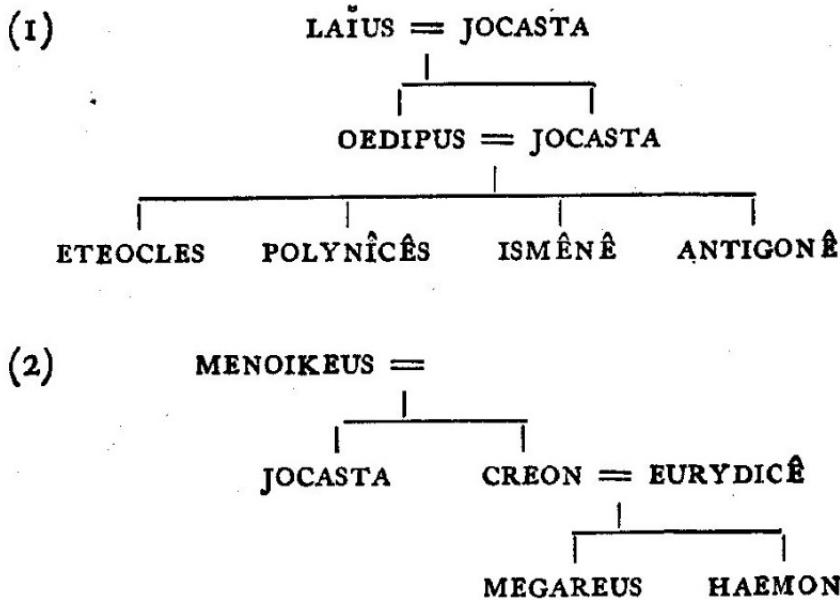
[CREON *is led away.*

CHORUS.

Supreme in man's felicity
Is Wisdom; and the wise in awe
Bow them beneath God's ancient law.
Vain-glorious lips and vanity
In heavy stripes their payment earn,
And men grow old before they learn.

N O T E S

P. 17, ll. 1, 2. The curses of our race: The family tree according to Sophocles is as follows:



Creon was Jocasta's brother. This play picks up the story as left by Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* (where, after the discovery of Oedipus' involuntary sins, Jocasta hangs herself and Oedipus puts out his eyes) and Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* (where Oedipus is already dead and his two sons, fighting for the crown of Thebes, have killed one another).

Sophocles in his old age wrote another Oedipus play, *Oedipus at Colonus*, in which the old and blind Oedipus, driven to exile by his sons, is tended by young Antigone; but there is no suggestion of that story here.

The language of this first speech of Antigone is, in the Greek, hurried, excited and not quite grammatical.

P. 17, l. 18. Beyond the gate: In Greek drama people who wish for privacy generally go out of doors.

P. 20, l. 77. "You make of no account rules which the gods regard as sacred."

P. 22, l. 100. The happy victory-song of the Elders makes a good contrast with the tense foreboding of the previous scene. As to the allusions: Polynicës, after being expelled from Thebes by his brother, had married Argeia, the daughter of Adrastus, King of Argos, who led the expedition of the Seven Chiefs against Thebes in order to win the crown for his son-in-law. The Dragon stands for Thebes, whose oldest families were sprung from the Dragon's Teeth sown by Cadmus; Dirce is the famous Theban stream. The White Shields were characteristic of Argos.

P. 23, l. 133. One there was: The gigantic Capaneus, who defied the thunderbolt of Zeus and was struck dead by it.

P. 23, l. 140 ff. Arès, god of War, and Dionysus (Bacchus) are the two patron gods of Thebes. Thêbê, the nymph, is a sort of personification of Thebes; one might compare the nymph Aegina, the goddess Athena, or *Dea Roma*.

P. 23, l. 141. Seven chieftains: the names of the Seven vary: the most usual list is Adrastus, Tydeus, Capaneus, Hippomedon, Parthenopaeus, Amphiaraus, Polynicēs.

P. 25, l. 182 ff. Creon's speech is dignified and patriotic. Granted the law that enemies should be left unburied, his decision not to exempt Polynices from the law for personal or family reasons, is correct, though perhaps imprudent. The law itself, and the penalty of death for attempting to break it, were by Athenian standards barbarous and are afterwards explicitly condemned by Tiresias (p. 65, ll. 1015 ff.).

P. 26, ll. 211 ff. The Elders clearly dislike Creon's decision.

P. 27, ll. 223 ff. The GUARD. A very effective character. See Introduction, p. 11.

P. 29, l. 248. What man: Some dramatic value in the masculine.

P. 30, ll. 278 f. These lines, the only open protest of the Elders, rouse Creon to fury. This should be remembered in interpreting their cautious language later.

P. 30, l. 289. Have alway whispered: It is objected that Creon speaks as if he had reigned for a considerable time, whereas this was really his first day on the throne. One might answer that, as the Queen's brother and a sort of Grand Vizier to Oedipus, as he is represented in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, he had long had experience of these intrigues.

P. 32, l. 323. A play on the two senses of the word δοκεῖν , "to seem good" and "to think." "A bad business, when a man is determined to think what is untrue."

P. 32, ll. 332-375. CHORUS. A fine imaginative lyric on the tremendous powers of man and his scientific inventions, a power which may be used equally for good or for evil. It reads like a prophetic condemnation of our contemporary world.

P. 35, ll. 400-450. It is worth noting that Creon is utterly taken aback by the discovery of Antigone's action and at first does not know what to say or do. Antigone of course is fully prepared.

P. 36, ll. 418-431. The dust-storm hid everything like a thick fog, and Antigone took advantage of it to approach the body. The question has been raised why she should make this second burial. She had already performed the necessary rite; ritually there was no need to do it again, while materially this second attempt is just as inefficient as the first. The answer, I think, is that such reasoning might satisfy an expert theologian, but does not allow for natural human feeling. When Antigone saw the body exposed again she would naturally try again to bury it, even if the burial could only be formal.

P. 38, ll. 454 f. The unwritten and undying laws of God: This belief in an external law of Justice or Righteousness, as independent of human wishes as the physical laws of the universe, is deeply characteristic of Greek thought. It is here a law of the Gods, but normally the Gods themselves are subject to it.

P. 41, l. 523. The form of this famous line is untranslatable and its meaning not clear. "I was born not to hate with those who hate, but to love with those who love." She will take no part in the family feuds, but she feels intensely the ties of love or kinship that hold the family together. Cf. 893-903, p. 60.

P. 43, l. 556. That must not be: I.e. You shall not take it as settled that you are to die and I to live, until you have heard me.

P. 45, l. 572. Haemon beloved: The MSS. attribute this line to Ismene, rightly in my opinion. Many modern editors, following Aldus, give it to Antigone on the ground

that "Haemon beloved" or "most dear" is more natural in Antigone's mouth, and Creon's "Thou and thy love" more natural as addressed to her. They also seem to have felt that some expression of Antigone's love for Haemon was greatly needed. On the other hand (1) the sudden intervention of a new speaker with a single line is difficult in any drama and, I think, unexampled in Greek drama; (2) It was not in accord with Greek taste that a woman should express her love in the presence of men. Even in Euripides' play Phaedra never speaks a word to Hippolytus. Cf. Ar. *Frogs* 1044. Not only is Antigone silent about her love, but Haemon indignantly repudiates his father's taunt that he is influenced by his.

I take it that Antigone turns away after l. 560 ("free given in service to the dead"), and Ismene breaks off in despair after Creon's insulting rejection of her in l. 573.

P. 46, l. 582 CHORUS. When a House is once shaken by God there is no escape for it. Evils come upon it like waves of the sea in storm till nothing is left. So it is now with House of Oedipus. The sisters were the one hope left, and that hope is now swept away by dust from the world of darkness, by folly and raging hate. The greatness of Zeus is eternal, man's greatness merely leads to downfall. The man who thinks himself great is deluded by false Hope for a moment—just a moment—before he falls.

Observe that this is a reversion to the primitive doctrine of the Jealousy of God, which Aeschylus passionately denies (*Ag.* 750-760). In Sophocles it is mere prosperity or greatness that is punished; in Aeschylus it is not that, it is always unrighteousness.

Pp. 48 ff., ll. 631-765. The Haemon Scene. In this scene Creon, deserted by everyone, becomes desperate and loses all self-control. Haemon's tact does not hold out long, but of course nothing but utter submission would have appeased Creon.

P. 52, ll. 738 f. Haemon states the normal Greek position against the "tyrant," who thinks the State belongs to him. (*L'état c'est moi.*) Such a ruler would suit a state which had no inhabitants, because then there would be nobody to differ from him!

P. 55, ll. 769 f. Those two girls: A significant touch. Creon will not withdraw any decision he has made and for the moment he imagines he has to put both the sisters to death. To his great relief he is reminded that Ismene has not broken the law and he has said nothing about her.

P. 55, ll. 781 ff. Eros Chorus. How strange is Love among beasts, men and gods; fierce, tender, unescapable—and a Madman! He breeds injustice among the just and hate between kinsmen. Is love a personal fascination; is it an impersonal eternal Power? Either way it is irresistible. (Pronounce the o long, like "a rose.")

P. 56, l. 801. I too beyond the bounds: The Elders can no longer profess obedience or neutrality.

P. 56 ff., ll. 806-882. The sequence of thought in this lyric scene is worth noting.

ANT. I go to a living death, a bride of the Grave.

CHO. But you go of your own will, to a death like no other. You will have great glory.

ANT. Niobe, once queen of Thebes, was turned to weeping stone; I am like her.

CHO. She was a goddess. You are to die a goddess's death.

ANT. Do not mock me! I go friendless, homeless in both worlds, to a death that is

miserable and unjust.

CHO. Daughter, you have dared all, for the sake of Right, and lost. It must be some sin of your forefathers for which you suffer.

ANT. That is my bitterest thought. I come of a sinful and accursed House. I am like them and I go to join them.

CHO. If Creon were truly godly he would be merciful; but Power cannot endure to be defied. You die for your own passionate faith.

ANT. I am utterly alone. I die friendless and unpitied.

P. 57, l. 324. Niobe, daughter of Tantalus, was wife to Amphîon, King of Thebes. When her children were slain by Apollo and Artemis, she went back to her home at Mt. Sipylus and was turned to weeping stone.

P. 58, ll. 353 ff. Prone flung thee before the Altar stone: That is as a suppliant, the regular connotation of προσπίττειν in tragedy. The common interpretation: "You have gone to the extreme of recklessness, and naturally come into conflict with Altar of Justice" seems to me to suit neither the Greek nor the situation.

P. 59, l. 872. To be not merciless: A very obscure phrase in the Greek. "To revere (pay respect) is a kind of godliness." Creon did not "pay respect" to Antigone; Antigone did "pay respect" to Polynices; either may be referred to, but the following phrase, which certainly refers to Creon, makes a better antithesis if this refers to Creon too. The sense is: "If Creon were really pious he would have some regard for his victims; but one cannot expect a man in power ever to allow his power to be defied."

P. 60, l. 889. Untouched am I; His conscience is troubling him. "I did not kill her. It is not my fault if she died." I have heard a distinguished oriental theologian argue that to strike a man whom you dislike with a stick is a sin, but there is no obligation to give or sell food to him even though he is starving and the refusal to do so will have fatal results. Cf. Macbeth's "Thou canst not say I did it" to Banquo's ghost.

P. 60, ll. 904-920. I have omitted a passage of sixteen lines which occurs in all the MSS. but is considered spurious by most editors. See the discussion in Jebb; also in Mr. Page's *Actors' Interpolations in Tragedy*, pp. 86 ff. If an interpolation, it was interpolated before the time of Aristotle, who refers to it (*Rhet.* 3, 16). The argument is taken from *Herodotus* 3, 11 where the wife of Intaphernê gives the same reasons for saving the life of her brother rather than her husband or child.

Yet he who thinks will praise what I have done.

Never, were I a mother and my son

Lay dead, were I a wife and he that died

My husband, never had I so defied

My City's will. Ye ask me on what ground?

A husband lost, another might be found;

Another son be born if one were slain.

But I, when Hades holds my parents twain,

Must brotherless abide for evermore.

Therefore I did thee honour, and therefore:

Hath Creon called me mad, my brother, yea,

A doer of evil. And I am led away

Unwed, unsung, robbed of the love that should

In right be mine and joy of motherhood.
Friendless, by fate accursed, with my breath
Yet warm, they cast me to the House of Death.

They are not only poor verses; they are totally inconsistent with Antigone's previous statements of motive; they are also irrelevant to the situation, as there was no question of saving a brother's life.

P. 60, l. 924. I am found impure: Literally "I acquired impiety" where we should say "a reputation for impiety." In primitive societies, where the collective feeling has almost irresistible authority, the individual who is universally considered "impious" or "impure" or "blood-guilty" or the like becomes so in his own opinion as well. In early Greek society the individual was vigorously asserting himself, his own judgement and conscience, against the herd, but the language still retained phrases belonging to the more primitive condition. From this usage Sophocles gets a fine psychological effect. Her courage fails. She is impious, in the eyes of Thebes, in the eyes of the gods; impious altogether!

P. 61, l. 940. The great King's last daughter: The only real representative, since Ismene has capitulated. In her last protest she again asserts that she is right and all Thebes wrong, she a royal princess and Creon and his associates common people.

P. 62 f., ll. 944-987. A difficult enigmatic poem. Early poetry in many parts of the world likes to make riddling allusions to the national myths and legends. The "kennings" of Icelandic Skaldic poetry form a striking instance. Gold is called "the Giants' mouthful" because of three giants who once divided a hoard by taking each as much of it as his mouth could hold; an arrow is "the leaping herring of Egil," Egil being a celebrated archer. Here reference is made to three Children of Kings who, like Antigone, were subdued by Fate and confined in strange prisons. Danaë, princess of Argos, was imprisoned in a tower of brass because her father, Acrisius, had been told by an oracle that her son would kill him. But Zeus in a shower of gold visited her in the tower. Her son was Perseus.

Lycurgus, King of the Edonians in Thrace, rejected and insulted Dionysus, as Pentheus, King of Thebes, does in the *Bacchae*.

Cleopatra, daughter of Boreas and Oreithyia, was married to Phineus, King of Salmydessus, who put her away and married the wicked Eidothea, who had Cleopatra imprisoned and her sons blinded.

The repeated cry, "My child" is possibly an appeal to Antigone even now to repent and ask for mercy, but more probably it is a mere expression of emotion.

P. 63 ff., ll. 988-1090. The Tiresias Scene. In structure like a preliminary study for the great Tiresias scene in the Oedipus; the warning, the silence, the breakdown of the silence through anger, and the confounding of the proud king. Note that the prophet is almost entirely occupied with the question of ritual pollution; there is no word of defence or sympathy for Antigone. Tiresias in tragedy is regularly guided by a boy, except in the *Bacchae* (ll. 170 ff.) where he has inspiration to guide him.

P. 66, ll. 1033 ff. It seems curious, if Creon had hitherto always been guided by Tiresias, that he should be so ready to suspect him now. There is the same relation between Oedipus and Tiresias, between Saul and Samuel, one might almost add, between Henry II and Thomas à Beckett. Doubtless the King feared and disliked these uncanny medicine-men, even while he gave them all marks of respect and honour.

P. 68, l. 1080. Hate of thee rends many cities: Evidently, therefore, all the dead of the invading army were left unburied; Polynices was only being treated like the rest. The prophet condemns the whole practice, as Athenian opinion condemned it. See Euripides' *Suppliant Women*.

P. 69, l. 1100. Free from her tomb that maiden: If he had gone straight to release Antigone, as the Elders advised, she might have been saved. See Introduction, p. 9.

P. 70, l. 1115 ff. The song of exultation coming just before disaster, a favourite effect of Sophocles, is perhaps justified here by the relief of the Elders at Creon's change of heart. The similar outburst in the *Oedipus*, ll. 1086 ff., is harder to justify. Cf. *Ajax*, ll. 693 ff., *Trachiniae*, 633 ff.

P. 70, l. 1115. Many-namèd One: Many separate local worships were absorbed into the cult of Dionysus who was then regarded as one god with many names. Here he is specially associated with Eleusis, sharing the Mysteries with Dêmêtêr; with Thebes, as son of Zeus and Semelê, who died in the embrace of the divine Lightning; with Delphi, where his torches can be seen flashing over the peaks of Parnassus, above the Corycian Cave; with the Maenads, whose dances he leads under the mystic name of Iacchus.

P. 71, ll. 1155 and 1188. The "unprepared" entrances of the Messenger and of Eurydice show a certain lack of technical skill compared with Sophocles' later work, though the actual Messenger's Speech is very fine when we come to it. (Cf. on 1244.)

P. 73, l. 1183. I caught some spoken word: Not necessarily the words just spoken to the Chorus, which would leave hardly time for the queen's swoon and recovery.

P. 73, l. 1199. Her of the Three Ways: Hecatê. As a goddess of the underworld she was offended by the denial of the funeral rites.

P. 73, ll. 1204, 1207. "That tower unblest": The horror felt by the ordinary man at the living tomb of Antigone expresses itself in these repeated phrases.

P. 74, l. 1216. Stones wrenched away: This showed that some one had broken into the tomb: evidently Haemon.

P. 74, l. 1233. Twice-stabbing: literally "twofold points (stabbers) of his sword."

P. 75, l. 1244. [*Exit EURYDICE*: This silent exit is an effect which Sophocles used later with much greater effect in the *Oedipus*, l. 1072.]

P. 78, l. 1301. There at the altar kneeling: The Greek text is uncertain here. It looks as if it mentioned her suicide, but if so, Creon's question in l. 1314 and the two lines answering it would clearly be superfluous.

P. 78, l. 1303. That elder son: Megareus or Menoikeus. Tiresias had pronounced that, to save Thebes, one of the Spartoi (the Dragon race), must die. Megareus voluntarily stabbed himself and fell from a tower into the Dragon's den. In Euripides' *Phoenissae* Creon tries to save his son, who deliberately deceives him in order to sacrifice himself. Perhaps Sophocles was here following a version in which Creon obediently carried out the demand of the prophet.

P. 79, l. 1324. Briefest is best: Most readers feel disappointed by the later scenes of this play. After the departure of Antigone and the last lyric about her (l. 987) it is difficult to become greatly interested in the new characters, Tiresias and Eurydice. Tiresias, of course, is necessary to the plot, but Eurydice seems only to have been

added in order to give greater poignancy to the Messenger's Speech by having it actually addressed to the mother of Haemon and not merely to the Elders. It looks as if Sophocles had made a bold experiment in the effect to be produced by silent acting.

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Transcriber's Notes:-

The line numbers refer to the lines in the original Greek text, not the lines as translated.

P. 67 "Know's thou that speech" changed to "Know'st thou that speech"

P. 25 "Oer a great City, cleaveth not alway" changed to "O'er a great City, cleaveth not alway"

Minor punctuation errors corrected.

[End of *Antigone*, by Sophocles, translated by Gilbert Murray]