

Antigone

Enter ANTIGONE and Ismene from the palace.

ANTIGONE:

Ismene, my dear sister through common blood,
do you know of any evil from Oedipus
Zeus will not perform on us who still live?
For I have seen nothing—nothing painful,
nothing mad or shameful or dishonorable—⁽⁵⁾
that is not among your or my sorrows.
And now what do they say? The general
has just put an edict over the whole city.
Have you heard it? Or have you avoided
learning how our friends suffer the fate of foes?⁽¹⁰⁾

ISMENE:

No word of friends, Antigone, either
sweet or painful, has come to me since we
two sisters were robbed of our two brothers,
both dying the same day by doubled hand.
But since the army of the Argives
departed last night, I've seen nothing else,⁽¹⁵⁾
either to cause me to rejoice or to weep.

ANTIGONE:

I knew it! For this reason I brought you
outside the gates, that you alone might hear.

ISMENE:

What? You seem to ponder something deeply.

ANTIGONE:

Indeed! For of our two brothers, Creon⁽²⁰⁾
gives honorable burial to one,
but dishonors the other. They say that
he hid Eteocles beneath the earth
with well-deserved pomp and circumstance,
as one honored among the dead below;⁽²⁵⁾
but the corpse of Polynices, who died
so sadly, they say it has been declared
to the citizens that no one may bury
or mourn him, but must see him unlamented,
unburied, a sweet find for birds to feast upon.⁽³⁰⁾
Such things they say our good Creon decreed
for you and me—for me, I say!
And he is coming here to announce it
clearly to anyone who hasn't heard,
for he considers it no small matter,⁽³⁵⁾
but for the one who does any of it,

the penalty is death by public stoning.
There you have it, and soon you will show
how nobly you honor your noble birth.

ISMENE:

But what more, my poor girl, in times like these,⁽⁴⁰⁾
could I do that would not tangle the knot further?

ANTIGONE:

Will you share in the labor and the deed?

ISMENE:

What is the venture? Where have your thoughts gone?

ANTIGONE:

Will you lift the corpse with this very hand?

ISMENE:

You want to bury him, although it's forbidden in the city!⁽⁴⁵⁾

ANTIGONE:

I'll bury my brother—your brother, too,
though you refuse! I'll not be found a traitor.

ISMENE:

Madwoman, even when Creon forbids it?

ANTIGONE:

He has no right to keep me from my own.

ISMENE:

No, no! Think, my sister, how our father⁽⁵⁰⁾
died hated and infamous from offenses
self-detected, smiting both his eyes with
his very own hands. His wife and mother—
both words at once!—took her life with twisted noose;
then, third, our two brothers in just one day⁽⁵⁵⁾
slew each other, poor wretches, achieving
a common doom at one another's hands.
And now the two of us, left all alone—
think how very horribly we will die
if we go against the king's decree and strength⁽⁶⁰⁾
outside the law. Rather, consider that we
were born women, proving we should not fight with men,
and that we are ruled by more powerful people
and must obey them, even in more painful things.
Therefore I ask forgiveness from those below,⁽⁶⁵⁾
as I am forced to in these matters, and yield
to those who walk with authority.
For to do excessive things is nonsense.

ANTIGONE:

I would not order you; and if you change your mind
now, I would not have you do it with me.⁽⁷⁰⁾
Be whatever you want, and I will bury him.
It seems fair to me to die doing it.
I will lie dear to him, with one dear to me,
a holy outlaw, since I must please those
below a longer time than people here,⁽⁷⁵⁾
for I shall lie there forever. You, though,
dishonor the gods' commands, if you wish.

ISMENE:

I do not dishonor them, but to do this
against the state—I have no strength for it.

ANTIGONE:

Use that excuse, if you like, but I indeed⁽⁸⁰⁾
will go and heap a tomb for my dearest brother.

ISMENE:

Alas, how I fear for you, daring girl!

ANTIGONE:

Don't worry for me; straighten out your own life.

ISMENE:

Then, at least, proclaim this deed to no one;
but keep it secret, and I shall do the same.⁽⁸⁵⁾

ANTIGONE:

Oh, denounce it! I will hate you the more
if you don't tell these things to everyone.

ISMENE:

You have a hot heart for chilling matters.

ANTIGONE:

But I know I'll please those I should please most.

ISMENE:

If you can—you want the impossible.⁽⁹⁰⁾

ANTIGONE:

Well, then, I shall stop whenever my strength fails.

ISMENE:

You should not start an impossible quest.

ANTIGONE:

If you say this, you will be hateful to me,
and the dead will hate you always—justly.

But let me and my foolish plans suffer⁽⁹⁵⁾
this terrible thing, for I shall succumb
to nothing so awful as a shameful death.

ISMENE:

Then go, if this seems best to you, but know that
your friends truly love you, however foolish.

Exit ANTIGONE off stage, ISMENE into the palace, after which the CHORUS marches onto the stage.

CHORUS:

Str. 1

Ray of the sun,⁽¹⁰⁰⁾
fairest light of all those shining
on seven-gated Thebes,
at last you appeared,
O eyes of golden day,
coming over the streams of Dirce,⁽¹⁰⁵⁾
you sent away the white-shielded warrior
from Argos, running from here,
with your piercing bridle.
He set forth against our land
because of the contentious claims of Polynices,⁽¹¹⁰⁾
like a sharply crying
eagle flying into our land,
covered with a wing white as snow,
descending with many shields
and crested with horse-hair.⁽¹¹⁵⁾

Ant. 1

He perched on the roof,
gaping wide with bloody spears
around our seven gates,
but then he went away,
before his jaws were filled with our blood⁽¹²⁰⁾
or Hephaestus' torches could take
our crown of towers.
Such a clash of Ares swelled behind him,
a hard conquest for the dragon's rival.
For Zeus hates excessively⁽¹²⁵⁾
the boasts of a great tongue, and looking on them
coming in rapid flow,
over-confident in clanging gold, he threw down
the one rushing with brandished fire
to the top of his goal,⁽¹³⁰⁾
seeking already to proclaim his victory.

Str. 2

He fell in an arc to the hard ground,
torch in hand, the one who with raging onslaught
furiously was breathing
with the rush of the most hateful winds.⁽¹³⁵⁾
But, those things went otherwise,

and great Ares sent them to
various fates, smiting them,
our chariot's strongest horse.
Seven captains at our seven gates,(140)
marshaled against equal foes, left
to Zeus the router bronze weapons,
except those two wretches, who were
born of the same father and the same mother,
standing against each other with doubly slaying spears,(145)
they both took an equal share of their common death.

Ant. 2

But since great-named Victory came,
rejoicing in answer with Thebes of many chariots,
let us enjoy oblivion
of the recent wars(150)
and let us go to all the temples
of the gods to dance through the
night, and may Bacchus, who
has made Thebes shake, be our leader.

Enter CREON from the palace.

But here is the king of this land,(155)
Creon, son of Menoeceus, our new leader
in this new situation given by the gods.
What plan does he hold
that he proposed this gathered
council of old men,(160)
summoning us by proclamation?

CREON:

Gentlemen, the gods have set right again
our city's affairs, after shaking them
in a storm, and I have summoned you here
out of all the citizens, knowing well(165)
how you always revered the power of
Laius' throne; then, both when Oedipus saved
the city and when he fell, you stood in
consistent support of their children.
And so, since in the same day they both fell(170)
by twofold fate, each striking and spreading
fratricidal pollution, now I hold
sole power and the throne, because I am
the closest relative of the fallen.
It is impossible to know the soul,(175)
the mind, and character of any man,
until he has proven himself in the law.
For if someone rules an entire city
and does not take hold of the best counsels,
but holds his tongue out of fear, I think him(180)
to be the worst of men, now and always;

and the man who considers more important
than his fatherland his friend, I think him
worthless. For—and may all-seeing Zeus
be my witness—I would never be silent⁽¹⁸⁵⁾
if I saw madness creeping among
the citizens in place of salvation,
nor would I consider an enemy
of my country a friend to myself,
recognizing this: that my country is⁽¹⁹⁰⁾
safety itself, and only when she is upright
can our sailing find friends. With laws like these
I will make our city grow. Therefore, I
have made a decree to the citizens
concerning the sons of Oedipus:⁽¹⁹⁵⁾
Eteocles, who fell fighting for this city,
who earned every prize of valor,
will be buried and receive all honors
that go to the best of the dead below.
His erstwhile kinsman, however, I mean⁽²⁰⁰⁾
Polynices, who returned from exile
with hopes of burning his native land and
ancestral gods from top to bottom,
wishing to feast on kindred blood and lead
the rest into slavery, it has been⁽²⁰⁵⁾
decreed that in this city he shall be
neither buried nor mourned by anyone,
but everyone must leave him unburied,
a feast for birds and dogs, an outrage to see.
This is my judgment, and never from me⁽²¹⁰⁾
will the base take equal honor to the good;
but whoever is friendly to this city will
in life and death be equally honored by me.

CHORUS:

You are at your pleasure to decide this,
son of Menoeceus, concerning the city's⁽²¹⁵⁾
friend and foe. You may use any habit both
with the dead and with all of us who live.

CREON:

Then I would have you keep watch over my words.

CHORUS:

Give this task to a younger man to do.

CREON:

No, the corpse's guards are already posted.⁽²²⁰⁾

CHORUS:

What would you have us do beyond this?

CREON:

Do not join with those disobeying it.

CHORUS:

No man is so foolish as to lust for death.

CREON:

And truly that is this deed's reward, but
often profit has destroyed men through their hopes.(225)

Enter GUARD from offstage.

GUARD:

My lord, I will not say that I come breathless
from rushing or quickly moving my feet,
for often my thoughts stopped me in my place,
and I'd wheel around on the road back where I came.
My heart kept talking to me, telling me,(230)
"Poor fool, why are you going where you're sure
to be punished?" "Idiot, you stopping
again? If Creon hears it from someone else,
then you'll really pay for it!" Twisting like this
I made my way, the opposite of haste,(235)
and thus a short road became a long one.
But, at last, the vote for coming won the day.
Even if I have nothing to say, I'll tell you
anyway, for I came seized by one hope,
to suffer nothing but my fated doom.(240)

CREON:

Why is it you have this lack of spirit?

GUARD:

I wish to tell you first my side of it,
for I neither did the deed nor saw him
who did, nor do I deserve any harm.

CREON:

You're really trying to talk around the problem.(245)
Clearly you have something new to report.

GUARD:

Terrible things make a man hesitate.

CREON:

Then why don't you speak and go away free?

GUARD:

And I'm saying it! Just now someone has
buried the corpse and gone off, sprinkling dust(250)
over its flesh and performing the due rites.

CREON:

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

GUARD:

I don't know, for there was no stroke of a mattock or heap from a shovel, just hard earth and dry land, unbroken, no trace⁽²⁵⁵⁾ of wheels, but the workman worked without sign. When the day watch first showed it to us, we all thought it a most distressing marvel. For, although he was hidden from sight, he wasn't entombed *per se*, but there was⁽²⁶⁰⁾ a little dust on him, as from one fleeing a curse. Yet there weren't any signs of beasts or a dog coming near him, nor did the body seem mangled. Evil words broke out among us, guard accusing guard, and it would have come⁽²⁶⁵⁾ to blows in the end, for there was no one to stop us. Every single man stood on trial, but none could be convicted, everyone claimed he knew nothing. We were ready even for trial by ordeal,⁽²⁷⁰⁾ to walk through fire, to swear to the gods that we had neither done the deed nor been privy to the planning or the doing. At last, when our investigation came to nothing, one man spoke up, who caused us⁽²⁷⁵⁾ all to nod our heads to the ground in fear, for we had no alternative to what he said or a safe course for ourselves if we obeyed. His idea was that this deed must be brought to you and not concealed.⁽²⁸⁰⁾ This idea prevailed, and the lot chose unhappy me to take this good office. So here I am, unwilling—I know well—among the unwilling, for no one cherishes the messenger of evil words.⁽²⁸⁵⁾

CHORUS:

My lord, my mind has long been counseling that perhaps this was the work of the gods.

CREON:

Stop, before you say something to really anger me and show yourself both old and foolish! You speak insufferably when you claim⁽²⁹⁰⁾ the gods have some concern for this carcass. Would they honor him as a benefactor and bury him, who came to set fire to their temples girt with columns, to scatter their donations, earth, and laws? Or do you⁽²⁹⁵⁾

revere gods who honor evil men?
It isn't so. Rather, even before,
men in the city resisted this decree
and mumbled against me secretly,
shaking their heads and refusing to bear⁽³⁰⁰⁾
the yoke as they should, to gratify me.
These guards here have been bribed—I can see that
clearly—by such men to do this, for no
institution has so harmed humanity
as the creation of money. It's destroyed⁽³⁰⁵⁾
even cities, it has expelled men from
their homes; it teaches the minds of honest
men to deviate and take up foul things.
It has shown men how to be villainous
and to know every sort of godlessness.⁽³¹⁰⁾
However many did this for money
have brought punishment upon themselves, but,
since Zeus truly has my reverence still,
know this well, and I will say an oath before you:
unless you find the culprit of this tomb⁽³¹⁵⁾
and bring him before these eyes of mine,
Death alone will not protect you:
you'll all be hanged alive to demonstrate
your insolent crime, so the rest of your lives
you may steal, knowing once and for all⁽³²⁰⁾
what sort of reward it brings, and learn that
we must not love all profit equally.
For you should know that more men suffer
from shameful gains than are saved by them.

GUARD:

May I say something, or should I just turn and go?⁽³²⁵⁾

CREON:

You have annoyed me just by saying that!

GUARD:

Does it sting in the ears or in your soul?

CREON:

Why do you care where my pain is located?

GUARD:

The doer troubles your mind, I your ears.

CREON:

Oh, it is clear you were born a babblers.⁽³³⁰⁾

GUARD:

Regardless, I would never do the deed.

CREON:

You have, and you have sold your soul for cash.

GUARD:

Alas!

It's terrible when the one who judges judges wrong.

CREON:

Quibble now about judgments; but if you⁽³³⁵⁾
don't show me who did this, you will affirm
that foul profits reap terrible rewards.

Exit CREON into the palace.

GUARD:

Well, I hope we do find him! But whether
he's taken or not—for chance controls that—
there's no way you'll see me coming back here.⁽³⁴⁰⁾
Even now beyond my hope and thought I've
been saved and owe the gods some gratitude.

Exit GUARD offstage.

CHORUS:¹⁷

Str. 1

This world has many wonders,
but nothing is more wondrous than humanity.
It crosses even the grey sea⁽³⁴⁵⁾
with a stormy south wind,
passing under churning waves in open water;
and the oldest of the gods,
immortal, inexhaustible Earth,
it wears away.⁽³⁵⁰⁾
With ploughs it winds back and forth,
year after year,
turning up the soil with the offspring of horses.

Ant. 1

He captures and takes
the blithe tribe of birds⁽³⁵⁵⁾
and the races of beasts
and the salty brood of the sea
in the coils of woven nets,
a very skillful man. He rules
with devices the mountain haunts⁽³⁶⁰⁾
of the wild animal
and tames the shaggy-necked horse
with a yoke on its back
and the tireless mountain bull.

Str. 2

He taught himself language and wind-like⁽³⁶⁵⁾
thought and city-ruling urges,

how to flee the slings of frost
under winter's clear sky
and the arrows of stormy rain, ever-resourceful.
Against no possibility⁽³⁷⁰⁾
is he at a loss.

For death alone he finds no aid,
but he has devised escape
from impossible diseases.

Ant. 2

With clever creativity beyond expectation,⁽³⁷⁵⁾
he moves now to evil, now to good.
The one who observes the laws of the land
and justice, our compact with the gods,
is honored in the city, but there is no city
for one who participates in what is wrong⁽³⁸⁰⁾
for the sake of daring.
Let him not share my hearth,
nor let me share his ideas
who has done these things.

The GUARD returns onstage, leading ANTIGONE.

What strange omen now confuses⁽³⁸⁵⁾
my sight? How can I deny that
I know this young girl is Antigone?
O poor child of your poor father, Oedipus,
what is this? Have they somehow caught you
breaking the king's laws, found you⁽³⁹⁰⁾
doing something foolish?

GUARD:

Here she is who did the deed, she's the one
we found burying him—but where is Creon?

Enter CREON from the palace.

CHORUS:

Here he comes from the house, and just in time!

CREON:

What is it? What chance makes my coming timely?⁽³⁹⁵⁾

GUARD:

My lord, a mortal should never swear that
something cannot happen, for hindsight makes
liars of our plans. Just now I swore I'd
never come back here, because of those threats
you shot at me, but the greatest pleasure⁽⁴⁰⁰⁾
is the joy you didn't even hope for.
I came here, despite my oaths to the contrary,
bringing this girl, who was captured performing

the rites of burial. This time no lot
was shaken; no, this one was my good luck,(405)
no other's. Now then, my lord, you take her,
as you wish, and question and sentence her.
I've justly freed myself from these troubles.

CREON:

But to bring her? Where did you find her? How?

GUARD:

She was burying the man; you know it all.(410)

CREON:

Do you really mean what you're saying?

GUARD:

I saw her burying the very corpse you
forbade. Am I speaking clearly enough?

CREON:

And how was she seen and caught in the act?

GUARD:

This is how it happened: When we came back,(415)
threatened by those terrible things you said,
we brushed off all the dust that was covering
the body, left the clammy thing well and
truly bare. Then, we lay under shelter
of the highest hills, fleeing the foul stench;(420)
each man tossing reproaches back and forth,
if any man's attention strayed from this task,
It was that time when the bright circle of
the sun stands in the middle of the sky
and the heat burns; suddenly a cyclone(425)
lifted up from the earth a storm of dirt,
a distress of heaven, it fills the plain,
tormenting and ripping apart the trees.
The whole sky was filled. We just closed our eyes
and rode out the divine storm. After a while,(430)
it ended, the girl was seen, who was wailing
bitterly like the shrill voice of a bird
who sees her empty nest, stripped of its nurslings.
Thus she screamed, when she saw the uncovered
body: She groaned loudly and called down evil(435)
curses on whoever had done the work.
Immediately she gathered dry dust
in her hands and from a jug of fine bronze
lifted up she crowned the corpse with three-fold
libations. We saw it and rushed forward,(440)
caught her quickly, completely unperplexed.
We questioned her both about the previous

incident and the current; she stood in denial of nothing, something for me both sweet and painful, all at once. Nothing⁽⁴⁴⁵⁾ is sweeter than escaping trouble for yourself, but it's painful to conduct friends into it. But, for me, everything takes second place to my own safety.

CREON:

You there, staring down at the ground, speak up:⁽⁴⁵⁰⁾ do you affirm or deny doing these things?

ANTIGONE:

I assert that I did it; I do not deny it.

CREON:

You, then, may take yourself where you will,

Exit GUARD.

rescued from a heavy charge. But, you, tell me briefly, not at length: did you know⁽⁴⁵⁵⁾ it had been announced not to do this?

ANTIGONE:

I did. Why would I not know? It was clear.

CREON:

And yet you dared to overstep these laws?

ANTIGONE:

Because it wasn't Zeus who pronounced these things to me, nor did Justice, companion⁽⁴⁶⁰⁾ of the gods below, establish such laws for humanity. I would never think your pronouncements had such strength that, being mortal, they could override the unwritten, ever-lasting prescriptions of the gods,⁽⁴⁶⁵⁾ for those aren't something recently made, but live forever, and no one knows when they first appeared. I did not intend to pay the penalty to the gods for violating these laws in fear of some man's opinion,⁽⁴⁷⁰⁾ for I know I will die. How could I not, Even if you had not proclaimed it? But if I die before my time, I say this is an advantage. Anyone who lives a life of sorrow as I do, how could⁽⁴⁷⁵⁾ they not count it a blessing to die? Therefore, there is no pain for me in meeting this fate, whereas if I were to endure

that one born from my mother die unburied,
that would cause me pain. As it is, I feel⁽⁴⁸⁰⁾
nothing. If, however, I seem to you
to have acted foolishly, then perhaps
I owe my foolishness to a fool.

CHORUS:

She's clearly the fierce⁽⁴⁸⁵⁾
daughter of a fierce father; she doesn't know to bend with the wind.

CREON:

But know that hard minds fall the hardest, and
that iron, so powerful of itself,
baked to exceeding hardness, you might see
crack and break into pieces. I know that⁽⁴⁹⁰⁾
spirited horses are broken with a small bit,
for no one is allowed to think big thoughts,
if he is another man's slave. She showed
herself capable of insolence then,
going beyond the laws put before her.⁽⁴⁹⁵⁾
Her second insolence, after she had
done it, was to exult in her deed and
laugh that she had done it. Now I am no man,
but she is a man, if power lies with her
with impunity. No, even if she⁽⁵⁰⁰⁾
were closer than my sister's child, closer
than any who share my family's chapel,
she and her sister will not escape the
worst fate, for that girl as well I charge as
equal in plotting this burial. Her, too,⁽⁵⁰⁵⁾
bring her here, for I've just seen her inside
in fury, not like someone in full control
of her senses. The heart of one who weaves
wickedness in darkness is usually
convicted beforehand. I, for my part,⁽⁵¹⁰⁾
hate anyone caught in the act who tries
to beautify his crimes thereupon.

ANTIGONE:

Do you want something more than killing me?

CREON:

Nothing more; I have that, and I have it all.

ANTIGONE:

Then why wait? Nothing you say gives me the⁽⁵¹⁵⁾
slightest pleasure—I pray nothing you say
ever will—and by nature I offend you.
And yet, could my fame be more gloriously
established than by placing my brother
in a tomb? I think all these people would⁽⁵²⁰⁾

agree, if fear did not hold their tongues.
Tyranny is lucky in many ways,
above all in doing and saying what it will.

CREON:

You alone of all Cadmus' race think this.

ANTIGONE:

These think it, too, but hold their tongues for you.(525)

CREON:

Aren't you ashamed to think differently from them?

ANTIGONE:

There's no shame in revering one from the same womb.

CREON:

And no brother died for the other side?

ANTIGONE:

A brother by the same mother and father.

CREON:

Why then this honor insulting to him?(530)

ANTIGONE:

The dead man would not agree with you.

CREON:

If you honor him equally with the wicked.

ANTIGONE:

This was not his slave who died, but his brother!

CREON:

Ravaging this land, while he stood in her defense!

ANTIGONE:

Nevertheless, Hades requires these rites.(535)

CREON:

The good don't want to share honors with the bad.

ANTIGONE:

Who knows what is considered righteous below?

CREON:

An enemy is not a friend, even when dead.

ANTIGONE:

I cannot share their hate, only their love.

CREON:

Then go below, and if you must be loved,⁽⁵⁴⁰⁾
love them! No woman will rule while I live.

Enter ISMENE from the palace.

CHORUS:

But here is Ismene before the doors,
tears running down her cheeks out of love for her sister.
A shadow over her flushed brow
disfigures her face,⁽⁵⁴⁵⁾
staining her lovely cheek.

CREON:

You—like a creeping viper you hid in
my house, poisoning me. I did not know
I was nurturing two blights to rebel
against my throne. Come, tell me—will you also claim⁽⁵⁵⁰⁾
a share of this funeral? Do you deny it?

ISMENE:

I did the deed, if she consents,
and I will take and bear the charge.

ANTIGONE:

But Justice will not allow this to you,
since neither did you want nor did I share it.⁽⁵⁵⁵⁾

ISMENE:

But, in your time of trouble, I am not
ashamed to sail those stormy seas beside you.

ANTIGONE:

Death and the dead will witness who did the deed;
I love no friends who are only friends in words.

ISMENE:

No, sister, do not dishonor me, but let⁽⁵⁶⁰⁾
me die with you and honor him who died.

ANTIGONE:

You may not die with me, nor call yours that
which you did not touch. My death is enough.

ISMENE:

Could I desire life when you have left me?

ANTIGONE:

Ask Creon, since you are his protector.⁽⁵⁶⁵⁾

ISMENE:

Antigone

Why do you grieve me if it does not help yourself?

ANTIGONE:

If I mock you, I do so with pain.

ISMENE:

But now—what can I do to help you now?

ANTIGONE:

Save yourself. I do not grudge you your escape.

ISMENE:

Poor girl, am I to have no share in your fate?(570)

ANTIGONE:

Because you choose to live, and I to die.

ISMENE:

But not with my arguments left unspoken.

ANTIGONE:

You seem clever to some, I to others.

ISMENE:

Then the error is equal for us both.

ANTIGONE:

Cheer up. You live, but my soul has been(575)
dead a long time, that I might serve the dead.

CREON:

I declare that both these children are fools,
one just become so, one her whole life.

ISMENE:

Indeed, my lord, what sense we had does not
stand by us in troubles, but goes away.(580)

CREON:

For you, at least, choosing bad deeds with bad people.

ISMENE:

What would life be for me alone, without her?

CREON:

Do not speak of her; she is already gone.

ISMENE:

You would kill the bride of your own son?

CREON:

Antigone

There are other fields just as fertile.(585)

ISMENE:

Not with such harmony as he has with her.

CREON:

I do not want bad wives for my sons.

ISMENE:

Dearest Haemon, how your father injures you!

CREON:

You annoy me...and this marriage of yours.

ISMENE:

Will you really rob your son of this girl?(590)

CREON:

Death himself will stop this wedding for me.

ISMENE:

It is determined, it seems, that she shall die.

CREON:

For you and me both! Waste no more time, but
bring them inside now, maids. From now on, they
must be women and not wander free, for
even brave men flee, when they see Death so close.(595)

Exit ANTIGONE and ISMENE with Servants into the house.

CHORUS:²⁰

Str. 1

Truly blessed are those who have not tasted evil,
for to them whose house is shaken by the gods,
no species of madness is left out, creeping over the
majority of the family—
like the swell of the salt sea when(600)
the sea's darkness runs upon angry Thracian winds,
it churns up murky sand
from the deep and the storm-swept
promontories, beaten by the opposing waves, roar with lamentation.

Ant. 1

I see that the old woes of the house of(605)
the Labdacids add to the woes of the dead,
nor does the new generation deliver its race, but one of the gods throws them down.
They have no release, for now light has fallen on
the last root of the house of Oedipus.
Bloody ashes of the lower gods(610)
now mow her down in turn,
along with the folly of argument and fury of wits.

Str. 2

O Zeus, what human transgression
could limit your power?
All-catching Sleep never takes it,(615)
nor the unwearied months of the gods,
but as never-decaying master,
you hold the brilliant radiance of Olympus.
The law will prevail,
in time that is, time to come,(620)
as in all time past.
Nothing comes assuredly
to every mortal life—nothing but the rush to ruin.

Ant. 2

For indeed wide-ranging hope
is a blessing to many men,(625)
but to many also a trick of light-minded desires.
It comes to one who knows nothing
until he burns his foot
walking in hot fire.
Hence the old saying still shows its wisdom:(630)
Sometimes the bad seems good
to one whose wits
God leads to madness.
He will last a short time without ruin.
But here is Haemon, the last and youngest(635)
of your children! Does he come
in grief for the fate of his
intended bride, the maiden Antigone,
in mourning for the bed he was cheated out of?

CREON:

We will soon know better than predictions.(640)
Son, can it be that you have heard my final
vote and come to fight your father for your bride?
Or am I your friend whatever I do?

HAEMON:

Father, I am yours, and as you have me,
you guide the best course for me to follow.(645)
No marriage will ever be more important to
me than justly carrying out your precepts.

CREON:

And that, child, is how you ought to keep your
affections: Stand by your father's ideas
in all things. This is why a man prays to(650)
have obedient children in his house:
that they may take vengeance on their father's
enemy in bad times and honor his friends
as he himself does. But, whoever sires
useless children—what could you say except(655)

he has created problems for himself
and much laughter for his enemies?
My boy, never give up your wits for a
woman because of the pleasure, knowing
that this darling becomes cold in your arms,⁽⁶⁶⁰⁾
your wife a wicked concubine in your house.
And what wound could be worse than a bad friend?
Therefore, spit her out like an enemy
and let her find a husband in Hell.
Since I caught her, alone of all entire⁽⁶⁶⁵⁾
people, in open rebellion, I will not
make myself a liar to the city,
but kill her. So, let her call on the Zeus
of kinship, for if I nurture defiance
in my relatives, I'd surely have to⁽⁶⁷⁰⁾
for those outside my clan. Whoever is
a good man at home is shown to be just
in the city, too, but whoever goes
outside the laws or violates them, or
thinks to give commands to his superiors,⁽⁶⁷⁵⁾
this man will not meet praise from me. Rather,
whomever the city chooses must be
obeyed in all things—small, just, and the opposite.
And this man, I would wager, rules fairly
and would want to be ruled well, and when marshaled⁽⁶⁸⁰⁾
under a cloud of spears, he would stand,
a good and just fighter in the front ranks.
No evil is worse than disobedience.
This one thing destroys cities, turns homes upside
down, it leads to the rout of allied armies;⁽⁶⁸⁵⁾
while those who live uprightly are saved by
obedience. Therefore, rulers must be
supported, and we must not yield to women.
It would be better, if it had to be,
to fall at a man's hands and not to be called⁽⁶⁹⁰⁾
worse than a woman.

CHORUS:

To us, at least, if we are not deceived
by age, you seem to speak what you say wisely.

HAEMON:

Father, the gods endow human beings
with intelligence, which is the greatest⁽⁶⁹⁵⁾
of all possessions. I could never—
I don't know how I could say you don't
speak correctly, but sometimes another
man's opinion is also right. You, however,
cannot watch everything that people⁽⁷⁰⁰⁾
say or do or blame, for the common men
out of fear of your face won't say such words

as you would not rejoice to hear; but I
can hear these things in darkness, how the city
weeps for this girl, says she's the least worthy⁽⁷⁰⁵⁾
of all women to die so badly for
such noble deeds. "She didn't let her brother,
who had fallen in combat, lie unburied,
to be devoured by some ravenous
dog or bird. They ought to give her an award!"⁽⁷¹⁰⁾
So the report spreads in darkness. When you
do well, father, I have no more honored
possession than that, for what prize is greater
for children than a father's fame when he's
prospering? Or a son's for his father?⁽⁷¹⁵⁾
Don't be so stubborn that you say you and
you alone are right. Whoever thinks that
he's the only one who can think or use
his tongue or soul, no one else—these men, when
you open them up, are seen to be hollow.⁽⁷²⁰⁾
But, for a man to learn, even a wise man,
is nothing shameful, nor to learn to bend
and give way. You see how, in the winter
storms, the trees yield that save even their twigs,
but those who oppose it are destroyed root and branch.⁽⁷²⁵⁾
Just so the captain who never slackens
his sail once he's stretched it gets his boat turned
and sails the rest with benches upside down.
Rather, yield your anger and let yourself change.
Even though I'm young, a good idea might⁽⁷³⁰⁾
come from me: It would be best by far
that man be born full of all the knowledge
there is, but, if it usually happens
not to turn out that way, to learn from those
who speak well is a good substitute.⁽⁷³⁵⁾

CHORUS:

My lord, if someone speaks in season, you should learn,
and you also, for both sides have spoken well.

CREON:

At our age, taught reason by a man so young?

HAEMON:

Taught nothing that is not just! If I am young,
I do not need more time to study what's right.⁽⁷⁴⁰⁾

CREON:

So, what's right includes revering anarchists?

HAEMON:

I'd never tell someone to revere the wicked!

CREON:

Then she has not been taken by this disease?

HAEMON:

Her fellow-citizens in Thebes deny it.

CREON:

The city will tell me how I ought to rule it?(745)

HAEMON:

Do you hear how rash and young *you* sound?

CREON:

Should I rule this land for myself or for others?

HAEMON:

This city does not belong to one man!

CREON:

Isn't the city thought to be her ruler's?

HAEMON:

You'd be a good monarch for a desert.(750)

CREON:

It seems he's an ally of the woman.

HAEMON:

If you are a woman! I care only for you!

CREON:

Worst of all men, at odds with your own father!

HAEMON:

Not when I see you at odds with justice.

CREON:

Am I wrong to protect my own empire?(755)

HAEMON:

You don't protect it when you trample the honors of the gods!

CREON:

Disgusting character!
To play the second to a woman!

HAEMON:

I would rather yield to her than to evil.(760)

CREON:

Antigone

In any case, this whole speech is for her.

HAEMON:

And for you and me and the gods below!

CREON:

You cannot marry her while alive.

HAEMON:

Then she will die and, dying, destroy another.

CREON:

Do you dare to threaten me so boldly?(765)

HAEMON:

What threat is it to speak my resolve to you?

CREON:

You will regret teaching what you do not know.

HAEMON:

Were you not my father, I would call you a fool.

CREON:

You're the slave of a woman, don't chatter at me.

HAEMON:

Will you make arguments, but hear no answer?(770)

CREON:

Really? Then know, by Olympus, that you shall not revile me with insults and rejoice! Bring the hated thing, so that she may die at once, close by the eyes of her bridegroom.

HAEMON:

No, not in my sight—never think this can(775) happen! She'll not die beside me, and you will never lay your eyes upon my face again, so rage with any of your friends who can bear it.

Exit HAEMON offstage.

CHORUS:

My lord, the man has gone quick with anger; his mind, at that age, bears pain violently.(780)

CREON:

Let him go and think superhuman thoughts, but he will not save these girls from their doom.

CHORUS:

Do you intend to kill both of them?

CREON:

You're right—not the one who didn't touch him.

CHORUS:

How do you intend to kill the other?(785)

CREON:

I shall take her to a place completely
devoid of human life and hide her, living,
in a rocky cavern. I'll put in with her
as much food as will ward off a curse, so that
our city will escape all pollution.(790)
There she can pray to Hades, the only god
she worships, and perhaps she will find a way
not to die—or learn, though too late for her,
that it is excessive work to love the dead.

CHORUS:

Str. 1

Love, unconquered in battle,(795)
Love, who attacks wealth,
who sleeps on a young girl's soft cheek
and wanders beyond the sea and in the wilderness:
There is no escape from you for immortals
or men who live but for a day;(800)
he who has you is mad.

Ant 1

You guide even just men's minds
towards injustice, to their destruction.
You have even shaken up this kin strife,
through her glances, clear desire of the bride(805)
is victorious, Love the coadjutor
in the great laws of old, for
Aphrodite, the irresistible goddess, is laughing.

Enter ANTIGONE from the palace, led by GUARDS.

But now I myself am also carried
beyond the laws when I see this.(810)
I can no longer hold back the streams of tears,
when I see Antigone heading for
the bridal chamber where all must sleep.

ANTIGONE:²⁵

Str. 2

See me, O citizens of my ancestral land,
treading the final path,(815)
gazing on the final light of the sun,

never again! But Death, the groom
of all, leads me alive
to the promontory of
Acheron; I have no share⁽⁸²⁰⁾
of marriage hymns, nor will any
hymn hymn me for my wedding
anyhow, but I shall be the bride of Death.

CHORUS:

Therefore, you will go famous and
honored into those depths of the dead.⁽⁸²⁵⁾
Not stricken by wasting disease
nor taking the wages of the sword,
but, alone of mortals, you will go,
the ruler of yourself, down to Hades.

ANTIGONE:

Ant. 2

I have heard that most sorrowfully did⁽⁸³⁰⁾
our Phrygian guest die, the daughter of Tantalus,
on the Sipylan cliff, how, like a vine of ivy,
the petrifying process overwhelmed her,
and the rain never leaves her,
languishing there, so men say,⁽⁸³⁵⁾
nor does the snow ever leave her,
and beneath her tearful lids
she wets the ridges with her tears;
now my destiny sends me to a rest most like hers.

CHORUS:

But she was a goddess and born of gods,⁽⁸⁴⁰⁾
while we are mortals, of mortal race!
Still, it will be to your great fame,
as you die to share the lot of the god-like
while you live and, later, when you die.

ANTIGONE:

Str. 3

Oh! I am mocked!⁽⁸⁴⁵⁾
By our fathers' gods, why
do you outrage me, not yet departed,
but still in the light?
O city, O rich gentlemen of the city,
hail, springs of Dirce⁽⁸⁵⁰⁾
and grove of many-charioted Thebes,
I'll yet have you as my witness,
how I have no friends to mourn me, by what laws
I go to the heaped-up prison
of my unheard of tomb.⁽⁸⁵⁵⁾
Oh, my poor lot, who have no home
among mortals or corpses,

neither the living or the dead!

CHORUS:

You went forward far too boldly
and crashed into the lofty⁽⁸⁶⁰⁾
pedestal of Justice, my child.
You are paying for your father's crime.

ANTIGONE:

Ant. 3

You have touched the most
painful of my cares,
the thrice-repeated doom of my father⁽⁸⁶⁵⁾
and this whole fate of ours,
the famous Labdacids.
Oh, the sins of my mother's bed
and my ill-fated mother's
self-creating intercourse with my father!⁽⁸⁷⁰⁾
From such as these I was born miserable!
I am going to live with them,
accursed, unwed.
Oh, my brother, you struck
an unlucky marriage,⁽⁸⁷⁵⁾
and dying you killed me, though I still lived.

CHORUS:

Reverence is a mark of character,
but power, for a man who has it,
does not tolerate offenses against itself.
Your self-guiding anger destroyed you.⁽⁸⁸⁰⁾

ANTIGONE:

Epode

Unwept, friendless, with no marriage hymn,
unfortunate, I am taken
down the prepared road.
It is no longer right for unhappy me
to see this holy eye of light,⁽⁸⁸⁵⁾
but no friend groans
over my unwept fate.

CREON:

Don't you know that songs and lament before
death would never stop, if they did any good?
Take her away at once, and shut her in⁽⁸⁹⁰⁾
her walled-up tomb, as I have said. Then leave
her there alone, where she must either die
or be entombed alive in such a house,
for we have no guilt in this maiden's case...
Regardless, she'll lose her home in the world above.⁽⁸⁹⁵⁾

ANTIGONE:

O tomb, O bridal bower, o underground
home everlasting, whither I journey
to my own people, whose great number—
so many destroyed—Persephone has
received among the dead. To these I go down—(900)
the last of them all and worst by far,
before my allowance of life is spent.
Nevertheless, as I go, I nurture
the hope that I will come dear to my father,
dear to you, mother, and dear to you, my own(905)
dear brother. When you died, with my own hands
I washed and adorned your bodies, and I poured
libations at your tombs. But now, Polynices,
after burying your body, I reap
rewards like these. Still, I honored you well(910)
in the eyes of the wise. No, if somehow
children whose mother I was or my husband
had died, I would not have undertaken
this labor in defiance of the citizens.
Shall I tell you the code I follow?(915)
I could get another husband when mine died,
and a child from another man, if I
lost one from him, but since my mother and
father both lie in Hell, there is no field
where I could grow another brother.(920)
With this as my law, I honor you above
all others; to Creon I seemed to have
made a mistake and to have done something
terrible, my brother. Now he holds me
thus in his hand and leads me, without a(925)
wedding, no bridal hymn, I have no share
of marriage or raising children, but,
as I am, bereft of friends and unlucky,
I am going alive into depths of the dead.
Which of the gods' laws have I transgressed?(930)
Why should I still look to the gods in my
unhappiness? What ally can I call?
In my case, by being pious, I have
won for myself the rewards of impiety.
But, if these men have sinned, may they not suffer(935)
more evils than they unjustly inflict on me.

CHORUS:

The same violent winds
still rage in her soul.

CREON:

Therefore her guards will
suffer for their slowness.(940)

ANTIGONE:

Alas, this word brings closer
my death.

CREON:

I'd be a liar to hearten you,
to say it's not certain.

ANTIGONE:

O ancestral town of Thebes⁽⁹⁴⁵⁾
and primeval gods,
I am led away indeed,
no longer merely waiting.

CHORUS:

Str. 1

Danae also dared to exchange
the light of day for walls of bronze;⁽⁹⁵⁰⁾
hidden away in a tomb-like
bedroom she was guarded.
Yet, her race was honorable,
O child, my child,
and she was the storehouse⁽⁹⁵⁵⁾
of the golden-flowing seed of Zeus.
The power of fate is something terrible.
It cannot be escaped—not with wealth or by war,
not with a tower or a sea-lashed black ship.

Ant. 1

The son of Dryas, quick to anger,⁽⁹⁶⁰⁾
the king of Edonia, was yoked by stinging angers,
confined by the will of
Dionysus in a rocky prison.
Thus the flowering, terrible fury of his
frenzy dripped away. He learned⁽⁹⁶⁵⁾
to know the god in stinging tongues,
whom he had provoked in his madness.
for he was stopping the races
of women and the Bacchic fire,
he irritated the muses who love flutes.⁽⁹⁷⁰⁾

Str. 2

Beside the sea's twin rocks, the Symplegades,
the promontories of the Bosphorus,
lies the Thracian Salmydessus,
where the city's neighbor Ares
watched the accursed wound dealt⁽⁹⁷⁵⁾
the two sons of Phineus
by his fierce wife,
who blinded their avenging eyes,
smitten by her bloody hands
and the point of her needle.⁽⁹⁸⁰⁾

Ant. 2

Wasting away unhappily, they mourned
their unhappy fate and their bastard
birth from their mother,
but her seed stretched back to the
ancient house of Erechtheus;(985)
in faraway caves,
her father nourished her in his hurricanes,
Boreas, swift as horses over the plains,
child of the gods. Yet against her, too,
the long-loved Fates pressed hard, my child.(990)

Enter TIRESIAS from offstage.

TIRESIAS:

Lords of Thebes, with two watching from one,
we have come treading our common road,
for the road for the blind is from the guide.

CREON:

What news do you have, old tiresias?

TIRESIAS:

I shall teach you, and you—trust the seer.(995)

CREON:

It is not my custom to disagree with you.

TIRESIAS:

And thus you have captained this city correctly.

CREON:

I will testify that you have helped me.

TIRESIAS:

Think now that you have walked onto a razor's edge.

CREON:

What is it? How I shudder at your words!(1000)

TIRESIAS:

You will know when you hear the omens of
my craft; for sitting on my ancient chair
of bird-watching, where in the past all the birds
have gathered for me, I heard a strange new sound—
birds, screaming with evil, barbaric frenzy;(1005)
and I knew that they were tearing at one
another with bloody talons, for the rush
of wings was clear. In fear, I went at once
to test the burnt sacrifices on the
blazing altars, but no fire was burning(1010)
on the victims. Rather, upon the embers,

a dripping ooze trickled from the thigh pieces;
it smoked and sputtered, and the bile was scattered
in the air, and the bones lay bare of the fat
that had covered them. Thus the omens failed,(1015)
there were no signs, as I learned from this boy,
for he is my guide, as I am to others.
The city is sick because of your counsel,
for our altars and all our hearths are defiled
by birds and dogs with carrion from the corpse(1020)
of the unlucky son of Oedipus.
For this reason the gods will not accept
our sacrifices, prayers, and burnt thigh-bones,
nor do the birds shriek forth clear-signaling cries,
gorged with a slain man's blood and fat. Therefore,(1025)
think on these things, my child; for every
human being makes mistakes, but when he has
made a mistake, that man is no longer
foolish and unhappy who remedies
the evil into which he has fallen(1030)
and is not stubborn. Obstinacy brings
the charge of stupidity. Yield to the dead,
don't kick a fallen man! What prowess does
it take to kill one already dead?
My counsel is good, and so is my advice.(1035)
To learn from good advice is sweetest, if
the advisor speaks to your advantage.

CREON:

Go ahead, old man; all of you can shoot
your arrows at me like archers at targets.
I am not even left untouched by the seers!(1040)
By your kind I was bought and sold and carried
home a long time ago. Make your profit,
purchase electrum from Sardis, if you wish,
and gold from India; but you will not
place him in a tomb, not even if Zeus's(1045)
own eagles want to snatch up the carrion
and take it to the very throne of Heaven!
I will not allow him to be buried
out of fear of this pollution, for I
know well that no human is strong enough(1050)
to pollute the gods. But, the cleverest
of mortals, old tiresias, fall with shameful
crash, when they decorate shameful words
for the sake of profit.

TIRESIAS:

Foo.(1055)
Does any man know, does any consider...

CREON:

Antigone

What thing? What great aphorism will you speak?

TIRESIAS:

...how much prudence is the greatest of possessions?

CREON:

(sarcastically)

As much as stupidity is the worst hurt?

TIRESIAS:

You certainly seem full of this disease.(1060)

CREON:

I don't want to return the seer's insult.

TIRESIAS:

Yet you do when you say I prophesy lies.

CREON:

The race of seers have always loved money.

TIRESIAS:

And tyrants have always loved cheated profits.

CREON:

Do you realize you speak these lies to your king?(1065)

TIRESIAS:

I do, for your city is safe because of me.

CREON:

You're a clever seer, but love injustice.

TIRESIAS:

You will make me say the secret of my knowledge.

CREON:

Do you think I say this for your profit?

TIRESIAS:

Do I seem to do this as far as you're concerned?(1070)

CREON:

Know that you'll not barter with my mind.

TIRESIAS:

And you—know well that before the sun has run a few laps more, you will give one from your loins, a corpse for corpses, in exchange for those you have sent from above the earth(1075) to below it, the living soul you have lodged

dishonorably in a tomb, and the
unhappy, unburied, unholy corpse
you hold back from the gods below. You have
no share in this, nor do the gods below,⁽¹⁰⁸⁰⁾
but this violence comes from you. For these things,
however, the destroying avengers
of Hell and the Furies of the gods are
lying wait for you, that you may be taken
in these same evils. Consider also⁽¹⁰⁸⁵⁾
if I say these things as a hired accuser,
for a short time will reveal the wailing
of men and women in your house.
All the cities are stirred by hatred, whose
mangled children took their only burial⁽¹⁰⁹⁰⁾
from dogs and beasts—or some winged bird, bearing
an unholy stench into his native city.
Since you hurt me, like an archer I have left
these words like unswerving arrows of the heart
against your spirit, whose sting you will not escape.⁽¹⁰⁹⁵⁾
Take me home, boy, so that this man may vent
his anger against younger men and learn
to keep his tongue quieter and fill his mind
with more elevated thoughts than he has now.

Exit TIRESIAS and Attendant offstage.

CHORUS:

My lord, this man has gone after prophesying⁽¹¹⁰⁰⁾
terrible things, and we know that since I took
this white hair in place of black, he has
never spoken falsely to this city.

CREON:

I know, and I, too, am shaking in my heart,⁽¹¹⁰⁵⁾
for to yield is a terrible thing, but it is
just as terrible to give up my anger.

CHORUS:

You must take good advice, child of Menoeceus.

CREON:

What should I do? Tell me, and I will obey.

CHORUS:

Go and release the maiden from her rocky
home and make a tomb for the unburied man.⁽¹¹¹⁰⁾

CREON:

You advise this? You think I should yield?

CHORUS:

Antigone

As soon as possible, my lord, for swift-footed
Divine Vengeance cuts down bad ideas.

CREON:

Alas, it is hard, but I give up what my heart
wished to do. One should not fight necessity.(1115)

CHORUS:

Go now and do it, do not leave it to others.

CREON:

I'll go just as I am! Come, come, servants,
those here and those away—grab axes and
rush to that point over there. I myself,
since my judgment has turned and seen better ways,(1120)
I bound her and I will go and release her,
for I fear that it is best to keep
the established laws as long as one lives.

CHORUS:

Str. 1

Many-named one, glory
of the Cadmeian bride,(1125)
offspring of loud-thundering
Zeus, you who protect famous
Italy, who are lord of
welcoming Eleusis
in the shelter of Demeter, O Bacchus,(1130)
inhabitant of Thebes, mother-city
of the Bacchants, by the flowing
stream of Ismenus, where the
dragon's teeth were sown.

Ant. 1

The flashing smoke(1135)
has seen you
over the double-crested
rock, where Corycian nymphs
go as your Bacchants
by Castalia's stream.(1140)
The ivy-covered slopes
of Nysa's mountains and
the green edge, rich in grapes, send you,
visiting the streets of Thebes,
while mortal tongues cry "Evoe!"(1145)

Str. 2

You honor this city
above all others
with your thunder-smitten mother,
but now, as the city and all her
people are held by the violence of disease,(1150)
come with cleansing fast over

the cliff of Parnassus or the lamenting crossing.

Ant. 2

Hail, dancing-master of the stars,
breathing fire, overseer
of the voices of the night,(1155)
child of Zeus, appear,
lord, together with your attendant
Nymphs, who in their madness
dance through the night with you, Iacchus, giver of gifts.

Enter the MESSENGER from offstage.

MESSENGER:

Dwellers of the house of Cadmus and Amphion,(1160)
there is no sort of human existence
I would ever praise or reproach as static.
Chance sets us up and chance knocks us down, good luck
and bad luck, always, and there is no seer
who can tell a man what is destined for him.(1165)
Creon was always enviable, I thought,
who saved this land of Cadmus from her foes;
and after taking sole rule of the country,
he ruled, flourishing with a good crop of sons.
And now he has lost it all, for when joy(1170)
betrays a man, I count him not as living,
but consider him an animated corpse.
Fill your home with riches, if you wish,
and live with a tyrant's bearing, but if you
lose the joy of these things, I would not buy(1175)
them from a man for the shadow of smoke
in exchange for real pleasure.

CHORUS:

What new grief of our kings do you bring us?

MESSENGER:

They are dead, but the living are worthy of death.

CHORUS:

And who slew them? Who has fallen? Tell us!(1180)

MESSENGER:

Haemon is lost. His blood was spilled by a familiar hand.

CHORUS:

By his father's or his own hand?

MESSENGER:

Himself, angry with his father for the murder.

CHORUS:

Antigone

O seer, how correct your prophecy turned out!(1185)

MESSENGER:

With things like this, consider the rest besides.

Enter EURYDICE from the palace.

CHORUS:

And now I see poor Eurydice here,
Creon's wife. She comes from the house in
mourning for her son, or perhaps by chance.

EURYDICE:

Citizens, I heard your words, as I was(1190)
coming to the doors, so that I could go
and pray before the goddess Athena.
And just as I was opening the door,
the sound of my family's misfortune
struck my ears, and I fell back, afraid,(1195)
against my maids, and lost my senses.
Still, tell the story again, whatever
it is, for I am already used to trouble.

MESSENGER:

Dear mistress, I shall say what I witnessed,
and I shall leave out not one word of the truth.(1200)
Why should I soothe you with words that will later
reveal me a liar? The truth is always right.
I was following your husband as a guide
into the farthest part of the plain, where
the unpitied corpse of Polynices,(1205)
torn by dogs, still lay. There, asking the goddess
of the crossroads and Pluto to hold back
their righteous anger and bathing his body
as custom demands, we gathered what was left
of him in newly-plucked branches, and, heaping(1210)
a high tomb of his native soil, we headed
to the stone-paved chamber of the bride of Death.
Someone heard the shrill voice of mourning
near the unhallowed chamber and pointed it
out to our master Creon. Who had uttered(1215)
the tortured cry was still unknown to him
creeping still closer, but he groaned and sadly
said, "Am I the prophet of my own doom?
Was it an unlucky road I traveled here?
The voice of my child greets me...servants, quick,(1220)
go closer! Stand by the tomb and, at the gap
in the rocks, find out if I recognize
the voice of Haemon or if the gods deceive me!"
At the command of our despairing master,
we did observe; and in the last part of(1225)

the tomb, we saw her hanged by the neck, fastened
by a noose of fine linen, and him wrapped
around her, clinging to her around the waist,
bemoaning the destruction of his lost bride
and the deeds of his father and his unhappy⁽¹²³⁰⁾
marriage bed. When the king saw them, he groaned
dreadfully and went inside towards the pair,
calling in lament, "Daring boy, what is
this thing you've done? What were you thinking?
What misfortune has destroyed your mind?⁽¹²³⁵⁾
Come out, child; as a suppliant, I beg you."
The boy glared at him wildly, spat in his face
and answered nothing, but drew his sword.
He missed
his father, as he leapt away. Then, the poor boy,
in his anger at himself, guided the sword,⁽¹²⁴⁰⁾
leaned on it and thrust it into his ribs
up the hilt; and while he still had sense,
he pulled the maiden into his dying embrace.
With his dying breath he sent a river
of crimson blood dripping down her white cheek.⁽¹²⁴⁵⁾
There they lay, corpse on corpse, and, poor thing,
he got his wedding rites in the house of Death,
showing to humanity by how much
foolishness is the greatest evil for a man.

Exit EURYDICE into the palace.

CHORUS:

What do you make of that? The lady has fled,⁽¹²⁵⁰⁾
before she could say a word, good or bad.

MESSENGER:

I, too, am astonished, but I am fed
by hopes that she does not think it right to mourn
her son's fate in front of the city,
but will set her maids to mourn their household's⁽¹²⁵⁵⁾
grief under their own roof. She is not so
foolish that she would do something rash.

CHORUS:

I don't know: To me, excessive silence
seems to bode as ill as too much shouting.

MESSENGER:

Then I will go and find out, lest she conceal⁽¹²⁶⁰⁾
something hidden in her angry heart as
she goes inside the house. You are right:
There is also grief in too much silence.

Exit MESSENGER into the palace.

CHORUS:

And now the king himself approaches, bearing
in his arms a memorial to,⁽¹²⁶⁵⁾
if it is right to say it, no foreign
madness, but showing his own mistakes.

Enter CREON from offstage.

CREON:

Str. 1
Oh!
Mistakes from thoughtless thoughts,
stubborn and deadly!⁽¹²⁷⁰⁾
O men who have seen
kin slaying and dying,
alas, for the misfortune of my plans!
Oh, my son—forever young by this untimely death,
alas, alas!⁽¹²⁷⁵⁾
You died, you were sent away
by my foolish counsels, not your own.

CHORUS:

I think you have seen justice too late.

CREON:

Alas!
I have learned pathetically,⁽¹²⁸⁰⁾
but then—oh, then some god was angry and hit me hard
in the head and shook me on fierce roads,
alas, overturned and trampled my happiness.
Oh, the ill-labored labors of mortals!

Enter 2nd MESSENGER from the palace.

2nd MESSENGER:

O master, you have enough evils already,⁽¹²⁸⁵⁾
the ones you carry now in your arms,
and those in the house you will see soon.

CREON:

What is left more evil than these evils?

2nd MESSENGER:

Your wife is dead, the mother of this very corpse,
poor creature, just now by recent strokes.⁽¹²⁹⁰⁾

CREON:

Ant. 1
Oh!
Oh, haven of Death, so hard to appease,
why, oh why do you ruin me?

O you who have announced these
grievous pronouncements to me, what word do you utter?(1295)
Oh, oh! You have slain again a man already destroyed!
What do you say, boy? Why do you tell me this news,
alas, alas,
this seal upon my ruin,
to add on my wife's fate?(1300)

CHORUS:

It is here to see, no longer hidden within.
The body of Eurydice is rolled out upon the ekkyklema.

CREON:

Alas!
Now I see this second, other evil.
What, oh what lot still awaits me?
I have just held my child in my arms,(1305)
poor thing, and here is another corpse before me.
Alas for the poor mother, alas for the child.

2nd MESSENGER:

Stung by passion, at the altar she loosed
her darkening eyes, lamenting first the
famous death of Megareus, who died before,(1310)
and then of this one, and last she called down
evil fortune on you, the child-slayer.

CREON:

Str. 2
Alas, alas!
I am shaken with fear. Will no one strike
me the mortal blow with a double-edged sword?(1315)
I am a wretch, alas,
and I am made whole by wretchedness.

2nd MESSENGER:

Yes, and you are responsible for these deaths
and hers whose corpse you see before you.

CREON:

How did she come to die so bloodily?(1320)

2nd MESSENGER:

She struck herself in the heart with her own hand,
when she learned of the sad fate of her boy.

CREON:

Woe is me, these things will never fall
on another person so as to exonerate me,
for I killed you, O unhappy(1325)
I, I claim it truly. Servants,

take me away right now, take me out of the way.
I don't exist any more; I'm no one.

CHORUS:

You offer good advice, if there is any good
in suffering. The quickest solution⁽¹³³⁰⁾
is best when troubles are in your way.

CREON:

Ant. 2
Go, go—
let it appear, that most beautiful of all fates,
the one bringing me my last day,
the very best fate! Go, go—⁽¹³³⁵⁾
so that I may never look upon another day!

CHORUS:

What will be will be. We must act on what lies
before us. The future is the gods' concern.

CREON:

That's all I was saying, my entire prayer.

CHORUS:

Don't pray any more; it is not for mortals
to escape our destined misfortune.⁽¹³⁴⁰⁾

CREON:

Let this rash man be led out of the way,
who, my child, unwillingly slew you,
and this woman, you, too—alas! I have
no where to turn to, nothing to lean on,⁽¹³⁴⁵⁾
for everything goes cross in my hands,
and a difficult fate falls on my head.

Exit CREON, led by Attendants, into the palace.

CHORUS:

Knowledge truly is by far the most important part
of happiness, but one must neglect nothing
that the gods demand.⁽¹³⁵⁰⁾
Great words of the over-proud
balanced by great falls
taught us knowledge in our old age.