

Sophocles

The Theban Plays

Oedipus the King

Oedipus at Colonus

Antigone

Translated, with Notes and an Introduction
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Antigone

Cast of Characters in Order of Appearance

ANTIGONE, daughter and incestuous half-sister of Oedipus

ISMENE, daughter and incestuous half-sister of Oedipus

CHORUS of fifteen Theban elders

CREON, king of Thebes, uncle and guardian of Antigone and Ismene

GUARD

HAEMON, son of Creon, cousin and fiancé of Antigone

TEIRESIAS, a blind prophet

MESSENGER, a servant of Creon

EURYNOME, wife of Creon, mother of Haemon

Nonspeaking Parts

GUARDS and ATTENDANTS

YOUNG BOY who leads Teiresias

SCENE: *In front of the royal palace of Thebes. Double doors on the stage are the entrance to the palace. One entrance, on the left side of the stage, represents the road to the site of the battle outside the city, and to Polyneices' body. The entrance on the right side of the stage is the direction of the city of Thebes.*

TIME: *The day after the end of the civil war between Eteocles and Polyneices, Oedipus' two sons. Polyneices had led a foreign force from the city of Argos to attack Thebes. The attackers were defeated, and in the fighting the brothers killed each other.*

(Enter ANTIGONE, followed by ISMENE, from the double doors of the palace.)

ANTIGONE

Ismene my true sister, born from the same mother,
is there any torment Oedipus suffered
which Zeus will not impose on us?
There is nothing—neither grief nor violence,
shame nor dishonor—no evil 5
you and I have not endured already.
And what is this new edict
the general has decreed to every citizen?
Do you know about it—or haven't you noticed
that the fate of enemies is now to be imposed on our friends? 10

ISMENE

I have heard nothing about friends, Antigone,
neither good nor bad news since
in one day we two were robbed of two brothers,
both dying together, by each other's hand.
And since the Argive army withdrew— 15
only last night—I do not even know
if my future is fortunate or doomed.

ANTIGONE

That's what I thought—that's why I brought you
outside the courtyard gates, so no one else will hear.

ISMENE

Hear what? I can see you are deeply troubled. 20

ANTIGONE

That there will be no tomb—our brothers—
Creon ordains—the thought drives me mad!—
honor for one, dishonor for the other.
Eteocles, so they say, he has treated with justice and customary law,
laid him in earth, to be honored by the dead below. 25
As for the battered corpse of Polyneices—
they say it is proclaimed to all the city—
no one is allowed to mourn or entomb,
but must leave it unburied and unwept, like carrion,
sweet pickings for the birds' pleasure. 30
Rumor says that this is what the noble Creon decrees
even for you and me—even for me!—
and he is coming to make it absolutely clear
to everyone that he does not view
the matter lightly, but for whoever does these things, 35
death by public stoning is the punishment.
This is how it stands, and you soon must show
if you are noble in yourself, or base—though noble born.

ISMENE

What can I do, my poor sister,
to ease the knot of your tormented thoughts? 40

ANTIGONE

Decide if you will share the labor and do it with me.

ISMENE

What labor? What do you plan to do?

ANTIGONE

Will your hands help mine to raise the body?

ISMENE

Is that what you intend—to bury him—even though it is forbidden?

ANTIGONE

Indeed I do—he is still my brother—and yours, 45
whatever you might prefer. I will not betray my duty to him.

ISMENE

O willful one—to go against Creon's command!

ANTIGONE

He has no right to keep me from my own.

ISMENE

No, sister—stop and consider
how our father died hated and despised 50
because of sins he himself exposed,
how he blinded himself, crushing his own eyeballs
and how our mother—his mother/wife, that dreadful double word—
ended her life with a plaited rope;
and thirdly, how our two brothers, in one day 55
slaughtered each other—their wretched fate
to end their lives at each other's hand.
Now we two alone remain—and think
how even worse our fates would be if, in defiance
of law, we disobey the decree of powerful rulers. 60
Do not forget that we are women—
it is not in our nature to oppose men
but to be ruled by their power. We must submit,
whatever they order, no matter how awful.
I shall implore those beneath the earth to understand 65
that I am forced to do these things, and pardon me.
I must obey the reigning power.
It would be mad not to do so.

ANTIGONE

Nor would I try to persuade you—nor welcome
your help later, if you should change your mind. 70
Do what seems best for you. I will bury him.
It will be a noble act, even if it leads to my death.
Loving and loved, I shall lie with him—
a pious criminal. There will be more time
for me to lie among those in the world below 75
than the longest life allows. But do as you please—
though dishonoring what the gods honor.

ISMENE

I do not wish to dishonor him,
but it is against my nature to defy the city's will.

ANTIGONE

Whatever you say, 80
I shall build a tomb for my beloved brother.

ISMENE

You go too far, I fear for you.

ANTIGONE

Don't worry about me—put your own fate right.

ISMENE

At least don't tell anyone what you intend
but keep silent—and I will do the same. 85

ANTIGONE

No—tell everyone. I insist. You will be more hated
for silence than if you shout it from the city walls.

ISMENE

You burn for deeds that chill my blood.

ANTIGONE

I know they will please the ones I most want to please.

ISMENE

If you succeed. But you crave the impossible. 90

ANTIGONE

When I have no more strength, only then I'll stop.

ISMENE

In any case, it is not right to chase the impossible.

ANTIGONE

I'll hate you if you say such things—
and the dead also will hate you, and with justice.
But whatever end comes from my rash act 95

or bad advice, could not be worse for me
than to die without honor.

ISMENE

If that is what you want, then go ahead. And always know,
in spite of your foolishness, that your dearest friends dearly love you.
(Exit ANTIGONE to the left toward the outskirts of the city and
POLYNEICES' body. ISMENE exits into the palace.)

(Enter CHORUS of fifteen Theban elders from stage right.)

PARODOS

CHORUS

Strophe A (100–116)

Sun's first rays, light more beautiful
than ever shone on seven-gated Thebes,
you shine at last,
eye of golden day,
gilding Dirce's lapping stream—
and goading with the sharpest spur
the armored and white-shielded Argive warrior
to frantic retreat.

Maddened by Polyneices'
two-edged arguments, fraternal quarrels,
they attacked our land
like shrieking eagles
with snow-white pinions
weapons fierce as talons
and helmet crested with bristling plumes.

Antistrophe A (117–26)

Over our halls they swooped
with ravening beaks,
over the seven gates, with slashing spears.
But we turned them back
before they were glutted with our blood
or Hephaestus' pine-fed fire could crown our towers.
Such a din of war surged behind—
but they did not conquer the Dragon's seed.

127–33

Zeus hates the blather of a boastful tongue;
seeing them surge forward like a flood

with their arrogance and clanging gold,
 he hurled a thunderbolt at one—
 already rushing to the highest tower
 to give a victory shout—

Strophe B (134–47)

who staggered, almost fell on the hard ground
 then righted himself, still clutching the torch,
 like a frenzied ecstatic of Bacchus
 with a whirlwind's force; but his threats were empty
 against our strongest ally and leading trace-horse,
 the great War god, who smote them all—
 to each a different death.

The seven captains of the seven gates
 and their seven matched contenders
 offered bronze trophies to Zeus;
 but not those two—accursed sons of one father
 and one mother, spears set against each other,
 javelin heads of equal power;
 they fought to the death.

Antistrophe B (148–61)

Now smiling, glorious Victory arrives
 to rejoice with all of Thebes,
 whose chariots lead the others.
 We can forget the war
 and celebrate through the night at all the temples,
 earth-shaker Bacchus leading our dance.

See, the new king comes,
 Creon, son of Menoeceus,
 a new king to bring the gods' new fortune.
 What plan will he launch,
 that he has called
 this assembly of elders to hear,
 summoning us by general decree?

(Enter CREON from the direction of the battlefield, stage left, with ATTENDANTS.)

CREON

Honored men! The gods have put us back on course,
 after the great storm that almost wrecked the city.

I have summoned you here,
apart from the others, knowing how loyally
you acknowledged the kingship of Laius,
and of Oedipus, when he came to rescue the city
and later, after his death,
stayed faithful to his children. 165

Now those two are gone in one day—
a double doom, killed by each other's polluted hand—
being of the same race and family,
the power and the throne become mine. 170

It is impossible to know a man,
his character and mind, until
he proves himself in action,
through rule and customary law. 175
I say that whoever governs the city
and does not accept the best advice
but keeps silent through fear
will always be unworthy—
and if he favors friends
over his own country, is utterly worthless. 180

I would never keep silent
if I saw danger approaching the people—
and Zeus, who sees everything, knows this—
nor ever make a friend or ally
of any man who threatened
the straight course or the safety
of our ship of state. 185
190

My laws will make the city great,
and now, in accord with them, I proclaim to every citizen
my edict concerning the children of Oedipus.
Eteocles, though the best of our spearsmen,
perished fighting for his city. 195
Him we shall bury with every ceremony
and libation for the honored dead.
That other of the same blood—I mean Polyneices,
who came out of exile, back to his fatherland
and gods, with a sacrilegious lust to burn 200

the temples and the city down, rooftop to cellar,
slaughter his family and lead the people to slavery—
it has been decreed that no one
may mourn him, nor honor him with burial;
his body must be left exposed, in shame, 205
food for dogs and birds of prey.

Such is my decree—never will I allow
evil men to be honored like the just.
But those who wish the city well,
both living and dead, will be honored by me. 210

CHORUS

This is your desire, Creon, son of Menoeceus,
concerning the enemy and the friend of the city.
We must agree that it is in your power to determine the laws
for the dead as well as for us, the living.

CREON

Make sure my commandments are kept. 215

CHORUS

Younger men could bear the burden better.

CREON

That's not what I mean—the guards for the corpse are already
assigned.

CHORUS

What then do you want us to do?

CREON

Not to side with those who disobey my orders.

CHORUS

No one is foolish enough to choose to die. 220

CREON

That would be the price of disobedience. But the hope of gain
often leads to destruction.

(Enter GUARD from direction of battlefield, stage left.)

GUARD

My lord, I cannot claim to be breathless
from hurrying on my way—
anxious thoughts often made me hesitate, 225
half-turning back. My mind
was divided—one side saying
“Fool, why go where you will only be punished?”
the other: “Wretch, while you dally, someone else
will tell Creon first—then how you’ll regret it.” 230

Brooding on these things I made slow progress
and a short road became long.
Finally, though, the side that said, “Go forward,” won.
Even if my words do me no good, I will speak.
I know that whatever happens, 235
my fate is already ordained.

CREON

What troubles you so much?

GUARD

First, I’ll speak for myself:
I did not do the deed, nor see the one who did—
you cannot put the blame on me. 240

CREON

You defend yourself well—
which makes quite clear that what you have to tell will shock.

GUARD

Yes, it’s bad—that’s why I hesitate.

CREON

Get on with it, speak out—then you can go.

GUARD

Well, here’s the story. Someone came 245
and did what’s necessary for burial—
sprinkled dry dust on the corpse, and all the proper rites.

CREON

What do you say? What man would dare—?

GUARD

That I do not know. For there was no mark
of spade or pickaxe, no earth thrown up— 250
all undisturbed and dry—nor any sign of wheel-ruts.

Whoever did this left no clues.
And when the first of the day-guard
showed us, we were all amazed and frightened.
We could not see the corpse—although it was not properly
buried 255
but covered with a layer of dust, as if to avert a curse—
and there was no sign that a wild beast
or a pack of dogs had worried or torn it.

Then the trouble began: angry words,
each guard accusing the others 260
until it almost came to blows—no one there to stop us—
for each could have been the guilty one.
But there was no proof, nothing certain,
even though we were ready to hold red-hot metal
or walk through fire and swear an oath to the gods 265
to show our innocence of the act
and our ignorance of who had done it.

At last there was nothing more we could say,
and the one who pointed this out only made us feel worse
and bow our heads in fearful assent to that truth. 270
We could not argue against him.
We knew that little good would result—
because he said the deed could not be hidden,
that you must be told. And with my usual bad luck
the lot fell on me—so here I am, 275
as unwilling to come as you to receive me,
for no one loves the bearer of bad news.

CHORUS (to CREON)

My lord, I have been wondering if this affair
is driven by the gods.

CREON (*to the CHORUS*)

Enough—before my fury overwhelms me, 280
 and you reveal yourselves as fools as well as doddering ancients.
 Intolerable to think, even for a moment,
 that the gods would have any concern for this corpse
 or honor it like that of a benefactor by decently
 covering the body of one who came to burn 285
 their pillared temples and sacred shrines,
 destroy their land and overturn their laws.
 How can you believe the gods accept such evil?
 Impossible! It's true, though, that for a long time
 there have been factions protesting against me, 290
 men meeting in secret, grumbling, reluctant to bow
 their necks to the yoke and yield to my rule.

I am convinced it was such men
 who bribed the guards to do this deed.
 For there is nothing worse for man than money. 295
 It is money which destroys cities,
 breaks families apart,
 corrupts the honest citizen
 to shameless, shameful things
 and teaches him every act of impiety. 300
 Be sure, whoever took the cash to do this deed
 in due course will pay it back in pain.

(*to the GUARD*)

As I still honor Zeus,
 I swear and tell you, guard,
 that if you do not find the one who did the burial 305
 and bring him here before me,
 not Hades alone—not mere death—will be sufficient.
 Racked and tortured, you'll sing out,
 and learn the lesson that when—and if—in future
 other bribes are offered, it's better 310
 not to snatch them, careless of their source.
 More men are ruined by such unlawful gains
 than live to have a rich old age.

GUARD

May I speak now, or shall I leave? 315

CREON

Can't you tell that even your voice offends me?

GUARD

Your hearing or your heart?

CREON

You dare define my feelings!

GUARD

I may offend your ears, but the one who did it hurts your heart.

CREON

Clearly, you talk too much! 320

GUARD

Maybe I talk too much—but I did not do the deed.

CREON

You did—and even worse—you sold your soul for silver.

GUARD

How awful—
that one who is a judge should have so little judgment.

CREON

Judge “judgment” how you please—but if
you will not say who the culprit is, 325
you'll see how your illicit gains bring only woe.
(Exit CREON through the double doors into the palace.)

GUARD

And I pray he'll be found—though whether
he is or not is a question of luck.
But you won't see me again!
Beyond my wildest hopes, I am saved. 330
My luck holds, and I give all thanks to the gods.
(Exit GUARD toward the country, stage left.)

FIRST *STASIMON*

CHORUS

Strophe A (332–41)

Many things are wonderful, but nothing
more wonderful and awesome than man.
He can travel through surging waves
and high-cresting surf
driven by stormy southern winds
across the grey and dangerous sea.
Year after year, he wears away
the substance of immortal Earth,
tirelessly working the soil
with plough and mule.

Antistrophe A (342–53)

He snares flocks of gaudy birds,
packs of wild beasts,
and whole schools of fish
in the mesh of his nets—
a cunning man indeed.
And he can dominate
every animal that roams the forest
with his skill—
yoke the shaggy troops of horse,
outwit and tame the tireless mountain bull.

Strophe B (354–64)

The art of speech, thought
as swift as the wind, and the need
to create and guard the city
he has learned well—
and how to protect himself
from bitter cold and driving rain.
His genius is endless; ingenious,
he confronts the future, able
to escape the worst sickness.
Only Hades' power—death alone—
he cannot evade.

Antistrophe B (365–83)

Master beyond expectation
of resource and invention,
sometimes his actions are evil,
sometimes good.
Following the laws of man

and swearing to honor the gods',
 he and his city prosper. But a citizen
 no longer when he rashly disobeys.
 He will be unwelcome at my hearth
 as in my thoughts—
 the man who does such things.

*(Enter GUARD from the direction of the battlefield, stage left, leading
 ANTIGONE. CHORUS continues.)*

But what do I see—is this a portent?
 I cannot deny I know her—
 this girl is Antigone,
 the unhappy child
 of her unhappy father Oedipus.
 And what does it mean? Surely you are not brought here
 for disobeying what the king decreed,
 caught in an act of madness?

GUARD

This is she—the one who did the deed.
 We caught her burying him. But where is Creon? 385

CHORUS

Here he comes from the house—and just when we need him.

*(Enter CREON through the double doors from the palace, accompanied by
 ATTENDANTS.)*

CREON

Need me for what? What is happening?

(Enter GUARD from the plain, stage left.)

GUARD

My lord, mortals should never say “never”;
 second thoughts make liars of us all.
 I insisted I’d never be back 390
 because of your threats—they really upset me!—
 but something good and unexpected
 gives the greatest pleasure,
 and here I am, though I swore not to return,
 leading this girl, who was caught red-handed 395
 at the burial rites. No need to cast lots

this time—this luck is mine alone!
Now, lord, you can take her, question
and judge and convict her. And grant, I pray,
that I go free from all these evils. 400

CREON
This one you bring here—where and how did you find her?

GUARD
Burying the man; now you know the whole story.

CREON
Are you really sure of what you say?

GUARD
I saw her covering the corpse—
doing what you had forbidden. Is that said clear enough? 405

CREON
How was she seen—and how taken?

GUARD
This is what happened. After we got there,
still brooding on your terrible threats,
and brushed away the dust that cloaked the corpse
to expose the putrefying object, 410
we went to the top of the hill, out of the wind,
to escape the contagion of its stink—
each man taunting those who did not look alert
but seemed to doze or slacken.

And so the time passed, 415
until the round lamp of the sun
with its burning heat stood high above our heads.
Then suddenly, a whirlwind rose
like a curse on the plain, tormenting the forest trees,
and all the air was clogged with dust. We bent low, 420
closed our eyes against this affliction from the gods, and endured.
It took a long time to end—and when it cleared
we saw the girl, bitterly wailing
the sharp cry of a mother bird

who grieves to see the nest empty of her young. 425
That was how she cried when she saw
the bare corpse—grief-stricken lamentation,
and evil curses on the ones who had done this.

At once she sprinkled the body with thirsty dust from the dry ground,
and lifting up a fine bronze pitcher of water, 430
honored the corpse with three libations.
Seeing this, all of us moved forward
to hold her there—which did not seem to surprise her—
and accuse her of this unlawful deed
done now and before, and she denied nothing. 435

In the same moment, I was torn
between joy and grief. It is good to escape
from trouble, but to lead a friend to punishment
is woeful. Yet I must confess that
my own safety is the most important. 440

CREON
And you, with your head bent to the ground,
do you admit or deny what you did?

ANTIGONE
I admit it—I do not deny anything.

CREON (*to the GUARD*)
You may go where you will,
no accusation against you. 445
(*GUARD exits stage left.*)
(*to ANTIGONE*)
But you—tell me, but briefly—
did you know it had been forbidden?

ANTIGONE
Of course I knew it. Everyone knew.

CREON
Yet you dared ignore those laws?

ANTIGONE

Zeus did not command these things, 450
nor did Justice, who dwells with the gods below,
ordain such laws for men.
Neither do I believe that your decrees,
or those of any other mortal, are strong enough to overrule
the ancient, unwritten, immutable laws of the gods, 455
which are not for the present alone, but have always
been—and no one knows when they began.
I would not risk the punishment of the gods
in fear of any man.

I already knew I was going to die—how could it be otherwise, 460
even if not at your command?
And if I die before my time—to me it seems a gain.
How can a person who lives as I do,
amid so many evils, not welcome death?
I do not fear that fate: it is the common lot, no special woe. 465
But if I should allow the corpse of my brother,
my mother's son, to lie unburied,
that would grieve me; nothing else.
And if it seems to you my acts are foolish,
Well—perhaps it is a fool who thinks so. 470

CHORUS

Like father, like daughter—a wild girl.
She has not learned to bend before the storm.

CREON

Do not forget that the most stubborn
are the first to fail, and sometimes
the iron bar longest-forged in the fire 475
is the one that shatters.
I have seen the bravest, most noble horse
tamed by the smallest curb. A slave
cannot afford proud thoughts when near his master.

She has already shown her arrogance 480
and flouted established law.
And now this second challenge—to do it again
and laughing, boast of her deed.

She will be the man, not I,
 if she can go victorious and unpunished! 485
 Whether she is my sister's child or even closer kin
 than any who worship Zeus at our household altar,
 neither she nor her sister will escape
 an evil fate. I'm sure that the two of them
 plotted this burial together. 490
(to his ATTENDANTS)
 Go call the other—I saw her just now inside,
 raving and out of her mind.
 Even before they act, the minds of plotters
 are overwhelmed by guilty thoughts!
 But I hate even worse the ones who try to glorify 495
 their lawless acts when caught.

ANTIGONE

What more do you want, now that you've caught me, than to kill me?

CREON

Nothing more. Because now I have everything.

ANTIGONE

Then what are you waiting for? Nothing you say
 pleases me, nor could it ever— 500
 no more than my words can please you.
 And yet what could bring me more glory and fame
 than to bury my own brother?
 Everyone would rejoice in this
 if fear did not shackle their tongues. 505
 But tyranny who has so much of everything
 can do and say whatever it wish.

CREON

You are the only Cadmean who takes this view.

ANTIGONE

They all see it as I do—but keep their mouths shut.

CREON

Aren't you ashamed to think differently from all the others? 510

ANTIGONE

There's nothing shameful in honoring one's own flesh and blood.

CREON

Can you deny it was also your own brother who died opposing him?

ANTIGONE

A brother, of the same blood and by the same mother and father.

CREON

Then how can you honor his enemy?

ANTIGONE

He is dead, and will never serve as a witness for your actions. 515

CREON

He will, if you insist on honoring them both equally.

ANTIGONE

It was not a slave who died, but a brother.

CREON

Died attacking this land, while the other defended it.

ANTIGONE

Nevertheless, Hades demands the customary rites.

CREON

But good and bad do not deserve them equally. 520

ANTIGONE

Who knows how these things are judged below?

CREON

An enemy is never a friend, even when dead.

ANTIGONE

My nature is drawn to love; I cannot hate either.

CREON

Well, follow them below if you must, and love them
as much as you please. While I live, no woman will rule me. 525

CHORUS

Look—here by the gate, weeping,
stands Ismene, her fond sister,
with darkened brow,
flushed face,
and tender cheeks glazed by tears. 530

(Enter ISMENE, led by ATTENDANTS, through the double doors of the palace.)

CREON

You, who slipped unseen into my house
like a snake to drink my blood! Unwittingly,
I nourished two rebels, enemies of my throne.
Tell me, will you admit your part in this burial,
or insist your innocence? 535

ISMENE

I confess to the deed—if she agrees
to let me take my share of the blame.

ANTIGONE

Justice does not grant your claim.
You did not want to help me in my task—nor will I share it.

ISMENE

But now I would be proud to sail with you 540
upon this sea of troubles.

ANTIGONE

Hades, and those below, bear witness to the truth.
I cannot love false friends who only offer words, not acts.

ISMENE

Sister, do not disgrace me—let me die
with you; let us consecrate the dead together. 545

ANTIGONE

No need to die with me—nor claim the credit
for what you did not do. My death will be enough.

ISMENE

But what will my life be worth without you?

ANTIGONE

Ask Creon—it's he you care about.

ISMENE

Why do you torment me? It does not ease you. 550

ANTIGONE

It pains me if you think I mock you.

ISMENE

There must be some way I could help you!

ANTIGONE

Save yourself and flee—I shall not blame you.

ISMENE

Awful—that I cannot share your fate!

ANTIGONE

You chose to live, I chose to die. 555

ISMENE

At least I tried to dissuade you.

ANTIGONE

Your choice seemed right to some—others agreed with mine.

ISMENE

Yet we are equally wrong.

ANTIGONE

Be brave. You will live—but my life already
ended long ago, in service to the dead. 560

CREON

I must say that one of these girls has just shown how foolish she is;
the other has been that way since her birth.

ISMENE

It's true, my lord—whatever sense I once had,
my misery has taken away.

CREON

It went when you allied yourself with evil people. 565

ISMENE

But what would life be worth for me, alone without her?

CREON

Don't even mention her. She no longer exists.

ISMENE

But will you kill your own son's future bride?

CREON

There are other fields for him to plough.

ISMENE

But not so well-matched as she to him. 570

CREON

I forbid my sons to marry evil brides.

ISMENE

Dearest Haemon, how your father demeans you!

CREON

And how you madden me—with this talk of marriage.

ISMENE

Will you really deny this girl to your own son?

CREON

It is Death who will stop the marriage. 575

ISMENE

So it is already decided that she has to die?

CREON

Yes—decided for you, decided by me.

No more delays. Servants, take them both inside.

From now on they must behave like women,

not roaming free. Even the bravest try to run away 580

when they feel that Hades is near.

(Exit ATTENDANTS, with ANTIGONE and ISMENE, through the double doors into the palace. CREON remains.)

SECOND STASIMON

CHORUS

Strophe A (582–92)

How fortunate, those who do not know
the bitter taste of evil,

whose house was never shaken by the gods

nor their whole family doomed—

assailed as by an earthquake,

a landslide, a tidal wave

leaving everything in ruins,

a wild Thracian wind

scooping black sand from the ocean's depths

to batter the rocky shore

which groans under its onslaught.

Antistrophe A (593–603)

Ancient and present woes

oppress the house of Labdacus.

From one generation to the next

there is no escape from the gods' curse.

Even now, these last shoots

from the stock of Oedipus

which promised light and hope

are smothered in bloody dust

by the gods of the Underworld;

by wild words and Furies in the mind.

Strophe B (604–14)

Great god Zeus, even the most

arrogant act of man cannot restrain your power.

All-conquering Sleep cannot overcome you

nor the wheeling months of Heaven.

You reign, ageless master of time,
 from the marble brilliance of Olympus.
 In the present and the future,
 as in the past, the same law prevails:
 that man who thinks himself
 the most blessed and fortunate
 will fall the furthest.

Antistrophe B (615–25)

Hope ranges the world
 and cheers most men at times,
 but can also deceive
 with fool's gold and lustful fantasies,
 until the dreamer stumbles into what seems cold ash
 and burns his feet in fire.

It was a wise man who told
 how evil shows the fairest face
 to those whom the gods will destroy.
 They soon meet their doom—
 live but a short time before disaster. 625

(Enter Haemon from the city, stage right. The CHORUS continues.)

Here is Haemon, your youngest and last-born.
 Does he come grieving
 for the fate of Antigone
 and because he will be cheated
 of his marriage bed and bride? 630

CREON

We'll know soon enough—with no need for seers.
 Tell me, child, now you've heard my final judgment on her,
 have you come in anger against your father,
 or will you accept my decision, and still love me?

HAEMON

Father, I am your son, and what you say is good. 635
 Your advice will keep me on the right path
 and I shall heed it. No marriage
 could be more important than your guidance.

CREON

Yes, son, it is best that you want
 to follow your father in everything. 640

This is what men pray for: to have a household
of obedient, loyal children
who will defend their father against all enemies
and respect his friends.
The man who begets worthless children—what can you say 645
except that he has made a stick for his own back,
become a laughing stock to all the world?

And never, my boy, be deceived by the pleasure
a woman can give; that fire
soon dies down, and nothing is worse 650
than sharing your bed with someone who hates you.
A false lover is worse than a festering sore.
Spit her out like an enemy, like a piece of rotten food—
let this girl find her true husband in Hades.
I caught her openly disobeying— 655
the only person in the city who dared to do so—
and shall not go back on my word to the people.
I will execute her. Let her implore Zeus, the god of kinship,
as much as she likes; if I allow my own family
to flout my orders, everyone would do the same. 660

The man who rules his household justly
will also be a righteous citizen.
But the one who tries to overstep the rule of law
or impose his will on the leaders,
gets no applause from me. 665
It is essential to obey in both small and great matters
the man the city appoints, whether his demands are just,
or quite the opposite. I am confident
that he would command or serve equally well,
would stand his ground in the front line, 670
brave comrade and defender.
There is no greater evil than anarchy,
which destroys cities, ruins houses,
breaks ranks, and leads to rout and retreat.
In the final analysis, 675
it is obedience which saves most men,
and thus we must preserve the proper order of things.
And there is no way we can allow a woman to triumph.

Better to be defeated by any sort of man
than seen as weaker than a woman. 680

CHORUS

Unless old age has robbed us of our wits,
it seems to us that what you say makes sense.

HAEMON

Father, it is the gods who give to men
the highest gift, the power of reason.
I do not know how—and find it hard—to say 685
that you are not always right, and
there might be other ways to understand this matter.

It is my duty to observe and listen
to what the people talk about and blame you for.
Dread of your icy glance stops every citizen 690
from any comment which might displease you.

But in the darkness, I hear them, their murmurings,
the city weeping with pity for her—
the girl who least deserves to perish
for such a glorious deed—she, 695
who when her own brother fell in bloody battle
would not leave him lie unburied, to the mercies
of feral dogs and carrion birds.
Is she not worthy of honor, and a crown of gold?
Such are the muffled rumors that spread. 700

For me, father, there is nothing
more precious than your prosperity.
What greater glory for children than their father's renown,
or what for a father than the fame of his children?
But, father—do not maintain one fixed opinion, 705
insisting that it and no other is right;
for whoever believes that he knows best
and no one else can equal him in word or deed,
such men are exposed as empty vessels.
It is no shame for a wise man 710
to be flexible and learn from others.

You've seen how trees on the banks of a stream
swollen with winter rain, which bend to its force, survive,

but those that fight the storm die uprooted.
It's the same if the captain does not adjust his sails 715
to a sudden wind—his ship is overturned,
his decks are swamped, and his keel goes upwards.
You too, should calm your anger and consider.
I know I am only young, but
let me give my opinion. Of course 720
it would be wonderful if men were born wise—
but that's not what usually happens.
The best thing is to listen to good advice.

CHORUS

It is right, Lord, if his words seem just, that you should learn from him
as much as he from you. What you both say makes sense. 725

CREON (to CHORUS)

Is someone of our age to be taught about
the laws of human nature by such a stripling?

HAEMON

I do not speak of anything unrighteous. And though I am young,
judge me, please, by my actions, not my years.

CREON

Such as honoring those who cause disruption? 730

HAEMON

I do not say you should honor anyone evil.

CREON

But is she not infected by that sickness?

HAEMON

Her fellow citizens of Thebes deny it.

CREON

Is the city to tell me how to govern?

HAEMON

Now you sound like someone even younger than me! 735

CREON

Am I to rule this land as I wish or according to others?

HAEMON

The city does not belong to one man alone.

CREON

Does not the city belong to he who rules?

HAEMON

You would be the perfect ruler for an empty desert.

CREON (*to the CHORUS*)

He might be fighting as a woman's ally! 740

HAEMON

Are you a woman?—because it's your side I'm on.

CREON

How? By attacking your father? You are vicious!

HAEMON

I see it's not just matters of law that you're wrong about.

CREON

Wrong—to protect my god-given authority?

HAEMON

You do not protect it when you flout the gods' laws. 745

CREON

O vile creature—even lower than a woman!

HAEMON

You will not catch me sinking to shameful actions.

CREON

But everything you say is in defense of her.

HAEMON

—and in defense of you, and me, and the gods below.

CREON

Do not think that while she lives you'll marry her. 750

HAEMON

Her death will lead to another.

CREON

Are you arrogant enough to threaten me?

HAEMON

How can I make threats against such empty nonsense?

CREON

Your empty so-called wisdom will end in tears.

HAEMON

If you were not my father, I'd say you can't think straight. 755

CREON

What arrogance, you woman's lackey!

HAEMON

You want to speak, but will not listen.

CREON

Is that so? Listen, I swear by the gods of Olympus
that you'll gain nothing by reviling and opposing me.

(to his ATTENDANTS)

Bring her out, that hateful wretch—and let her die 760
here, before her bridegroom's eyes, at once.

(ATTENDANTS exit through the double doors into the palace.)

HAEMON

Don't think you can do it in my presence
or that you'll have the pleasure of seeing me watch it—
nor ever see me again. Do what you want
with your mad friends—if you have any friends left. 765

(He rushes off toward the plain, stage left.)

CHORUS

He's gone. Young men's anger is swift and fierce,
and their grief almost too heavy to bear.

CREON

Let him go. He can do—or dream—the act of a brave man,
but nothing will save the two girls from their fate.

CHORUS

Surely you will not kill them both? 770

CREON

No, you're right. Not the one who did nothing.

CHORUS

And what fate do you intend for the other?

CREON

I will lead her on desolate paths
into a hidden rocky cave and leave her there alive
with the least food the law requires, 775
so that the city can escape pollution.
And there, praying to Hades, the god of the Underworld,
the only god she honors, perhaps
she'll manage to survive—or else will finally learn
how futile it was to put her trust in Hades. 780

THIRD STASIMON

CHORUS

Strophe A (781–90)

Eros, invincible in battle,
Eros, consumer of riches,
who slumbers through the night
on a maiden's soft cheeks,
ranges the furthest seas and visits 785
lonely huts on the high pastures.
No one escapes—neither immortal gods
nor men whose lives are short as those
of mayflies that live for only a day—
the one you touch is driven mad. 790

Antistrophe A (791–800)

Even just men's thoughts you warp to crime,
 stirring conflict between kindred—
 between father and son.
 But triumphant desire
 that shines from the eyes 795
 of the newly married bride
 is stronger than the greatest laws.
 Unconquerable Aphrodite
 sits among the gods
 and plays her games of power. 800

KOMMOS

(ANTIGONE is brought from the palace through the double doors by
 guards.)

And now I too am overcome
 and carried beyond the realm of loyalty and law,
 no longer able to hold back my tears
 when I see Antigone being led toward
 the bridal chamber where she will sleep with Death. 805

ANTIGONE Strophe B (806–22)

Behold me, fellow citizens
 of my ancestral land,
 walking the last mile, the last road,
 seeing the sun's light
 which I shall never see again 810
 for the last time.
 Hades, the god of death,
 who puts us all to sleep,
 leads me living to the banks of Acheron.
 No wedding songs are sung for me 815
 as I become his bride.

CHORUS

What glory and praise you deserve
 as you depart for the cavern of death—
 not struck by fatal disease nor
 slaughtered in war, but still alive 820
 and of your own free will—you alone
 of all mortals will enter Hades.

ANTIGONE Antistrophe B (823–38)

Like that story I heard of our Phrygian guest,
 the daughter of Tantalus—of how,
 on the peak of Sipylus, she was enclosed 825
 and hedged about, as ivy clings to a wall,
 by a stony accretion; and how,
 they say, the rain and snow that fall
 on the mountain top erode her form,
 and the ceaseless tears 830
 that pour from beneath her brows
 become streams down the hills. Like her,
 in a rocky cave, the gods lull me to sleep.

CHORUS

But she was a goddess, born of gods
 and we are mortal, of mortal stock. 835
 Yet it is a great thing to have it said,
 when you die, that your destiny
 was equal to that of a god.

ANTIGONE Strophe C (839–56)

By the gods of my father I ask:
 why do you mock me— 840
 not even waiting until I have gone,
 but still here before your eyes?
 O city! city!—
 you propertied men of the city!
 But fountains of Dirce, 845
 and holy groves of Thebes with its many chariots,
 you at least can testify how no one laments me,
 and by what an aberration of justice
 I go to the heaped stones of my prison and unnatural tomb.
 What a wretched creature I am— 850
 with nowhere to dwell, neither
 among mortals or corpses,
 not the living nor the dead.

CHORUS

Boldly you pressed to the furthest limit,
my child, until you stumbled against 855
the awesome throne of Justice—as if doomed
to pay the price of your father's sins.

ANTIGONE

Strophe C (858–75)

Ah! now you touch
on the worst thing of all—
that tripled pity, pain, and anguish I feel 860
at the thought of my father,
the dreadful fate
of the noble house of Labdacus,
and the tainted madness of that marriage bed
where my poor accursed mother slept 865
incestuously with my father, her own son.
Those were my parents—
already at birth I was doomed
to join them, unmarried, in death.
Brother, your ill-fated wedding 870
killed us both—though I am yet alive.

CHORUS

Your piety is admirable. But
the man who holds the power
must also be acknowledged.
Stubborn willfulness destroyed you.

EPODE (876–82)

ANTIGONE

No funeral hymns, no marriage songs; unloved,
unwept and wretched, I am led along the ordained path.
Never again shall I, miserable one,
raise my eyes toward the sacred eye
and light of the sun— 880
no dear friend is here to mourn me
nor weep for my harsh fate.

CREON

And who indeed do you think would not lament
and groan before their death, if there were any point in it?

(to GUARDS)

Take her away at once—lead her 885
to the covered tomb we prepared, as I ordered,
and leave her there alone. She can decide
whether she wants to die, or bury herself alive.
There will be no bloodguilt for us—and
she will lose her place on the face of the earth. 890

ANTIGONE

Tomb, bridal chamber, deep-dug final home,
where I go to find my own—
my kinsmen who have died,
whom the great Persephassa accepts among the dead.
I, the last one left, and the most wretched, 895
descend before my life has reached its natural end.
When I am there, how fervently I hope
that my father will greet me lovingly,
as will you, dear mother, and Eteocles my brother,
for with my own hands I washed your bodies, 900
adorned you, and made all
the funerary libations. And now, Polyneices,
it is for tending your body that I am rewarded thus.
And yet, to those who understand such things, I did well.

Believe me—not even if my own children 905
or husband lay dead and rotting
would I have done this thing and defied the city.
What law do I invoke by speaking thus?
If my husband died, I could find another.
Another man could give me another child. 910
But with my mother and father buried in Hades
no brother could ever come into being from them.

This is the law I obey, honoring you above anything else,
though Creon believed I was wrong
to dare that terrible act, dear brother. 915
And now he leads me away, his cruel grasp
depriving me of my rightful future—

a marriage bed and the rearing of children.
Thus I am cursed, deserted by my friends,
and must go, alive, to the deep-dug house of the dead. 920

I do not know what holy law I have transgressed
nor who will be my ally
if I cannot turn to the gods for help
and my piety is called irreverence. If I have erred,
and my punishment seems good to the gods 925
I must accept it, and forgive them.
But if my judges are wrong, then let them suffer
even worse evils than they impose on me.

CHORUS

Still the same storm, the same fierce winds,
batter her soul. 930

CREON

Let them take her quickly away—
or they'll regret their slowness.

ANTIGONE

These words
are my sentence of death.

CREON

I give you no encouragement to hope 935
that it will not be fulfilled.

ANTIGONE

City of my fathers, land of Thebes,
you ancestral gods and Theban lords:
look well upon me
as I am led away, unhesitating; 940
I who am the last of your royal family.
See what I suffer—and from what sort of men—
for my obedience to the laws of piety.
(ANTIGONE is led out by GUARDS, stage left.)

FOURTH STASIMON

CHORUS

Strophe A (944–54)

Even lovely Danaë was forced to exchange
 the light of heaven for that sealed bronze room
 where she was hidden, guarded, and tamed.
 Yet though of a family as honored as yours,
 dear child, it was her fate
 to be the vessel of Zeus' golden seed.
 The power of destiny
 is a fearsome thing—neither wealth
 nor Ares and the force of arms,
 nor towering walls nor a dark ship
 on a wild ocean will help you escape.

Antistrophe A (956–65)

And the short-tempered son of Dryas,
 king of the Edonians, as punishment
 for his mocking taunts was tamed by Dionysus
 and penned into a rocky prison
 where the surging strength of his madness ebbed 960
 as he learned the power of the god he had provoked.
 He thought he could halt those troupes of maenads—
 Bacchic women with their pitchy torches,
 calling *Eoui!*—but brought the wrath
 of the flute-playing Muses down on his head. 965

Strophe B (966–76)

And by the dark rocks
 where two seas clash,
 on the shores of Bosphorus
 and at Thracian Salmydessus,
 Ares witnessed the savage attack 970
 on the sons of Phineus by his new wife,
 saw how viciously—
 weaving comb and spindle
 like daggers in her blood-stained hands—
 she pierced their eyeballs 975
 and blinded them both.

Antistrophe B (977–87)

The doomed boys wept for their wretched state,
 their birth from that unhappy marriage,
 and for their mother, banished to a stony place.
 In her own right she had been born 980

queen of the Erechthids
and nurtured in windy caves
in a land of mountains and horses
half-way around the world,
a daughter of the wind-god Boreas. 985
Yet even on her, my child,
the ageless Fates turned their malevolence.

(Enter the blind prophet, TEIRESIAS, led by a BOY, from the direction of the city, stage right.)

TEIRESIAS
Lords of Thebes, we have shared the road,
two finding the way with the eyes of one—
this is how the blind must travel, with a guide. 990

CREON
What news do you bring, ancient Teiresias?

TEIRESIAS
I will tell you—and you must trust the prophet and obey.

CREON
I have not disobeyed your will in the past.

TEIRESIAS
And that is why you steered the city on the right course.

CREON
I know it, and can testify to your help. 995

TEIRESIAS
But know now that you are walking on the razor's edge.

CREON
What is it? I tremble at your words.

TEIRESIAS
You will learn, when you hear what my art reveals.
For as I sat on my ancient seat of augury
where all the birds come, 1000
I heard something strange,

an evil screeching I could not understand,
 from birds who tore at each other with murderous claws.
 The rush of their wings beat a strong message.
 At once, fearful, I tried to make a burnt offering 1005
 on the altar. But from the sacrificial victim
 Hephaestus accepted nothing—
 the fire would not kindle. A noxious liquid
 trickled onto the embers, smoke rose,
 flesh spattered, the gallbladder exploded 1010
 and the fat melted away, leaving the thighbones bare.
 Such was the failure of my attempt at prophecy, as this child
 explained—
 for he is my guide, as I am a guide for others.
 And it is your fault; the city is sick because of your will. 1015
 All the altars and hearths of the city
 are tainted by birds and dogs with carrion
 from the ill-fated body of Oedipus' son.
 That is why the gods will not accept our sacrificial prayers
 nor our burnt offerings, 1020
 and why the birds do not call out good omens clearly—
 their voices are clogged with the blood and fat of a slain man.

Consider this, my child.
 Every man can make mistakes.
 But though he errs, he 1025
 can leave behind his folly and misfortune
 and heal the wrong he did, if he is not self-willed—
 stubbornness is always stupidity.
 Yield to the dead, do not keep killing
 the one already dead. Where is the valor in that? 1030
 I wish you well—my words are well meant—
 to learn from a good adviser is to your advantage.

CREON

Old man, you all aim your arrows at me
 like archers at a target. Even from your plots
 I am not safe—all you fortune-tellers work against me, 1035
 for years I have been bought and sold like merchandise.
 Profit from me as much as you wish—barter
 the white-gold electrum from Sardis, and Indian gold.
 But you will never cover that man with a tomb—

not even to hide his corpse from the eagles of Zeus, 1040
who would tear at the rotten flesh and carry those gobbets up
to gorge at the foot of his holy throne.
Not even in dread of such pollution
will I allow that man to be buried.
No human act can ever defile the gods, as I know well. 1045
And even the cleverest mortals fail shamefully, old man Teiresias,
when they exaggerate the worth of shameful things for profit's sake.

TEIRESIAS
Alas, is there a man who knows or understands—

CREON
What? What grand statement are you making?

TEIRESIAS
—understands how far the power of reason is our best
possession. 1050

CREON
As far, I guess, as to know that thoughtlessness is the greatest ill.

TEIRESIAS
And yet you are infected with that same sickness.

CREON
I do not wish to insult the seer!

TEIRESIAS
But that is what you do, when you say my prophecies are false.

CREON
All seers are too fond of money. 1055

TEIRESIAS
And all tyrants are greedy, and only love gain.

CREON
Do you not know that you are speaking of your ruler?

TEIRESIAS

I know it very well. You rule because through me you saved the city.

CREON

You may be wise, seer, but you love to make trouble.

TEIRESIAS

You will goad me to say what's best left in my thoughts. 1060

CREON

Speak if you must, as long as you don't ask payment.

TEIRESIAS

Is that what you think is my motive?

CREON

Know well that you cannot bend me to your purposes.

TEIRESIAS

And you should know as well, that you will not live
through many more swift circuits of the sun 1065
before you yourself will give, in exchange for corpses,
a child of your loins, a corpse of your own flesh and blood.
For you have thrust below one who belongs above,
blasphemously entombed a living person,
and at the same time have kept above ground 1070
a corpse belonging to the chthonic gods—
unburied, unmourned, unholy.

Neither you nor the heavenly powers should have a part in this,
but your violence has forced it. Now, sent by those gods,
the foul avenging Furies, hunters of Hell, 1075
lie in wait to inflict the same evils on you.
Do you still think I have been bribed to say these things?
Believe me—not much time will pass before
your home will resound with the wailing of women and men.
The cities are seething with hatred against you 1080
as the torn flesh of their dead sons
with its unholy carrion stench
is brought by savage dogs and raptor birds back to their hearths.
How you provoke me! until, like an archer,

wrathful, I loose these arrows into your heart— 1085
deadly arrows whose fiery sting you cannot escape.
(*to the BOY, guiding him*)
Child, lead me back to my own house, let this man
vent his anger on younger men;
and may he learn to speak more wisely,
and think better thoughts, than he does now. 1090
(*Exit TEIRESIAS and BOY toward the city, stage right.*)

CHORUS

Lord, the man has gone, but has prophesied dreadful things.
And we know—since the time our hair was glossy-black
until today when we're all white-haired—
that in what he foretells for the city, he is never wrong.

CREON

I know this too, and it troubles me greatly. 1095
It is terrible to yield—but stubbornly to resist
and bring ruin upon yourself—that also is terrible.

CHORUS

Child of Menoeceus, you must seek good advice.

CREON

What should I do? You tell me, and I will obey you.

CHORUS

Go—go, release the girl from her closed chamber 1100
and build a tomb for the one lying exposed.

CREON

This is what you think I should do—give in, surrender?

CHORUS

Be as quick as you can, my lord, for the gods' avengers,
the swift-footed Harms, come to cut down the sinner.

CREON

It is very hard to change my mind—but I shall try. 1105
Necessity cannot be fought against.

CHORUS

Go now, at once—and do it yourself, do not leave it to others!

CREON

Immediately—I'm going, just as I am! And you servants—

go, go—every one of you. Take axes, hurry,
rush to that place—you can see it from here.

1110

And now, my thoughts have cleared, I know
that it is I who must free her, being the one who bound her.
The best way to live, I admit it at last,
is in obedience to the customary laws.

(Exit CREON and his ATTENDANTS toward the plain, stage left.)

FIFTH STASIMON

CHORUS

Strophe A (1115–25)

You have many names—
you who were the glorious child
of Cadmus' daughter
and loud-thundering Zeus;
you who keep watch on far-famed Italy,
who on the bosomy hills of Demeter's Eleusis
are worshipped by many—

1120

O Bacchus,
god of the mother-city of Bacchic Thebes
on the banks of the swift stream Ismenus,
where the wild dragons' teeth were scattered—

1125

Antistrophe A (1126–36)

Beyond the double-crested rock,
with their smoky torches
they follow you, the Corycian nymphs,
your Bacchants;
and by the Castalian spring,
on the ivy-hidden slopes
of Nysa's hills, and the green
vine-covered headlands
they follow; and all through the streets
of Thebes you can hear ring out
their ecstatic voices and cries of *Euoi!*

1130

1135

Strophe B (1137–45)

Thebes, which you honor
more than any other city—

as your mother did,
 she who was destroyed by a thunderbolt— 1140
 now that its citizens are gripped by plague,
 stride on your healing feet
 across the slopes of Parnassus
 and the groaning strait,
 to cleanse and to save us. 1145

Antistrophe B (1146–54)

O chorus leader of the stars
 whose breath streams fire,
 guardian of the night's voices,
 son begotten of Zeus—
 Lord, manifest, appear to us 1150
 with your troupe of Thyiads,
 frenzied and raving,
 who dance through the night
 for the giver of all, the great god Iacchus.

(Enter MESSENGER from the direction of the plain, stage left.)

MESSENGER
 Neighbors of Cadmus and the house of Amphion, 1155
 there is no rank or style of human life
 I would choose to praise or criticize.
 A man's bad luck or good fortune
 will change from day to day—
 not even a seer can prophesy what might happen. 1160
 Take Creon—whom I once thought deserved to be envied,
 who saved the Cadmean land from enemies
 and was proclaimed its monarch,
 set everything to rights and gloried in his children—
 now he has thrown it all away. 1165
 It seems to me that when a man loses his joy in life,
 his reason to live, he becomes a breathing corpse.
 No matter how great the treasure and power he achieves,
 I cannot think they would have more worth
 than a puff of smoke, once his joy in life has gone. 1170

CHORUS

What new grief for our king do you come to report?

MESSENGER

Dead—they are dead. And the living are to blame for their deaths.

CHORUS

Who lies dead? And who killed them?

MESSENGER

Haemon is dead—

his blood spilled by a kindred hand. 1175

CHORUS

His father's hand? Or someone else?

MESSENGER

It was his own act—in fury at his father for the murder.

CHORUS

O seer, your prophecy was true, and is accomplished!

MESSENGER

That is what happened; now you must consider what should be done.

CHORUS

Yes, and look—here comes poor Eurydice, 1180

Creon's wife. Either she heard us from the house,

talking of her child, or she arrives by chance.

(Enter EURYDICE through the double doors from the palace.)

EURYDICE

All of you here, citizens—I heard your words

as I came to the door, on my way

to offer prayers to the goddess Pallas— 1185

and as I lifted the bar of the gate,

about to open it, a cry of evil tidings

to my household assailed my ears. I fell back

into the arms of my women, fainting.

Whatever it was I thought I heard, say it again 1190

and I will listen. I am used to bad news.

MESSENGER

Dear mistress, I was there, and will describe
what I saw, leaving nothing out.
Why should I soothe you with words
later proved false? It is always better to tell the truth. 1195

As his guide, I went with your husband
up to the furthest part of the plain, where still
unmourned, the body of Polyneices lay, ravaged by dogs.
We entreated Pluto, and the goddess of the crossroads,
to hold back their anger and show mercy. 1200
We laved the remains with purifying water,
broke off branches to burn what was left
and heaped a high mound of his native earth
for a tomb. Then we turned toward the maiden's
stone-paved prison, the chamber of Hades' bride. 1205

Already, from afar, one of us had heard
a wailing voice from that accursed place
and came to tell our master Creon.
The garbled anguished sounds grew louder
the nearer we approached. He also groaned 1210
and loudly cried: "How wretched I am!
How could I foretell I was about to tread
the most unhappy path of all I've walked?
It is my son's voice that greets me! Servants,
hurry, closer, look—go to the tomb 1215
where the stones that sealed its mouth were pulled away
and tell me if I am right to recognize that voice as Haemon's—
or if the gods deceive me."

Obeying our master's desperate commands
we went deeper into the tomb 1220
and there beheld the girl—hung by the neck
in a noose of her linen veil—
and he, pressed close, clutching around her waist,
moaning and wailing the loss of his bride to the Underworld,
the deeds of his father, and his doomed marriage. 1225
When Creon saw him, a horrid cry burst from his lips
and he moved toward him, calling,
"Poor unhappy boy, what have you done?"

What passed through your mind?
You have gone mad and destroyed yourself. 1230
Come out, my child, I beg you.”
But the boy glared at him wildly
and kept silent—then spat in his face
and drew his double-edged sword. When his father
ran to escape, the blow missed. 1235
The doomed boy, furious with himself, curved
his body forward and thrust the sword deep into his own side.
Half-conscious, he lifted his weakened arms to embrace the girl
and choking, coughed a stream of blood onto her white cheek.
His corpse enfolding hers, 1240
their marriage rites at last achieved in Hades—
a sight to demonstrate how lack of wisdom
is mankind’s greatest curse.
(Exit Eurydice through the double doors into the palace.)

CHORUS

What do you think of that?
She went back inside without a word, neither good nor bad. 1245

MESSENGER

I am as surprised as you. But I hope,
though having heard such awful news of her child,
she will not cry her lamentations throughout the city,
but stay at home and grieve with her maidservants.
Her judgment is good enough not to make that mistake. 1250

CHORUS

I am not convinced. To me, both heavy silence
and too loud a show of grief seem equally ominous.

MESSENGER

Soon we’ll know if she is holding back
some secret plan in her angry heart;
I’ll go inside the house to see—you’re right, 1255
such strange silence is troubling.
(Exit MESSENGER through the double doors into the palace.)

CREON and ATTENDANTS enter carrying the body of HAEMON from
the plain, stage left.)

CHORUS

And here indeed comes the lord himself,
bearing in his arms the undeniable token
of the madness—if I am allowed to say this—
and the error which is his alone, no one else's. 1260

CREON

Strophe A (1261–83)

Alas, the blunders of deluded minds,
stubborn and deadly!
Behold us, closest kinsmen—
yet killer and killed.
Alas for all my misdirected and ill-fated plans. 1265
O my child, you died too young.
Ah, such grief!
A life cut short
through my stupidity, not yours.

CHORUS

At last you learn what justice is—but too late. 1270

CREON

Alas, the wretched man I am,
the bitter lesson learned at last:
as if a god had struck a mighty blow to my head
that forced me down a wild road,
stupefied, to overturn and trample my joys. 1275
Ah, such misery,
the weary burden of mortals!

(Enter Messenger through the double doors of the palace.)

MESSENGER

My master, you come with laden arms already,
I can see that (*indicating HAEMON's body*)—but you will soon find
even worse things, there in the house. 1280

CREON

What could be worse than the pain I now feel?

MESSENGER

The queen your wife is dead, the mother of this corpse—
true mother, poor lady; her death wounds fresh.

MESSENGER

Yes—because you have been blamed for both sons' deaths—
denounced by your dead wife before she died.

CREON

What did she do, how did she kill herself?

MESSENGER

With her own hand she struck into her heart
when she heard the bitter cries mourning her child.

CREON

Only to me the guilt belongs, these acts
can never be blamed on another mortal.

It was I who killed you,
I, the most wretched—I admit it. 1320

Servants, lead me away now,
as swiftly as can be done,
lead me out of here—I
who have ceased to exist,
who have become less than nothing.

CHORUS

What you say is good—if any good can come from such evil.
Get away as soon as you can, when evil is underfoot.

CREON Antistrophe B (1328–53)

Come, let it come,
let the highest one,
he who grants the best death,
come for me, bring my last day.
Come, let it come, the finest fate—
that I may never see another day.

CHORUS

What happens will happen. Now, you must do what is needed for the present. The future lies in the hands of others.

CREON

But I have prayed so hard for that wish to be fulfilled.

CHORUS

Do not pray for anything.
Mortals have no deliverance from fated misfortune.

CREON

Lead me—a vain and worthless man,
away from here. Oh, my son! 1340
Unknowing, unwilling, I killed you,
and you as well, my poor wife.
Oh, the agony!
To whom can I turn, where can I look?
All that I touch goes warped and askew 1345
and once again, cruel fate
has leapt onto my back, come down on my head.
(Exit CREON and his ATTENDANTS into the palace.)

CHORUS

Reason is the greatest part of happiness,
and knowing not to sin against the gods,
but to honor and revere them. 1350
The mighty boasts of haughty men
bring down the punishment of mighty blows—
from which at last, in old age, wisdom comes.

Antigone

In the choruses there is not a one-to-one correlation between the Greek lines and our translation. When there is a note on a line in the chorus and there is a discrepancy or an ambiguity, we bracket the line number [] and give the original Greek line.

1: Antigone and Ismene are full sisters. Both are the incestuous children of Oedipus and Jocasta. Oedipus is the son of Jocasta and Laius. Their mother, Jocasta,

committed suicide on learning of the incest. Oedipus blinded himself and subsequently died as an exile in Colonus, in Athens. See *Oedipus at Colonus*.

3: Zeus is king of the gods and rules from Mount Olympus.

8: Creon assumed the throne on the death of Eteocles and Polyneices. As king, he would also be commander-in-chief of the military.

10: “Friends” especially includes Polyneices, her brother. The enemies are the defeated Argive invaders. Although Polyneices led the Argives against the city, she considers him a Theban whose body should receive proper reverence.

15: Argive refers to Argos, a city-state in the Peloponnese where Polyneices raised the troops to invade Thebes.

23: Burial was of utmost importance in Greek religion and culture, and both her brothers had to be buried according to law and custom, regardless of any crime or guilt; see Introduction, pp. liii–liv.

24: The issue of god’s law versus man’s law is the major theme of this play.

32: The next of kin had the primary obligation to bury the dead.

36: Public stoning was rare in the Greek world. However, it is often threatened in Greek tragedy, so it probably represents the idea of a method of execution in preclassical times.

38: It is a religious and moral requirement of Greek society to bury one’s kin. Antigone is saying that aristocrats bury their kin and that failure to do so would make even an aristocrat base and ignoble.

49–52: These lines suggest that Oedipus died in Thebes, unhonored. In *Oedipus at Colonus* he dies at Athens, honored by the gods. *Antigone* was written ten to fifteen years before *Oedipus the King* and almost forty years before *Oedipus at Colonus*. Sophocles was not consistent in his treatment of the myth.

54: Jocasta hanged herself (*Oedipus the King* 1263–64).

65: The gods of the Underworld demand that the dead be buried; they inflict punishment on those who neglect this duty.

72: Antigone is willing to disobey man’s law to uphold the law of the gods that demand burial for one’s kin, but she acknowledges that she is bound by man’s law and may be executed.

100: It is customary to invoke the sun in a hymn of victory and celebration.

[104]: Dirce and Ismenus are Thebes’ two rivers.

[106]: “Argive warrior” stands for the entire Argive army.

[119]: Thebes had seven gates. The attacking Argive army had seven main leaders, including Polyneices, each of whom attacked one gate.

[123]: Hephaestus is the god of the forge and the volcano and is thus also associated with fire.

[126]: The “Dragon’s seed” are the men of Thebes who were born from dragon’s teeth sown by Cadmus, the founder of Thebes; see Introduction, p. xxvi.

[128]: This boastful attacker was named Capaneus, who swore that even Zeus himself would not keep him from sacking Thebes (Aeschylus *Seven against Thebes* 424). Because of his *hubris*, Zeus struck him dead with a lightning bolt when he tried to breach the walls of Thebes (Euripides *Phoenician Women* 1172–86).

[136]: Bacchus is another name of Dionysus, the god of wine, son of Semele, the daughter of Cadmus, founder of Thebes, and Zeus.

[139]: The “War god” is Ares.

[143]: To commemorate a victory, it was customary to dedicate captured weapons to a god.

[144]: The “accursed sons” are Eteocles and Polyneices.

148: Victory was a goddess, often associated with Athena, called Athena Nike. Her temple was on the Acropolis at Athens.

[163]: The “great storm” is a ship metaphor. The ship of state is a frequent motif in Greek literature.

171: Eteocles and Polyneices are polluted because they shed kindred blood.

197: It was customary to pour libations of water, wine, honey, or olive oil on the dead.

206: This line is reminiscent of the beginning of Homer’s *Iliad* (1.1–6), where the wrath of Achilles causes the bodies of the Achaeans to be a feast for the dogs and a banquet for the birds. This fate is the ultimate in dishonor for a Greek.

256: The curse is the pollution that comes from an unburied body.

307: Hades refers either to the ruler of the Underworld or to the Underworld itself. Here it stands for death.

332–41: This “Ode to Man” glorifies the nature of man and his intelligence, but emphasizes that for a city to prosper, man must honor the gods.

[365–75]: The one “Following the laws of man” may refer to Creon, who obeys man’s laws, contrasted with Antigone, who disobeys them. Creon links the justice of the gods with the laws of man, but fails to obey gods’ laws. The relationship of man’s laws to gods’ laws is the crux of Sophocles’ drama and the struggle between Creon and Antigone: man must live under laws, but those laws must respect the gods.

396: Burial rites included washing the body, libations and rites, and burial.

450–70: In this speech Antigone puts forth the eternal struggle between the laws of the gods—what Aristotle calls natural law—and the laws of man and raises the issue of whether the state can override the laws of the gods. Aristotle comments on this passage in *Rhetoric* 1.13.1: “For there really is, as every one to some extent divines, a natural justice and injustice that is binding on all men, even on those who have no association or covenant with each other. It is this that Sophocles’ *Antigone* clearly means when she says that the burial of Polyneices was a just act in spite of the prohibitions: she means that it was just by nature.”

459: While Antigone argues that Creon’s edict violates the laws of the gods, nonetheless she admits that she is subject to the law. Likewise, Gandhi, in the twentieth century, preached civil disobedience and passive resistance to laws but admitted that everyone was subject to the law.

487: Each household held an altar to Zeus, a symbol of the solidarity of the house. Creon has power over Antigone not only because he is king but also because he is her closest male kinsman. She doubly defies him as ruler of the state and the male kinsman who holds power over her.

508: Cadmus was the founder of Thebes. Hence, Thebans are also called “Cadmeans” in the play.

519: The crux of Antigone's argument is that the gods of the Underworld demand burial of kinsmen, no matter what the circumstances.

525: Men held all the power in Greek society. It would have been shameful and would have destroyed a man's honor if he were ruled by a woman.

530: The chorus is commenting on Ismene's expression, which would not show under the mask. Alternately, she might have changed masks.

557: "Others" are the gods of the Underworld and Polyneices.

568: The most common marriage among Greeks was to a patrilineal first cousin. Haemon and Antigone are matrilineal first cousins. By having his son marry a child of Oedipus and grandchild of Laius, Creon would solidify the legitimacy of his rule and his son's. If Haemon and Antigone had a son, that child would be the grandson of Oedipus, and there would be no question of the continuity of the ancient descent lines of the family of Laius.

572: The manuscripts ascribe this line to Ismene, but some scholars give the line to Antigone.

[594]: Labdacus was the paternal grandfather of Oedipus. For the curse on the house, see Introduction, p. xxvi.

601: The "bloody dust" is the dust that Antigone put over her brother's corpse. It is bloody because the burial of Polyneices is causing Antigone's death.

603: The Furies were goddesses of the Underworld who pursued and punished those polluted by bloodguilt, which could be incurred by such things as killing or leaving a body unburied.

606: Sleep is the brother of Death.

609: Mount Olympus is the home of Zeus and the gods.

626: Creon had a daughter, Megara, who wedded Heracles, and a son Megareus (sometimes called Menoeceus), who sacrificed his life to save Thebes in the recent attack by Polyneices.

675–77: Creon's defense of the rule of law, necessary for any state to survive.

717: The ship of state image again.

737: Athens was a democracy when this play was written. Tyranny had existed in many Greek cities, as well as Athens, in the sixth century, but by the fifth century it had been eliminated from most of Greece.

776: Creon's original edict (lines 35–36) called for stoning. However, since Antigone is a blood relative, actively taking her life might cause bloodguilt and a pollution. By walling her up in a cave and giving her some food, she would eventually die of starvation, causing no bloodguilt. For the same reason, weak or deformed infants were exposed in the wild rather than simply killed by the parent. Sophocles used this vehicle to show how much Creon distorted gods' laws, since he buries the living and leaves the dead unburied.

780: Some commentators make Creon exit here. However, it is more likely that he remains on stage, since he has sent his attendants to bring Antigone in at lines 760–61, and he addresses her in line 883.

781: Eros is the adolescent attendant of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. He brings

intense physical desire, often at the behest of Aphrodite. He is often depicted as a small boy with wings.

805: “Death” is not in the Greek.

814: Acheron, “River of Pain,” is a river of the Underworld. Here it is synonymous with Hades.

823: “Phrygian guest” refers to Niobe, the daughter of Tantalus who came from Phrygia in Asia Minor to Thebes. She married Amphion, the king of Thebes. Niobe boasted that she had more children than Leto, the mother of Apollo and Artemis, and that her children were more beautiful. In revenge, Apollo and Artemis killed her children. Niobe wept inconsolably, until she was turned into stone on Mount Sipylus, in Phrygia. Tantalus was a son of Zeus, who stole food from the gods. Because he had eaten the food, he became immortal. Hence, he was punished for all time in the Underworld, where he is always hungry and thirsty. He stands in water up to his chin and when he tries to drink, the water recedes. When he tries to eat from overhanging trees, the wind blows the fruit away.

835: Niobe was a granddaughter of Zeus.

854–57: The chorus seems to be saying that Antigone is paying the penalty for disobeying Creon’s decree. Another interpretation is that she is dying because she relied on the justice of the unwritten laws. All this is part of the curse of the house of Laius, as her subsequent speech reveals.

870: This probably refers to the wedding of Polyneices to Argeia, daughter of Adrastus. That wedding allowed Polyneices to gain Argive allies with which to attack Thebes.

889: See comments on line 776.

894: Persephassa is another name for Persephone, queen of the Dead and wife of Hades.

899: “Eteocles” is not in the Greek.

905–20: (904–20 in the Greek text) Some editors have rejected these lines as spurious, because they do not see Antigone’s sentiment as consistent with her position on burial. Goethe said that he wished Sophocles had never written these lines. However, the sentiment finds some parallels with Herodotus 3.119. Aristotle (*Rhetoric* 3.16.1417, 132–33) discusses this passage as belonging to Sophocles, so it must be genuine. The problem of the editors who reject these lines is that they do not fully understand the nature of the obligation to bury kin. The obligation goes to the nearest patrilineal relative and could possibly extend to matrilineal relatives to the degree of second cousin. The obligation to bury a husband would fall on the husband’s blood relatives, not on his wife. Ordinarily, the duty would not fall on a woman at all. If there were no close male blood relatives available, the obligation would fall on the kinship group, the phratry, and then on the tribe. Part of Antigone’s argument is that she can always get another husband or child, but not another brother. Since a wife passed into the kinship group of her children, she would not be a real parent of that child. Hence, her kinship obligation of burial would be to her parents and brothers, not her husband and children. In this speech Antigone is reasserting her obligation to bury her brother

as paramount. Aeschylus sums up the position of the woman in this kinship structure in a speech by Apollo in the *Eumenides* (657–61): “I will explain this, too, and see how correctly I will speak. The mother of what is called her child is not the parent, but the nurse of the newly-sown embryo. The one who mounts is the parent, whereas she, as a stranger for a stranger, preserves the young plant, if the god does not harm it.”

944: Danaë was the daughter of Acrisius. He had received an oracle that Danaë’s son would kill him. To avoid the oracle, he imprisoned Danaë in a cavern. However, Zeus, in a shower of gold, came into the cave and impregnated her. She gave birth to Perseus, who later fulfilled the oracle. The parallel is not exact, since Danaë was imprisoned, not to kill her, but to prevent her from becoming pregnant. An additional result of Antigone’s entombment would be that she would die childless.

956: The son of Dryas was Lycurgus, king of the Edonians in southern Thrace. He resisted Dionysus bringing his worship into Thrace. As a punishment he was either blinded or imprisoned in a cave in Mount Pangaion and then pulled apart by horses. In another version he was driven mad and killed by his son.

958: See line 135 and note to that line.

[963]: “Bacchic” is not in the Greek. These female followers of Bacchus are also known as maenads.

[965]: The Muses are the goddesses of the arts, including music and poetry.

[968–69]: The Bosphorus is a strait between the Asian and European parts of Turkey. It leads from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea. Salmydessus is in Thrace, on the west coast of the Black Sea.

[970–76]: Phineus married Cleopatra, daughter of Boreas (the North Wind). She bore him two children. Phineus imprisoned Cleopatra and then married Eidothea, who blinded her two stepsons, using a shuttle, a stick used in weaving. To punish Phineus, Zeus offered him blindness or death, and Phineus chose blindness.

[982]: The Erechthids were the ancient royalty of Athens. Cleopatra was a granddaughter of Erechtheus. Her mother, Oreithyia, the daughter of Erechtheus, had been taken as a wife by Boreas.

987: The Fates—Clotho, Atropos, and Lachesis—spun out the fate of gods and men. Even the gods could not overturn the decision of the Fates.

1007: Hephaestus here stands for fire.

1011: In a Greek sacrifice fat would be wrapped around the thighbones and burned for the gods, who would enjoy the smoke that resulted. Here, the fat melts but does not catch fire. Consequently, there is no smoke to please the god, nor any fire from which to make prophecies.

1018: An unburied body causes a miasma, a pollution on the land; see 1043–44.

1038: Sardis was the major city of Lydia in Asia Minor. In the sixth century, its fabulously wealthy king, Croesus, was one of the earliest to mint coins. At the beginning of his reign (ca. 561 BC) he minted coins of electrum, a mixture of gold and silver.

1064–72: Teiresias summarizes a major theme of the play in these lines: Creon has confused the natural order of the universe by leaving the dead unburied and burying the living.

1080–83: These lines refer to part of the myth that Sophocles had not previously

mentioned in the play but that would have been known to all the Athenian audiences. Creon refused burial to the Argive dead who attacked Thebes. Theseus, king of Athens, intervened and forced Creon to bury the Argive dead. The further continuation of the myth relates that the children of the Seven against Thebes, the *Epigonoi*, return and later capture Thebes.

1104: The Harms are personifications of the forces of vengeance.

1115: Cadmus' daughter is Semele, the mother of Dionysus (Bacchus).

1119: The Greeks had settled in southern Italy and Sicily in great numbers since the eighth century BC. With their colonies they brought the vine and the worship of Dionysus to Italy. In the fifth century southern Italy became known for its wine production and cults of Dionysus.

1120: Demeter was the goddess of grain, whose central worship in Athens was at Eleusis, about six miles from the center of the city, through a cult known as the Eleusinian Mysteries. Dionysus was also worshipped as part of this cult.

1122: Bacchus was associated with Delphi and healing, as well as with Thebes.

1125: Cadmus founded Thebes by sowing a dragon's teeth; see note to line 126.

1128: The Corycian Cave is in the mountains near Delphi. It was inhabited by nymphs.

1130: Castalia is a stream flowing above Delphi, which comes out in cataracts near Mount Parnassus.

1132: Nysa is often called the home of Dionysus. The name is applied to more than a dozen places, and it is uncertain which place is referred to. Here it may refer to Nysa in Euboea, which was famous for wine.

1140: This refers to Semele, who died of fright when Zeus appeared to her in his true form, accompanied by peals of thunder and flashes of lightning.

1143: Parnassus is the mountain near Delphi.

1144: If Nysa is in Euboea, "strait" refers to the waters between the island of Euboea and the mainland.

1151: Thyiads is another name for Bacchantes, or maenads, who accompany Dionysus.

1154: Iacchus is another name for Dionysus.

1155: Amphion was a king of Thebes who built the walls of the city.

1175: The Greek is ambiguous. It could mean "by his own hand" or "by a kinsman's hand." The chorus takes it to mean "by a kinsman's hand," but the true meaning is made clear by the Messenger's answer.

1185: Pallas is another name for Athena.

1191: Her son, Megareus, had already died in the fighting around Thebes just before the play began.

1199: The goddess of the crossroads is Hecate, an Underworld goddess to whom offerings were made at crossroads.

1222: The Greek says "a piece of linen." We have translated "veil" to capture the image of a bridal chamber of death.

1301: This line is corrupt in the Greek, and line 1302 is missing, but the context must be close to what we have.

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Glossary of Terms from Greek Tragedy

<i>agon</i> : A musical or gymnastic contest.	<i>exode (exodus)</i> : A scene not followed by choral song.
<i>anagnoresis</i> : A recognition of events.	<i>iambic trimeter</i> : The basic meter of Greek tragedy, consisting of three feet, containing a short syllable followed by a long syllable.
<i>anapests</i> : In poetry, a metrical foot consisting of two short syllables and one long syllable.	<i>kommos</i> : A lyric song between actors and chorus.
<i>antistrophe</i> : A choral song sung by the chorus as it moved or danced from right to left. <i>See also</i> strophe; epode.	<i>machina</i> : A crane to lower and raise an actor playing a god onto the stage.
<i>auletes</i> : A person who played an <i>aulos</i> , a double flute, usually in the orchestra.	<i>meter</i> : The rhythm of Greek tragedy, consisting of metrical units called feet, made up of short and long syllables.
<i>aulos</i> : The double flute, which accompanied lyric passages.	<i>monody</i> : A lyric song, sung by one actor, usually a lament.
<i>chorus</i> : A group of singers that usually represented some group, such as the elders of a city. Sophocles used a chorus of fifteen singers. They often comment on the action and sometimes can be seen as the voice of the poet.	<i>orchestra</i> : The round semicircle of the theater in front of the stage. The word means "place for dancing."
<i>coryphaeus</i> : The chorus leader.	<i>parode</i> : The first song of the chorus.
<i>deuteragonist</i> : The second actor. The first actor was the protagonist; the third, the tritagonist.	<i>parodos (parodoi)</i> : A side ramp for entrances and exits.
<i>dithyramb</i> : A choral song, sung by a chorus of fifty to honor Dionysus. There were dithyramb competitions at the Great Dionysia.	<i>peripeteia</i> : A reversal of fortune.
<i>dochmiac</i> : A meter used to indicate intense emotion, consisting of one short syllable, followed by two long syllables and a short syllable.	<i>prologue</i> : The first part of the tragedy, before the chorus enters.
<i>eccyclema</i> : A wheeled device used to display an interior scene in ancient tragedy.	<i>protagonist</i> : The first, or main, actor.
<i>episode</i> : A part of the drama between choral songs.	<i>satyr play</i> : The fourth play presented by an author. It was short and satiric.
<i>epode</i> : A choral song sometime added to the strophe and antistrophe in a different meter, and recited by the chorus standing still.	<i>skene</i> : A stage building at the rear of the orchestra. It had a door from which actors could enter and exit, and it could represent a location, such as a palace.
	<i>stasimon</i> : A song sung after the chorus has entered the orchestra.
	<i>stichomythia</i> : A rapid dialogue between two actors, often consisting of half lines or single lines.
	<i>strophe</i> : A choral song sung by the chorus as it moved or danced from left to right. <i>See also</i> antistrophe; epode.

- tetralogy: A set of four plays, consisting of three plays, called a trilogy, and a fourth play, the satyr play, presented at the Great Dionysia.
- theatron*: The seats in which the audience sat to view the tragedy.
- theologeion*: A raised device from where the god might speak.
- trochaic trimeter: A meter, accompanied by the *aulos*, consisting of a long syllable followed by a short syllable.

Glossary of Names

Abae: Site of a major oracular shrine to Apollo in the district of Phocis.	Argos: A city-state in the Peloponnesus.
Acheron: "River of Pain," a river of the Underworld, mentioned in <i>Antigone</i> 814.	Artemis: Virgin goddess, sister of Apollo, goddess of the hunt and of animals.
Acropolis: The "high city." The center of Greek cities was usually placed on a high hill. The Acropolis, which was the center of Athens, contained temples to Athena and Poseidon.	Atalanta: Mother of Parthenopaeus, one of the Seven against Thebes. Noted for her swiftness, she defeated her suitors in the footraces.
Adrastus: King of Argos and father-in-law of Polyneices.	Athena (Pallas Athena): A virgin goddess, associated with the olive; the patron goddess of Athens.
Aegeus: King of Athens, father of Theseus.	Athens: A city of the region of Attica, home of Sophocles.
Aetna: A region in Sicily containing a volcano of that name.	Attica: The territory of which Athens was the center.
Agenor: King of Phoenicia and father of Europa and Cadmus, who founded Thebes.	Bacchants (maenads): Female followers of Dionysus.
Aidoneus: Another name of Hades.	Bacchus (Dionysus): <i>See</i> Dionysus.
Amphiaraus: One of the Seven against Thebes.	Boreas: The North Wind.
Amphion: A king of Thebes who built the city walls.	Bosphorus: The strait from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea.
Amphitrite: Wife of Poseidon, god of the sea.	Cadmus: Founder of Thebes.
Antigone: Daughter of Oedipus and Jocasta and sister of Ismene, Eteocles, and Polyneices.	Capaneus: One of the Seven against Thebes.
Aphrodite: Goddess of love and sex.	Castalian spring: A stream above Mount Parnassus, near Delphi, sacred to Apollo and the Muses, where the Pythia was accustomed to bathe. Pilgrims to the shrine of Apollo purified themselves by washing in it. The spring later became associated with the poetic inspiration of the Muses.
Apis: A mythical king of the Peloponnesus.	Cephisus: A river in Attica, as well as the name of the river god.
Apollo (Phoebus Apollo): God of archery and light, associated with prophecy, especially through his oracle at Delphi.	Cerberus: The three-headed dog who guards the entrance to Hades.
Arcturus: The brightest star of the constellation Boötes, which had its helical rising in September.	Choregos: A wealthy citizen who bore the cost of a play production, especially the Chorus for a play, as a form of taxation.
Areopagus: The court where murder was tried.	Chrysippus: Son of Pelops, raped by Laius.
Ares: God of war, son of Zeus and Hera, and father of Harmonia by Aphrodite.	
Argeia: Daughter of Adrastus, king of Argos, and wife of Polyneices.	

- Cithaeron: The mountain near Thebes where Oedipus was exposed as a baby.
- Colonus: Suburb of Athens; also the name of the hero after whom Colonus was named.
- Corinth: A wealthy city-state, northwest of Athens, that rivaled Athens and Thebes in power.
- Corycian cave: A cave in the mountains near Delphi.
- Creon: Brother of Jocasta, king of Thebes in *Antigone*.
- Cronos: Father of Zeus, Poseidon, Hades, Demeter, Hera, and Hestia; son of Uranus and Gaia.
- Cyllene: A mountain in Arcadia, associated with the god Hermes.
- Danaë: Daughter of Acrisius and mother of Perseus by Zeus.
- Darkness: One of the first gods.
- Daulis (Daulia): A city in the region of Phocis.
- Death (Thanatos): God of Death and brother of Sleep.
- Delphi: The city in central Greece where the Temple of Apollo and Apollo's priestess, the Pythia, was located.
- Demeter: Goddess of grain, sister of Zeus, and mother of Persephone by Zeus.
- Dionysus (Bacchus): God of wine, born in Thebes from the union of Semele and Zeus.
- Dirce: A river of Thebes.
- Dorian: One of the three main divisions of the Greek people.
- Dryas: Father of Lycurgus, king of the Edonians in Thrace.
- Earth (Gaia): Mother Earth, the progenitor of all life.
- Eleusinian Mysteries: The cult of the worship of Demeter and Dionysus.
- Eleusis: Site of the cult of the worship of Demeter and Persephone.
- Erechthids: Ancient royalty of Athens.
- Erinyes: *See* Furies.
- Eros: Adolescent attendant of Aphrodite who brings carnal lust.
- Eteocles: Son of Oedipus and Jocasta, brother of Polyneices and Antigone.
- Eteoclos: From Argos, one of the Seven against Thebes.
- Euboea: Island east of the Greek mainland.
- Eumenides: *See* Furies.
- Eumolpus: Founder of the family that provided priests to the cult of the Eleusinian Mysteries.
- Eurydice: Wife of Creon, mother of Haemon and Megareus.
- Fates: Three goddesses, Clotho, Atropos, and Lachesis, who determine the destiny of gods and men.
- Furies (Erinyes or Eumenides): Goddesses of the Underworld who avenge bloodguilt.
- Great Dionysia: A state religious festival in Athens, taking place in late March or early April, in honor of the god Dionysus, at which Greek tragedies were performed.
- Hades: God of the Underworld and the Dead; brother of Zeus and husband of Persephone. "Hades" can also refer to the place, the Underworld itself.
- Haemon: Son of Creon and Eurydice.
- Hecate: Goddess of the crossroads.
- Helicon: A mountain in Boeotia, the home of the Muses.
- Helios: God of the sun.
- Hephaestus: God of the forge and the volcano, son of Hera.
- Hera: Queen of the gods; wife and sister of Zeus.
- Heracles: Son of Zeus and Alcmene, a hero who rids the world of monsters.
- Hermes: Messenger god, who leads the departed to the Underworld.
- Hippomedon: Son of Talaos, one of the Seven against Thebes.
- Iacchus: Another name for Dionysus.
- Ismeme: Daughter of Oedipus and Jocasta and

- sister of Antigone, Polyneices, and Eteocles.
- Ismenus: A river of Thebes.
- Jocasta: Wife and mother of Oedipus, sister of Creon, and widow of Laius.
- Justice: An earth goddess, daughter of Zeus and Themis (law).
- Keres: Spirits of death and vengeance. Daughters of Night, they are sometimes identified with the Furies.
- Labdacus: Father of Laius and grandfather of Oedipus.
- Laius: Father of Oedipus and husband of Jocasta; king of Thebes.
- Leto: Mother of Apollo and Artemis by Zeus.
- Loxias: An epithet of Apollo, perhaps meaning "light."
- Lycia: A region in Asia Minor associated with Apollo and Artemis.
- Lycurgus: King of the Edonians in southern Thrace.
- Maenads: *See* Bacchants.
- Megareus (Menoceus): Elder son of Creon and Eurydice, killed in attack on Thebes.
- Menoceus: Father of Creon; also son of Creon.
- Merope: Wife of Polybus and adoptive mother of Oedipus.
- Muses: Daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne; goddesses of arts, including music and poetry.
- Nereids: Sea nymphs, daughters of Nereus.
- Nike: Goddess of victory; also Athena Nike, Athena who brings victory.
- Niobe: Daughter of Tantalus, wife of King Amphion of Thebes. Her children were killed by Apollo and Artemis.
- Nysa: A home of Dionysus.
- Oea: A mountain near Eleusis.
- Oedipus: King of Thebes, son of Laius and Jocasta, husband of Jocasta, and father of Antigone, Ismene, Polyneices, and Eteocles.
- Olympia: Site of a major oracular shrine of Zeus in Elis, in the Peloponnesus.
- Olympus: The highest mountain in Greece, where Zeus and his fellow gods and goddesses dwelt.
- Paeon: Hymn of supplication or praise to a god.
- Painted Stoa (Stoa Poikile): A building in the agora, or marketplace, of Athens, which contained paintings of Athenian military victories and various spoils.
- Pallas: *See* Athena.
- Pan: Half man and half goat, he protects herds. He is connected with sex and fertility, often seducing maidens, and is also associated with music, maenads, and Dionysus.
- Parnassus: A mountain above Delphi, home to Apollo and the Muses.
- Parthenopaeus: Son of Atalanta, one of the Seven against Thebes.
- Pelops: Son of Tantalus and grandfather of Agamemnon and Menelaus.
- Perithous: A companion of Theseus in his descent to the Underworld in a plot to kidnap Persephone.
- Persephassa: Another name for Persephone.
- Persephone: Daughter of Demeter and Zeus, wife of Hades, and queen of the Underworld.
- Phasis: A river in Colchis, on the Black Sea.
- Phineus: King of Thrace, whose wife blinded his two sons from a former marriage.
- Phocis: A pastoral region east of Delphi.
- Phoebus: Another name for Apollo, meaning "shining" or "bright."
- Phrygia: A region in Asia Minor.
- Polybus: King of Corinth and adoptive father of Oedipus.
- Polydorus: Son of Cadmus and Harmonia; second king of Thebes.
- Polyneices: Son of Oedipus and Jocasta and brother of Antigone, Ismene, and Eteocles.
- Poseidon: Brother of Zeus and Hades and son of Cronos and Rhea; god of the sea and earthquakes.

- Prometheus: Son of Iapetus, one of the Titans. He stole fire from Zeus to give it to man. His name means "Foresight."
- Pythia: The priestess of Apollo at Delphi who delivers his oracles.
- Pytho: Another name for Delphi. It also is the name of the Pytho or Python, the serpent killed by Apollo at Delphi.
- Salmydessus: A Thracian city on the southern shore of the Black Sea.
- Sardis: Capital of Lydia in Asia Minor, where early coinage was developed.
- Semele: Mother of Dionysus by Zeus and daughter of Cadmus, founder of Thebes.
- Seven against Thebes: The seven who attacked Thebes with an Argive army, trying to put Polyneices on the throne. Besides Polyneices, they were Amphiaras; Tydeus, son of Oeneus; Eteoclos of Argos; Hippomedon, son of Talaos; Capaneus; and Parthenopaeus, son of Atalanta.
- Sipylus: A mountain in the region of Phrygia in Asia Minor. Niobe is turned into this mountain by her weeping.
- Sleep (Hypnos): God of Sleep, child of Night, and brother of Death.
- Sphinx: A mythical creature having the body of a lion and a female human head, often with a serpent's tail and an eagle's wings.
- Styx: A river that runs through the Underworld.
- Tantalus: Son of Zeus and father of Niobe. He was punished for eternity by the gods for stealing some of their food.
- Tartarus: The deepest part of the Underworld, where sinners are punished.
- Teiresias: Blind Theban prophet.
- Thebes: City of Boeotia in Greece.
- Theseus: Son of Aegeus and king of Athens. He killed the Minotaur in the labyrinth in Crete.
- Thrace: An area of northeastern Greece, bordering on the Black Sea.
- Thyiads: Another name for Bacchants.
- Titans: The gods who ruled before Zeus and battled him for supremacy.
- Tydeus: Son of Oeneus, one of the Seven against Thebes.
- Underworld (Hades): Realm of the dead, ruled by Hades and his wife, Persephone.
- Victory: *See* Nike.
- Zeus: King of the gods, who rules from Mount Olympus. The son of Cronos and Rhea, he married his sister, Hera.