

ANTIGONE

Antigone: Sweet sister Ismene, o the misfortunes that Zeus has inflicted upon us, the survivors, since Oedipus's sins were brought to light. There is no grief, no distress, no shame, no dishonour we have not shared. And now what is this new decree our leader has prescribed for the entire city? Have you heard anything? Are you not aware that crimes are being committed against our loved ones?

Ismene: Antigone, I have heard nothing of our loved ones, good or bad, since we were left of our two brothers, each by the other killed by mutual blows. Since the Argive army retired last night, I know of nothing further, either for good or ill luck.

Antigone: I have, and, so you alone may hear it, I have summoned you here beyond the main gates.

Ismene: What's wrong? You seem disconcerted.

Antigone: Kreon has decided to heap honours on one brother, dishonour on the other. They say he buried Eteokles with every proper custom and in full reverence alongside those already interred, but the wretched corpse of Polyneikes he proclaimed must be neither buried nor mourned, left unwept, uncovered, tempting prey to ravening birds. That's what they say the goodly Kreon has decided against you and me (yes, me too!). He is now back again to announce this decree to those who yet have not heard it, and to make sure that whoever defies him shall be condemned to death by stoning. That is the situation. Now you may show yourself to be truly noble or else a traitor to your distinguished family.

Ismene: You headstrong girl, if this is the case, what more can I do?

Antigone: Be my assistant, my accomplice.

Ismene: What mad scheme is this? What are you thinking?

Antigone: We must bury him ourselves.

Ismene: You plan to bury him? Against Kreon's orders?

Antigone: Yes, he's my brother. Yours too, whether you like it or not. I won't betray him.

Ismene: You're too bold – Kreon has forbidden it.

Antigone: He can't stop me – Polyneikes is our kin!

Ismene: O God! Sister, remember – our father died reviled and dishonoured, his eyes gouged out by his own hand in recompense for his manifest sins. His mother-wife ended her life in shame, tangled in those twisted cords. And finally, our two brothers in one day slaughtered each other – a shared downfall. We're left alone – think what an end will be ours if we defy a tyrant's law and might! We are women – we can't prevail against men! We are ruled by stronger forces than ourselves – we must suffer this decree, and indeed more pitiful things still. Therefore I entreat the dead to forgive me but, helpless as I am, I shall obey those who rule over us. To go against them would be madness.

Antigone: I shan't ask you for help, nor, should you change your mind, would I have you as an accomplice. Whatever you think, I shall bury Polyneikes. It is a fine thing to die for such an act. I shall commit a holy crime, then lie beside my dear brother. There is more time to comfort the dead than the living – I shall sleep for eternity. But if that's what you want, desecrate all divinity.

Ismene: I shall not do so, but your plan flies in the face of the citizenry. I cannot help you.

Antigone: That is your choice. I shall go and bury my dearest brother.

Ismene: O my poor sister, my fear for you is great.

Antigone: It shouldn't be. Worry about yourself.

Ismene: Don't tell a soul of your plan. Keep it secret, as shall I.

Antigone: No, shout it out! I will hate you all the more for your silence. Announce it to the world.

Ismene: A warm heart for a cold deed!

Antigone: Yet I know it is my duty.

Ismene: If you can do it – you have the zeal, but not the power.

Antigone: If I find I cannot, I will stop trying.

Ismene: Impossibilities shouldn't be attempted.

Antigone: Say any more and I will hate you, as will our dead brother. And rightly so. Let me be to commit this folly, as you call it! Nothing I suffer in consequence can stop me from a glorious death.

Ismene: If that is your will, go. You are irrational, but your family loves you still.

Chorus: Great sun, who shone on Thebes's seven gates,
Outgleaming all before in heavenly course,
Day's golden eye, traversing Dirke's straits,
With your keen spur you rout the Argive force.
See Polyneikes rage in bitter strife,
A white-winged eagle swooping on the land!
A ringing clash! Taunts sharper than a knife!
Plumed helmets sway throughout the hostile band.
Those gory swords set in a gaping ring,
He neared the entrance, but before his lust
Could feed upon our blood, or fire could bring
Doom to our towers, reducing them to dust,
The sound of Ares clamoured at his rear,
A dragon-like assailant on the rise.
Zeus hates all braggarts when they taunt and jeer,
So now, when in a torrent great in size
On came the foe, their helmets clashing loud
He cast a thunderbolt across the tips
Of Thebes's battlements into the crowd,
Their foremost men with "victory" on their lips.
He fell headlong onto the echoing ground,
His firebrand doused, his frantic onrush stayed,
Whilst Ares dealt destruction all around;
Men died in throngs, their debt to death now paid.
Seven chiefs, appointed each to his own gate,
To honour Zeus applied their weapons well.
Yet those two brothers shared a common fate –
Two spears consigned them instantly to Hell.
Famed Victory came to warlike Thebes this night,
But now we turn our backs upon the strife.
We'll dance in celebration of the fight.
Earth-shaking Bacchus, give our revels life!

Here comes Kreon, Menoikeus' son, our new leader during this latest godsent episode. What counsel has he for us? Why has he decreed this meeting of elders?

Kreon: Gentlemen, the gods have disturbed our city with considerable disquiet but have now restored her to safety. I have sent heralds to convene you apart from the rest of the citizens. I know you always respected Laios when he ruled here, and Oedipus too after he had healed the city's wounds; and after his death, you steadfastly supported his surviving sons. Then, after they had perished together on the selfsame day from reciprocal death-blows, I took over the reins of power by virtue of kinship with the unfortunate pair. It is difficult to know a man's heart and soul, his beliefs, until he becomes a skilled statesman and legislator. A man who rules a whole city without seeking the best counsel possible, who keeps his lips sealed out of fear, is (and always was) disastrous. Also he who rates personal friendship above his own city counts for nothing in my book. All-seeing Zeus be my witness, I could not keep silent if I saw the citizens on the brink of ruin. An enemy of the state could never be my friend, for I am aware that the ship of state is our saviour and only when she sails an even course can we form good alliances. I intend to continue to improve the state along these lines.

Now, here is my edict to the city about the sons of Oedipus: Eteokles, who died fighting for his city, doing sterling work with his spear, is to be buried with all full honours as befits those who die gloriously. His brother Polyneikes, however, who, while an exile, came against his country and its gods, determined to sack it utterly, to shed the blood of his people, to lead them into slavery – it has been decreed that he may receive no funeral honours, must remain unmourned, uncovered, his carcass a reviled prey to carrion and dogs. This is my decision – never will I hold more respect for evil than for good. All benefactors of this city will be equally honoured, living or dead.

Chorus: Son of Menoikeus, that is your will concerning the city's friends and enemies. You may administer the law to the dead and to those who still live.

Kreon: Be watchers of my words...

Chorus: Surely you prefer a younger man to undertake the task.

Kreon: Guardians of the corpse are already in place.

Chorus: What other commands do you have?

Kreon: Not to collude with those who disobey me.

Chorus: No-one is so crazy as to crave death.

Kreon: That indeed is the penalty. The hope of gain has frequently lured men to their death.

Guardian: Lord, I'll not say I am out of breath from running. No, I had many changes of heart, I was constantly on the point of turning back. Often I said to myself: "Your poor bastard, why are you walking right up to inevitable punishment?" Then again I said: "Idiot, why are you stopping? If Kreon hears this news from another, you're in deep trouble." These thoughts, turned over in my mind, slowed me down. Thus does a short trek become a long one. But finally my decision to come here won out. If it's nothing that I tell you, at least I'll have told you. One thing keeps me going – whatever is destined to happen will happen.

Kreon: Why this fretfulness? Spit it out.

Guardian: Let me tell you about myself first. I didn't do it, I didn't see who did it, so I shouldn't be punished.

Kreon: Your defense is well prepared, entrenched even. Tell us – what bizarre thing has occurred?

Guardian: Bizarre indeed! I can barely bring myself to tell it.

Kreon: Tell it, then you can go.

Guardian: I will. Someone has recently buried the corpse – sprinkled the flesh with dry dust, given it funeral rites.

Kreon: What??? Who dared do this?

Guardian: I don't know. There was no sign of a shovel, no pick-ax mark. The earth was hard and dry, no breaks in the surface, no evidence of wagon-wheels. Whoever did it covered up his tracks well. When the guard on first day-watch showed us, we all wondered how it had been done. As we saw it, the body was not buried – there was a sprinkling of dust as though it was the reverential act of someone who just did the deed and moved on. No signs of wild beast or one of our dogs. Immediately people started accusing each other – an outbreak of curses which could have ended in violence with no-one willing, or able, to prevent it. Anyone could have done it, though it was unclear who was the guilty party, and nothing could be proved. We were prepared to grasp hot metal, walk through fire, swear an oath that we had not done it, that we had not colluded with whoever had planned it and carried it out. Finally, when we had exhausted our inquiries, someone said something which caused us to bow our heads in fear. We couldn't gainsay it, nor could we acquiesce without serious consequences. You must be told, this couldn't be kept hidden. This decision prevailed, and the lot fell on me, I'm afraid. So here I am, no more willing to speak that you are to hear, that I know. No-one likes the bringer of bad news.

Chorus: Lord, I have been thinking – is this something the gods have done?

Kreon: Silence! I am close to exploding with anger! Don't prove yourself a fool, and an old one at that! Your talk of the gods having a hand in this burial is intolerable. Did they have reverence for his service to the city – he who came to burn down the pillared temples and destroy their land and their laws? Maybe you think the gods respect evil?

No! For a long time now men have barely tolerated my rule, whispered against me – naysayers, loath to yield to my powers, to accept me. Well I know that they are seduced by the hope of gain – that's why they act this way. There is nothing more evil than money. It destroys cities, it uproots homes, would tutor mortals from good to bad, teaching evil and irreverence in everything. The avaricious always pay the price eventually. But if I still serve Zeus, let it be known (and this I swear), if you do not find the man who performed this rite and bring him before me, one Hell only will not be sufficient for you – you will be left to hang, living, until you tell all you know of this outrage. You'll learn to grasp gain only where it is lawful, that the love of lucre is not appropriate in every instance. More people are damned by base profit than saved.

Guardian: Can I say something, or should I leave?

Kreon: Your words simply torture me!

Guardian: Is it your ears or your heart that is wounded?

Kreon: How dare you try to analyze my pain?

Guardian: The man who did this assaults your heart, I assault only your ears.

Kreon: Clearly you love the sound of your own voice.

Guardian: At least I am innocent of this crime.

Kreon: Not if you have sold your soul for cash.

Guardian: Ah! How dreadful that an intelligent man could be so wrong!

Kreon: A clever rationale! But if you don't deliver the miscreants to me, you'll see that sordid love of gain can work its own woe.

Guardian: Let's hope he is found quickly then. But whether he's apprehended or not (that is up to Fate), you won't see me back here. I thank the gods I've been spared – the last thing I expected, I have to say.

Chorus: Of all the wonders there will ever be

Man is the greatest: through the cold, grey sea
He ploughs the swelling waves, he works the Earth
(She who to all the other gods gave birth)
Year after year, on horses mounted high;
He hunts wild beasts, plucks birds out of the sky,
Entraps with nets the denizens of the ocean.
His faculties are constantly in motion.
Hill-creatures, mountain-bulls and shaggy steeds
He tames; through language and swift thoughts he feeds
His knowledge; statecraft, too, and how to raise
Stout dwellings which withstand harsh, wintry days,
He knows. His boundless gifts some cure have made
For every ill. Yet Death he can't evade.
His talent's awesome, whether for good or ill;
Devising laws he saves the state with skill,
But when he works for evil, loyalty
Evaporates. That man's no friend to me.

What dread omen is this? Here comes the maid Antigone. Unhappy daughter of unhappy Oedipus, what is the matter? Surely she hasn't disobeyed the king's edict? Have they arrested her by mistake?

Guardian: She's the culprit. We caught her in the act of burial. Where's Kreon?

Chorus: He's coming back from the palace. We need him here.

Kreon: What is it? What has happened?

Guardian: Lord, men should not swear oaths. Our intentions and our thoughts can sometimes be at odds. I told myself I'd never be back here with you after the tongue-lashing I underwent before. But unexpected joy transcends any other kind, so here I am, my former oath forsworn, with the girl – caught red-handed, she was. No lots were drawn this time – this windfall duty is mine alone. Now, lord, take her and do your will. Judge her, convict her. I am a free man, rid of all this trouble.

Kreon: How did you apprehend her? And where?

Guardian: She was burying her brother. Now you know the lot.

Kreon: Do you realize what you're saying? Do you mean it?

Guardian: Yes, I saw her burying the corpse you denied burial rites. Is that clear enough for you?

Kreon: How did you catch her?

Guardian: It was like this: when I got back after that drubbing from you, we swept away all the dust which covered the body and left the rotting carcass bare. Then we took up position on a high rock where we could be out of the wind and thus protected from the stench that came off the body. And we yelled at each other for falling down on the job.

This went on for ages, but eventually the sun appeared. Very bright, it was, and it warmed us up. Suddenly a hurricane blasted across the plain. It ripped through all the greenery in the wood that stands on the plain. It filled the sky. We shut our eyes – it was a sickness sent by God. This went on for ages and when it stopped, we could see the girl who now shrieked like a shrill-voiced bird who has found her chicks missing from the nest. She'd seen that the corpse had been stripped and was wailing and cursing whoever had done it. Immediately she picked up some dry dust and, lifting high a handsome jug of bronze, she paid honour to the corpse with three offerings – honey, milk, wine. When we saw her we rushed at her and apprehended her at once – she wasn't alarmed at all – then we accused her of what she had done earlier and what she'd done just now. She just stood there and denied nothing. That pleased me but it bugged me too. Though it's wonderful to escape trouble, it's dreadful to drive one's friends into it. But in the end everything comes second to one's own safety.

Kreon: You! Yes, you, with your head bowed down to the ground! Do you deny this?

Antigone: No, I did it I deny nothing.

Kreon: Take yourself off. You're free to go, there are no charges against you. But you – tell me (no lengthy explanations, just the bare facts), did you know I had proclaimed a law against what you have done?

Antigone: I knew! How could I not? Everyone knew.

Kreon: And yet you had the gall to go against my orders?>

Antigone: They were not Zeus's orders; Justice, who dwells in the Underworld, did not lay out such laws (they are Man's). I had no idea that your decrees had the weight to supercede the unwritten and immovable laws of Heaven. *They* are not ephemeral, they are for ever. No-one knows their origin. I am not going to be punished by the gods for this and I fear no *man's* judgment I knew death would be my fate, of course, even without your pronouncement. But if I die before my time, I count it as gain. How can anyone who lives with constant misery, as I have, not think of death as gain? Such a fate cannot bring grief to me. If I had left my brother there, an unburied cadaver, *that* would have been grievous. My deed has prevented this. If you consider my act a foolish one, it is you who are the fool.

Chorus: A truculent spirit born of a truculent father! She doesn't know how to yield in adversity.

Kreon: You'll find that the harshest will is soonest broken, just as the strongest and most rigid iron, when baked in the fire, is the first to shatter. It takes only the smallest bridle to tame wild stallions. Pride ill becomes a slave. She showed overweening pride when she broke the laws I had prescribed. Her first deed showed pride enough, but this second one she positively exults in, laughing in our faces. If this insolence of hers goes unpunished, she will have unmanned me and become the man herself. Whether she is my sister's child or closer than any who worship Zeus our Protector, neither she nor her sister shall escape the harshest fate possible. Yes, I condemn Ismene equally. Bring the woman here! I just saw her in the palace – it's clear she's insane, hardly in control of her wits. The heart of one who secretly plots some crime will often betray itself before the deed is committed. But I detest those who, caught red-handed, try to gloss over their actions.

Antigone: Take me and put me to death – what more can you hope to do?

Kreon: Nothing. Your death is sufficient.

Antigone: What, then, are you waiting for? Your words don't please me (nor could they ever) any more than mine please you. What greater honour can I gain than by burying my brother? All those present would say the same if fear didn't tie up their tongues. Yes, a ruler is blessed indeed – he can say and do whatever he wants.

Kreon: You alone hold that opinion about these descendants of Kadmos.

Antigone: No, they are on my side. You have closed their mouths.

Kreon: Are you not ashamed to perform this rash act alone?

Antigone: There is no shame in honouring one's kin.

Kreon: Was there not a kinsman who dies in combat with him?

Antigone: Yes – I shared both mother and father with him too.

Kreon: And performed a rite which dishonoured him.

Antigone: He would not say so if he were living today.

Kreon: He would – you give the same respect to a traitor that you give to him.

Antigone: He was no hireling - he was my brother.

Kreon: Who attacked Thebes. Eteokles fought for her.

Antigone: Hades demands impartiality.

Kreon: A bad man should not receive the same rites as a good one.

Antigone: Who can tell if that is the law of the Underworld?

Kreon: An enemy can never be a friend, even in death.

Antigone: My nature is of love, not hate.

Kreon: You'll soon join them – love them both if you must. No woman will have power over me while I live.

Chorus: Here comes Ismene out through the gates, Antigone's sister, weeping. Her brows are cloudy, distorting her suffused face, and her fair cheeks are wet.

Kreon: You! You slink around the palace like some snake, secretly sucking me dry. I had no idea I was nurturing TWO rebellious furies. Come on, tell me, were you an accomplice or will you swear ignorance?

Ismene: I am guilty if she goes along with my plea. I share the blame.

Antigone: No! Justice denies you this! You were against it, you had no part in it.

Ismene: I do not shame to be a fellow-passenger on your sea of troubles.

Antigone: Hell and its inhabitants know whose deed this was. A friend in words alone is no friend to me.

Ismene: Sister, don't deny me the right to die with you and sanctify our dead brother.

Antigone: Don't presume to share death with me, and don't appropriate what you never had a hand in. One death will be sufficient – mine.

Ismene: What sort of life will I have without you?

Antigone: Ask Kreon. You obviously dote on him.

Ismene: Why do you torment me like this? You can gain nothing by it.

Antigone: If I mock you, it's a painful mockery.

Ismene: How can I help you, even at this late stage?

Antigone: Save yourself. I don't begrudge your escape.

Ismene: Oh please, may I not share your fate?

Antigone: You have chosen life, I death.

Ismene: I predicted your punishment quite clearly.

Antigone: We both have our defenders.

Ismene: And we are equally guilty.

Antigone: Have comfort! You're alive, but my soul has long been dead. That's how I could pay respect to the dead!

Kreon: Two maids, one recently proven mad, the other mad since birth!

Ismene: Lord, in misfortune there is no mind, however strong, which remains constant.

Kreon: In your case, certainly – you chose to join evildoers in evil.

Ismene: How will I live without my sister?

Kreon: Don't speak of her – she is already dead.

Ismene: Will you kill your own son's fiancée?

Kreon: He can plough another field.

Ismene: But such a loving couple!

Kreon: I despise wicked women – they are not for my sons.

Ismene: Dearest Haemon, how your father discredits you.

Kreon: Stop your moaning – you and your marriage-talk.

Chorus: Will you part your son and her?

Kreon: Hades will put paid to the marriage.

Chorus: Then she is to die?

Kreon: She is. No more delays. Bring her in, slavewomen! They must be tightly bound.

Even brave men run when they are staring Death in the face.

Chorus: Blessed are they who never taste of woes;

A house dashed by the gods is never free

Of vengeance which, in endless cycle, grows,

As when foul Thracian winds assault the sea

And cause the battered promontories to groan.

The House of Labdakos I see beset

With ancient grudge nor destined to atone;

God-hounded, it can never pay the debt.

Light shone on this last seed of Oedipus

But now a bloody knife has stopped her breath,

Sent by the gods below. So furious

A mind, such impudence has brought her death.

Zeus, how can mortal sin withstand your might?

Sleep that enfeebles all can't master it,

Nor tireless time. Still on Olympus's height

In ageless glory on your throne you sit.

Throughout all time this precept will prevail:

No greatness is achieved without great strife.

Uncertain hope will many folk avail,

Yet many are seduced into a life

Of giddy wants. The man who nothing knows

Will be consumed by fire. It's always been

That Heaven-sent, early ruin comes to those

Who good and evil cannot tell between.

Here is Haemon, your youngest. He is heartbroken over Antigone's fate. He will never wed her now.

Kreon: We shall soon know without the benefit of prophets. Son, have you not heard my final decision on your bride-to-be? Are you angry at your father or are we to remain friends whatever happens?

Haemon: Father, I am yours. Your decisions are wise and I will always abide by them. I shall never rate my marriage-bond above your good counsel.

Kreon: Child, your sentiments are as they should be – that your father's decisions should outweigh everything. Men will always hope they have obedient sons who will requite their foes and honour their friends as they do their father. A man who has fathered recalcitrant sons you will say has brought upon himself nothing but trouble, not to mention the mockery of his enemies. Don't be bewitched by a woman – you know an evil wife will lead to cold embraces. What leaves a greater scar than a bad friend? Reject her – she is malevolent. Let her wed in Hell. I have had her arrested, the only citizen to disobey my edict. Therefore, since I cannot be proven a liar, I must have her executed. Let her pray to Zeus, the protector of families, if she likes – it'll do her no good. If I raise rebellious kin, I must expect the same from others. An honourable family-member is likewise an honourable citizen. I am confident such a man would rule well, and under fire in the thick of battle he would be a staunch comrade. Whoever goes too far and breaks the rules with every intention of mastering those in command gets no praise from me. The man whom the city chooses as its ruler must be listened to – in everything, however trivial, just or unjust. Anarchy is the greatest evil of all – it destroys cities, ravages families, brings defeat to armies. Obedience, however, will protect the legions of honourable men. Leaders, then, must preserve obedience; it must certainly not be undermined by a woman. Let a man conquer us, if needs must – we must never be slaves to a woman.

Chorus: Unless time has addled my brains, I think your words are wise.

Haemon: Father, the gods gave wisdom to man – it is our greatest possession. I couldn't possibly say that your words aren't wise. Yet others oppose you. And you cannot be aware of everything men say or do or condemn. Your angry look shows us all your disapproval of what you hear. In dark corners, however, I hear things – that the city is in sympathy with this girl – the most unjustly abused of all women, destined for a dreadful death for the noblest of deeds. Her brother died in battle and she would not allow him to lie unburied, a prey to wild dogs and carrion birds. Does she not deserve recompense in gold? That is the furtive gossip here. I prize nothing above your good fortune, father. What is more splendid for a child than his father's success. What more can a father want from his child? Do not assume there is but one answer to this problem. Anyone who thinks his own heart, his own voice, his own reason must prevail over all others is exposed as worthless. Even a wise man can be schooled and admit his mistakes – it is not shameful. When rivers rage and flood their banks, see how mighty trees, by yielding, preserve their branches, while those resist are blasted, roots and all,. Likewise a ship which puts on a bold front and refuses to yield, ends up turning turtle and sailing with its benches upside-down. So yield, reverse your decision. I know I am younger, but let me say this: though it is preferable for every man to have instinctual wisdom, it is more commonly not the case, so you must learn from sound advice.

Chorus: A reasonable point of view, lord, as is yours. Good advice from both sides.

Kreon: So mature men should learn from youngsters?

Haemon: Not unless their words are judicious. Yes, I am young, but take note of my actions, not my years.

Kreon: And is an insolent action one to be respected?

Haemon: I could not condone wickedness.

Kreon: Is this girl not riddled with wickedness?

Haemon: Her fellow-citizens would not say so.

Kreon: And *they* are to tell me what to do?

Haemon: Now those are the words of a child!

Kreon: Am I to govern the city through another?

Haemon: The city belongs to all, not just you.

Kreon: So it's not acknowledged as its ruler's domain?

Haemon: You'd do well as the monarch of a desert!

Kreon: So he has sided with a woman!

Haemon: Yes, if YOU are a woman. I am on your side.

Kreon: You villain, everything you say I against me.

Haemon: Yes, because you're wrong.

Kreon: Am I wrong in taking my office seriously?

Haemon: But you don't - you trample on the sanctity of the gods!

Kreon: You despicable...! Worse than a woman!

Haemon: I am guilty...of nothing!

Kreon: All your words are on her behalf.

Haemon: *And yours, and mine*, and those of the gods of the Underworld.

Kreon: You can never marry her while she lives.

Aemon: Her death will be the end of me too.

Kreon: Your threats are the very peak of insolence.

Haemon: What threats? Against a fool?

Kreon: You'll regret your attempt to instruct me – *you're* the fool!

Haemon: If you weren't my father I would call this insanity.

Kreon: Don't patronize me. You, at the beck and call of a girl!

Haemon: You'll speak but you won't listen.

Kreon: Really?? By Zeus, you won't get away with these slurs of yours, I promise you. Bring out the wretch, let her fiancé watch her die.

Haemon: I'll not watch her die, be sure of that. You'll never see my face again. Keep you raving for your friends to witness – if any of them are willing.

Chorus: Lord, his fury has sped him away. A young man's heart, when touched with pain, is heavy indeed.

Kreon: Let him go. Let him do or think whatever he wants. He'll not save these maids from death.

Chorus: So you intend to kill them both?

Kreon: You are right – I'll not kill her who did not commit the deed.

Chorus: What method of execution do you intend?

Kreon: I'll take her along a deserted track and immure her, alive, in an underground cave. I'll leave her just enough food for expiation – that way the city will avoid the charge of pollution. There she may pray to Hades (her only god) – who knows, maybe he'll save her from death! Too late she'll discover worshipping Hades brings nothing but trouble.

Chorus: O unmatched Love, who ruin men of wealth,

Who dwell in girls' soft cheeks, who haunt the fields,
The seas. No man, no god can flee your stealth.
Your madness finds them all. Each to you yields.
Manipulating, turning good to ill,
Stirring domestic strife. A bride's sweet eyes
Are death-blows, making laws by their own will.
We're helpless, while your power never dies.

I can scarcely bear the sight before me, I can't hold back my tears. Antigone is being led to her bridal-chamber – a bridal-chamber that will be her eternal resting-place.

Antigone: See me, citizens! This is my last journey, this is the last time I will see the sun! Easeful Hades beckons me to Acheron's shore, though I still live; no bridal-hymn, no wedding-song shall sing me to my chamber. No, I am to wed Death Himself.

Chorus: Fame and praise follow you on your way to your death; no wasting disease shall plague you, you shall be the sheath for no sword. Alone among mortals you journey to Hades of your own free will.

Antigone: I have heard how Tantalos' daughter, the Phrygian maid, died a dreadful death on the pinnacle of the rock of Sisyphe. Like the tenacious ivy that adamant root encircled her. Rain lashed her, they say, and snow, moistening the ridges that were now her cheeks. In like fashion God is lulling me to sleep.

Chorus: She was a goddess – we are merely mortal. You will win renown by sharing the fate of a goddess, both now and in the hereafter.

Antigone: You mock me! By my country's gods, why this revulsion? I am not yet dead and already you reproach me. O my city! O you citizens of wealth! Streams of Dirke, grove of Thebes, famed for her chariots, you are my witnesses – unmourned, by *his* decree I go to my prison-tomb. Who would have predicted such a thing? A living corpse, lost between heaven and earth.

Chorus: Your excessive boldness brought you up sharply against Justice's high throne, child, and now you are paying the price demanded by your blood-line.

Antigone: You have touched me to the quick. You all know my father's suffering and the curse of the famed House of Labdakos. The fateful incest – my father's coupling with his own mother, a coupling which created me. Accursed, unwed, I go to meet them. Father and brother in this dread match, in dying you have handed me a living death.

Chorus: Reverence is one thing but overweening strength is quite another. Your willful passion is the cause of your present fate.

Antigone: No pity, no friends, no hope of marriage! I go in all wretchedness the way that is prepared for me. I may no longer look upon the blessed sun, and no friend will mourn my passing.

Kreon: There is not a man who would mourn and wail forever if it could hold off death. Quick, take her, build her tomb around her, as I commanded, then leave her either to die or live in constant captivity. I have observed the divine laws in this case, nonetheless she has forfeited life above the earth.

Antigone: My tomb is the bridal-chamber which will hold me captive for eternity! I go to be reunited with my family, all of them the guests of Persephone. I am the latest, by far the unhappiest, to join them, long before my life's-end span. I cherish great hopes of greeting my loving father and mother and my dear brother. On your deaths I purified your bodies, I prepared you for burial, I poured the libations to the Underworld. Now you too,

Polyneikes, I laid out in the selfsame way – and this is my reward! Yet wise men will agree that my reverence was appropriate. If I had been the mother of children and my husband a corpse in need of burial, I would not have chosen this fate against the will of my fellow-citizens. What law would I have served? My husband dead, I could have had another of whom I might have borne another child, but since my mother and father rest in Hades, I may not have another brother. Yet, dear brother, by my thus favouring your memory Kreon has smelt in me a fault, a rank effrontery! And now he is marching me off – virgin, unwed, deprived of consort, of children, bereft of friends – to an abode for the dead, and yet still living. What holy law have I transgressed? How can I look to the gods anymore? What ally may I turn to now that my piety has won me nothing but impiety? But if my act pleases the gods, my punishment may teach me my sin. But if these men are wrong, may they suffer no greater ill than they unjustly mete out to me.

Chorus: Her soul's sharp stings buffet her still.

Kreon: Then will her guards have cause to weep if they drag their heels.

Chorus: Her death is nigh – those words confirm it.

Kreon: Be assured – it *will* follow.

Antigone: Thebes, my city, ancient gods, they are taking me, I am no more. See, Theban lords, the last remaining lady of the royal house, see how they treat one who reveres godliness.

Chorus: Danae was doomed to shun the sun's bright face
And stay confined in her bronze chamber-tomb.
And yet, child, she was of a noble race
And Zeus's offspring issued from her womb'
But wealth nor war nor walls nor naval might
Can circumvent the dreadful power of Fate!
Sullen Lykurgos, held in a stone-set night,
Felt all of Dionysos' stinging hate.
The fury in his madness ebbed away
And made him face the god. He was to blame
For stemming Bacchic rites – alas the day! –
And all the Muses quickly were aflame.
Twin, dark-blue rocks admit a double clash
Of waves upon the Bosphorus's strand
Where Ares saw a pointed needle flash
Which, guided by a furious mother's hand,
Robbed the two sons of Phineus of their sight,
Four orbs which now for retribution cried.
Poor wretches, they bewailed their dreadful plight,
The issue of a sadly-married bride,
Who was the House of Erechtheus's own,
The North Wind's daughter, raised in caves afar,
Racing young colts and by strong breezes blown,
And yet the Fates contrived her life to mar.

Teiresias: Theban lords, we two have traveled a common road, one pair of eyes serving for us both. The blind must perforce have a guide.

Kreon: What's the news, old Teiresias?

Teiresias: I'll tell you – listen to a prophet's words.

Kreon: I have never ignored them before.

Teiresias: And thus you hold a straight course as the city's helmsman.

Kreon: I can testify to the benefits.

Teiresias: You are once more on Fate's razor-edge.

Kreon: What is the matter? Your words chill me.

Teiresias: My prophetic skills will tell you. Sitting on my hallowed chair of augury where I perform all my bird-divinations, I heard a sound of birds that I have never heard before – a terrible, confused screeching – they were tearing each other apart with their murderous talons. The whirring of their wings told me that quite clearly. Immediately, in fear, I attempted a sacrifice on the blazing altars. But Hephaistos declined to set it alight. The juices from the thigh-pieces dropped onto the embers and was consumed, smoking and sputtering, the gall-bladder was scattered high and clear and the meat fell, dripping, from the fat that had enveloped it. The failed prophecies of these too-obscure rites I learned of this boy (my guide, as I am guide to others). Your judgment has caused the city's sickness.

Our altars, our shrines are strewn with flesh torn from the body of Oedipus's ill-fated son by vultures and curs. Our gods no longer accept our sacrificial prayers, our offerings, no bird shrills out good omens but laps up a dead man's blood.

Think on this, child. All men err sometimes – it is common. But when that happens, a man of sin who can heal himself and not remain obstinate is then a man of sound judgment. Stubbornness breeds stupidity. Respect the dead, don't mutilate them. What use is there in killing the already-dead? I counsel you well – when the result is one's welfare, it is good to learn good counsel.

Kreon: Old sir, you all aim your darts at me, it seems, you prophets assail me too. As of old I am bought and sold by your tribe. Trade in Sardinian amber, if you will, or Indian gold, but you will *not* bury that man, not even if Zeus's eagles peck off his flesh and carry it to his very throne.. I have no fear in forbidding this burial – it would be an abomination. No man can pollute divinity. When they fall, old Teiresias, men of evil fall with terrible force, uttering terrible words, with a smiling face for the sake of gain.

Teiresias: Does anyone know –

Kreon: Know what? Bring out the platitude.

Teiresias: - that good counsel is best.

Kreon: I know that a lack of wisdom causes untold harm.

Teiresias: And yet that is the sickness you are infected with.

Kreon: I don't want to bandy words with this prophet.

Teiresias: Yet you do – you say my divination is false.

Kreon: Your whole tribe is mercenary.

Teiresias: And tyrants are covetous.

Kreon: Do you realize you are speaking to a king?

Teiresias: I do. It was by my advice that you saved this city.

Kreon: You may be a wise prophet but you are also a man of sin.

Teiresias: You'll force me to say what mustn't be said.

Kreon: Go ahead, but don't expect to reap any gain from your words.

Teiresias: Is that how you see me now?

Kreon: I will not be bartered with.

Teiresias: Well, be assured that the sun's swift chariot-wheels will not have made many journeys across the sky before you will pay corpse for corpse - the products of your loins, for one cast into eternal night, her soul housed in a tomb, dishonoured, and for another, left above the ground, unanointed, unconsecrated, unhouseled. The outcome is inevitable – neither you nor the gods can alter it – you will be compelled to comply. The murderous, avenging Furies from hell are stalking you – they will have their revenge on you by the same dire means you yourself have used. Have I been bribed, then, that I say this? Very soon you will hear the lamenting of men and women issuing from your palace. Hatred consumes all cities where mangled corpses have been devoured by dogs, wild animal, birds, taking their unholy odour to the city's altars and shrines. To your grief I have aimed my arrows truly at your heart. Their force you cannot escape.

Lead me in, boy. Let him turn his anger on those younger than I. let's hope he'll learn to curb his tongue and school his mind more wisely than he does now.

Chorus: His prophesy is remarkable, lord. My dark hair has turned to white and yet I have still never heard him utter a falsehood.

Kreon: I know, and it shakes me! To yield is a terrible thing, yet exposure to a ruinous fate is terrible too.

Chorus: Menoikeus' son, you have to accept wise counsel.

Kreon: What must I do? I should yield?

Chorus: Yes, lord, and with all speed. The swift-footed gods of Mischief destroy the ill-advised.

Kreon: O! It's hard but I know in my heart that it must be done. One cannot fight the inevitable.

Chorus: Go now and do it. Don't leave it to others.

Kreon: I'll go just as I am. Go, attendants, and fetch your fellow-servants too. Take axes and go to the place over there. Now I am resolved, I, her prisoner, shall free her. It's best to obey the established laws to one's dying day.

Chorus: Bacchus, of many names, and glorified

By nymphs of Kadmos' house, the honoured pride
Of Italy, who guard the valleys wild
Of our Earth-Goddess; Father Zeus's child,
Protector, too, of Thebes, our mother-state,
Where your mad worshippers luxuriate
Along Ismenos' streams where dragons' teeth
Bred harvests. On the twin-peaked rocks beneath
Bright torches burn, Kastalia's freshets house
Parnassian Bacchant-nymphs where they carouse.
Those ivy-clad Nysaean hills attend,
Those green, grape-heavy fields, for you defend
Thebes. Votaries shriek 'Evoe' at her gates.
You honour her above all other states,
So Hera, too. Now Thebes has come to feel
A violent sickness. Come, then, lord, and heal!
Come from the hillside or the roaring sea!
Guide of the stars that breathe their fire on me,
The cause of night-time cries, o Zeus's son,

Appear with all your Bacchants, every one,
Who madly dance and make the heavens ring
For you, their Iacchos, you, their everything.

Messenger: Citizens of the domain of Kadmos and Amphion, it is not our business either to praise or disapprove a man's life, since Fate can both exalt and destroy the fortunate and unfortunate alike. No seer can predict a man's destiny. Kreon was once envied, was he not? – he liberated the land of Kadmos from its foes, he annexed land, he raised a noble family, flourished, ruled well. That's gone now. No, when a man forsakes the pleasures of life, he's no longer alive, in my opinion, merely a living corpse. He can have as much wealth as he likes but when the relish in it disappears, I wouldn't give a straw for it all.

Chorus: Are you here to report some royal calamity?

Messenger: They're dead. Those responsible still live.

Chorus: Who's the killer? Who the killed? Tell us.

Messenger: Haemon is dead and the blood is on his own hands.

Chorus: Did his father slay him? Or he himself?

Messenger: I SAY himself, in fury at his father's condemnation of Antigone.

Chorus: Prophet, you were right all along.

Messenger: That is the news. The rest is up to you.

Chorus: Look! Here comes Eurydike, Kreon's unhappy consort, from the palace. Ha she heard about her child? Or is it coincidental?

Eurydike: Citizens, I heard your conversation as I was coming out to offer prayers to Athene. I drew back the bolts and here I am, dinned with news of tragedy in our family. I staggered back into the arms of my maidservants, in dread, numb. Repeat the news, please. I'll listen – I am no stranger to sorrow.

Messenger: I shall, Your Majesty, and I'll leave nothing out. Why should I soft-pedal my words and then afterwards prove a liar? The truth is always better. I accompanied your husband to the edge of the plain, where yet lies the spurned, cur-torn corpse of Polyneikes. We cleansed it with holy water after a prayer to Persephone and Pluto to hold their anger in check, buried it (what was left of it) in newly-cut young branches and dug a high tomb from his native earth. Then we went again to the stony bridal-chamber which enclosed Antigone when someone at that unconsecrated tomb heard the sound of shrill cries of grief and informed Lord Kreon. As he came closer he was bombarded with indistinct, wretched shrieks. At this he let out a lamentable sound of his own – 'O God! Am I, then, a prophet? Is this my most ill-starred journey yet? My child's voice greets me. Servants, come quickly, gather round the tomb and look. Go through that fissure in the rock at the entrance. I recognize Haemon's voice, or else the gods deceive me.' We looked as our unhappy king told us to, and at the back of the tomb we saw Antigone hanging by a rope of linen around her neck, and Haemon clinging to her in an embrace, bewailing his dead love, his father's deeds, his star-crossed marriage. When Kreon saw them, he let out a cry of desolation, approached his son and groaned: 'O poor boy, what have you done? Where are your wits? What has caused your plight? Come out, boy, I beg of you.' But the boy cast a wild eye at his father, spat in his face and would not reply. Instead he drew his two-edged sword but missed his mark, his father escaping its point. Then the wretch, raging at his father, leant on his sword and thrust half its length into his own side and, still living, took the girl's soft arms in his and embrace her. He breathed out

his life's blood as it stained her pale cheeks. The bodies lay tangled together, wedded at last in Hades, mute witnesses of the extent of the tragic consequences of ill counsel.

Chorus: What does this mean? The lady has gone without a word, good or bad.

Messenger: That astonishes me too, but I am fed on the hope that she will not wish to grieve the news of her son's death openly but prefer to indulge in a private mourning within the palace and among her maidservants. She's prudent enough not to make that mistake.

Chorus: I don't know, but this deathly silence seems as ominous as excessive wailing.

Messenger: I'll go in – perhaps, in her overcharged heart, she is hiding something from us. You are right – there may be something in her stark silence.

Chorus: Here comes the king himself, bearing (dare I say it?) a remembrance which says much, the result of his own folly, no other.

Kreon: O harsh, deadly sin! Senseless sense! See father and son, killer and killed!

Wretched counsel! My boy, so young to die! You're gone, you're dead, all my fault, not yours.

Chorus: Your eyes, it seems, have opened too late.

Kreon: Yes, I have learned wisdom and it tortures me. God has burdened me with a crushing weight, stricken me grievously. All joy is beaten out of me. Man's pain is so hard to bear.

Messenger: Lord, though you hold in your arms the cause of your grief, inside you will see yet more to wail.

Kreon: What? Still more woe?

Messenger: Your wife, mother of this dead boy, is no more, poor wretch. Fresh gashes mar her skin.

Kreon: Unappeasable Hades, why have you destroyed me? Grief-bearer, what are you telling me? Dead already, you have slain me once more. What new slaughter is this, boy, slaughter on slaughter? My wife dead?

Chorus: Look and see. The doors are wide open.

Kreon: O no! More woe greets my eyes. What has Fate in store for me? My child in my arms and another corpse before me. Poor mother, poor boy.

Messenger: Her eyes closed in perpetual darkness as she struck herself by the altar, weeping for long-dead Megareus and now her son, finally cursing you for an evil child-slayer.

Kreon: O I am beset with fear. Why has no-one taken a sword to me? A wretched man condemned to a wretched fate.

Messenger: Over Antigone's body she condemned you for both deaths.

Kreon: How did she end her life?

Messenger: With a self-inflicted blow to the heart, when with a scream she heard of her son's death.

Kreon: O God! The blame is mine, all mine. It was I who killed you, that is the truth. Servants, lead me away, get me out of here. I am nothing now, nothing.

Chorus: A sound choice, if one may Call it that when distress is so great. Present evils must be dealt with as quickly as possible.

Kreon: Go, go. The sooner I reach my final hour the better. I do not wish to look on one more day.

Chorus: That the future shall decide. We must do what is required. Let others take care of the future.

Kreon: All my desires were in that prayer.

Chorus: Pray no more. Mortals cannot escape destiny.

Kreon: Lead me away. Child, I have killed you, but not of my own will, Antigone too. I don't know where to look, where to turn. I have mismanaged everything, an unbearable destiny has overwhelmed me.

Chorus: Happiness requires wisdom above all. We must never dishonour the gods. Proud men's big words pay a big price, but old age brings wisdom.