Sophocles' *Antigone*

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Introduction

Sophocles is the playwright of heroism, and Antigone the first female character in drama to be a hero in the full sense of the word. She is the first conscientious objector. The play is often performed as veiled criticism of the government prevailing at the time to show that something is rotten in that particular state.

First, I offer a look at tragedy as it was originally performed, then Sophocles' other work, and its later influence, finally a close look at the Antigone, with suggestions to facilitate an eventual performance.

The Performance of Tragedy

The first performance of a tragedy is attributed to Thespis, ca. 534 B. C. in Athens. He had only one actor, who differentiated himself from the chorus, and Aristotle tells us that Aeschylus added a second actor and that Sophocles added a third, creating more possibilities for interchange and conflict. The three actors were called Protagonist, Deuteragonist, and Tritagonist (first, second, and third actor), and if further parts were needed, they were divided between them. Since all the actors were male, masks allowed them to play female roles. Masks particularly suited actors in the large theatres in which they performed. There were also supernumeraries, or nonspeaking parts, such as attendants and children. An actor was called a hypokritês, which meant "one who answers, an interpreter, expounder." Aristotle tells us that Sophocles introduced scene-painting to suggest a visual background.

At the main Athenian dramatic festival, the Greater Dionysia, each dramatist put on three tragedies and one satyr play which comically handled tragic themes. A comedy by a different playwright followed. Aeschylus preferred the connected trilogy which allowed the development of a concept such as the workings of divine justice over several generations. Sophocles abandoned the practice of writing connected trilogies and instead preferred to highlight a major character within a single play.
Tragic performances were given annually throughout the fifth century in Athens. The theatre of Dionysus (the god of theatre) was outdoors, probably circular, with an altar in the center, and was built into the side of the acropolis. The chorus, who generally remained present throughout the performance, danced in the orchestra (circular space in the center of the theatre) as they sang. The music for tragedy was provided by the aulos, a reed instrument (like the oboe), and sometimes drums. Spoken portions of the drama, mainly in iambic trimeter, alternated with the choruses, which were always in lyric meters and usually arranged in stophès and antistrophès ("turns" and "turnings back", possibly referring to their danced accompaniment). The chorus' entry is called the parodos and their exit is called the exodos, and the choral sections in between are called stasima. Anapests often accompany entrances and exits and provide a type of marching rhythm. Antigone's final exit is in anapests.

The spoken part may consist of a monologue called rhēsis, or a dialogue between two, three and sometimes four actors, or some exchange with a chorus. During heightened moments the dialogue takes the form of one-line interchanges called stichomythia. Sometimes an actor bursts out into an impassioned lyric aria. A kommos is a formal lament, usually chanted by an actor with the chorus (Antigone, as she goes to her death, or Creon at the end of the play).

The theatre of Dionysus seated around 15,000-18,000 people, from a population of about 300,000 in Attica, comprised of male citizens, women, children, slaves and visitors. It is likely that only males attended the theatre.

At first all the actors were non-professional, and the playwright acted too. It is said that Sophocles' weak voice prevented him from acting in his own plays. Gradually acting became more professional and prizes were awarded to actors from about the middle of the fifth century. A prize was given for the best tragic trilogy and for the best comedy. The best chorēgos (the person who paid for the costuming and training of the chorus) also was given a prize. The jury was selected from the citizens.
It was conventional not to depict violence before the audience. Dead bodies could be displayed on a device called the *ekkyklêma*, which was rolled out from the center doors of the building depicted on the skênê (backdrop, literally "tent"). A *mêchanê* ("machine") allowed aerial entrances and exits, usually of the gods. The use of side entrances/exits, *parodoi*, could indicate whether a character was local or from a foreign region, or going to or coming from a particular place (e.g., a battlefield vs. the city, as in *Antigone*).

The Greater Dionysia was held in early spring, the 9th -13th days of the month Elaphebolion (March/April) when the seas were calm and the allies could attend. On the first day there was an elaborate show of tribute from the allies, war orphans paraded, and prominent citizens were given awards. It was very much like the May Day parade in Russia, when Soviet power was at its height. Going to the theatre was a social, civic, and religious event. One purpose of the festival was to impress allies and resident aliens. The audience were part of the performance and openly expressed their feelings and reactions which very likely influenced the judging.

Three days of the Greater Dionysia were devoted to plays. These performances began at dawn and lasted all day. There are several plays which seem to begin at dawn, or even in the dark, for instance Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*.

There are three major tragic playwrights whose works we have: Aeschylus (525-456 B. C.), 7 of whose plays survive out of approximately 80; Sophocles (ca. 495-406 B. C.), with 7 plays out of approximately 123; and Euripides (ca. 480-406 B. C.), with 19 out of about 90.

Most tragic plots came from mythology. Many of Aeschylus' themes and characters are taken from epic. Aeschylus himself claimed he wrote "slices from the banquet of Homer" (Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 8.347E). In varying mythological plots the playwrights could be quite original, sometimes returning to the well-known versions only at the end of the play. Very few plays dealt with historical themes. The only play that
survives of the historical plays is Aeschylus' *Persians*. Phrynichus earlier wrote *The Capture of Miletus*, and it was said that he was fined because he reminded the Athenians of their recent sufferings. It was produced in 493/2 and told of an Ionian colony seized and destroyed by the Persians in 494.

By 472 B.C. the Athenians were more tolerant, and it is a tribute to them that they could applaud the *Persians* that presented their enemies sympathetically, so close to the actual war (seven years after the war had ended). The first play that we hear had a plot and characters entirely of the author's own making was the *Antheus* by Agathon, towards the end of the fifth century.

Aeschylus lived during the glorious period of the Persian Wars (490-489 B.C. and 480-479 B.C.) when the invading Persians were defeated. He fought at Salamis, as evidenced by his epitaph, which commemorates him as a soldier and not as a playwright. He never had to face the less glorious Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.) which came about as a reaction by Sparta and other former allies against the expansion of the Athenian empire.

**Sophocles**

Sophocles was born at Colonus near Athens in about 495 B.C. and died in 406 BC. He was spared the sight of Athens' final defeat at the hands of Sparta, when it had to dismantle its walls in 404 B.C.

Sophocles was a model citizen. He acted as *Hellenotamias* (a treasurer, 443/2) in the league Athens organized against Persia. He studied dance and was said to have danced around the trophy after the battle of Salamis (Athenaeus 1.20F). He also served as a general dealing with the Samian revolt in 441. Some say that the *Antigone* earned him this position. Others suggest that Sophocles' disgust at the exposure of the bodies of the enemies might have led him to write this play. After the Sicilian defeat in 413 B.C. he was one of the *Probouloi* (special Athenian officials) elected to deal with the disaster.
Sophocles followed in Aeschylus' footsteps by serving his city when he could, in either a political or cultural function. He lived to about 90, and it is said that he was sued by a son, who claimed he was no longer capable of managing his own affairs. He read lines from the recently written *Oedipus at Colonus*, and was acquitted. Whether this is true or not, the *Oedipus at Colonus* was written in advanced age, and is a clear masterpiece. The story of a law suit is probably spurious, since there is other testimony that Sophocles got on well with both of his sons. Phrynichus (the comic poet) wrote that "Sophocles lived to a ripe old age, and he was happy and clever. After writing many excellent tragedies, he died well without suffering any serious misfortune." The lexicon known as the *Suda* says that Sophocles was named the bee on account of his sweetness. Perhaps a fragment from one of Sophocles' plays may reveal his own outlook: "It is fairest to live justly, and most profitable to live healthily, but the sweetest is to have a bit of love each day" (356 Radt).

The ancients regarded Sophocles as a man at ease with himself and contented with life. He is credited with a ready wit. He boasted, as he stole a kiss from a boy serving him, that he was practicing strategy (*strategein*), since Pericles had said that he knew how to be a poet, but not a general (*strategos*), and Sophocles concludes, "Don't you think my strategy worked?" (Athenaeus 13.604C-D) In Plato's *Republic* (329C), he is reported to have claimed that he was happy that he was finally free from that wild taskmaster, love. After his death he was said to have become a sacred hero like Oedipus, and was worshipped as *Dexion*, roughly translatable as "he who receives," because of his association with the cult of Asclepius, which he had helped to introduce into Athens after the plague (430-26 B. C). He also was a priest of the healing spirit Halon.

In Aeschylus, god can confront god and major questions are raised about conflicting rights. Sophocles shows man confronting god and a world which can never be knowable. Euripides shows man confronting himself, and sometimes losing the battle. Sophocles presents us with the hero, and Euripides shows us the antihero. According to
Aristotle, Sophocles claimed he depicted men as they ought to be, but Euripides as they were (Poetics 1460b33-4). Euripides, who chose to be isolated from an active citizen's life, and left Athens in old age, saw things more bleakly. It is difficult to find or recognize any heroes in Euripides. Instead there are now heroines, or noble children, or slaves. The main recourse man has in the chaotic Euripidean world is philia, "friendship," or "mutual dependency." Heroism is dead, in the way we have known it, killed in a war where the enemy is seen to be oneself.

Sophocles shows his characters struggling to right the wrongs they perceive in the world about them, and there is some objective justification for their struggles. What Sophoclean heroes do, they also do in isolation. Antigone goes to her death alone, as does Ajax. By contrast, Euripides' Heracles needs the help of Theseus, to continue his life, and Euripides' Iphigenia in the Iphigenia at Aulis needs her father's words to aid her in her final decision to die for the sake of Greece. Euripides questions objective truth, seeing it as a personal construct, aided by interpersonal relationships. Iphigenia's death is required for perverse reasons by leaders acting on their own behalf rather than the communal good. But Sophocles' Antigone and Ajax die for ideals, which, although somewhat misguided in their one-sidedness, can still be respected. Sophocles celebrates the hero; Euripides laments the victim.

Sophocles is said never to have been placed third when he competed. He first competed in 468 and defeated Aeschylus and is said to have been awarded the prize around 24 times (18 at the City Dionysia) in contrast to Aeschylus' 13 and Euripides' 4.

Of the plays that survive, only the Philoctetes and the Oedipus at Colonus can be dated with certainty, and the Antigone approximately, with reference to the Samian war. The following chronology is tentatively suggested:

Antigone 443 or 441 BC
Ajax ca. 442 BC
Trachiniae ca. 432 BC
Oedipus Tyrannus ca. 427 BC
Electra ca. 413 BC
Philoctetes 409 BC
Oedipus at Colonus 401 BC (Posthumous)

There are many fragments, including a large part of the satyr play, the Ichneutae.

Antigone, Oedipus Tyrannus, and Oedipus at Colonus are often called "The Theban Cycle," but they were never performed together as a trilogy on a single day. Instead they span Sophocles' life.

Aristotle saw Sophocles as the greatest of the ancient playwrights and regarded his Oedipus Tyrannus as a model of dramatic construction. Clue after clue is discovered, bringing us closer and closer to the place where we began:

We shall not cease from exploration.
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time
Through the unknown, remembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning.

T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding"

This is a play about knowledge. Over the temple at Delphi was written "Know Thyself" and "Nothing in Excess." If Creon fundamentally violated the latter, Oedipus violated the former. Yet these violations were what defined these heroes. Oedipus is supposedly the man of knowledge, the one who solved the riddle of the Sphinx. He knew what went on four legs in the morning, two at noon and three in the evening: man.

Sophocles is a master of imagery, and the relation between sight, insight, blindness and ignorance in this play is important: in Greek the verb "to know" is the perfect tense of the verb "to see." When Oedipus had sight he lacked insight; it was only
when he blinded himself physically that he could finally truly see and understand. In 
*Oedipus at Colonus*, he will not only see for himself, but for all others, as he becomes a 
guide to his last resting place, and finally a guide for the land as a chthonic seer, and 
protective hero-spirit.

Oedipus was the beast that he, the hunter, hunted. He was the child that slew the 
father and supplanted him in his mother's bed, the Freudian fantasy as the original 
nightmare. He was the disease that he, the doctor, had to cure. He was a marvel, endowed 
with skills, the riddle-solver who could not solve his own riddle.

Oedipus chose relentlessly to follow every clue and find the cause of the plague in 
the city, besides finding out who he was, and ultimately that one equaled the other. He 
tried to avoid what had been foretold, but he could not. His only real choice was to avoid 
the truth. This he chose not to do and his relentless pursuit of the truth destroyed his 
public persona but defined him as a man.

The relentless progression from revelation to revelation, moderated by false clues, 
orchestrated moments of release followed by scenes of gripping terror, are examples of 
Sophocles' mastery of plot. Sophocles also uses language programmatically to enhance 
his effects. He varies his rhythms and uses words percussively, a fine example being 
Oedipus’ angry charge to Teiresias in one of the greatest mixed metaphors of all time:

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tuflo;" tav t' w\ta tovn te nou'n tav  t' o[mmat' ei\ (371),
"You are blind in your ears, your mind, and your eyes.” Reciting these angry T's is like 
spitting fire.
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Oedipus tried to avoid his fate and escape the oracle he had heard when he was 
young. But the more he ran the more he was trapped in the net, or the infernal machine, 
the trap that Cocteau said was set in motion the moment he was born. Nevertheless, it is a 
mistake to see Oedipus as a simple victim of fate. The ancient view was a complex one, 
seeing man as responsible for his fate besides being subject to controlling forces; Oedipus 
says himself, "Apollo wrought this cruel fate of mine, but it was my hand that struck"
(1329-32). This may seem contradictory, but it is not so far removed from the modern view of man being genetically and environmentally determined, yet able to act in that narrow framework. Man's having a choice distinguishes much of Western philosophy from the Eastern, and the Western drive to freedom from Eastern fatalism and resignation to one's karma.

The spark of freedom is what Prometheus gave man, and it blazed in Oedipus. As Yeats said, "Whatever flames upon the night, man's own resinous heart has fed." Oedipus' freedom was to find out who he was and rage against the obstacles along the way. What has often been called his *hamartia*, his "fatal flaw," is the fire that made his glory.

As Pericles said in the funeral oration, the Athenians knew that happiness was based on freedom, and freedom on a brave heart. Bernard Knox has suggested that Oedipus parallels Pericles or Athens itself, and his tragedy was the same as the city's in being based on a passionate drive. Oedipus lost happiness, but exercised his freedom, which allowed him not to "go gentle into that good night." He raged even until he entered Colonus. His rage may have been his ruin (see *Oedipus Tyrannus* 673-75), but it fanned his vital energy which maintained him "against the dying of the light."

*Oedipus at Colonus* shows us the aged Oedipus more accepting on one level, but an angry demigod on another. At the opening he says three things have taught him to endure (*stevrgein*): suffering, long time, and nobility (7-8). If this endurance is meant to imply patience, we find this refuted by Oedipus' rage against his son Polyneices, which clearly shows us that there is still some of the old Oedipus left. He curses his sons as he goes off to fulfill a blessing for Athens as the city's patron hero in return for refuge.

Besides hate, Oedipus shows love, which he says is the main gift he has given his daughters. He says they have been loved by him more than by any man, and this love compensates in part for their sufferings (1615-19). Athens will give Oedipus hospitality and a welcome in *philia*, the love/duty one renders an honored guest. Oedipus upholds the ancient creed of helping one's friends and harming one's enemies. At the end of his life,
Oedipus rewards the faithful (his daughters/Theseus/Athens) and curses the faithless (his sons/Creon). His final power is to bless and curse. Oedipus accepts his death, but he will not give up his right to choose.

There is a development between the three plays. Antigone, which is written earliest of the three, shows a type of idealism which implies a belief in higher values to the point of sacrificing one's life to achieve them. The Oedipus Tyrannus shows the folly and tragedy of rationality itself. But it also seems to respect the hero's pursuit of truth, even when it entails his own self-destruction. Socrates claimed the unexamined life is not worth living, but for Oedipus the examined life leads to a living death. Nevertheless, life and knowledge are reaffirmed, terrible though they may be. The struggle is, as Dylan Thomas said about Dionysus, "the force that through the green fuse drives the flower." This is what made Athens Athens, and Oedipus Oedipus. This is what constitutes us all if we are truly to live. The Oedipus at Colonus shows a merging of god and man at the end of the latter's life. Religion is a salve for the pain of life. The earlier doubts are not resolved, but they are transfigured just as Oedipus is himself. God has become man, and man, god. The spirit of this irascible old man will protect Athens and inspire us.

The Ajax is another of the earliest plays we have from Sophocles, and also deals with a theme we find in the Antigone, the burial of an enemy. Many of Creon's arguments are found in Menelaus' mouth as he praises law: "Laws can never flourish in a city where fear is not firmly established... and the ship of state will sink where men are free to transgress and do what they like" (Ajax 1073-83).

Odysseus is awarded Achilles' armor and Ajax sets about to kill the Greek leaders who in his eyes have rigged the decision. The arms have been awarded to the man who can benefit the polis more. They thus go to Odysseus the negotiator, the politician, instead of the warrior. With the war over, a new type of weapon is called for: speech. Instead of confrontation and battle, negotiation and compromise are the order of the day. The time for noble Achilles or Ajax is over; it is the day for Odysseus.
Ajax refuses to compromise. He says to Tecmessa, "You are a fool if you think you can change my character at this point" (594-95). This is the glory of a Sophoclean hero - the strength to create an identity in conflict with the way the world works. Man's adherence to his own desire becomes both his glory and tragedy. The Sophoclean hero is Achilles reborn in a world out of joint.

Can Ajax live in such a world? He tries to kill the leaders, and Athena drives him mad. When he regains his sanity, he decides on suicide. He speaks of all changing with time: "Long and uncountable time brings all that is hidden to light and hides what is hidden, and there is nothing one cannot expect..." (646-48). But there is one thing that will not change with time: Ajax. As Thomas Rosenmeyer says, "The hero does not count, he lives, and when life becomes a sordid business of ticking off days, he sacrifices life" (Masks of Tragedy 168).

Burial is denied Ajax until Odysseus intervenes. Compromise carries the day in this ultimate ironic act: Ajax's bitterest enemy has negotiated his burial. But Ajax's death has gained him the glory of remaining uncompromised. He remains Ajax.

Electra, in her play, also resembles Antigone in prizing her relation to her dead relative more than her relation to the living. Electra speaks to Chrysothemis as Antigone did to Ismene, in an attempt to enlist her help. She wants her to perform a bold deed to restore family honor and is rebuffed as Antigone was, as a woman who does not know her place. Chrysothemis echoes conventional prejudice when she says, "Do you not see that you are a woman, not a man, and weaker than your enemies?" (997-98) Murdering a mother is different from burying a brother. The latter may be a crime against the state, but the former in most cases is a crime against both written and unwritten laws. Orestes' act is brutal, and Electra screams, "Strike, strike again" as her mother is killed (1415). Yet Sophocles' dramatic devices make the audience accept what Electra and Orestes do. The chorus condone the vengeance of the children by noting that justice is on their side (1437-41). Sophocles also avoids some of the alienating effects of the crime of matricide by
putting Aegisthus' death second. It is that death that remains in the audience's mind as the play ends. Thus we have more sympathy for the children in Sophocles. Aeschylus and Euripides put Clytemnestra's death last and thereby arouse horror in the audience with that final image of matricide.

The *Trachiniae* shows us Heracles, another hero, in fact a demigod, between gods and men, but also in his actions between men and beasts. He was a monster who slew other monsters, making a world safe for a civilization in which he could not share. He, like Ajax, like Oedipus, and like Philoctetes, is one who is needed and rejected; aside from their time of usefulness they are not considered fit for the conventional society of the Greek *polis*.

Heracles slew monsters but was defeated by erotic passion: "He defeated all by the strength of his hands, but he was finally defeated himself by Eros" (488-89). He committed the fatal error of introducing a foreign princess into his house "to lie under the same blanket" with his lawful wife (539-40). We, the audience, know what this can lead to, having had the example of Agamemnon who brought Priam's daughter Cassandra home to be part of his household. So also in Euripides' *Andromache*, Neoptolemus imported Hector's wife as his concubine and mother of his only child. After this, he was not to rest easy in his home and marriage to Hermione, Menelaus' daughter. As both Agamemnon and Neoptolemus learned, one does not bring a princess home to share a wife's bed. Both died because of their wives' intrigues.

Hoping to regain his love, Deianeira (whose name means man-slayer) sends her husband Heracles a cloak imbued with a drug given her by the centaur Nessus. Simulating the fire of love itself, with concomitant agony, sunlight activates the power of this drug. It is fatal for Heracles and eats into him like an acid (or love). The "disease" of love turned out to be deadly (544). Heracles, in his single-mindedness, perpetuates his passion by insisting his son marry Iole. His desire shapes his destiny and he even intends to shackle the next generation.
This play ends with the statement that there is nothing here that is not Zeus/God (1278). That is true: there is nothing here that is not Zeus, and his incarnation in the Sophoclean hero. Greek tragedy shows us the paradox of fate/god and man inextricably woven together, without man being released from responsibility. It is this which constitutes his human glory. Sophocles' heroes choose and suffer the consequences. The Sophoclean hero may learn through his suffering, but he will not change. Ajax will be Ajax and Heracles, Heracles.

Even at his/her best, it is difficult to feel empathy towards a Sophoclean hero, who is both alienated and alienating, but one has to admire the single-minded pursuit of goals which so often entail self-destruction, along with the destruction of others. As Bernard Knox says, "Sophocles creates a tragic universe in which man's heroic action, free and responsible, brings him sometimes through suffering to victory but more often to a fall which is both defeat and victory at once; the suffering and glory are fused in an indissoluble unity" (The Heroic Temper, p. 6).

*Philoctetes* is a late play, and the only Greek tragedy with an all male cast. It raises the issue of victory and its price. Does the end justify the means? An oracle says the bow of Achilles is necessary for victory at Troy. Neoptolemus goes with Odysseus to deceive Philoctetes who was given the bow by Heracles, but Neoptolemus cannot become Odysseus: he cannot be a liar. Sophocles' genius is to show us Neoptolemus trying to compromise his nature. Only after experience and reflection does he see that the loss of self, or self-betrayal, is worse than the loss of Troy. His dilemma is like Antigone's, and his loyalty to himself and the ideals that constitute his character is more important than loyalty to those in power, particularly when his allegiance involves a loyalty to a higher truth.

Theme upon theme is repeated in Sophocles, as he replicates the hero in his strange majesty. Philoctetes and Neoptolemus are like two sides of Achilles, one, the irascible and wild nature of the devoted warrior, the other, his virtue and integrity. When
they are divided they lose; together, they defeat Odysseus. Heracles brings about this powerful fusion by dragging them back into the mythological track.

The bare island of Lemnos is a wonderful symbol for the craggy hero Philoctetes. Sophocles has other brilliant descriptions of nature, such as the ode to fair Colonus, a land of fine horses where the nightingale sings her melodious songs in the wine-dark ivy and sacred foliage (Oedipus at Colonus 668-719).

**Antigone: The Play**

There are many conflicting interpretations of this play. For instance, too many moderns see right only in Antigone, and view Creon as a stereotypical dictator in the wrong. Bertolt Brecht blackened Creon with fascist colors and Tom Paulin presents Creon with the same strident rhetoric as the bigoted Northern Irish leader Ian Paisley. Andrzej Wajda had his chorus wearing miners' helmets cheer Antigone. Nevertheless things are not so simple in Sophocles' play. As Hegel suggests, two rights are opposed: the right of the family against the rights of the state. Familial values and duty towards the gods of the underworld conflict with state interests, including the Olympian gods; personal issues confront public issues, and they radically influence each other.

More than an opposition of rights, however, this play brilliantly shows us the opposition of two passionate people who go hell-bent to their own destruction. Antigone's hot-headedness is particularly clear in a couple of brutal exchanges with her sister. Nevertheless she is indisputably a heroine who knows her duty to her family. Here her duty lies: to her beloved brother and the unwritten laws of the gods.

Creon opposes Antigone with the might of law on which he says personal happiness is based, namely via a well-controlled city. What Antigone does is the opposite of what Socrates did: he declared that he would follow the city's laws even if the decision was unjust (Crito). With Sophocles' usual dramatic economy, Antigone is punished by the ruler and the polis she opposes, and Creon is punished by the loss of his own family, whose values he subordinated to those of the polis.
Justification can be found for Creon's refusing burial to an enemy. This view is unpopular in some circles. Both Sourvinou-Inwood and James Diggle have eloquently argued for it.\footnote{See C Sourvinou-Inwood, "Assumptions and the Creation of Meaning: Reading Sophocles' \textit{Antigone}," \textit{Journal of Hellenic Studies} CIX (1979) 134-148, also James Diggle who provided additional evidence from fifth- and fourth-century history and literature in a lecture, "Creon and the Burial of Traitors: Some Thoughts on the \textit{Antigone}," delivered at Delphi, International Meeting of Ancient Drama (1990), later printed in Program to \textit{Antigone}, Epidaurus, 1995.} It was clearly acceptable law to refuse burial to traitors in the city. Just as heroes were celebrated, enemies and particularly traitors were punished. Polynice chose to wage war against his native city, and even if his brother refused to share the rule of Thebes, as it had been arranged after the death of Oedipus, this was not sufficient justification to bring an army against one's own people.

Sophocles never presents us with black vs. white, heroes vs. villains. Oscar Wilde said, "A thing is not necessarily true because a man dies for it." One may even claim the \textit{Antigone} should be called the \textit{Creon}, because it is more his tragedy. As Ajax said, a noble man ought either to live with honor, or die with honor (479-80). Creon did neither. He aimed at honor, but missed through the excessiveness of the pursuit. No Teiresias justifies the extremity of Creon's actions. He loses a son and his wife dies cursing him. He has lost honor along with his family. He is right to say that he is less than nothing and a walking corpse.

Creon is well named, because his name means ruler and he rules in an absolute way. He represents the law of the city, defends it, and finally yields to the pressures of the prophet Teiresias and the chorus. At first he is unbending, as Haemon points out, but he is constantly forced to modify his position, agreeing first not to include Ismene in her sister's harsh punishment, then finally allowing Polynice's burial and Antigone's release -
but too late. His is the rigidity of the Sophoclean hero, the tree that will not bend to save itself when the river is in flood (712-14). The ruler who will not listen to his people, or even his family, and claims he should be obeyed whether right or wrong (666-67), may end up losing both, as does Creon. He gains in knowledge, accepting blame, and concluding that he is nothing, less than nobody (1317-25). He does not have the grandeur of Oedipus, but he shares his suffering. Contrary to Oedipus he learns in spite of himself rather than because of himself.

Antigone is equally unbending, if not more so, but she at least dies without being responsible for another's death, and confident that she is loyal to what she believes. Her curse, like her father's, will be fulfilled. Creon will suffer what she did and worse, even to the point of having to listen to a rather pompous and moralizing chorus after terrible things have happened.

This is a tragedy about unrelenting passion; these protagonists do not give up. Both Creon and Antigone suffer from their inability to compromise, something Antigone also shared with her father, who pursued the truth about his origin against the advice of those trying to save him, namely Teiresias and Jocasta. Creon, Oedipus and Antigone also are impatient and easily angered. They lash out at those closest to them (Oedipus's impatient anger led him to kill his father). The chorus calls Antigone a law unto herself, autonomos (821), and she resembles Creon and Oedipus in this also. One might even argue that what she did was totally ineffectual, and, in fact, led to innocent deaths in addition to her own. It was only Teiresias and his dire prophecy that brought about Polyneices' burial.

Antigone kills herself rather than wait and suffer more humiliation. Creon is made to realize his mistakes by Teiresias, and goes to release Antigone, but her suicide prevents his freeing her. She is first found by Haemon who has come to rescue her. Like Romeo, he arrives too late and decides to join his beloved in death. Their romance will wait for Euripides (in his lost play Antigone, Haemon helps Antigone bury her brother, and with
Dionysus' help they escape punishment by Creon, and are married). Haemon dies in what seems to be a perverted marriage ritual, a "marriage to death." Antigone speaks of her marriage to Hades, and it may in fact be her veil with which she hangs herself (a veil figured in the marriage ritual). Haemon's name is derived from the Greek word for blood, and when he takes his life, his blood spurts out over Antigone's cheek in a type of consummation.

This play, as others by Sophocles, is riddled with imagery. Disease, wild and tame animals, ships, and rigidity, are themes. Most of these images have to do with power and control. Creon says of Antigone: "It's the stubborn spirit that's more prone to fall than others; it's the toughest iron that snaps and shatters" (473-76). Haemon accuses his father of being unbending, and says, "In winter storms the trees that bend save themselves, but those that resist are destroyed root and branch. It's the same with a ship: when the wind is strong, if you sheet in the sails too much, the boat will capsize" (712-17). He illustrates his rigidity even when he follows Teiresias' advice; instead of releasing Antigone, since she is the living person and in need of attention first, he goes off to bury Polyneices, who in this case could certainly have waited a little longer, and it shows that it is Creon's nature to attend to the man first, and to carry out what is beneficial for the city. Those who claim that Sophocles often subordinates characterization to plot say that this sequence is simply dramatic fodder for the messenger speech, namely the description of the collective fatalities in the cave. Antigone's suicide is obviously more dramatic than the burial of Polyneices' body. But the sequence is relevant to the characterization of Creon. Another theme is the opposition of male against female. Creon says that he will not be made a female nor be bested by one (e.g., 484-85, 525). It turns out that he will weep at the end like a woman and that he is in fact bested by Antigone. He goes inside the house at the end, the woman's territory, whereas Antigone braved the man's world by burying her brother and being led out of the city.
Ismene acts as a foil to Antigone. This allows us to appreciate the difference between a compliant citizen and a conscientious objector. Antigone is harsh and cruel towards her sister. For someone who claims that she is by nature one who prefers friendship to enmity, she is extreme in her rejection of Ismene. Her motive might be to save Ismene's life by showing that she was not implicated. Perhaps Antigone also needs to reject Ismene's softness so strongly because she recognizes how much easier it would be to be like her. Antigone's heroic posture may need this negative buttress. Ismene, however, is willing to die at her sister's side. Antigone is like her father, who always goes too far.

The guard is a wonderful contrast to Creon, revealing how much of a tyrant he is. Creon threatens torture and treats him like a slave. Their encounter illustrates Haemon's accusation to Creon: "You're not ruling a desert, father, but a city with people" (739). The guard is an everyday person, not at all interested in heroics, and thus (like Ismene) highlights Antigone's bold stand. Altruism and ideals vanish when it comes to saving his own skin. His self-absorption matches that of the protagonists. The messenger, too, shows that he is a reasonable and not very imaginative man. For instance, he is more concerned with decorum than pity for the queen; he comments that she knows her place and will mourn indoors rather than embarrass anyone by ordering a public lamentation (1246-50).

By contrast, Haemon and Ismene represent what reasonable and sympathetic people will do. They have neither the fanaticism of the heroes, nor the mundane concerns of the guard and messenger. Haemon and Ismene both show their loyalty to those they love. Their positions are understandable and certainly at the beginning they are good citizens. Rather like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, their fates are tied to the heroic monsters who direct the plot.

A modern audience might expect the chorus to voice more opposition to Creon. But we remember that he holds absolute power over the chorus and this can explain much of their deferential action.
The first chorus celebrates a victory, and this communal joy contrasts with the individual suffering of Antigone. It is light coming before the dark. The second chorus is about what man can accomplish and what are his limitations (death, and impiety or evil acts which will be punished). I translate deinos, as "amazing." It can mean "wonderful," "awesome," "great," but also "terrible," and "monstrous." We get the modern word "dinosaur" from it, "monster lizard." This word can apply to any Sophoclean hero: they are great in their capacity for both good and evil. It is obvious how this adjective applies to both Antigone and Creon.

The third chorus talks of the evils that haunt a family for generations. This certainly applies to the family of Oedipus which has been living under a family curse since Laius. This chorus also preaches against excess. One recalls the Delphic maxim, "Nothing in Excess." A tragic hero will often do everything in excess.

The fourth chorus is about love. Love was often regarded as a disease in antiquity. A girl's cheeks are mentioned, and Haemon will die staining Antigone's cheek. Love leads to madness and violence, and indeed will lead Haemon to violence against himself, as it also led Antigone to bury her brother, and in her case love was joined to duty.

The fifth chorus talks of various mythical characters who were imprisoned or confined as Antigone was. This gives a type of elevation to her, by associating her with the figures of heroic legend.

Like the first chorus, the last chorus invokes Dionysus, the god of the theatre, and lord of the dance. The audience hopes for a happy ending, because Creon will finally follow Teiresias' advice. But Dionysus, whom Euripides characterized as both most fierce (deinotatos) and most gentle to man (epiótatos, Bacchae 861), in this case will be the former. Like man, as characterized in the second chorus, Dionysus can be both awesome and awful.
The last choral comment, that good sense is hammered in by age, reworks Aeschylus' tragic message in the *Oresteia* that man must learn by suffering. In tragedy, learning often comes too late.

Finally, I shall mention a pair of problems which have troubled others. First of all, Antigone performs the rituals for her brother twice, but the first ritual was sufficient to ensure her brother's passage to the underworld. The second occasion is more elaborate because she includes liquid offerings that she did not use on the first occasion, however, this is not sufficient explanation for taking on the risk of a second burial.

Why does Antigone perform the ritual twice? The covering was removed by the guards, and, although the ritual needs were satisfied, Antigone does not want her brother to be dishonored this way. This is also good drama. The first time, we see Creon wondering who dared defy him. We also hope that Antigone will not get caught, and this increases the suspense. Then we see Antigone defiantly performing the deed again, as if she wanted to be caught. This is consistent with her telling Ismene not to conceal what she intends to do, but shout it out to everyone (86-87). Antigone is caught in the act and we see her dragged before Creon. Only a double burial allows the audience at first to feel hope that Antigone can escape, and then feel horror at her being arrested.

This is also a good piece of characterization. Antigone is as stubborn as her father, and Creon. Burying her brother is a type of self-affirmation, and something which will gain public approval, as Haemon affirms (692-700, 733). Antigone would not be Antigone if she did not openly declare what she had done. Public recognition was important to an ancient Greek. It was one of the essential ingredients for happiness.

There are even suggestions that the gods might be on Antigone's side. The first burial shows no sign of human intervention, and the chorus suggest that the gods might have been involved (278-79). The guard calls the dust storm that accompanies the next burial a "god-sent plague" (421). This possible intervention of the gods is a nice anticipation of the Teiresias scene at the end when he comes to tell Creon that he is
polluting the gods by leaving what should be buried exposed (Polyneices' corpse), and burying what should be allowed to live (Antigone).

Another problem is that Antigone claims that she would not do what she did for a husband or a child, but only for a brother, arguing that the former are replaceable; since her mother and father are dead, a brother is irreplaceable (905-12). The problem is that Antigone told Creon that she was defending the unwritten laws of the gods, and it is difficult to imagine that the gods would make the distinction that she now makes (cf. 450-57). Goethe, and others, have claimed these lines were not written by Sophocles, but by a later writer and were added to the text.

Nevertheless those lines are true to an ancient code which favors the paternal family, or *genos*. A woman in particular regards the husband's family as foreign; her real protection comes only from her paternal family. There is mythological support for favoring brothers. For example, Althaea kills her son Meleager because he slew her brothers after the Calydonian boar hunt. Furthermore, Antigone's argument has a literary precedent: it was put forward by the wife of Intaphernes in Herodotus, when Darius asked her to choose whose life she would save: child, husband or brother (Herodotus III. 119).

Antigone does not have child or husband, and her greatest loyalty at this point is to her brother: she is giving her life for him. Like many a Sophoclean hero, she is passionate in her devotion to a point that brings her past the "normal" human experience. Her high-flown rhetoric makes the "inevitability" of her action understandable. Sophoclean heroes like to justify themselves.

Hegel said the *Antigone* was "one of the most sublime and in every respect most consummate work of art human effort ever produced" (*On Tragedy* 178). Although the play is from fifth-century Athens, the issues about human rights have everlasting

2It is clear that Sophocles knew his Herodotus: see *Oedipus at Colonus* 337-41 which parallels Herodotus II. 35.
relevance. This play is also a human drama and a tragedy that shows the price of supporting these rights. Both Antigone and Creon are two passionate people who have destroyed themselves and others. This is also a play about madness, hidden under the mask of ideals.

**Brief Textual History**

The City Dionysia in 386 B.C. instituted a revival of the great plays of the fifth century. Around 330 B.C. the Athenian politician Lycurgus prescribed that copies of the texts of the plays should be deposited in the official archives, and that future performances should conform to these texts. The purpose was to safeguard the plays from adaptation and interpolation by actors and producers, of a kind to which they had already become vulnerable. These copies were lent to the Egyptian king, Ptolemy Euergetes I, and will have passed into the library at Alexandria, to form the basis of the critical edition made by the Librarian Aristophanes of Byzantium (ca. 257-180 B.C.). Aristophanes divided the lyrics (previously written as continuous prose) into metrical cola. He also added brief introductory comments, probably making use of Aristotle's lost *Didaskaliai* (production records). Part of these comments survive in the *hypotheses* (plot summaries) which were prefixed to the plays by later scholars in the Roman period. The composition of commentaries (*uJpomnhvmata, scholia*) on the plays was begun in the Hellenistic period (by scholars such as Aristarchus of Samothrace, ?217-145 B.C., and Didymus, ?80-10 B.C.). Further scholia were added in the Byzantine period.

The selection of the seven plays that we possess was probably done in the second or third century A.D. and *scholia* were included for school use. After parchment gradually replaced papyrus (around the fourth century A.D.) the unselected plays gradually passed out of use. After the Athenian Academy was closed in 529, the classical texts disappeared from sight for several centuries and did not reemerge until the revival of learning in the early Byzantine period, when they were copied from the uncial into the new cursive script. Among the scholars who wrote commentaries and handled the texts of the plays
the most important are Thomas Magister (late thirteenth century), Manuel Moschopulus (fl. 1300), and Demetrius Triclinius (early fourteenth century). Triclinius brought a new metrical awareness to the amendment of the text, in particular the lyrics. The oldest manuscript of Sophocles’ plays is L (in the Laurentian library in Florence) written in the tenth century, and there are many others from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries. The editio princeps was printed by Aldus Manutius in Venice in 1502.

**Brief Performance History**

Sophocles and the themes he wrote about have always been popular. *Antigone* has always been eagerly performed by people concerned about human rights. Fintan O'Toole noted this when he said, "There is not and never has been a pure, universal text of *Antigone* divorced from contemporary politics. The effort to construct one now is as appropriate as taking the figs out of the fig rolls."³

In his study of all the different versions of the myth, *Antigones* (1984), George Steiner traces how individual playwrights adapted the figure to their own historical periods. I cite a few examples. Robert Grenier provided moral lessons in his *Antigone ou la piété* (1580). Jean Anouilh staged his *Antigone* (1944) during the Nazi occupation of Paris; his even-handed presentation of both Creon's and Antigone's position got it past the censors. Bertolt Brecht's *Antigone* (1948) showed Creon overtly as Hitler. Athol Fugard's *The Island* (1973) featured prisoners of Apartheid playing out *Antigone* in protest. Wajda produced a version in 1984 which showed *Antigone* aligned with the Solidarity Movement. The Irish use the work to indict the British occupation in the North: Tom Paulin's *The Riot Act* (1984); Aidan Carl Mathews' *Antigone* (1984); and Brendan Kennelly's *Antigone* (1984). *Antigone: A Cry for Peace* (1994) was produced by Nikos Koundouros at the border of former Yugoslavia with a military backdrop featuring tanks.

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In opera, Antigone was not popular in the seventeenth century, nor the nineteenth, but enormously so in the eighteenth and twentieth. Powerful women as heroines, like Medea and Antigone, were only tolerated as themes for opera in the centuries when discussions of women's rights were particularly lively.

On the Author's Translation

This is not a literal translation, although I think it conveys all the essential ideas of the original. It was designed initially for performance in Ireland. It is meant to be actable, so sound is important. I have tried to keep the language simple and sometimes faintly reminiscent of colloquial language in Ireland. The first performance was in Cork, Ireland (1999), directed by Athol Fugard, with an international cast. Several subsequent performances featured an Irish cast.

I minimize obscure mythological allusions. I strive for immediate understanding and yet also want to convey the complexity of the Sophoclean original.

Sophocles is a master of character and of the language that creates character. He steers a path between the grandeur of Aeschylus and the witty colloquialisms of Euripides. I have been closer to the vernacular in the case of the guard's speech (223-77). Greek guards have much in common with the Irish farmer. They like to be expansive at their moment of power when they have an important message to deliver.

There are many problems. Poetic economy is always maddening, particularly when the poet is as great as Sophocles. Ismene's "you have a hot heart for cold things" (88), becomes in my translation, "Your fiery defiance chills my heart." Some of the ambiguity is lost in making it more dramatically accessible. The coldness refers to a whole gamut of things from the actual coldness of the corpse to an abstract like "defiance." A "hot heart" can range from simple passion to hot-headedness.

4See my Sing Sorrow: Ancient Classics in Modern Opera.
Another example. The marvelously compact ou[toi sunevcqein, ajlla; sumfilei'n e[fun (523) is bound to fail in English. Both sunevcqein and sumfilei'n are neologisms: sun- meaning "with" is linked with ev[cqein meaning "to hate," and this coined word means "to share in the feeling of hate," and sumfilei'n means "to share in the feeling of love." The emotions are extended to a social situation by the sun-prefix, cf. "sym-pathize." The entire sentence covers the concept of birth, and what a person is by "nature," fuvsi", as opposed to what a person becomes through "law," or "custom," novmo". Antigone's nature is not to divide, but bring together: not to cause hostilities between people, but to unite them in filiva, "friendship," and the duty that that entails (see Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, VIII-IX). Philos can mean "beloved," "friend," or "relative," in addition to "one's own," and a comparable ambiguity is in the verb, philein.

The difference between Creon who divides by civil law, and Antigone who reconciles by obeying the laws of nature is at the crux of this drama. I first translated line 523 specifically: "I want to bring my brothers together, not keep them apart." I would have liked to say something more general: "I am one for reconciliation rather than hostility," but this sounds pretentious in performance. I finally opted for "I was born to love, not to hate," which I think is the most dramatically viable translation.

There is ambiguity in Antigone's statement in 48 that Creon "can't keep me from mine." Mine" can refer concretely to Antigone's brother or abstractly to her rights, or sense of right. I translate this line as "He has no right to come between my brother and me." I opted for clarity, but something is obviously lost.

Often there are no satisfactory equivalents in English. For instance, in translating 1175, I have the messenger tell the chorus simply that "Haemon is dead, and he killed himself." Sophocles left us in doubt as to how Haemon died because he uses the word autocheir, which can refer either to "his own hand," or "his relative's hand." So in the original, the chorus have to ask who killed Haemon because of this ambiguity.
I use less colloquial language in the choral odes, but I try to be concrete and dramatically effective. The richness of the original Greek is at times impossible to replicate. In 1261-69, when Creon bursts into dochmiacs (a lyric meter which conveys excitement, even derangement, particularly from sorrow), the sound of the vowels (particularly u and o) echoes to the point of creating moans. A sequence of k's and t's at one point suggests the sharpness of the sword which killed both mother and son. Io and aiai are vocalizations of pain and aiai follows the address to pai, the child lost through his own stubbornness. The thought of the child is fraught with the same pain which is conveyed by the language itself in the syllable of mourning: ai. This is missed in the translation.

This text has to be read out loud, or it does not have the full life intended. Performance is important. One has to hear, see and relish the words, as well as the singing and dancing. I have tried to make my words actable, with an attempt to capture the musicality through rhythm and alliteration.

Now some performance suggestions, beginning with the cast (these were followed in the first production in Ireland, and later with the Irish cast that took it to Delphi and Vienna):

Antigone: A determined, idealistic girl of about seventeen. Mezzo voice. She is a wee bit too sure of what she knows.
Ismene: A sweet girl of about eighteen. Actor may be female or male. More interested in what is proper than what is right.
Creon: A good man but too sure of himself.
Haemon: A young man of about nineteen. He knows where he is going; he is a gentler man than his father.
Teiresias: Someone who speaks with quiet authority.
Guard: Someone from the country; a simple man.
Messenger: Someone who knows his place, and the place of others.
Eurydice: A devoted mother.
Chorus: May be one person. Must be able to sing.
I would prefer the choruses to be sung or chanted to an Irish reed pipe, penny whistle, or oboe, or clarinet, and drum, and as the chorus sings, with only his/her voice audible besides the pipe, and occasional drum.

Accents and vocabulary function as identity cards in Ireland. Ideally, I would like a Creon with a British accent, or even better, a Belfast Protestant's. But I do not want him played in a way that would demonize him. I want him to appear rational at the beginning, and devastated at the end. Antigone and Ismene could have either the accent from somewhere in the Republic of Ireland, or one typical of the Catholic population of Belfast or Derry. Haemon also. The chorus of old men could have accents like Northern Irish politicians. The guard should speak more like a farmer from the Republic. The messenger should be a bit stuffy (British accent again). Eurydice's accent should be the same, but more graceful.

The set should be something simple, possibly suggesting a palace and a battlefield. I like Gordon Craig's minimal sets. The darkness of the first meeting should gradually merge into the day mentioned by the first chorus. Some suggested colors, to be done by lighting. Antigone and Ismene at the beginning: shades of red; Creon's confrontations: white, with black somehow in background/black and white; Antigone and cave: greens and greys; Teiresias: purples and blues; Creon at end, suffering, with knowledge dawning on him: grey and some faint purple.

As a prologue, I show a video on Irish themes, including stills and film clips of various people and events in Irish history.5 I use these pictures as commentary on the choruses. For the first chorus, on the recent victory, one sees pictures of civil war atrocities in Ireland, e.g., civil war after Collins signed the treaty; standard conflict in Belfast, or Derry. The second chorus which begins "There is much that is amazing in the world, /But nothing more amazing than man!" has a filmic counterpoint which shows

5This video was made by Tania Kamal-Eldin.
imperialist atrocities: Derry's Bloody Sunday, Jan. 30, 1972 and various confrontations with tanks and internment. The third chorus on the history of people, families, and suffering, and the power of God is reflected in pictures of the violent history of Ireland from Druids to Vikings, to Cromwell, who was either directly or indirectly responsible for the deaths of more than one million Catholics from a population of about five million in the 17th century. I use pictures of those who loved freedom: e.g., Robert Emmet, Wolfe Tone, Michael Collins, De Valera, and pictures of mothers with sons who were among the hunger strikers to correspond to the fourth chorus on love. Pictures and slides of prisoner camps in Ireland; Long Kesh with the hunger strikers; Bobby Sands and the imprisoned hunger strikers, who gave their lives for freedom, correspond to the fifth chorus on mythological precedents for Antigone being imprisoned. The sixth and final chorus on Dionysus, the god of theatre, I express through an actress playing Brendan Kennelly's Medea (I hope the audience sees her as Antigone). Finally I show a picture of Creon confronting Antigone from a fifth-century B.C. vase, with Bernadette Devlin and Ian Paisley to suggest a comparable stand-off.

Then the lights go out. In the dark, voices are heard saying names from the play: Acheron, Salmydessus, Dirce, Thebes, Dionysus. Four actors choose the names they like and one begins, the next follows at a lower decibel, and the next accordingly. Then Antigone says, “Ismene” from one side of the stage, or theatre, beginning softly and more urgently. Ismene waits a bit, and on the fourth “Ismene” answers “Antigone,” likewise quietly one time and then more urgently. As their volume increases the four voices that began quiet down until both girls are the only voices left, and they cry out to each other and run into each other’s arms. As Ismene tries to speak, Antigone puts her hand over her mouth, and searches the area. The lights go up, but only dimly. It will only be when the first chorus enters that the full lights should fill the stage, to coincide with the sunrise as described in their ode. When Creon first appears he is greeted by a shout, “King Creon!” He is cheered at appropriate times in his first speech. All mutter agreement.
Just before the entrance of Teiresias, the ensemble make wind sounds. The chorus look nervous seeing this holy man approach.

At the end the dead bodies are symbolically represented by an article of clothing. Haemon throws his cloak at his father. Eurydice lays her cape down at Creon’s feet. Finally, Antigone puts her wreath next to the two “bodies.” The four actors that began reciting the names at the beginning start again. They fade away and Ismene says quietly, “Antigone?” three times. The lights go up.

**SUGGESTED PROGRAM NOTES**

Ancient Athens in the fifth century before Christ produced the first written dramas in the western world. Sophocles was one of the three great playwrights who lived then and whose work we have. He wrote the *Oedipus Rex*, which twenty-five centuries later led Freud to his theory of the Oedipus complex. Sophocles wrote about 123 plays, of which only seven survive to this day all of which are recognized as masterpieces. Sophocles’ heroes struggle to right the wrongs they perceive in the world about them.

*Antigone* is the first, and remains, the greatest play in western literature about the consequences of individual conscience defying civil authority. *Antigone* is the favorite of many. In her clash with King Creon, as she defends the rights of the family, Antigone invokes “the unwritten law of the gods,” whereas Creon rests his case on defending the safety and security of the state against anarchy.

These issues about human rights have everlasting relevance. This play is performed whenever a country is in trouble: it is sometimes the only way people can fight back against abusive authority. This play resonates with timeless immediacy in situations of conflict. Plays have often been used in repressive conditions to reveal the truth when the mass media like newspapers, radio or television have been silenced by censorship. Anouilh wrote an *Antigone* for fascist Paris in 1944; in 1948 Brecht used Antigone as a model for his Mother Courage, an archetype of the rebellious woman suitable for any age; Athol Fugard’s *The Island*, performed in 1973, shows black prisoners incarcerated on Robben Island in South Africa performing this play to keep their sanity in the midst of the insanity of Apartheid, an unjust system of government which deprived an entire segment of the population of their human rights. In 1984, Tom Paulin shows us an Antigone (*The Riot Act*) from the North of Ireland, and she is a freedom fighter, whereas Creon’s words sound like Ian Paisley’s. In 1986, Brendan Kennelly also sees the Irish relevance in his *Antigone*, with a deadly net of words strangling substantive action.

But most of all, this play is a human drama and a tragedy that shows two passionate people who go hell-bent to destroy themselves and others. The price of supporting their
beliefs is paid in human blood. This is a play about madness, hidden under the mask of ideals. It is also a play about courage, and the consequences of courage.

Background to the play: Sophocles’ plays, *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone*, and *Oedipus at Colonus* are commonly regarded as a trilogy, although they were written in different years. They tell the story of the family of Oedipus. Laius, king of Thebes, is given a prophecy that he will be killed by his son. When his son Oedipus is born, Laius orders that he should be left on a mountainside to die. The servant commanded to expose the baby takes pity on him, and gives him to a shepherd who brings him to the king of Corinth to be raised by the royal family. The Delphic oracle tells Oedipus he will kill his father and marry his mother. He leaves Corinth to escape this fate, but kills a man at a crossroads, who, unknown to him, is his father. He arrives in Thebes. After saving the people from the Sphinx, he marries the queen, Jocasta, not knowing she is his mother, and fathers four children on her: Eteocles, Polyniceus, Ismene and Antigone. A plague strikes the city and he is identified as the source of the pollution, and he discovers the awful truth of his past. Jocasta commits suicide, and Oedipus blinds himself. Having cursed his sons because they dishonored him, Oedipus goes to Colonus to die. The sons agree to alternate the rule of Thebes, but Eteocles refuses to give up the throne. Polyniceus attacks Thebes with the help of forces from Argos. The brothers kill each other in the fight. Creon, brother of Jocasta, has now taken over the rule of Thebes and this is where the play begins, just before the dawn...

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Cast:

Antigone
Ismene
Creon
Haemon
Teiresias
Guard
Messenger
Eurydice
Chorus
It is night.

Antigone

Sweet Ismene, my dearest sister, you know how much we've suffered; how we have had to live with the sins of our father Oedipus, and all that they brought - pain, shame, and humiliation. And now, after all that, this new proclamation from our ruler. Have you heard about it? Or don't you care about what our enemies are doing to us?\(^6\)

Ismene

I've heard nothing since our two brothers killed each other; nothing either good or bad since the invading army left.

Antigone

That is why I've called you outside away from the others. I wanted to speak to you alone and tell you what I've heard.

Ismene

What is it? You frighten me, Antigone.

Antigone

Yes. I want to frighten you. Creon has honored one of our brothers with burial and dishonored the other. He has buried Eteocles in proper observance of right and custom, so that he can be honored among the dead below. But he has forbidden anyone to bury or weep for Polyneices. His body must be left unmourned, without a tomb, a feast for scavenging birds. This is the worthy Creon's decree; he's coming here in person to spell it out. He doesn't take this lightly: anyone defying the proclamation

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\(^6\)In Sophocles' Theban plays, Laius, king of Thebes, was given a prophecy that he would be killed by his son. So when his son Oedipus was born, Laius ordered that he should be left on a mountainside to die. The servant commanded to expose the baby took pity on him, and gave him to a shepherd who brought him to the king of Corinth to be raised by the royal family. The Delphic oracle told Oedipus he would kill his father and marry his mother. He left Corinth to escape this fate, but killed a man at a crossroads, who, unknown to him, was his father. He arrived in Thebes. After saving the people from the sphinx who was ravaging the land, he married the queen, his mother, Jocasta. A plague struck and he was identified as the source of the pollution. Jocasta committed suicide. Having cursed his sons, Oedipus went to Colonus to die. The sons agreed to alternate the rule of Thebes but Eteocles refused to give up the throne. Polyneices attacked Thebes with the help of forces from Argos. They killed each other in the fight. Creon, brother of Jocasta, has now taken over the rule of Thebes and issued a proclamation forbidding burial of Polyneices. Antigone and Ismene are sisters of Eteocles and Polyneices.
is to be stoned to death. Yes. That's the situation.
So now you have the chance to show
whether you are true to your noble birth, or a coward.

Ismene

My poor sweet Antigone. But, if this is so, what can we do about it?

Antigone

I have a plan. Are you prepared to join me?

Ismene

You frighten me again. What do you want us to do?

Antigone

Will you help me honor the dead?

Ismene

Bury Polyneices? But you've just said that's forbidden.

Antigone

I shall bury our brother, even if you don't want to. I, for one, will not betray him.

Ismene

You are out of your mind Antigone. Creon is the law.

Antigone

He has no right to come between my brother and me.

Ismene

Sister, remember how our father blinded himself when he
discovered that he had killed his father and slept with his
own mother. He died, hated and condemned by all!
Then his wife and mother (one and the same),
and she was our mother as well, brought her life
to a violent end by hanging herself.
And now, finally, our two poor brothers, on a single day,
kill each other. And are we going to add to that cycle of horrors?
We shall die if we go against the decision of the ruler.
We are helpless women, Antigone, not made to fight against men.
We are ruled by the more powerful; we must obey this order
and if necessary even worse. I shall obey those who stand in authority,
but I shall beg those under the earth to understand
I'm being forced to do this against my will.
It's mad to fight a battle you can't win.

Antigone

Fine. I wouldn't let you help me now even if you wanted to;
I don't want you at my side after what you've just said.
Do as you like; I shall bury my brother. I know it's right, die if I must!
My crime will be a holy crime. I am his and I shall lie buried with him.
There will be more time with those below than those on earth.
I'll be there for eternity. But as for you, forget about the gods,
if that's what you want.

Ismene

That's not what I want. I just can't break the laws of the city.

Antigone

Make that excuse if you like. I'm going to bury our brother.

Ismene

Oh, poor sister, I'm so afraid for you!

Antigone

Don't worry about me; just take care of yourself.

Ismene

At least keep your plan secret, and I'll do the same.

Antigone

No! Go and tell everyone! I'll despise you all the more
if you try to keep it secret. Let the whole world know
what Antigone is going to do!

Ismene

Creon will soon cool that hot heart of yours!

Antigone

The ones that count will thank me well enough.

Ismene
If you succeed, but you won't.

Antigone

Only death will stop me; your words can't.

Ismene

You’re in love with the impossible. And I’m afraid.

Antigone

If that's all you have to say, then you are my enemy, and Polyneices will have every right to call you that as well. So let me suffer for what you call impossible, because I know that whatever I suffer, I, at least, shall die with honor.

Ismene

Then go, Antigone. There’s nothing I can do to stop you. But know that I’ll always love you.

Antigone and Ismene exeunt. The chorus enters the orchestra. The sun rises. The stage is bathed in light.

Chorus

First ray of sun, fairer than any seen before
By Thebes of the seven gates,7
At last you appear,
Golden eye of day
Glancing over the streams of Dirce8;
You made the man who came from Argos flee,
When, decked out in white armor and trappings,
He attacked our land.
This war was brought upon us
By that man of many quarrels, Polynice9.
He flew against us with piercing scream,
Like an eagle on wings as white as snow;
He came with many weapons
And helmets tossing their horse-hair plumes high;

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7There were seven gates to the city; seven heroes attacking, seven defending. This was vividly recounted in Aeschylus' Seven Against Thebes.
8Dirce is a river near Thebes named after the brutal wife of Lycus, King of Thebes, who persecuted Antiope. She was slain by the sons of Antiope avenging their mother.
9Polynice's name in Greek means "many quarrels," "much strife."
He stood above our houses,
Ringing them with spears hungry for gore,
But he fled before they had tasted our blood,
Before the fire of Hephaestus' pine torches\textsuperscript{10}
Had seized the crown of our towers.
Such was the din of war beating his back;
He was no match for the dragon race of Thebes.\textsuperscript{11}
Zeus hates a boastful tongue.
Seeing them advance in full force
With the overweening pride of shimmering gold,
Just as one reaches the highest towers
And prepares to bellow victory,
Zeus brings him down with his lightning bolt.\textsuperscript{12}

Down he falls and hits the hard earth,
That fire-bearer who raged, a wild Bacchant in his mad attack,\textsuperscript{13}
And breathed on us the blasts of hostile winds.
His plan to take the city went awry.
The worthy war-god gave victory to one, defeat to another;
Shattering the enemy he raced our chariot to victory.
Seven spearmen for seven gates,
Matched equal to equal;
Six won and gave their all-bronze weapons
To Zeus the trophy-collector,
While six fell defeated.
But at the seventh gate the ill-fated brothers,
Born of one father and one mother,
Clashed their spears, and
Both lost, sharing a double death.

Since glorious Victory has come
Answering with joy the joy of Thebes,
Let us forget the war
And dance our victory into the night.
We shall visit the shrines of the gods;
May Bacchus be the lord of a dance
That will shake the land of Thebes.

\textsuperscript{10}Hephaestus, Hera's son, is the god of fire, and carpenter of the gods, married to Aphrodite.
\textsuperscript{11}The Thebans were said to have been born from the teeth of the dragon slain by Cadmus, the founder of Thebes.
\textsuperscript{12}This is Capaneus, who is known for his arrogant boasting; he said he would sack Thebes even if Zeus, the king of the gods, opposed him. He was blasted by Zeus' lightning bolt.
\textsuperscript{13}Bacchants were worshippers of Dionysus, the god of the theatre and of wine. They were traditionally shown as wild creatures, possessed by the god and ranging the mountains. In my translation Bacchant refers to the male worshiper and Bacchante the female. Bacchus is another name for Dionysus.
But here is our leader,
Newly appointed by the fortune of war.
Why does he ask for this talk with his elder citizens?

Enter Creon.

Creon

Gentlemen, the gods shook our city with a heavy storm,
but now they have set things right again.
I have singled you out from all the rest
because I know how loyal you were to Laius' government
and afterwards, when Oedipus ran the city, you were loyal to him,
and when he died your loyalty carried through to his sons.
Now that they are dead, I hold all the power since I am their closest relative.

You cannot know a man's heart, thought and judgement
until you have tested his skill in leadership and lawmaking.
Any ruler who does not pursue the policies he judges best,
but holds his tongue because he is afraid, I think him the lowest of the low.
Worse still, a man who sets a friend or relative above his country
doesn't deserve the name of citizen. Speaking for myself,
I wouldn't keep quiet if I saw the city threatened with destruction.
And I wouldn't call an enemy of my land a friend of mine.
I know our salvation is the ship of state and only those
who keep her on the right course can be called her friends and benefactors.
I plan to make this city great.

And now I have an announcement for the people about Oedipus' sons.
Eteocles who died defending the city, a great warrior and patriot, shall be buried
in a tomb with all the honors appropriate for the most heroic of our dead.
But, his brother Polynices, a fugitive from his native land, and his gods,
and his relatives, who came to burn this city to the ground, drink our blood, a
nd lead us into slavery, I decree that he shall have no funeral and no mourning.
His corpse will be left unburied, to be torn apart and eaten by dogs and birds.
Such is my decision. Traitors will never be preferred over law-abiding citizens.
I will always honor the loyal subject whether he is alive or dead.

Chorus

It is your prerogative to punish disloyalty and to reward loyalty.
We know only too well the power you hold over us, whether dead or alive.
Creon

So see that what I have decreed is done.

Chorus

Can't you get someone younger to do it?

Creon

I'm not asking you to stand guard over the body. I have men ready to do that.

Chorus

Then, what else do you want from us?

Creon

No sympathy for lawbreakers.

Chorus

No one's going to risk his life defying you.

Creon

You're right, death is the penalty if they do. But money corrupts.

*Enter guard.*

Guard

Your lordship, I don't say I'm exactly out of breath comin’ here: my feet were a wee bit heavy. I kept thinkin’ and thinkin’, and this held me up; I went in circles, determined to go back. My mind just wouldn't stop talkin’: 'You bloody good for nothin’, you're goin’ to be punished for what you have to say. So now, you eejit, you're stoppin’? If Creon hears about what happened from somebody else, how d'you think you're goin’ to get out of the muck then?’ Turnin’ this over and over, lookin’ at it again and again, I dragged my feet, and made a short road long. Finally I screwed up my courage and decided to come. And here I am! Even if what I say amounts to nothin’, I'll still tell ya the whole story. I keep sayin’ to myself I'll only suffer what is bound to happen anyway.

Creon
What are you going on about, man?

Guard

I want to tell ya first I didn't do it, and I didn't see who did, so you can't blame me.

Creon

Get on with it! It's clear you have something serious to tell me.

Guard

A weighty matter slows a man down!

Creon

For God's sake out with it - then you are free to go!

Guard

O. K., O.K. I'll tell ya. Someone has buried Polyneices and got away with it. Whoever it was scattered earth over the body, and performed the burial rites, just like we learned in church.

Creon

What? Who would have dared?

Guard

There was no sign that a pickaxe was used and the earth hadn't been turned over by a hoe; the ground was hard and dry, unbroken, no wheel marks either. Whoever did it left no trace. When the guard of the mornin’ watch showed us it, Jesus, we were desperate! We couldn't see the body: it wasn't exactly buried but there was a thin blanket of earth over it, just enough to satisfy the gods. There was no sign of bites from wild animals, or dogs. We badmouthed each other, one guard blamin’ the other, and we might have cracked a couple of skulls because there was nobody there to stop us. Any one of us could have done it, but you couldn't point the finger at a soul because nobody had seen anythin’. We were ready to go through fire, bog, and muck and swear by our mudders' lives we didn't do it, and we didn't know who'd planned or done it. To cut a long story short, when our search got us nowhere,
somebody said something which made all our knees knock with fear, and we couldn't see any way out of this hellhole.
He said we had to tell you and not hide a single thing.
So that's what happened, and I was the poor bastard who got the short straw: I won the privilege of bringin’ you the good news. [Awkward bow] So here I am: unwillin’ and unwanted... don't think I don't know: nobody loves the messenger who brings bad news.

Chorus

Could the gods be behind this?

Creon

That’s ridiculous. Now you are making me angry.
It is blasphemy to suggest that the gods have any interest in this corpse.
Did they want him buried so they could load him with honors as a benefactor?
He came to burn and loot their sacred temples and treasures, and destroy their land and its laws. Do you see the gods honoring traitors? Impossible!
For a long time now people in the city who find me difficult have been muttering privately against me, reluctant to keep their necks under the yoke, as they should if they felt any loyalty to me.
I see what's happened – they've bribed someone to do this.
There is nothing worse than greed: it destroys cities; drives men out of their homes; perverts honorable minds and leads to crime.
It teaches villainy and neglect of the gods. Those who were paid to do this will soon regret it! Listen closely:
I swear that if you do not find the person responsible for the burial and bring him here to me, eternal hell shall be too short for you!
You will hang you alive until you scream out your treachery and learn that I am your paymaster, and no one else.
The bribes in your pocket won't protect you.

Guard

Will your lordship allow me to put in a word, or am I to clear off just like that?

Creon

You're playing with fire.

Guard

Is the fire in your ears or in your heart?

Creon
You want a map? What does it matter where the fire is?

Guard

The one who did it burns your heart; I just burn your ears.

Creon

Stop rambling!

Guard

Rambler, yes; criminal, no.

Creon

Yes! Because you sold your soul for money!

Guard

It's a pity if a man can't tell false coin from true.

Creon

Stop being clever. If you do not bring me the guilty parties you'll pay with your blood for selling yourself.

Exit Creon.

Guard

Sure’s God, I want the person who did it found, but whether he will be or not, who the fuck knows? One thing for sure, you’ll never see me here again.
Now, thank’s be to Jesus, I'm let off - who would have thought it possible?

Exit guard.

Chorus

There are many wonders in the world,
But nothing more amazing than man!
He crosses the white-capped sea in winter's storms,
Cuts through the surge as it booms about him;
He harasses the almighty immortal unwearying Earth,
Turning his plow back and forth year after year,
Turning up the soil with the help of mules.

Skillful man of clever thought
Traps in the woven coils of his nets
The birds, with thoughts as light as wings,
And tribes of wild animals,
And sea creatures of the deep.
With his devices he overpowers
The wild beast that roams the mountain;
He tames the rough-maned horse
And the untiring mountain bull,
Hurling a yoke over their necks.

He has mastered speech
And thought as swift as wind,
And the ways of government.
All-resourceful man
Knows how to flee the
Airborne arrows of ice and rain.
He is ready for all that comes,
As he goes out to meet the future;
He can cure terrible diseases;
Only death he cannot escape.

His contrivance is skillful beyond hope;
He moves sometimes towards good,
Sometimes towards evil.
When he follows the laws of the land
And swears to keep the justice of the gods,
He is lofty in the city; but exiled, and homeless
Is the man who consorts with evil
For the sake of greed and ambition.
He has my curse upon him;
He'll never be welcome in my house,
Nor a companion for my thoughts.

(The chorus see Antigone who is brought in by a guard.)

Am I imagining this? Can I believe my eyes?
Surely this is the young Antigone,
Unhappy daughter of an unhappy father.
Has she been caught disobeying the ruler’s decree?

Guard

Where is Creon? Creon? Creon?

They look.

Chorus
Here he comes!

*Enter Creon.*

Creon

What is it? You again!

Guard

She did it! We caught her buryin’ the body.
Sir, you can't count on anythin’! Second thoughts turn the first into a lie: I swore I’d never come here again because your threats scared the hell out of me!
But the joy a person prays for and never thought he'd get is by far the best; so here I am, though I never fancied I would be – I caught this wee girl buryin’ the body.
We didn't draw straws this time: he lucky mission was mine!
Now sir, take her, judge her, convict her;
but I'm free and it’s my right to be out of this mess!

Creon

How did you catch her?

Guard

She was buryin’ the body with her own hands: that’s the whole of it!

Creon

Do you realize what you're saying? Are you sure you've got it right?

Guard

I saw her buryin’ the body you said should be left unburied.
Is that not clear enough for you?

Creon

Yes, but how did you come to see and catch her in the act?

Guard

Well, this is how it was. When we got back after you threatened our lives, we swept off all the earth that covered the body, and made sure the decayin’ corpse was naked. Then we put the hill between us and the stink of the corpse, and we sat down. We kept each other awake with threats if we thought anybody was slackin’ off and not doin’
what he was supposed to do, keep watch that is.
We kept dis up until the roastin’ sun was directly above us and the heat
was like an oven...the hour of the devils!
Then suddenly a swirlin’ wind raised a dust storm
which filled the sky and covered the plain, and whipped the leaves on the trees.
The dust was everywhere, so we shut our eyes
to protect ourselves from this god-sent plague.
And then when it finally let up, this wee girl comes into view.
She screams a bitter heart-piercin’ cry like a mudder bird
who finds her nest empty, and her newborn young nowhere to be found. Just like dat.
When she sees the naked corpse, she screams, weeps, and groans,
and calls down bitter curses on them that done it.
Quickly she scatters earth over the corpse. Then she lifts up a bronze jug
and pours a sacred offerin’ of milk, honey and water over him.
As soon as we saw dis, we ran and hunted her down;
when we charged her with this crime and the one before,
she wasn't afraid. She didn't deny a thing. I was all mixed up –
pleased and sad at the same time. I mean it's a pleasure to get out of trouble,
but it is sad to make a wee girl suffer.

But y’ know what they say: charity begins at home! And I'm let off!

Creon

You there, with your eyes on the ground. Do you admit or deny this?

Antigone

I admit it; I deny nothing.

Creon (to the guard)

You can be off, go where you please, you have escaped a heavy penalty.

Exit guard.

(To Antigone) Now then Antigone, tell me, didn’t you know
that I had issued a decree forbidding this?

Antigone

I knew. How could I not know? Everyone knew.

Creon

And yet you dared to break the law?
Antigone

Yes. Because this order did not come from the gods above nor those below and I didn't think that any edict issued by you had the power to override the unwritten and unfailing law of the gods. That law lives not only for today or yesterday, but forever. I did not fear the judgement of a mere man so much as that of the immortal gods. I knew I would die some day. Of course I knew – even if you hadn't made your proclamation. And if I must die before I have a chance to live, well, then, so be it. Anyone who has been living as I have, buried alive in sorrow, thinks death a blessing. For me death holds no pain, but if I had left my brother unburied, for that I would have suffered. It is a fool who calls what I have done foolish.

Chorus

Savage child of a savage father. Suffering has taught her nothing.

Creon

(Addressing chorus, and audience) It's the stubborn spirit that's more prone to fall than others; it's the toughest iron that snaps and shatters. I have seen wild horses tamed by a small bridle. Arrogance does not suit a young girl. She showed her insolence when she broke the law, and that's not all. It was one crime to do it, but to boast about it afterwards? If she gets away with this, she is the man - not I. Even if she is my sister's child, and closer in blood than any other member of our house, she and her sister will not escape punishment. Oh, yes, the other is equally guilty.

Call her; a moment ago I saw her inside, ranting and out of her wits. The mind often betrays the criminal, even when he plots his evil in the dark.

(Turning to Antigone) But what I hate most is someone who's caught putting a good face on the crime!

Antigone

Will my death satisfy you?

Creon
That's all I want.  

Antigone

way I feel. Nor can anything I say change your feelings about me. But I don't care. There's no greater glory than this for me - the burial of my brother. Everyone here would cheer me, if fear didn't silence them. But the tyrant is lucky: he can do and say what he likes with impunity.

Creon

You are the only one who thinks so, Antigone.

Antigone

Oh, no, they agree with me, Creon, but they have to be careful what they say to you.

Creon

Have you no shame?

Antigone

There is no shame in what I have done for my brother.

Creon

Wasn't the one who died defending his country a brother too?

Antigone

Yes, Eteocles was also my brother, by the same mother and the same father.

Creon

Then why do you dishonor one by giving honor to the other?

Antigone

My dead brothers would not look at it that way.

Creon

Oh yes, Eteocles would if he got no more honor than a traitor.

Antigone

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Polyneices was not simply a traitor; he was Eteocles' brother.

Creon

One brother attacked his country; the other defended it.

Antigone

The gods require that the same laws of burial be observed for both.

Creon

Traitors and heroes do not have the same rights.

Antigone

Who knows who is traitor or hero in the land of the dead?

Creon

An enemy will never be one of us, even if he is dead.

Antigone

I was born to love, not to hate.

Creon

Then go love in hell. As long as I'm alive, no woman will tell me what to do.

Enter Ismene.

Chorus

Look, Ismene is coming through the gates weeping for her beloved sister and brothers. Her face is flushed and tears are pouring down her cheeks.

Creon (to Ismene)

I didn't realize you were a snake lurking in my house, ready to poison me, and that I was raising two traitors. So tell me, did you or did you not share in this burial?

Ismene
Yes, I did. If she says so, then I share the blame.

Antigone

Justice won't let you: you refused and I did it alone.

Ismene

I'm prepared to suffer with you.

Antigone

Those below know who did it; I need more than words.

Ismene

Don't despise me, sister: I want to die with you and pay respect to the dead.

Antigone

Don't try to die with me and don't take the blame for something you didn’t do; it is enough that I die.

Ismene

Without you what reason do I have for living?

Antigone

Ask Creon. You supported him.

Ismene

Why do you hurt me? What do you get from it?

Antigone

I don't mean to hurt you. I'm just telling the truth.

Ismene

I want to help you.

Antigone

Then save yourself: I don't want you to die too.

Ismene
Oh, pity me. Let me die with you.

Antigone

No. You chose life, and I, death.

Ismene

I only said what I believed.

Antigone

Some will think you are right; others will think I am.

Ismene

We’re both guilty now.

Antigone

No! You live; as for my life, I dedicated it to the dead a long time ago.

Creon

You're insane, the pair of you.

Ismene

Suffering drives out good sense, Creon.

Creon

You lost your good sense when you chose to side with a criminal.

Ismene

I can’t live without my sister.

Creon

Don't speak of her; she is as good as gone.

Ismene

Will you kill your son's future bride?
Creon

There are other furrows for him to plow.

Ismene

He won't find another like her to love.

Creon

Thank god! If he married her he would have had a criminal in his bed.

Ismene

O Haemon, you too are a victim of your father's cruelty!

Creon

You're exhausting my patience, Ismene.

Ismene

Will you really steal Antigone from your son?

Creon

It will be death that stops that marriage. Not me.

Antigone

So you've decided I'll die.

Creon

Yes. We've both decided, so let's stop wasting time. Take them inside! From now on they must realize that they are women and are not free to roam where they like. Guard them well. Death prompts even the most courageous to think of escape.

*Antigone and Ismene are led away.*

Chorus

Happy are they whose life has no taste of sorrow. Once their house falls from grace, They are cursed, generation after generation, Like the muddy sea swell
When a cruel Thracian wind stirs up black sand
From the ocean's floor.
The shores struck by this ill wind moan and shriek.

The sorrows of the living pile up
Over the sorrows of the dead:
There is no peace for any generation;
The gods strike them down,
And there is no escape.
In the house of Oedipus,
The light shining over the last roots
Is extinguished by the bloody burial owed the gods,
By thoughtless talk, and a hell-bent mind.

For the gods have the power and the glory!
Who can challenge them?
Sleep has no power over them,
Nor the ceaseless stream of days.
Ageless and timeless,
The gods dwell in the flashing splendor of Olympus.
Mankind is different.
His happiness, like his life, is fragile.
One law governs past, present, and future:
Happiness does not last.

The hope we all have in our hearts
Leads some to profit,
Others it lures into empty longing;
Only the pain of experience's fire can teach wisdom.
A wise man said
Bad seems good to the mind of him
Whom the gods would destroy.
He is happy for only a moment before disaster.
Happiness is the shortest candle of all:
Light for one minute, then darkness.

Here's Haemon, the last of your children; I think he's heard the news about his bride's fate,
and that his hopes for marriage are now ruined.

Enter Haemon

Creon

I can see that for myself. Son, did you hear my decision about your bride?
Are you angry with me? Or are we still friends?

Haemon
Father, I am yours. You have the wisdom to direct me, and I'll follow you.
No marriage means more to me than your wise guidance.

Creon

Right! That's a good son: he follows his father. People pray
to have obedient sons – allies for their fathers,
punishing enemies and honoring friends.

But the man who has useless children has sown tears for himself
and laughter for his enemies.

No, I say it clearly, son, never lose your mind over a woman:
if you have a bad wife, the bed soon grows cold and she'll poison your life.
Throw her out, like the trash she is; let her find a husband in hell.
Your Antigone is the only person in the city who defied me
and I caught her in the act. I have no choice but to punish her
as I would any traitor. She can appeal to family ties all she wants,
but if I allow disobedience in the family, I can expect it from the people too.
A good family man will always be a good citizen. We cannot afford lawbreakers.
We have to obey the man whom the city appoints as leader in all his decisions
large or small, just, and if necessary, unjust.
The man who knows the virtue of obedience can be either a good ruler
or a good subject, and if he stands next to me in the storm of battle,
he'll be a strong, brave, and reliable companion.
There is nothing worse than anarchy. It disrupts families and destroys cities.
Obedience saves lives and keeps the ship of state on the true course.
We need to preserve discipline and must never let ourselves be defeated by a woman.
If you must be beaten, be beaten by a man; don't ever let yourself be called
a woman's plaything, my son.

Chorus

You make a lot of sense Creon.

Haemon

Father, the most precious of all possessions the gods give men is intelligence.
I cannot say, nor would I ever want to be in a position to say, that you are wrong.
I know it is not in your nature to care what people may be saying, or doing,
or with what they disagree. You terrify most people and
they are afraid to confront you. I, on the other hand,
can go about the city unrecognized, and I have heard people weeping
for this young woman, saying that the last thing she deserves
is to die for an act of great nobility. Yes! She would not allow her brother
who died in battle to lie unburied, to be mauled by savage dogs and wild birds.
Surely she deserves to be honored rather than condemned?
That is what they are whispering. There is nothing that I want more, father, than your well-being. What can please a son more than his father's happiness and reputation - and a father in turn cannot wish more for his son. Be open-minded, and don't think that your opinion and no other is right. A man who thinks he is the only one who makes sense, or talks well, or has a mind, merely shows his own limitations. A wise man can always learn - there's no shame in that – and learn not to be too set in his ways. In winter storms the trees that bend save themselves, but those that resist are destroyed root and branch. It's the same with a ship: in a strong wind, if you sheet in the sails too much, the boat will capsize. Get over your anger and be willing to change your mind. If you will forgive me preaching to you, father, I would say it's best to be born all-wise, but since this is rare, next best is to listen to good advice.

Chorus

Sir, he has spoken well; why can't you learn from him? And you too Haemon, from your father: you both have a point.

Creon

So, am I, leader of the city, in my mature years, in full possession of all my powers, to be taught by an immature boy like you?

Haemon

Only if I'm right; consider what I say, not my age.

Creon

Are you saying we should accept anarchy?

Haemon

No!

Creon

But can't you see that that's what she is doing, breeding anarchy.

Haemon

The people of our city don't think so.

Creon
Now it's the city that tells me how I should rule?

    Haemon

Father, you're behaving like a child. No city belongs to one man.

    Creon

Doesn't the city's authority come from its ruler?

    Haemon

You're not ruling a desert, father, but a city full of people.

    Creon (to chorus)

She's poisoned his mind against me.

    Haemon

No; I'm on your side.

    Creon

Aren't you ashamed to stand there and question your father in front of others?

    Haemon

Not when I see him acting unfairly.

    Creon

What is unfair about respecting and discharging the responsibilities of my office?

    Haemon

But you show no respect - you trample on the gods!

    Creon

And you trample on filial piety! You are worse than a woman!

    Haemon

I'm not ashamed of what I've said, father.

    Creon

You can't stop pleading her case, can you!
Haemon

I am pleading for you too, for me, and for the gods below.

Creon

She will not live to marry you!

Haemon

If she dies she'll take someone else with her.

Creon

So now you have the gall to threaten me!

Haemon

Where is the threat in being honest with you?

Creon

You'll be sorry for this. You don't understand anything.

Haemon

If you were not my father, I would say that you had lost your senses.

Creon

You're completely in her power! Stop wasting my time!

Haemon

Won't you listen to a thing I'm saying?

Creon

I have had enough! By God, I'm not going to stand here and let you insult me a moment longer! I'll teach you! Drag out that viper, so she can die here on the spot, next to her bridegroom.

Haemon

I'll never let that happen. She won't die next to me. I'm leaving. Do your worst father. You will never see me again.

Exit Haemon.

Chorus

Sir, he's left in a fury; a young mind stung with pain is dangerous.
Creon

He can do what he wants; he can get drunk on his grand ideas, but he will not save those two girls from death.

Chorus

So you are going to kill them both!  (pause)

Creon

No, you are right! Not the one who didn't touch the corpse.

Chorus

How do you plan to kill Antigone?

Creon

I'll take her to some remote place and bury her alive in a rocky hollow, giving her just enough food so the city will escape pollution from her death. She can pray to the gods of the underworld (they are the only ones she worships) and ask them to spare her life; she may finally learn that it is wasted effort to revere a dead traitor.

Exit Creon.

Chorus

Passion always wins the fight; Passion ravishes all.
You pass the night on the soft cheeks of a girl;
You wander over the sea and visit the Haunts of those who live in the wild.
No immortal can escape you,
Nor that creature of a day - man.
All who are passion’s slaves are mad.

You tear the just away from justice
Into violence;
It is you who have stirred up this fight between blood relatives. Passion is always victorious; it flashes from the eyes
Of the beautiful bride as she is taken to bed.
The goddess Aphrodite has her throne next to the mighty laws. When she plays her game with you,
She will win!

Enter Antigone, escorted by guards.
The sight of Antigone loosens the knot of loyalty.
I cannot hold back the fountains of tears
That spring forth when I see her
Going to her bridal chamber of eternal sleep.

Antigone

Fellow citizens of this place that I call home,
Look on me as I go on my last walk,
To see the sun's rays for the last time,
And never again.
Hades of everlasting sleep\(^{14}\)
Brings me to the shores of Acheron.\(^{15}\)
Now I go to marry death,
But there will be no one to sing for me
At my wedding.

Chorus

You have fair fame and praise
As you go to the cave of the dead!
Not wounded by wasting disease,
Nor suffering death from the sword,
But by your own free will,
Alone and alive,
You will descend to Hades.

Antigone

I was told story of Niobe\(^{16}\)
The saddest of all women.
She was near steep Sipylus,
And the rock embraced her;
Like ivy the stone clung to her;
Now the rain and snow constantly assail her
In her sorrow, or so men say;
And she bathes the ridges
With tears that do not cease.
Most like her am I,
Whom the gods send now to sleep.

\(^{14}\)Hades stands for the underworld and sleep is sometimes said to be the brother of death.
\(^{15}\)Acheron is one of the rivers of Hades. The dead must cross it, with Charon as their ferryman.
\(^{16}\)Niobe is the daughter of Tantalus, king of Lydia in Asia Minor. She married Amphion, king of Thebes. They had seven daughters and seven sons. Niobe boasted that she was more blessed than Leto who had only two children (Apollo, the god of archery and the sun, and music, and Artemis the goddess of the hunt and childbirth). Leto asked her children to avenge this insult, and they killed Niobe's children. The gods changed her into a rock cliff (visible on Mount Sipylus in Asia Minor). She still weeps ceaselessly: streams constantly flow from this cliff.
Chorus

But she is a goddess and born from gods,
And we are mortal and born from men.
Yet for the dead it is a great thing
To share in the fair fame of the gods,
Both in life and then in death.

Antigone

So you're laughing at me.
Why do you insult me while I'm alive?
Can't you wait until I'm dead?
O city, O prosperous citizens,
O fountains of Dirce and forest of fair-charioted Thebes,
I call on you to witness how unwept by friends,
And under what cruel laws,
I go to my rocky prison, my strange tomb.
[850] Oh, misery, I shall be housed
With neither the living nor the dead.

Chorus

My child, you passed the limit of daring
And now you will be sacrificed on the high altar of justice.
Your crime adds to the crimes of the house of Oedipus.

Antigone

You have touched a wound in me,
Painful memory of my father,
And of all the famous Labdacids,\(^{17}\)
That thrice-sung ode to sorrow.
Oh the horrors of sharing a mother's bed:
My father bedding the woman who bore him.
To such parents I owe my wretched birth;
Cursed and unmarried, I go to share their house.
Woe Polyneices for your fatal marriage:
When you died you slew me too!

Chorus

Your reverence for your brother deserves respect,

\(^{17}\) Labdacus is Cadmus' grandson, Laius' father, Oedipus' grandfather and Antigone's great-grandfather. One legend tells us that he opposed Dionysus' worship and, like Pentheus, was torn apart by Bacchantes for this outrage.
But legitimate power must not be crossed.
It was your own choice,
Your passionate anger destroyed you!

Antigone

Unwept, without friends, unsung,
Misery itself,
I travel the road before me.
All wretched, no longer may I
Look on the holy eye of the sun's light
And no friend weeps for my death.

Enter Creon.

Creon

If moaning could postpone death, no one would ever stop crying!
Take her away at once and block up the entrance as I've ordered.
Leave her there alone; it is her choice whether she lives or dies.
Our hands are clean: we leave her in her grave with food and water.
We are only depriving her of the company of the living.

Antigone

O tomb, my bridal chamber, home beneath the earth, where I go to join my own.
The house of death has already received many of them. I join the list,
and since I die unjustly before my time, my death is the worst of all.
I feed upon the hope I shall be welcomed by my dear father
and you my sweet mother, and by you my dear brothers:
with my own hands I washed you all and prepared your bodies for burial;
then I poured drink offerings on your tombs. For tending your body,
Polyneices, see what I suffer!
Wise people will say that I did well to honor you.
I would not have acted in this way, in defiance of the state,
if I had been the mother of children, or if my husband had died.
Why? If my husband had died, I could have remarried, or if I'd lost a child,
I could have borne another, but since my mother and father are both dead,
no new brother of mine can be born.
That is why I honored you my sweet brother,
but Creon calls it transgression and reckless crime.
Now he leads me alive into the hollowed out womb of the dead,
I, who know not the marriage bed, nor the bridal hymn,
who shall never raise a child, but alone, deprived of friends, a wretched creature.
What law of the gods did I violate? Why am I wasting my time praying to the gods?
Whom can I call to stand by my side? I honored what should be honored,
and yet stand convicted of dishonor.
If the gods think that my punishment is deserved, then I forgive my executioner.
But if instead he is guilty, I curse him and I demand that the gods make him suffer the same pain he unjustly inflicts on me.

Chorus

The same passionate wind still blows through her spirit.

Creon

Get her out of here NOW: if you're slow you'll be sorry!

Antigone

O God, this command brings me closer to death.

Creon

Yes. There’s no escape, Antigone.

Antigone

O Theban city, land of my ancestors,
Gods of my forefathers,
They lead me away, and there is no more time.
Look on me, rulers of Thebes,
The last of the royal line,
See what I suffer and who causes it
Because I honored what should be honored.

Exit Antigone.

Chorus

Imprisoned in a tomb-like chamber,
Danae also had to leave the light of heaven
For a bronze-bolted home.  
She, too, was of an honorable line, my child,
Guardian of the golden flowing seed of Zeus.
But the force of fate is fierce:
Neither wealth, nor war, nor defending wall,
Nor black wave-battered ships offer escape.

The hasty-tempered son of Dryas,

---

18Danae was the daughter of Acrisius, king of Argos, and was told that she would bear a child that would kill him. He locked her in a bronze tower, but Zeus found his way in, coming as a shower of gold. Danae gave birth to the Perseus. Acrisius found the mother and child in the tower and set them in a chest afloat on the sea to die, but Zeus saved them. Later Perseus did indeed accidentally kill his grandfather Acrisius. Sophocles wrote about this in two lost plays, Danae and Acrisius.
Lycurgus, the son of Dryas, was king of the Edonians in Thrace. He opposed the introduction of Bacchic rites and so was punished. One account says he was torn apart like Pentheus and Labdacus, but there are other versions. He may have been blinded (Iliad 6. 130-43) or forced to kill his son, or, as here, simply imprisoned. Aeschylus wrote a trilogy and a satyr play about Lycurgus.

The Bosporus joins Propontis (Sea of Marmara) to the Black Sea, and its name (Bosporus: "cow crossing") refers to Io crossing it in the form of a cow, like Danae, a victim of Zeus' lust. Ares was a patron god of the war-loving Thracians. Salmydessus was a city on the west coast of the Black Sea.

Phineus, king of Salmydessus, married Cleopatra. They had two sons. Some accounts say that Phineus remarried, and the step-mother Eidaea or Eidothea (daughter of Dardanus, who built Troy) put out the children's eyes. Only her childhood experience of a cave explicitly relates her to Antigone's imprisonment. Cleopatra's father was Boreas, god of the North Wind.

Erechtheus was a mythical king of Athens and one of his daughters, Orithyia, was swept away by Boreas. She had four children by him, and one was Cleopatra.
Free with her companions;
She was born of the gods,
But the relentless fates
Also pressed hard upon her.

*Exit Antigone.*
*Enter Teiresias and Creon.*

Teiresias! Does he have something to tell us?

**Teiresias**

Elders of Thebes, this boy and I have traveled this road together,
one seeing for both of us; the blind need a guide.

**Creon**

What do you want, Teiresias, old man?

**Teiresias**

I want nothing; just listen and obey.

**Creon**

I haven't disobeyed your commands in the past.

**Teiresias**

And so you steered the ship of state well!

**Creon**

I will admit that I have benefited from your help.

**Teiresias**

Good. Then know that you are once again on the razor's edge.

**Creon**

What are you talking about? Your words frighten me.

**Teiresias**
You will learn after you have heard what the signs have revealed to me. I took my ancient seat of prophecy, where birds of all kinds congregate, and I heard strange noises coming from them, a meaningless screech of madness; I knew they were ripping each other with bloody claws: I could tell this from the whirring of their wings. Suddenly I was afraid and tried to make a sacrifice on the lighted altar, but the fire refused my offerings: they wouldn't burn. A stinking slime from the thigh bones dripped down on the ashes; it smoked and sputtered, and gall from the livers spurted up into the air; the dripping thigh bones lay bare of their covering fat. It was useless to get a message out of the mess that my boy described to me: he is my guide as I am a guide for others.

It is your decree, Creon, that has brought sickness on the city. Our altars and braziers are filled with the offal that birds and dogs deposit there: pieces of Polyneices, who fell in battle, that ill-fated offspring of Oedipus. The gods no longer receive either the prayers that we offer nor the flames from sacrificial thighs, and the birds no longer cry out clear messages for me, because they have eaten fat mixed with a dead man's blood.

Think about this, my son, there is not a man born who does not make mistakes. But if he is flexible and tries to correct his mistakes, he's both wise and fortunate. Your stubbornness is mere stupidity. Stop kicking a dead man. What victory is there in dealing further blows to the dead? I want to help you, so I am giving you good counsel: it should be a pleasure to learn from an advisor if you stand to gain from his advice.

Creon

Old man, you have joined the others in attacking me, and your prophecies just add to my wounds. You soothsayers have made money out of me for years by bringing me terrible news. Count your gains, bring in your nuggets from Sardis and your gold from India. But you'll not bury that man, not even if the eagles of Zeus carry the pieces of his corpse up to high heaven! Pollution does not frighten me. I know that no mortal can pollute the gods.

And you, Teiresias, watch out! Even the cleverest fall and fail when they cloak their shameful message in glib words for the sake of gain.

Teiresias

I have a piece of advice for you.

Creon (interrupting impatiently)
What? Still more advice?

Teiresias

Sound judgement is the most precious of all possessions.

Creon

Yes, but I also know that talking nonsense causes the greatest harm.

Teiresias

That is the disease you suffer from!

Creon

I would tell you what I think, but I don't want to insult a prophet.

Teiresias

You insult me when you dismiss my prophecies.

Creon

Prophets are all money-grubbers.

Teiresias

And tyrants love bribes.

Creon

Don't you realize who it is you are talking to? I am your ruler!

Teiresias

Of course I do; you are the ruler because of me: I am the one who helped you save the city.

Creon

You are a skillful prophet, but you also flirt with dishonesty.

Teiresias

You are provoking me to say things which are better left unsaid.

Creon
Say your worst and make sure you collect your fee.

Teiresias

I'm not speaking for gain - certainly not for yours!

Creon

Today you will learn that you can't sell your influence over me.

Teiresias

And you will learn! Before the sun's chariot has run many courses, you will give up a child from your home, a corpse in payment for corpses. You buried one who should have remained alive on the earth. You put in a tomb a living being, while you kept unburied a corpse which belongs to the gods below. You should not have done this, and your violation has also polluted the gods above. Now you can never escape the avenging furies of hell, and they have set an ambush for you. See if I have been bribed to say this – you won't have long to wait to hear the weeping of men and women in your house. These are the arrows which, since you provoked me, I have shot directly into your heart, and I guarantee you will not escape the consequences.

Child, take me home, so he can rage against younger men, and learn to keep a quieter tongue and a mind more tractable than the one he has now.

Exit Teiresias.

Chorus

Sir, the man has made terrible prophecies. I know that in all my years, he has never lied to the city.

Creon

I know that. My mind is spinning. I think it is wrong for me to give in, but if I don't, I'm afraid I may be caught in a fatal web.

Chorus

Think carefully.
Creon

Tell me what I should do and I'll do it.

Chorus

Go and free the girl from her rocky chamber and build a tomb for the exposed corpse.

Creon

Is that your advice? So you're telling me to give in?

Chorus

As quickly as possible, sir - swift-footed vengeance is on its way.

Creon

Oh God, it's so hard [pause].... but I'll do it. I can't fight the inevitable.

Chorus

Go then and do it yourself; don't leave it to others.

Creon

I'll go at once; call my attendants to help me. Since I see what I did was wrong, I'll go free her myself. Oh, I'm afraid...

Exit Creon.

Chorus

God of many names,
The delight of Semele,
Offspring of Zeus the god of thunder,
O Bacchus,
You who watch over noble Italy,23
And rule the hollow valleys of Eleusinian Demeter,24
Which are open to all,
You who live in Thebes,
The mother city of the Bacchantes,
Next to the flowing stream of Ismenus,25

23 The worship of Dionysus was imported by the Greeks who settled most of southern Italy.
24 Demeter is goddess of the earth, mother of Persephone who was taken off by Hades. She has special rites at Eleusis which help a soul enter Hades.
25 This is another Theban river.
Near where the wild dragon's seed was sown.

Burning pitch lights your way
Above the two-crested peak
When the Corycian nymphs
Roam in your honor near the Castalian spring.
The Nysian mountain's slopes of ivy
And the green shores covered with grapes
Attend your procession;
Immortal voices sing your praises,
When you walk the streets of Thebes.

You honor this city above all cities
Along with your mother blasted by lightning;
And now to your citizens stricken with disease,
Come, healer,
Over the slopes of Parnassus
Or across the moaning sea-narrows.

Hail lord of the dance of the fire-breathing stars,
Priest of night voices, son of Zeus,
Appear lord, with your Thyiads by your side,
Dancing all night their frenzied figures
In honor of their lord Iacchus.

Enter Messenger.

Messenger

You who live in Cadmus' city, home of Amphion, life is so unpredictable that one must beware of praising or blaming prematurely. Luck constantly changes: now a person's happy, now he's miserable. No mortal can predict the future. Creon was once to be envied, or at least so I thought, since he saved our Cadmeian land from its enemies, took it on as his responsibility, guided it in single-handed rule, and he was blessed with princely sons. Now all has turned to nothing, for when a man must give up all his joys,

---

26 The Phaedriades are two cliffs above Delphi, part of the Parnassus range.
27 The Corycian cave is on Parnassus above Delphi, where both Apollo and Dionysus are worshipped.
28 The Castalian spring is also close to Delphi and its waters purified those coming to the temple of Apollo; it is also sacred to Dionysus.
29 Nysa is a mountain in Euboea where Dionysus is said to have been raised by Nymphs. Euboea was known for its wine, the gift of Dionysus.
30 Tricked by Hera, Semele asked Zeus to appear to her in divine form; he showed himself in the form of a thunderbolt and she was killed. He put Dionysus into his thigh which acted as a womb until the child was born.
31 Thyiads are Bacchantes.
32 Iacchus is another name for Bacchus/Dionysus.
I don't think he lives, but instead he's a corpse that breathes.
Rejoice in great wealth all you like and live in a palace,
but if there is no happiness in your life
then all is worthless smoke and shadow.

Chorus

What bad news are you bringing?

Messenger

They are dead and the living are responsible for their deaths.

Chorus

Who is dead? Who is the murderer?

Messenger

Haemon, whose name rightly means blood, is dead.

Chorus

Who killed him?

Messenger

He killed himself, angry at the murder his father committed.

Chorus

Teiresias, your word has come true.

Messenger

Yes, you are right, and now we have to deal with it.

Enter Eurydice.

Chorus

I see poor Eurydice, Creon's wife, coming from the house.
I don't know whether by chance or because she has heard about her son.
Citizens, as I was unlocking the gate before going out to pray, I overheard talk of some disaster; I fainted with fear and fell back into the arms of the servants. Tell me what it is; please, I am not unused to hearing bad news.

Messener

I was there and I shall tell you, dear Madam, and I shall not leave out one word of the truth. Why should I try to soothe you with kind words which will later make me a liar? Truth is always best.

I went along with your husband to the edge of the field where the body of Polyneices was still lying, ripped apart by dogs. We prayed to gods and goddesses of the underworld, asking them to be merciful. We washed the body with ritual water, and pulled up bushes to make a pyre and burned what was left of him on it. Heaped high with his native earth, we built a tomb, and then went to the girl's bridal chamber of death with its bed of stone.

While we were still some way off, we heard a shrill cry from the unholy tomb, and we ran to tell our master Creon. As Creon drew nearer, he heard an indistinct cry of pain, and when closer, he moaned in bitter agony: "Oh terrible, have I guessed right? Am I on the loneliest path I have ever walked? Is it my son's voice I hear? Come on, all of you, run closer and look inside, and tell me if this is the voice of Haemon, or is it a trick of the gods."

We looked as our despairing master told us, and we saw her at the back of the tomb hanging by her neck from a noose of knotted linen. Haemon was embracing her with his arms around her waist. He wept for the loss of his bride, and the acts of his father which destroyed his hope of marriage. When Creon saw him, he went up to him and let out a horrifying cry of pain, "What are you doing here? What are you thinking? Are you mad? Come out at once! I beg you; I'm pleading with you!"

His son glared at him with wild eyes and spat in his face. Wordlessly, Haemon drew his long two-edged sword and lunged at his father, who dodged away; then, furious with himself, the poor lad straight-away fell upon his sword, driving its full length right through his body. Still conscious he embraced the girl again with his free arm, and as he breathed a kiss, a sharp stream of blood jetted from his lips to stain her white cheek and consummate their union in death. The corpses lay there in their last embrace. The poor boy was married, but by death.

Eurydice exits.

Chorus

Our queen has left without a word. What does this mean?
Messenger

I hope now that she has heard of her son's death
she will not demand public mourning, but will keep it indoors,
as it should be, a household lamentation. She is not without discretion.

Chorus

I'm worried: I think that both deep silence and wild wailing are dangerous.

Messenger

If we go inside, we'll soon find out. You're right, too much silence also has its dangers.\textsuperscript{33}

Exit Messenger. Creon enters, carrying the body of his son.

Chorus

Here's the king carrying the bitter fruit of his folly.
His destruction was his own fault, not anyone else's.

Creon

Oh, grim mistakes of my mad mind,
Stone-stubborn and heavy with death,
You see your family, those who slew and those who died!
Oh, I curse the blind folly of my decisions!
Oh my child, so young in your young death,
\textit{Aiai, aiai!}
You died and were taken from me
Because of my own wrong-headedness, not yours.

Chorus

Too late it seems you see where justice lies.

Creon

I have learned a bitter lesson:
The gods have struck a heavy blow,
Drove me down a cruel path,
Trampling on my joy.

\textsuperscript{33}Cf. \textit{OT} 1073-75: Jocasta leaves and the chorus fear that evil will follow from her silence; and in \textit{Tr.} 813-14 the chorus ask Deianeira, "Why do you leave in silence?" Both these women have left to kill themselves.
Enter Messenger.

Messenger

My lord, you have a store of sorrows: one you carry here in your arms, but soon you will see another in your house.

Creon

What is there that can be worse than this?

Messenger

Your wife is dead, the mother of the dead boy you hold, poor creature, still bleeding from her fresh wounds.

Creon

Shame,
Shame for the insatiable house of Hades!
Why do you destroy me?
You messenger of evil bringing me pain,
What is this you are telling me?
Aiai, why kill me again? I am already dead.
What is this message you bring me?
Aiai, aiai
New death upon old,
The death of my wife
Seizing me in her cold embrace.

Chorus

She's here for you to see.

Eurydice's body is brought in.

Creon

Oh, God, I see her. What more could there be? I hold my child in my arms, and now must I see her dead body before me?

Oh poor mother, poor child.

Messenger
She killed herself with a sword near the altar....
she closed her eyes and welcomed the darkness, weeping for Haemon.
Finally she cursed you as the murderer of her child.

Creon

_Aiai aiai_
My heart is racing; all I see is darkness. Please, someone,
Strike me down with a sword!
Free me from my misery!

Messenger

Your dying wife called you responsible for destroying both her and your son.

Creon

How did she kill herself?

Messenger

She stabbed herself to the heart, so that she could feel
the same sharp pain that her son felt.

Creon

_Oimoi_...No one else is to blame for this. I did it, I killed you,
Oh God, I did it, it is true. You, there, lead me away,
throw me away, get rid of me: I am nothing and less than nothing.

Chorus

You are right, if there is any right in wrong. The quickest way to death
is the best, if the path is filled with such sorrow.

Creon

Oh yes, oh yes, come, welcome death - show me my last day,
the best day of all because it is my last.
Oh yes, yes, may I not live to see another day.

Chorus

That is in the future, and the future is in others' hands.
We must attend to the tasks before us.

Creon

77
I have prayed for what I most desire.

Chorus

No prayers; man cannot escape the suffering the gods have in store for him.

Creon
Take me away, useless creature that I am, I, who killed my son,
and also my wife (looking at Eurydice).

Oh, this pain, I don't know which way to look, which way to lean;
I destroyed everything I touched and I have no strength left.

Chorus

If a person is to be happy,
He needs good sense.
Never show disrespect to the gods.
Loud words from those with high pretensions
Lead to heavy blows of punishment;
Good sense is hammered out on the anvil of age.

END