

ANTIGONE

SOPHOCLES

Although *Antigone* is a complete play, it is closely associated with two other plays by Sophocles: *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. *Oedipus*, separated from his royal parents at birth, fulfills a dreadful prophecy. When he becomes an adult, he unknowingly kills his father and marries his mother, *Jocasta*. As king of *Thebes*, *Oedipus* blinds and banishes himself when he learns what he has done, leaving his brother-in-law *Creon* to rule. With his daughters *Antigone* and *Ismene*, *Oedipus* wanders in torment for years, finally dying in *Colonus*. *Antigone* and *Ismene* return to *Thebes* to find their brothers, *Eteocles* and *Polynices*, arguing about who should rule the kingdom. After *Creon* sides with *Eteocles*, *Polynices* raises an army and attacks *Thebes*. The brothers kill one another in battle. When *Creon* orders full burial honors for *Eteocles* but commands that *Polynices* remain unburied, he condemns the soul to eternal unrest. At this point the play *Antigone* begins.

CHARACTERS

ISMENE (is mē/nē)
ANTIGONE (an tig'ə nē) } daughters of Oedipus
CREON (krē'on), King of Thebes
HAEMON (hē'mōn), son of Creon
TEIRESIAS (tī rē'sē əs), a blind prophet
A SENTRY
A MESSENGER
EURYDICE (yū rid'ə sē'), wife of Creon
CHORUS OF THEBAN ELDERS
KING'S ATTENDANTS
QUEEN'S ATTENDANTS
A BOY LEADING TEIRESIAS
SOLDIERS

Scene: Before the Palace at Thebes.

Enter ISMENE from the central door of the Palace. ANTIGONE follows, anxious and urgent; she closes the door carefully, and comes to join her sister.

ANTIGONE. O sister! Ismene dear, dear sister Ismene!
You know how heavy the hand of God is upon us;
How we who are left must suffer for our father, Oedipus.
There is no pain, no sorrow, no suffering, no dishonor
5 We have not shared together, you and I.
And now there is something more. Have you heard this order,
This latest order that the King has proclaimed to the city?
Have you heard how our dearest are being treated like enemies?

ISMENE. I have heard nothing about any of those we love,
10 Neither good nor evil—not, I mean, since the death
Of our two brothers, both fallen in a day.
The Argive army, I hear, was withdrawn last night.
I know no more to make me sad or glad.

ANTIGONE. I thought you did not. That's why I brought you out
here,

15 Where we shan't be heard, to tell you something alone.
ISMENE. What is it, Antigone? Black news, I can see already.

ANTIGONE. O Ismene, what do you think? Our two dear brothers . . .

Creon has given funeral honors to one,
And not to the other; nothing but shame and ignominy.
20 Eteocles has been buried, they tell me, in state,
With all honorable observances due to the dead.
But Polynices, just as unhappily fallen—the order
Says he is not to be buried, not to be mourned;
To be left unburied, unwept, a feast of flesh

25 For keen-eyed carrion birds. The noble Creon!
It is against you and me he has made this order.
Yes, against me. And soon he will be here himself
To make it plain to those that have not heard it,
And to enforce it. This is no idle threat;

30 The punishment for disobedience is death by stoning.
So now you know. And now is the time to show
Whether or not you are worthy of your high blood.

ISMENE. My poor Antigone, if this is really true,
What more can I do, or undo, to help you?

35 ANTIGONE. Will you help me? Will you do something with me? Will
you?

ISMENE. Help you do what, Antigone? What do you mean?

ANTIGONE. Would you help me lift the body . . . you and me?

ISMENE. You cannot mean . . . to bury him? Against the order?

ANTIGONE. Is he not my brother, and yours, whether you like it

40 Or not? I shall never desert him, never.

12 Argive army (ār'jiv or
ār'giv). Polynices's army
came from Argos (ār'gos), a
city in southern Greece.

18 funeral honors. In Greek
mythology, the souls of
unburied human beings
could not cross the River
Styx to the realm of the dead
but were compelled to wander
forever with no permanent
resting place. Burying the
dead was a sacred duty for
surviving friends and
relatives.

19 ignominy (ig'nə min'ē
n. public shame and
disgrace; dishonor.

20 Eteocles (i tē'ə klēz).

22 Polynices (pol'ə nī'sēz)

■ What do you think that
Antigone expects from
someone who is "worthy of
your high blood"?

ISMENE. How could you dare, when Creon has expressly forbidden it?

ANTIGONE. He has no right to keep me from my own.

ISMENE. O sister, sister, do you forget how our father

Perished in shame and misery, his awful sin

Self-proved, blinded by his own self-mutilation?

And then his mother, his wife—for she was both—

Destroyed herself in a noose of her own making.

And now our brothers, both in a single day

Fallen in an awful exaction of death for death.

Blood for blood, each slain by the other's hand.

Now we two left; and what will be the end of us,

If we transgress the law and defy our king?

O think, Antigone; we are women; it is not for us

To fight against men; our rulers are stronger than we,

And we must obey in this, or in worse than this.

May the dead forgive me, I can do no other

But as I am commanded; to do more is madness.

ANTIGONE. No; then I will not ask you for your help.

Nor would I thank you for it, if you gave it.

Go your own way; I will bury my brother;

And if I die for it, what happiness!

Convicted of reverence—I shall be content

To lie beside a brother whom I love.

We have only a little time to please the living.

But all eternity to love the dead.

There I shall lie for ever. Live, if you will;

Live, and defy the holiest laws of heaven.

ISMENE. I do not defy them; but I cannot act

Against the State. I am not strong enough.

ANTIGONE. Let that be your excuse, then. I will go

And heap a mound of earth over my brother.

ISMENE. I fear for you, Antigone; I fear—

ANTIGONE. You need not fear for me. Fear for yourself.

ISMENE. At least be secret. Do not breathe a word.

I'll not betray your secret.

ANTIGONE. Publish it

To all the world! Else I shall hate you more.

ISMENE. Your heart burns! Mine is frozen at the thought.

ANTIGONE. I know my duty, where true duty lies.

ISMENE. If you can do it; but you're bound to fail.

ANTIGONE. When I have *tried* and failed, I shall have failed.

ISMENE. No sense in starting on a hopeless task.

ANTIGONE. Oh, I shall hate you if you talk like that!

And *he* will hate you, rightly. Leave me alone

With my own madness. There is no punishment

45 self-mutilation

(self/'myū'ti ā'shan), *n.*

When he realized that he had killed his father and married his mother, Oedipus blinded himself by piercing his eyes with a brooch worn by his wife/mother.

46-7 his mother . . . own making. Jocasta (jō kas/'tə), realizing that she was both wife and mother to Oedipus, hanged herself.

52 transgress (trans gres'/), *v.* go contrary to; sin against.

■ Which sister do you think makes the wiser decision about burying Polynices?

83 he, Polynices.

85 Can rob me of my honorable death.

ISMENE. Go then, if you are determined, to your folly.

But remember that those who love you . . . love you still.

(ISMENE goes into the Palace. ANTIGONE leaves the stage by a side exit.)

(Enter the CHORUS of Theban elders.)

CHORUS. Hail the sun! the brightest of all that ever
Dawned on the City of Seven Gates, City of Thebes!

90 Hail the golden dawn over Dirce's river
Rising to speed the flight of the white invaders
Homeward in full retreat!

The army of Polynices was gathered against us,
In angry dispute his voice was lifted against us,

95 Like a ravening bird of prey he swooped around us
With white wings flashing, with flying plumes,
With armed hosts ranked in thousands.

At the threshold of seven gates in a circle of blood

His swords stood round us, his jaws were opened against us;

100 But before he could taste our blood, or consume us with fire,
He fled, fled with the roar of the dragon behind him
And thunder of war in his ears.

The Father of Heaven abhors the proud tongue's boasting;

He marked the oncoming torrent, the flashing stream

105 Of their golden harness, the clash of their battle gear;
He heard the invader cry Victory over our ramparts,
And smote him with fire to the ground.

Down to the ground from the crest of his hurricane onslaught

He swung, with the fiery brands of his hate brought low;

110 Each and all to their doom of destruction appointed
By the god that fighteth for us.

Seven invaders at seven gates seven defenders

Spoiled of their bronze for a tribute to Zeus; save two

Luckless brothers in one fight matched together

115 And in one death laid low.

Great is the victory, great be the joy

In the city of Thebes, the city of chariots.

Now is the time to fill the temples

With glad thanksgiving for warfare ended;

120 Shake the ground with the night-long dances,
Bacchus afoot and delight abounding.

■ What does the main conflict in the play appear to be?

90 Dirce's river. Dirce (dér'sē), the wife of a previous ruler of Thebes, was brutally murdered and her corpse thrown into a stream thereafter called by her name.

101 the dragon, a metaphor for the army of Thebes. According to legend, Thebes was founded by Cadmus (kad'məs) whose first followers were killed by a dragon Cadmus slew the dragon as planted its teeth; from the teeth came a race of giants who submitted to Cadmus and re-founded the city.

103-107 The Father of Heaven . . . to the ground. Zeus, who favored the Thebans in the battle, struck down the invading Argive army with thunderbolts. 108 onslaught (ōn'slōt'), a vigorous attack.

112-113 Seven invaders . . . tribute to Zeus. Polynices and six Argive generals each attacked one of Thebes's seven gates, which were successfully defended by seven Theban heroes. Instead of keeping the armor of the slain Argives, the defender offered it as a tribute to Zeus. 114-115 Luckless brothers . . . laid low. Antigone's brothers, Eteocles and Polynices, killed each other in single combat, ending the war.

But see, the King comes here,
Creon, the son of Menocceus,
Whom the gods have appointed for us
125 In our recent change of fortune,
What matter is it, I wonder,
That has led him to call us together
By his special proclamation?

(The central door is opened, and CREON enters.)

CREON. My councillors: now that the gods have brought our city

130 Safe through a storm of trouble to tranquillity,
I have called you especially out of all my people
To conference together, knowing that you
Were loyal subjects when King Laius reigned,
And when King Oedipus so wisely ruled us,
135 And again, upon his death, faithfully served
His sons, till they in turn fell—both slayers, both slain,
Both stained with brother-blood, dead in a day—
And I, their next of kin, inherited
The throne and kingdom which I now possess.
140 No other touchstone can test the heart of a man,
The temper of his mind and spirit, till he be tried
In the practice of authority and rule.
For my part, I have always held the view,
And hold it still, that a king whose lips are sealed
145 By fear, unwilling to seek advice, is damned.
And no less damned is he who puts a friend
Above his country; I have no good word for him.
As God above is my witness, who sees all,
When I see any danger threatening my people,
150 Whatever it may be, I shall declare it.
No man who is his country's enemy
Shall call himself my friend. Of this I am sure—
Our country is our life; only when she
Rides safely, have we any friends at all.
155 Such is my policy for our common weal.

In pursuance of this, I have made a proclamation
Concerning the sons of Oedipus, as follows:
Eteocles, who fell fighting in defense of the city,
Fighting gallantly, is to be honored with burial
160 And with all the rites due to the noble dead.
The other—you know whom I mean—his brother Polynices,
Who came back from exile intending to burn and destroy
His fatherland and the gods of his fatherland,
To drink the blood of his kin, to make them slaves—

123 **Menocceus**
(mə nē'sē əs).

■ What background information does the Chorus provide in this speech?

130 **tranquillity** (trankwɪl'ə tē), *n.* calmness; quiet.

133 **King Laius** (lē'əs), a former king of Thebes and father of Oedipus.

140 **touchstone** (tuch'stʊn'), *n.* a black stone used to test the purity of gold or silver; hence, any test.

153 **she**, Thebes.

155 **weal** (wēl), *n.* well-being; prosperity.

■ Why is Creon willing to bury Eteocles but not Polynices?

165 He is to have no grave, no burial,
No mourning from anyone; it is forbidden.
He is to be left unburied, left to be eaten
By dogs and vultures, a horror for all to see.
I am determined that never, if I can help it,
170 Shall evil triumph over good. Alive
Or dead, the faithful servant of his country
Shall be rewarded.

CHORUS. Creon, son of Menocceus,
You have given your judgment for the friend and for the enemy.
As for those that are dead, so for us who remain,
175 Your will is law.

CREON. See then that it be kept.
CHORUS. My lord, some younger would be fitter for that task.
CREON. Watchers are already set over the corpse.
CHORUS. What other duty then remains for us?
CREON. Not to connive at any disobedience.
180 **CHORUS.** If there were any so mad as to ask for death ———
CREON. Ay, that is the penalty. There is always someone
Ready to be lured to ruin by hope of gain.

(He turns to go. A SENTRY enters from the side of the stage. CREON pauses at the Palace door.)

SENTRY. My lord: if I am out of breath, it is not from haste.
I have not been running. On the contrary, many a time
185 I stopped to think and loitered on the way,
Saying to myself "Why hurry to your doom,
Poor fool?" and then I said "Hurry, you fool.
If Creon hears this from another man,
Your head's as good as off." So here I am,
190 As quick as my unwilling haste could bring me;
In no great hurry, in fact. So now I am here . . .
But I'll tell my story . . . though it may be nothing after all.
And whatever I have to suffer, it can't be more
Than what God wills, so I cling to that for my comfort.

195 **CREON.** Good heavens, man, whatever is the matter?
SENTRY. To speak of myself first—I never did it, sir;
Nor saw who did; no one can punish me for that.
CREON. You tell your story with a deal of artful precaution.
It's evidently something strange.

SENTRY. It is.

200 So strange, it's very difficult to tell.
CREON. Well, out with it, and let's be done with you.
SENTRY. It's this, sir. The corpse . . . someone has just
Buried it and gone. Dry dust over the body
They scattered, in the manner of holy burial.

179 **connive** (kə nɪv'), *v.* cooperate secretly.

186–187 **Why hurry . . . poor fool?** The sentry worries that what he has to tell Creon will result in his death; killing the messenger who brought bad news was presumably a common practice.

205 CREON. What! Who dared to do it?

SENTRY. I don't know, sir.

There was no sign of a pick, no scratch of a shovel;
The ground was hard and dry—no trace of a wheel;
Whoever it was has left no clues behind him.
When the sentry on the first watch showed it us,
210 We were amazed. The corpse was covered from sight—
Not with a proper grave—just a layer of earth—
As it might be, the act of some pious passer-by.
There were no tracks of an animal either, a dog
Or anything that might have come and mauled the body.
215 Of course we all started pitching in to each other,
Accusing each other, and might have come to blows,
With no one to stop us; for anyone might have done it,
But it couldn't be proved against him, and all denied it.
We were all ready to take hot iron in hand
220 And go through fire and swear by God and heaven
We hadn't done it, nor knew of anyone
That could have thought of doing it, much less done it.
Well, we could make nothing of it. Then one of our men
Said something that made all our blood run cold—
225 Something we could neither refuse to do, nor do,
But at our own risk. What he said was "This
Must be reported to the King; we can't conceal it."
So it was agreed. We drew lots for it, and I,
Such is my luck, was chosen. So here I am,
230 As much against my will as yours, I'm sure;
A bringer of bad news expects no welcome.

CHORUS. My lord, I fear—I feared it from the first—
That this may prove to be an act of the gods.

CREON. Enough of that! Or I shall lose my patience.

235 Don't talk like an old fool, old though you be.
Blasphemy, to say the gods could give a thought
To carrion flesh! Held him in high esteem,
I suppose, and buried him like a benefactor—
A man who came to burn their temples down,
240 Ransack their holy shrines, their land, their laws?
Is that the sort of man you think gods love?
Not they. No. There's a party of malcontents
In the city, rebels against my word and law,
Shakers of heads in secret, impatient of rule;
245 They are the people, I see it well enough,
Who have bribed their instruments to do this thing.
Money! Money's the curse of man, none greater.
That's what wrecks cities, banishes men from home,

212 pious (pi'as), *adj.* having or showing reverence for God; righteous.

214 maul (môl), *v.* treat roughly; physically harm.

236 blasphemy (blas'fə mē) *n.* abuse or contempt for God or sacred things.

Whom does Creon first suspect has buried Polynices? Whom do you suspect?

246 instrument (in'strə-mənt), *n.* thing with or by which something is done; person made use of by another.

250 Tempts and deludes the most well-meaning soul,
Pointing out the way to infamy and shame.
Well, they shall pay for their success. (*To the SENTRY.*) See to it!
See to it, you! Upon my oath, I swear,
As Zeus is my god above: either you find
The perpetrator of this burial
255 And bring him here into my sight, or death—
No, not your mere death shall pay the reckoning,
But, for a living lesson against such infamy,
You shall be racked and tortured till you tell
The whole truth of this outrage; so you may learn
260 To seek your gain where gain is yours to get,
Not try to grasp it everywhere. In wickedness
You'll find more loss than profit.

SENTRY. May I say more?

CREON. No more; each word you say but stings me more.

SENTRY. Stings in your ears, sir, or in your deeper feelings?

265 CREON. Don't bandy words, fellow, about my feelings.

SENTRY. Though I offend your ears, sir, it is not I

But he that's guilty that offends your soul.

CREON. Oh, born to argue, were you?

SENTRY. Maybe so;

But still not guilty in this business.

270 CREON. Doubly so, if you have sold your soul for money.

SENTRY. To think that thinking men should think so wrongly!

CREON. Think what you will. But if you fail to find

The doer of this deed, you'll learn one thing:

Ill-gotten gain brings no one any good. (*He goes into the Palace.*)

275 SENTRY. Well, heaven send they find him. But whether or no,

They'll not find me again, that's sure. Once free,

Who never thought to see another day,

I'll thank my lucky stars, and keep away. (*Exit.*)

CHORUS. Wonders are many on earth, and the greatest of these

280 Is man, who rides the ocean and takes his way

Through the deeps, through wide-swept valleys of perilous seas

That surge and sway.

He is master of ageless Earth, to his own will bending

The immortal mother of gods by the sweat of his brow,

285 As year succeeds to year, with toil unending

Of mule and plough.

He is lord of all things living; birds of the air,

Beasts of the field, all creatures of sea and land.

He taketh, cunning to capture and ensnare

254 perpetrator (pér'pə-trā'tar), *n.* one who commits anything bad or foolish.

265 bandy (ban'dē), *v.* exchange.

290 With sleight of hand;

Hunting the savage beast from the upland rocks,
Taming the mountain monarch in his lair,
Teaching the wild horse and the roaming ox
His yoke to bear.

295 The use of language, the wind-swift motion of brain
He learnt; found out the laws of living together
In cities, building him shelter against the rain
And wintry weather.

300 There is nothing beyond his power. His subtlety
Meeteth all chance, all danger conquereth.
For every ill he hath found its remedy,
Save only death.

O wondrous subtlety of man, that draws
To good or evil ways! Great honor is given
305 And power to him who upholdeth his country's laws
And the justice of heaven.

But he that, too rashly daring, walks in sin
In solitary pride to his life's end
At door of mine shall never enter in
310 To call me friend.

(Severally, seeing some persons approach from a distance.)

O gods! A wonder to see!
Surely it cannot be—
It is no other—
Antigone!

315 Unhappy maid—
Unhappy Oedipus's daughter; it is she they bring.
Can she have rashly disobeyed
The order of our King?

(Enter the SENTRY, bringing ANTIGONE guarded by two more soldiers.)

SENTRY. We've got her. Here's the woman that did the deed.

320 We found her in the act of burying him. Where's the King?

CHORUS. He is just coming out of the palace now. *(Enter CREON.)*

CREON. What's this? What am I just in time to see?

325 SENTRY. My lord, an oath's a very dangerous thing.
Second thoughts may prove us liars. Not long since
I swore I wouldn't trust myself again

200 UNIT TWO: MAKING JUDGMENTS

290 sleight of hand, skill and quickness in moving hands; tricks of a modern magician.

after 310 severally. Each of the following lines is spoken by a different member of the Chorus.

■ What question would you ask the Chorus about this speech?

To face your threats; you gave me a drubbing the first time.
But there's no pleasure like an unexpected pleasure,
Not by a long way. And so I've come again,
Though against my solemn oath. And I've brought this lady,
330 Who's been caught in the act of setting that grave in order.
And no casting lots for it this time—the prize is mine
And no one else's. So take her; judge and convict her.
I'm free, I hope, and quit of the horrible business.

CREON. How did you find her? Where have you brought her from?

335 SENTRY. She was burying the man with her own hands, and that's the truth.

CREON. Are you in your senses? Do you know what you are saying?

SENTRY. I saw her myself, burying the body of the man

Whom you said not to bury. Don't I speak plain?

CREON. How did she come to be seen and taken in the act?

340 SENTRY. It was this way. After I got back to the place,
With all your threats and curses ringing in my ears,
We swept off all the earth that covered the body,
And left it a sodden naked corpse again;
Then sat up on the hill, on the windward side,
345 Keeping clear of the stench of him, as far as we could;
All of us keeping each other up to the mark,
With pretty sharp speaking, not to be caught napping this time.
So this went on some hours, till the flaming sun
Was high in the top of the sky, and the heat was blazing.

350 Suddenly a storm of dust, like a plague from heaven,
Swept over the ground, stripping the trees stark bare,
Filling the sky; you had to shut your eyes
To stand against it. When at last it stopped,
There was the girl, screaming like an angry bird,
355 When it finds its nest empty and little ones gone.

Just like that she screamed, seeing the body
Naked, crying and cursing the ones that had done it.
Then she picks up the dry earth in her hands,
And pouring out of a fine bronze urn she's brought
360 She makes her offering three times to the dead.
Soon as we saw it, down we came and caught her.
She wasn't at all frightened. And so we charged her
With what she'd done before, and this. She admitted it,
I'm glad to say—though sorry too, in a way.

365 It's good to save your own skin, but a pity
To have to see another get into trouble,
Whom you've no grudge against. However, I can't say
I've ever valued anyone else's life
More than my own, and that's the honest truth.



A This is an ivory statuette of a tragic actor.

359–360 And pouring . . . to the dead, pouring wine, water, or oil as an offering to the gods.

370 CREON (to ANTIGONE). Well, what do you say—you, hiding your head there:

Do you admit, or do you deny the deed?

ANTIGONE. I do admit it. I do not deny it.

CREON (to the SENTRY). You—you may go. You are discharged from blame.

(Exit SENTRY.)

Now tell me, in as few words as you can,

375 Did you know the order forbidding such an act?

ANTIGONE. I knew it, naturally. It was plain enough.

CREON. And yet you dared to contravene it?

ANTIGONE. Yes.

That order did not come from God. Justice,

That dwells with the gods below, knows no such law.

380 I did not think your edicts strong enough

To overrule the unwritten unalterable laws

Of God and heaven, you being only a man.

They are not of yesterday or today, but everlasting

Though where they came from, none of us can tell.

385 Guilty of their transgression before God

I cannot be, for any man on earth.

I knew that I should have to die, of course,

With or without your order. If it be soon,

So much the better. Living in daily torment

390 As I do, who would not be glad to die?

This punishment will not be any pain.

Only if I had let my mother's son

Lie there unburied, then I could not have borne it.

This I can bear. Does that seem foolish to you?

395 Or is it you that are foolish to judge me so?

CHORUS. She shows her father's stubborn spirit: foolish

Not to give way when everything's against her.

CREON. Ah, but you'll see. The over-obstinate spirit

Is soonest broken; as the strongest iron will snap

400 If over-tempered in the fire to brittleness.

A little halter is enough to break

The wildest horse. Proud thoughts do not sit well

Upon subordinates. This girl's proud spirit

Was first in evidence when she broke the law;

405 And now, to add insult to her injury,

She gloats over her deed. But, as I live,

She shall not flout my orders with impunity.

My sister's child—ay, were she even nearer,

Nearest and dearest, she should not escape

410 Full punishment—she, and her sister too,

202 UNIT TWO: MAKING JUDGMENTS

■ What is Antigone's philo-
phy in lines 377-395?

380 edict (ē'dikt), *n.* decr-
or law proclaimed by a king
or other ruler on his sole
authority.

400 over-tempered. The
tempering of steel or any
other metal involves bring-
ing it to a proper or desired
condition of hardness, elas-
ticity, etc., by heating and
cooling it.

407 flout (flout), *v.* treat
with contempt or scorn.

407 impunity (im pyū'nə-
tē), *n.* freedom from injury,
punishment, or other bad
consequences.

Her partner, doubtless, in this burying.

Let her be fetched! She was in the house just now;

I saw her, hardly in her right mind either.

Often the thoughts of those who plan dark deeds

115 Betray themselves before the deed is done.

The criminal who being caught still tries

To make a fair excuse, is damned indeed.

ANTIGONE. Now you have caught, will you do more than kill me?

CREON. No, nothing more; that is all I could wish.

120 ANTIGONE. Why then delay? There is nothing that you can say

That I should wish to hear, as nothing I say

Can weigh with you. I have given my brother burial.

What greater honor could I wish? All these

Would say that what I did was honorable,

125 But fear locks up their lips. To speak and act

Just as he likes is a king's prerogative.

CREON. You are wrong. None of my subjects thinks as you do.

ANTIGONE. Yes, sir, they do; but dare not tell you so.

CREON. And you are not only alone, but unashamed.

30 ANTIGONE. There is no shame in honoring my brother.

426 prerogative (pri rog'a-
tiv), *n.* right or privilege that
nobody else has.

CREON. Was not his enemy, who died with him, your brother?
 ANTIGONE. Yes, both were brothers, both of the same parents.
 CREON. You honor one, and so insult the other.
 ANTIGONE. He that is dead will not accuse me of that.
 435 CREON. He will, if you honor him no more than the traitor.
 ANTIGONE. It was not a slave, but his brother that died with him.
 CREON. Attacking his country, while the other defended it.
 ANTIGONE. Even so, we have a duty to the dead.
 CREON. Not to give equal honour to good and bad.
 440 ANTIGONE. Who knows? In the country of the dead that may be the law.
 CREON. An enemy can't be a friend, even when dead.
 ANTIGONE. My way is to share my love, not share my hate.
 CREON. Go then, and share your love among the dead.
 We'll have no woman's law here, while I live.

(Enter ISMENE from the Palace.)

445 CHORUS. Here comes Ismene, weeping
 In sisterly sorrow; a darkened brow,
 Flushed face, and the fair cheek marred
 With flooding rain.
 CREON. You crawling viper! Lurking in my house
 450 To suck my blood! Two traitors unbeknown
 Plotting against my throne. Do you admit
 To share in this burying, or deny all knowledge?
 ISMENE. I did it—yes—if she will let me say so.
 I am as much to blame as she is.
 ANTIGONE. No.
 455 That is not just. You would not lend a hand
 And I refused your help in what I did.
 ISMENE. But I am not ashamed to stand beside you
 Now in your hour of trial, Antigone.
 ANTIGONE. Whose was the deed, Death and the dead are witness.
 460 I love no friend whose love is only words.
 ISMENE. O sister, sister, let me share your death,
 Share in the tribute of honor to him that is dead.
 ANTIGONE. You shall not die with me. You shall not claim
 That which you would not touch. One death is enough.
 465 ISMENE. How can I bear to live, if you must die?
 ANTIGONE. Ask Creon. Is not he the one you care for?
 ISMENE. You do yourself no good to taunt me so.
 ANTIGONE. Indeed no: even my jests are bitter pains.
 ISMENE. But how, O tell me, how can I still help you?
 470 ANTIGONE. Help yourself. I shall not stand in your way.
 ISMENE. For pity, Antigone—can I not die with you?

■ Do you think that Creon will eventually reverse his decision to put Antigone to death? Why or why not?

447-448 fair cheek . . . flooding rain. Ismene's face is spoiled by tears.

ANTIGONE. You chose; life was your choice, when mine was death.
 ISMENE. Although I warned you that it would be so.
 ANTIGONE. Your way seemed right to some, to others mine.
 475 ISMENE. But now both in the wrong, and both condemned:
 ANTIGONE. No, no. You live. My heart was long since dead,
 So it was right for me to help the dead.
 CREON. I do believe the creatures both are mad;
 One lately crazed, the other from her birth.
 480 ISMENE. Is it not likely, sir? The strongest mind
 Cannot but break under misfortune's blows.
 CREON. Yours did, when you threw in your lot with hers.
 ISMENE. How could I wish to live without my sister?
 CREON. You have no sister. Count her dead already.
 485 ISMENE. You could not take her—kill your own son's bride?
 CREON. Oh, there are other fields for him to plough.
 ISMENE. No truer troth was ever made than theirs.
 CREON. No son of mine shall wed so vile a creature.
 ANTIGONE. O Haemon, can your father spite you so?
 490 CREON. You and your paramour, I hate you both.
 CHORUS. Sir, would you take her from your own son's arms?
 CREON. Not I, but death shall take her.
 CHORUS. Be it so.
 Her death, it seems, is certain.
 CREON. Certain it is.
 No more delay. Take them, and keep them within—
 495 The proper place for women. None so brave
 As not to look for some way to escape
 When they see life stand face to face with death.
 (The women are taken away.)
 CHORUS. Happy are they who know not the taste of evil.
 From a house that heaven hath shaken
 500 The curse departs not
 But falls upon all of the blood,
 Like the restless surge of the sea when the dark storm drives
 The black sand hurled from the deeps
 And the Thracian gales boom down
 505 On the echoing shore.
 In life and in death is the house of Labdacus stricken.
 Generation to generation,
 With no atonement,
 It is scourged by the wrath of a god.
 510 And now for the dead dust's sake is the light of promise,
 The tree's last root, crushed out

■ What other literary couples do you know whose parents oppose their union?

490 paramour (par'ə mūr), n. lover.

500-501 The curse . . . upon all of the blood. The curse on Oedipus has passed on to his descendants.

506 the house of Labdacus (lab'də kəs), the ruling family of Thebes. Labdacus, a former king, was the grandfather of Oedipus.

508 atonement (ə tɒn'mənt), n. a giving of satisfaction for a wrong, loss, or injury.

509 scourge (skɜːrj), n. punish severely.

■ What does the Chorus mean by "the tree's last root" in line 511? You may want to refer to the head-note on page 191.

By pride of heart and the sin
Of presumptuous tongue.

515 For what presumption of man can match thy power,
O Zeus, that art not subject to sleep or time
Or age, living for ever in bright Olympus?
Tomorrow and for all time to come,
As in the past,
This law is immutable:
520 For mortals greatly to live is greatly to suffer.

Roving ambition helps many a man to good,
And many it falsely lures to light desires,
Till failure trips them unawares, and they fall
On the fire that consumes them. Well was it said,
525 Evil seems good
To him who is doomed to suffer;

And short is the time before that suffering comes.
But here comes Haemon,
Your youngest son.
530 Does he come to speak his sorrow
For the doom of his promised bride,
The loss of his marriage hopes?

CREON. We shall know it soon, and need no prophet to tell us.

(Enter HAEMON.)

535 Son, you have heard, I think, our final judgment
On your late betrothed. No angry words, I hope?
Still friends, in spite of everything, my son?

HAEMON. I am your son, sir; by your wise decisions
My life is ruled, and them I shall always obey.
I cannot value any marriage tie
540 Above your own good guidance.

CREON. Rightly said.
Your father's will should have your heart's first place.
Only for this do fathers pray for sons
Obedient, loyal, ready to strike down
Their fathers' foes, and love their fathers' friends.
545 To be the father of unprofitable sons
Is to be the father of sorrows, a laughingstock
To all one's enemies. Do not be fooled, my son,
By lust and the wiles of a woman. You'll have bought
Cold comfort if your wife's a worthless one.
550 No wound strikes deeper than love that is turned to hate.

513 presumptuous (pri-
zump/'chū əs), *adj.* bold.

519 immutable (i myū/'ta-
bəl), *adj.* never changing.

525-527 Evil seems
good . . . suffering comes.
People who convince then
selves that the evil they do
good must eventually suffer
punishment.

This girl's an enemy; away with her,
And let her go and find a mate in Hades.
Once having caught her in a flagrant act—
The one and only traitor in our State—

555 I cannot make myself a traitor too;
So she must die. Well may she pray to Zeus,
The god of family love. How, if I tolerate
A traitor at home, shall I rule those abroad?
He that is a righteous master of his house
560 Will be a righteous statesman. To transgress
Or twist the law to one's own pleasure, presume
To order where one should obey, is sinful,
And I will have none of it.
He whom the State appoints must be obeyed
565 To the smallest matter, be it right—or wrong.
And he that rules his household, without a doubt,
Will make the wisest king, or, for that matter,
The staunchest subject. He will be the man
You can depend on in the storm of war,
570 The faithfulest comrade in the day of battle.
There is no more deadly peril than disobedience;
States are devoured by it, homes laid in ruins,
Armies defeated, victory turned to rout.
While simple obedience saves the lives of hundreds
575 Of honest folk. Therefore, I hold to the law,
And will never betray it—least of all for a woman.
Better be beaten, if need be, by a man,
Than let a woman get the better of us.

CHORUS. To me, as far as an old man can tell,
580 It seems your Majesty has spoken well.

HAEMON. Father, man's wisdom is the gift of heaven,
The greatest gift of all. I neither am
Nor wish to be clever enough to prove you wrong,
585 Though all men might not think the same as you do.
Nevertheless, I have to be your watchdog,
To know what others say and what they do,
And what they find to praise and what to blame.
Your frown is a sufficient silencer
Of any word that is not for your ears.
590 But I hear whispers spoken in the dark;
On every side I hear voices of pity
For this poor girl, doomed to the cruelest death,
And most unjust, that ever woman suffered
For an honourable action—burying a brother
595 Who was killed in battle, rather than leave him naked

553 flagrant (flā/'grənt), *adj.*
glaringly offensive;
outrageous.

■ Do you think that
Creon's appraisal of
Antigone as one who
"twist[s] the law to one's
own pleasure" is a fair one?
Explain.

578 rout (rout), *n.* a com-
plete defeat.

For dogs to maul and carrion birds to peck at.
 Has she not rather earned a crown of gold?—
 Such is the secret talk about the town.
 Father, there is nothing I can prize above
 Your happiness and well-being. What greater good
 600 Can any son desire? Can any father
 Desire more from his son? Therefore I say,
 Let not your first thought be your only thought.
 Think if there cannot be some other way.
 605 Surely, to think your own the only wisdom,
 And yours the only word, the only will,
 Betrays a shallow spirit, an empty heart.
 It is no weakness for the wisest man
 To learn when he is wrong, know when to yield.
 610 So, on the margin of a flooded river
 Trees bending to the torrent live unbroken,
 While those that strain against it are snapped off.
 A sailor has to tack and slacken sheets
 Before the gale, or find himself capsized.
 615 So, father, pause, and put aside your anger.
 I think, for what my young opinion's worth,
 That, good as it is to have infallible wisdom,
 Since this is rarely found, the next best thing
 Is to be willing to listen to wise advice.
 620 **CHORUS.** There is something to be said, my lord, for this point of
 view,
 And for yours as well; there is much to be said on both sides.
CREON. Indeed! Am I to take lessons at my time of life
 From a fellow of his age?
HAEMON. No lesson you need be ashamed of.
 625 It isn't a question of age, but of right and wrong.
CREON. Would you call it right to admire an act of disobedience?
HAEMON. Not if the act were also dishonorable.
CREON. And was not this woman's action dishonorable?
HAEMON. The people of Thebes think not.
CREON. The people of Thebes!
 630 Since when do I take my orders from the people of Thebes?
HAEMON. Isn't that rather a childish thing to say?
CREON. No, I am king, and responsible only to myself.
HAEMON. A one-man state? What sort of a state is that?
CREON. Why, does not every state belong to its ruler?
 635 **HAEMON.** You'd be an excellent king—on a desert island.
CREON. Of course, if you're on the woman's side—
HAEMON. No, no—
 Unless you're the woman. It's you I'm fighting for.

■ What questions do you still have about what's happening? Jot them down in your notebook.

617 *infallible* (in fal'ə bəl), *adj.* free from error.

CREON. What, villain, when every word you speak is against me?
HAEMON. Only because I know you are wrong, wrong.
 640 **CREON.** Wrong? To respect my own authority?
HAEMON. What sort of respect tramples on all that is holy?
CREON. Despicable coward! No more will than a woman!
HAEMON. I have nothing to be ashamed of.
CREON. Yet you plead her cause.
HAEMON. No, *yours*, and mine, and that of the gods of the dead.
 645 **CREON.** You'll never marry her this side of death.
HAEMON. Then, if she dies, she does not die alone.
CREON. Is that a threat, you impudent—
HAEMON. Is it a threat
 To try to argue against wrong-headedness?
CREON. You'll learn what wrong-headedness is, my friend, to your
 cost.
 650 **HAEMON.** O father, I could call you mad, were you not my father.
CREON. Don't toady me, boy; keep that for your lady-love.
HAEMON. You mean to have the last word, then?
CREON. I do.
 And what is more, by all the gods in heaven,
 I'll make you sorry for your impudence.
 (Calling to those within.)
 655 Bring out that she-devil, and let her die
 Now, with her bridegroom by to see it done!
HAEMON. That sight I'll never see. Nor from this hour
 Shall you see me again. Let those that will
 Be witness of your wickedness and folly. (Exit.)
 660 **CHORUS.** He is gone, my lord, in very passionate haste.
 And who shall say what a young man's wrath may do?
CREON. Let him go! Let him do! Let him rage as never man raged,
 He shall not save those women from their doom.
CHORUS. You mean, then, sire, to put them both to death?
 665 **CREON.** No, not the one whose hand was innocent.
CHORUS. And to what death do you condemn the other?
CREON. I'll have her taken to a desert place
 Where no man ever walked, and there walled up
 Inside a cave, alive, with food enough
 670 To acquit ourselves of the blood-guiltiness
 That else would lie upon our commonwealth.
 There she may pray to Death, the god she loves,
 And ask release from death; or learn at last
 What hope there is for those who worship death. (Exit.)



▲ This marble relief from the first or second century A.D., is a theater mask that added height to the actor's stature.

667–674 I'll have her taken . . . worship death. If Antigone is provided with enough food to enable her to pray for her life, then whether or not she dies is up to the gods, and Creon and the state are thus blameless.

■ Do you think that Antigone is one of "those who worship death"? Explain.

675 **CHORUS.** Where is the equal of Love?
 Where is the battle he cannot win,
 The power he cannot outmatch?
 In the farthest corners of earth, in the midst of the sea,
 He is there; he is here
 680 In the bloom of a fair face
 Lying in wait;
 And the grip of his madness
 Spares not god or man,
 Marring the righteous man,
 685 Driving his soul into mazes of sin
 And strife, dividing a house.
 For the light that burns in the eyes of a bride of desire
 Is a fire that consumes.
 At the side of the great gods
 690 Aphrodite immortal
 Works her will upon all.

(The doors are opened and ANTIGONE enters, guarded.)

But here is a sight beyond all bearing,
 At which my eyes cannot but weep;
 Antigone forth faring
 695 To her bridal bower of endless sleep.
ANTIGONE. You see me, countrymen, on my last journey,
 Taking my last leave of the light of day;
 Going to my rest, where death shall take me
 Alive across the silent river.
 700 No wedding day; no marriage music;
 Death will be all my bridal dower.
CHORUS. But glory and praise go with you, lady,
 To your resting place. You go with your beauty
 Unmarred by the hand of consuming sickness,
 705 Untouched by the sword, living and free,
 As none other that ever died before you.
ANTIGONE. The daughter of Tantalus, a Phrygian maid,
 Was doomed to a piteous death on the rock
 Of Sipylus, which embraced and imprisoned her,
 710 Merciless as the ivy; rain and snow
 Beat down upon her, mingled with her tears,
 As she wasted and died. Such was her story,
 And such is the sleep that I shall go to.
CHORUS. She was a goddess of immortal birth,
 715 And we are mortals; the greater the glory,
 To share the fate of a god-born maiden,
 A living death, but a name undying.

690 **Aphrodite** (af'ro di'tē),
 goddess of love and beauty.

694 **faring** (fer'ing),
 ARCHAIC. travelling.

699 **silent river**, in Greek
 mythology, one of the rivers
 that separated the land of
 the dead from the land of
 the living.

701 **dower** (dour), *n.* dowry

707 **the daughter of
 Tantalus, Niobe** (ni'ō bē'),
 whose children were slain b
 the gods to punish her for
 her excessive pride.
 Overcome with grief, she
 turned into a stone from
 which tears continued to
 flow. The stone was carried
 by a whirlwind to Mount
 Sipylus (sip'ī las) in Phrygi
 (frij'ē ə), the kingdom of
 Niobe's father.

ANTIGONE. Mockery, mockery! By the gods of our fathers,
 Must you make me a laughingstock while I yet live?
 720 O lordly sons of my city! O Thebes!
 Your valleys of rivers, your chariots and horses!
 No friend to weep at my banishment
 To a rock-hewn chamber of endless durance,
 In a strange cold tomb alone to linger
 725 Lost between life and death for ever.

CHORUS. My child, you have gone your way
 To the outermost limit of daring
 And have stumbled against Law enthroned.
 This is the expiation
 730 You must make for the sin of your father.

ANTIGONE. My father—the thought that sears my soul—
 The unending burden of the house of Labdacus.
 Monstrous marriage of mother and son . . .
 My father . . . my parents . . . O hideous shame!
 735 Whom now I follow, unwed, curse-ridden,
 Doomed to this death by the ill-starred marriage
 That marred my brother's life.

CHORUS. An act of homage is good in itself, my daughter;
 But authority cannot afford to connive at disobedience.
 740 You are the victim of your own self-will.

ANTIGONE. And must go the way that lies before me.
 No funeral hymn; no marriage music;
 No sun from this day forth, no light,
 No friend to weep at my departing. *(Enter CREON.)*

745 **CREON.** Weeping and wailing at the door of death!
 There'd be no end of it, if it had force
 To buy death off. Away with her at once.
 And close her up in her rock-vaulted tomb.
 Leave her and let her die, if die she must,
 750 Or live within her dungeon. Though on earth
 Her life is ended from this day, her blood
 Will not be on our hands.

ANTIGONE. So to my grave,
 My bridal bower, my everlasting prison,
 I go, to join those many of my kinsmen
 755 Who dwell in the mansions of Persephone,
 Last and unhappiest, before my time.
 Yet I believe my father will be there
 To welcome me, my mother greet me gladly,
 And you, my brother, gladly see me come.
 760 Each one of you my hands have laid to rest,
 Pouring the due libations on your graves.

718 **mockery.** Antigone
 mistakenly thinks that the
 Chorus, in comparing her
 to the gods, is making fun
 of her.

729 **expiation** (ek'spē-
 z'shən), *n.* atonement.

■ Describe the role of the
 Chorus in this scene.

755 **Persephone** (pēr sēf'a-
 nē), daughter of Zeus and
 Demeter (dē mē'tər); made
 queen of the lower world
 (Hades).
 761 **libation** (lī bā'shən), *n.*
 the wine, water, etc. offered
 to a god.

It was by this service to your dear body, Polynices,
I earned the punishment which now I suffer,
Though all good people know it was for your honor.
765 O but I would not have done the forbidden thing
For any husband or for any son.
For why? I could have had another husband
And by him other sons, if one were lost;
But, father and mother lost, where would I get
770 Another brother? For thus preferring you,
My brother, Creon condemns me and hales me away,
Never a bride, never a mother, unfriended,
Condemned alive to solitary death.
What law of heaven have I transgressed? What god
775 Can save me now? What help or hope have I,
In whom devotion is deemed sacrilege?
If this is God's will, I shall learn my lesson
In death; but if my enemies are wrong,
I wish them no worse punishment than mine.

780 **CHORUS.** Still the same tempest in the heart
Torments her soul with angry gusts.

CREON. The more cause then have they that guard her
To hasten their work; or they too suffer.

CHORUS. Alas, that word had the sound of death.

785 **CREON.** Indeed there is no more to hope for.
ANTIGONE. Gods of our fathers, my city, my home,
Rulers of Thebes! Time stays no longer.
Last daughter of your royal house
Go I, *his* prisoner, because I honored
790 Those things to which honor truly belongs.

(*ANTIGONE is led away.*)

CHORUS. So, long ago, lay Danae
Entombed within her brazen bower;
Noble and beautiful was she,
On whom there fell the golden shower
795 Of life from Zeus. There is no tower
So high, no armory so great,
No ship so swift, as is the power
Of man's inexorable fate.

800 There was the proud Edonian king,
Lycurgus, in rock-prison pent
For arrogantly challenging
God's laws: it was his punishment
Of that swift passion to repent

■ Explain Antigone's argument for defending her brother over a husband or a son.

776 sacrilege (sak/rə lɪj), *n.* an intentional injury or disrespectful treatment of anyone or anything sacred.

791 Danae (dan/ə ē), a maiden imprisoned in a bronze (brazen) chamber by her father, who feared a prophecy that a child born to Danae would someday kill him. Zeus entered her bronze chamber as a golden rain, and from their union Perseus, who eventually did kill his grandfather, was born.

791-814 So, long ago . . . as upon thee, my child. In these lines, the Chorus compares Antigone's fate to that of three other mortals who had been imprisoned.

798 inexorable (in ek/sər ə-bəl), *adj.* relentless, unyielding.

800 Lycurgus (lɪ kər/gəs), a Greek king who opposed the worship of Dionysus (dɪ/ɔ-nɪ/səs) and was punished by being imprisoned in a cave and driven insane.

805 In slow perception, for that he
Had braved the rule omnipotent
Of Dionysus' sovereignty.

On Phineus' wife the hand of fate
Was heavy, when her children fell
Victims to a stepmother's hate,
810 And she endured a prison-cell
Where the North Wind stood sentinel
In caverns amid mountains wild.
Thus the grey spinners wove their spell
On her, as upon thee, my child.

(*Enter TEIRESIAS, the blind prophet, led by a boy.*)

815 **TEIRESIAS.** Gentlemen of Thebes, we greet you, my companion and I,
Who share one pair of eyes on our journeys together—

For the blind man goes where his leader tells him to.

CREON. You are welcome, father Teiresias. What's your news?

TEIRESIAS. Ay, news you shall have; and advice, if you can heed it.

820 **CREON.** There was never a time when I failed to heed it, father.

TEIRESIAS. And thereby have so far steered a steady course.

CREON. And gladly acknowledge the debt we owe to you.

TEIRESIAS. Then mark me now; for you stand on a razor's edge.

CREON. Indeed? Grave words from your lips, good priest. Say on.

825 **TEIRESIAS.** I will; and show you all that my skill reveals.

At my seat of divination, where I sit

These many years to read the signs of heaven,

An unfamiliar sound came to my ears

Of birds in vicious combat, savage cries

830 In strange outlandish language, and the whirr

Of flapping wings; from which I well could picture

The gruesome warfare of their deadly talons.

Full of foreboding then I made the test

Of sacrifice upon the altar fire.

835 There was no answering flame; only rank juice

Oozed from the flesh and dripped among the ashes,

Smoldering and sputtering; the gall vanished in a puff,

And the fat ran down and left the haunches bare.

Thus (through the eyes of my young acolyte,

840 Who sees for me, that I may see for others)

I read the signs of failure in my quest.

And why? The blight upon us is *your* doing.

The blood that stains our altars and our shrines,

The blood that dogs and vultures have licked up,

845 It is none other than the blood of Oedipus

806 sovereignty (sov/rən-tē), *n.* supreme power or authority.

807 Phineus' wife. King Phineus (fin/ē əs)

imprisoned his former wife and their two sons when he

believed false accusations about them made by their

stepmother, Idaea (i dē/ə).

813 grey spinners, the three Fates who control the length

and nature of human lives.

826 seat of divination, the place where Teiresias sat to listen to the birds, which were believed to foretell (divine) the future.

842 blight (blīt), *n.* disease, or anything that causes destruction or ruin.

Spilled from the veins of his ill-fated son.
 Our fires, our sacrifices, and our prayers
 The gods abominate. How should the birds
 Give any other than ill-omened voices,
 850 Gorged with the dregs of blood that man has shed?
 Mark this, my son: all men fall into sin.
 But sinning, he is not forever lost
 Hapless and helpless, who can make amends
 And has not set his face against repentance.
 855 Only a fool is governed by self-will.
 Pay to the dead his due. Wound not the fallen.
 It is no glory to kill and kill again.
 My words are for your good, as is my will,
 And should be acceptable, being for your good.
 860 CREON. You take me for your target, reverend sir,
 Like all the rest. I know your art of old,
 And how you make me your commodity
 To trade and traffic in for your advancement.
 Trade as you will; but all the silver of Sardis
 865 And all the gold of India will not buy
 A tomb for yonder traitor. No. Let the eagles
 Carry his carcass up to the throne of Zeus;
 Even that would not be sacrilege enough
 To frighten me from my determination
 870 Not to allow this burial. No man's act

853 hapless (hap'lis), *adj.*
 unlucky; unfortunate.

■ How do you think Creon
 will respond to Teiresias's
 plea to forgive Antigone?

864 Sardis (sar'dis), capital
 of ancient Lydia (present-day
 Turkey); famous for its
 wealth and luxury.

Antigone 217

Has power enough to pollute the goodness of God.
 But great and terrible is the fall, Teiresias,
 Of mortal men who seek their own advantage
 By uttering evil in the guise of good.
 875 TEIRESIAS. Ah, is there any wisdom in the world?
 CREON. Why, what is the meaning of that wide-flung taunt?
 TEIRESIAS. What prize outweighs the priceless worth of prudence?
 CREON. Ay, what indeed? What mischief matches the lack of it?
 TEIRESIAS. And there you speak of your own symptom, sir.
 880 CREON. I am loth to pick a quarrel with you, priest.
 TEIRESIAS. You do so, calling my divination false.
 CREON. I say all prophets seek their own advantage.
 TEIRESIAS. All kings, say I, seek gain unrighteously.
 CREON. Do you forget to whom you say it?
 TEIRESIAS. No.
 885 Our king and benefactor, by my guidance.
 CREON. Clever you may be, but not therefore honest.
 TEIRESIAS. Must I reveal my yet unspoken mind?
 CREON. Reveal all; but expect no gain from it.
 TEIRESIAS. Does that still seem to you my motive, then?
 890 CREON. Nor is my will for sale, sir, in your market.
 TEIRESIAS. Then hear this. Ere the chariot of the sun
 Has rounded once or twice his wheeling way,
 You shall have given a son of your own loins
 To death, in payment for death—two debts to pay:
 895 One for the life that you have sent to death,
 The life you have abominably entombed;
 One for the dead still lying above ground
 Unburied, unhonoured, unblest by the gods below.
 You cannot alter this. The gods themselves
 900 Cannot undo it. It follows of necessity
 From what you have done. Even now the avenging Furies,
 The hunters of Hell that follow and destroy,
 Are lying in wait for you, and will have their prey,
 When the evil you have worked for others falls on you.
 905 Do I speak this for my gain? The time shall come,
 And soon, when your house will be filled with the lamentation
 Of men and of women; and every neighbouring city
 Will be goaded to fury against you, for upon them
 Too the pollution falls when the dogs and vultures
 910 Bring the defilement of blood to their hearths and altars.
 I have done. You pricked me, and these shafts of wrath
 Will find their mark in your heart. You cannot escape
 The sting of their sharpness. Lead me home, my boy.
 Let us leave him to vent his anger on younger ears,

880 loth (lōth), *adj.* loath,
 unwilling.

905–910 The time shall
 come . . . and altars. This
 prophecy by Teiresias later
 comes true when the
 families of the slain Argive
 chiefs enlist the aid of the
 Athenian king, Theseus, to
 obtain burial rites for their
 dead. The Athenian army
 marches against Thebes and
 conquers it.
 910 defilement (di fil'ment),
n. destruction of the purity
 or cleanness of (anything
 sacred); desecration.

915 Or school his mind and tongue to a milder mood
Than that which now possesses him. Lead on. *(Exit.)*

CHORUS. He has gone, my lord. He has prophesied terrible things.
And for my part, I that was young and now am old
Have never known his prophecies proved false.

920 **CREON.** It is true enough; and my heart is torn in two.
It is hard to give way, and hard to stand and abide
The coming of the curse. Both ways are hard.

CHORUS. If you would be advised, my good lord Creon—
CREON. What must I do? Tell me, and I will do it.

925 **CHORUS.** Release the woman from her rocky prison.
Set up a tomb for him that lies unburied.

CREON. Is it your wish that I consent to this?

CHORUS. It is, and quickly. The gods do not delay
The stroke of their swift vengeance on the sinner.

930 **CREON.** It is hard, but I must do it. Well I know
There is no armor against necessity.

CHORUS. Go. Let your own hand do it, and no other.

CREON. I will go this instant. Slaves there! One and all,
Bring spades and mattocks out on the hill!

935 My mind is made; 'twas I imprisoned her,
And I will set her free. Now I believe
It is by the laws of heaven that man must live. *(Exit.)*

CHORUS. O Thou whose name is many,
Son of the Thunderer, dear child of his Cadmean bride,

940 Whose hand is mighty
In Italia,
In the hospitable valley
Of Eleusis,

945 The mother-city of thy worshippers,
Where sweet Ismenus gently watereth
The soil whence sprang the harvest of the dragon's teeth,

Where torches on the crested mountains gleam,
And by the Castalia's stream

950 The nymph-train in thy dance rejoices,
When from the ivy-tangled glens
Of Nysa and from vine-clad plains
Thou comest to Thebes where the immortal voices
Sing thy glad strains.

955 Thebes, where thou lovest most to be,
With her, thy mother, the fire-stricken one,

■ If you could ask Tiresias
one question on behalf of
Antigone, what would it be?

938 **Thou whose name is many.** The Chorus invokes the god Dionysus, whose native city of Thebes was under his special protection. Bacchus, Iacchus, and God of Wine are three of his many names.

946-947 **Ismenus . . . dragon's teeth.** The city that Cadmus and the giants founded is near the river Ismenus.

950-952 **nymph-train . . . Nysa.** When Semele (sem'ə lē), the mother of Dionysus, died, Zeus took his infant son to the nymphs of Nysa (nī'zə), who cared for him during his childhood.

956 **thy mother, the fire-stricken one.** Zeus had promised Semele that he would grant her one wish. Her wish was to see him in his full splendor as the king of gods and men. Being mortal, she could not endure the sight and was consumed to ashes.

Sickens for need of thee.
Healer of all her ills;
Come swiftly o'er the high Parnassian hills,
960 Come o'er the sighing sea.

The stars, whose breath is fire, delight
To dance for thee; the echoing night
Shall with thy praises ring.
Zeus-born, appear! With Thyiads revelling
965 Come, bountiful
Iacchus, King!

(Enter a MESSENGER, from the side of the stage.)

MESSENGER. Hear, men of Cadmus's city, hear and attend,
Men of the house of Amphion, people of Thebes!

What is the life of man? A thing not fixed

970 For good or evil, fashioned for praise or blame.
Chance raises a man to the heights, chance casts him down,
And none can foretell what will be from what is.
Creon was once an enviable man;

He saved his country from her enemies,

975 Assumed the sovereign power, and bore it well,
The honoured father of a royal house.
Now all is lost; for life without life's joys
Is living death; and such a life is his.

Riches and rank and show of majesty

980 And state, where no joy is, are empty, vain
And unsubstantial shadows, of no weight
To be compared with happiness of heart.

CHORUS. What is your news? Disaster in the royal house?

MESSENGER. Death; and the guilt of it on living heads.

985 **CHORUS.** Who dead? And by what hand?

MESSENGER. Haemon is dead,
Slain by his own—

CHORUS. His father?

MESSENGER. His own hand.

His father's act it was that drove him to it.

CHORUS. Then all has happened as the prophet said.

MESSENGER. What's next to do, your worships will decide.
(The Palace door opens.)

990 **CHORUS.** Here comes the Queen, Eurydice. Poor soul,
It may be she has heard about her son.

(Enter EURYDICE, attended by women.)

959 **Parnassian hills.** Parnassus (pār nas'as), a mountain in southern Greece, was sacred to Apollo and the nine Muses.

964 **Thyiads** (thi'yadz), women driven mad by wine and the power of Dionysus. Also called Maenads (mē'nadz).

■ What does Antigone have in common with these gods and goddesses mentioned by the Chorus in lines 938-956?

968 **Amphion** (am fī'on), a former king of Thebes.

EURDYDICE. My friends, I heard something of what you were saying
As I came to the door. I was on my way to prayer
At the temple of Pallas, and had barely turned the latch
995 When I caught your talk of some near calamity.
I was sick with fear and reeled in the arms of my women.
But tell me what is the matter; what have you heard?
I am not unacquainted with grief, and I can bear it.

MESSENGER. Madam, it was I that saw it, and will tell you all.
1000 To try to make it any lighter now
Would be to prove myself a liar. Truth
Is always best.

It was thus. I attended your husband,
The King, to the edge of the field where lay the body
Of Polynices, in pitiable state, mauled by the dogs.
1005 We prayed for him to the Goddess of the Roads, and to Pluto,
That they might have mercy upon him. We washed the remains
In holy water, and on a fire of fresh-cut branches
We burned all that was left of him, and raised
Over his ashes a mound of his native earth.
1010 That done, we turned toward the deep rock-chamber
Of the maid that was married with death.

Before we reached it,
One that stood near the accursed place had heard
Loud cries of anguish, and came to tell King Creon.
As he approached, came strange uncertain sounds
1015 Of lamentation, and he cried aloud:
"Unhappy wretch! Is my foreboding true?
Is this the most sorrowful journey that ever I went?
My son's voice greets me. Go, some of you, quickly
Through the passage where the stones are thrown apart,
1020 Into the mouth of the cave, and see if it be
My son, my own son Haemon that I hear.
If not, I am the sport of gods."

We went
And looked, as bidden by our anxious master.
There in the furthest corner of the cave
1025 We saw her hanging by the neck. The rope
Was of the woven linen of her dress.
And, with his arms about her, there stood he
Lamenting his lost bride, his luckless love,
His father's cruelty.

When Creon saw them,
1030 Into the cave he went, moaning piteously.
"O my unhappy boy," he cried again,

998 I am not unacquainted
with grief. Menoeceus, a son
of Creon and Eurydice, had
sacrificed himself at the
beginning of the war
because of a prophecy that
Thebes would be saved only
if he were killed.

1005 Goddess of the Roads,
Hecate (hek'ə tē), a goddess
of the underworld who sent
apparitions to frighten trav-
elers at night.



▲ This terra cotta statuette
of Melpomene (mel pəm'ə-
nē), the Muse of Tragedy,
holding a tragic mask,
dates from around 300 B.C.

"What have you done? What madness brings you here
To your destruction? Come away, my son,
My son, I do beseech you, come away!"

1035 His son looked at him with one angry stare,
Spat in his face, and then without a word
Drew sword and struck out. But his father fled
Unscathed. Whereon the poor demented boy
Leaned on his sword and thrust it deeply home
1040 In his own side, and while his life ebbed out
Embraced the maid in loose-enfolding arms,
His spurring blood staining her pale cheeks red.

(EURDYDICE goes quickly back into the Palace.)

Two bodies lie together, wedded in death,
Their bridal sleep a witness to the world
1045 How great calamity can come to man
Through man's perversity.

CHORUS. But what is this?
The Queen has turned and gone without a word.

MESSENGER. Yes. It is strange. The best that I can hope
Is that she would not sorrow for her son
1050 Before us all, but vent her grief in private
Among her women. She is too wise, I think,
To take a false step rashly.

CHORUS. It may be.
Yet there is danger in unnatural silence
No less than in excess of lamentation.

1055 **MESSENGER.** I will go in and see, whether in truth
There is some fatal purpose in her grief.
Such silence, as you say, may well be dangerous.
(He goes in.)

(Enter ATTENDANTS preceding the King.)

CHORUS. The King comes here.
What the tongue scarce dares to tell
1060 Must now be known
By the burden that proves too well
The guilt, no other man's
But his alone.

(Enter CREON with the body of HAEMON.)

CREON. The sin, the sin of the erring soul
1065 Drives hard unto death.
Behold the slayer, the slain,
The father, the son.
O the curse of my stubborn will!

1038 unscathed
(un skātəd'), adj. not
harmed.

■ What events does the
Messenger recount in lines
999 to 1042?

1046 perversity (pər vēr'sə-
tē), n. quality of being con-
trary and willful.

Son, newly cut off in the newness of youth,
1070 Dead for my fault, not yours.

CHORUS. Alas, too late you have seen the truth.

CREON. I learn in sorrow. Upon my head
God has delivered this heavy punishment,
Has struck me down in the ways of wickedness,
1075 And trod my gladness under foot.
Such is the bitter affliction of mortal man.

(Enter the MESSENGER from the Palace.)

MESSENGER. Sir, you have this and more than this to bear.
Within there's more to know, more to your pain.

CREON. What more? What pain can overtop this pain?

1080 **MESSENGER.** She is dead—your wife, the mother of him that is
dead—

The death wound fresh in her heart. Alas, poor lady!

CREON. Insatiable Death, wilt thou destroy me yet?

What say you, teller of evil?

I am already dead,

1085 And is there more?

Blood upon blood?

More death? My wife?

(The central doors open, revealing the body of EURYDICE.)

CHORUS. Look then, and see; nothing is hidden now.

CREON. O second horror!

1090 What fate awaits me now?

My child here in my arms . . . and there, the other . . .

The son . . . the mother . . .

MESSENGER. There at the altar with the whetted knife

She stood, and as the darkness dimmed her eyes

1095 Called on the dead, her elder son and this,

And with her dying breath cursed you, their slayer.

CREON. O horrible . . .

Is there no sword for me

To end this misery?

1100 **MESSENGER.** Indeed you bear the burden of two deaths.

It was her dying word.

CREON. And her last act?

MESSENGER. Hearing her son was dead, with her own hand

She drove the sharp sword home into her heart.

1105 **CREON.** There is no man can bear this guilt but I.

It is true, I killed him.

Lead me away, away. I live no longer.

CHORUS. 'Twere best, if anything is best in evil times.

What's soonest done, is best, when all is ill.

■ Do you think that Creon has gained wisdom through this tragedy? Explain.

1082 insatiable (in sá'shə-bol), *adj.*: that cannot be satisfied; greedy.