

Antigone
by Sophocles

Translation of R. C. Jebb
Revised by Pierre Habel and Gregory Nagy
Newly revised by the Hour 25 Antigone Team

Outside the gates of Thebes. Antigone and Ismene enter.

Antigone

Ismene, my sister, who came from the same womb as I did, do you know any evil out of all the evils [*kaka*] bequeathed by Oedipus that Zeus will not bring to a *telos* for the two of us in our lifetime? There is nothing—no pain, no disaster [*atē*], |5 no shame, nor loss of *tīmē*—that I have not seen in your sufferings [*kaka*] and mine. And now what is this new edict that they say the general has just decreed to all the *dēmoi* in the *polis*? Do you know anything? Have you heard? Or does it escape you that |10 evils [*kaka*] from our enemies [*ekhthrois*] are on the march against our near and dear [*philois*]?

Ismene

No word [*mūthos*] has come to me of our *philois*, Antigone, either bringing joy or bringing pain, since we two were robbed of our two brothers who died in one day by a double blow. |15 And since the Argive army has fled during this night, I have learned nothing further, whether better fortune is mine, or further disaster [*atē*].

Antigone

I knew it well, so I was trying to bring you outside the courtyard gates so that you alone might hear.

Ismene

|20 Hear what? It is clear that you are brooding on some dark news [*epos*].

Antigone

Why not? Hasn't Creon destined our brothers, the one to be buried with honor, the other unburied without *tīmē* [honor]? Eteokles, they say, with due observance [*dikaios*] of right [*dikē*] and custom [*nomos*], he has laid in the earth |25 for his *tīmē* [honor] among the dead below. As for the wretched corpse of Polyneikes, however, they say that an edict has been published to the townsmen that no one shall bury him or mourn him, but instead leave him unwept, unentombed, for the birds a pleasing treasure |30 as they look to gratify [*kharis*] their hunger. Such, it is said, is the edict that the good [*agathos*] Creon has laid down for you and for me—yes, for me—and it is said that he is coming here to proclaim it for the certain knowledge of those who do not already know. They say that he does not conduct this business lightly, |35 but whoever performs any of these rites, for him the fate appointed is death by public stoning¹ in the *polis*. This is how things stand for you, and so you will soon show your nature, whether you are noble-minded, or the base [*kakē*] daughter of a noble line [*esthlois*].

Ismene

Poor sister, if things have come to this, what would I profit |40 by loosening or tightening this knot?

Antigone

Consider whether you will share the *ponos* [labor] and the task.

Ismene

What are you hazarding? What do you intend?

Antigone

Will you join your hand to mine in order to lift his corpse?

¹ *dēmoleustos* = stoned [*leustos*] by the people [*dēmos*]

Ismene

Are you thinking [*noos*, vb.] of burying him—when it is forbidden to the *polis*?

Antigone

|45 Yes, he is my brother, and yours too, even if you wish it otherwise. I will never be convicted of betraying him.

Ismene

Hard girl! Even when Creon has forbidden it?

Antigone

No, he has no right to keep me from my own.

Ismene

Ah, no! Think [*phrēn*, vb.], sister, how our father |50 perished in hatred and with loss of *kleos*, when, because of the crimes that he himself detected, he smashed both his eyes with self-blinding hand; then his mother-wife, a double name [*epos*], with a twisted noose destroyed her life; |55 lastly, our two brothers in a single day, both unhappy murderers of their own flesh and blood, worked with mutual hands their common doom. And now we, in turn—we two who have been left all alone—consider how much more miserably [*kakos*, adv.] we will be destroyed, if in violence [*biā*] to the law [*nomos*] |60 we transgress against the decree or power [*kratos*, pl.] of tyrants [*turannoī*²]. No, we must bear in mind [*noos*, vb.], first, that ours is a woman's nature, and accordingly not suited for battles against men; and next, that we are ruled [*arkhein*] by the more powerful [*kratos*, adj.], so that we must obey in these things and in things even more stinging. |65 I, therefore, will ask those below the earth for pardon, since I am forced [*biā*, vb.] to this, and will obey those who have come to into positions of power and authority [*telos*]. It makes no sense [*noos*] to do what is fruitless.

Antigone

I would not encourage you—no, nor, even if you were willing at some point, |70 would I welcome you as my partner in this action. No, be whatever sort of sister pleases you. I will bury him—it would honor me to die while doing that. I shall rest with him, *philē* with *philos*, being a criminal for having performed a holy deed. For the time is greater |75 that I must serve the dead than the living, since in that world I will rest forever. But if you so choose, continue to take *tīmē* away from what the gods in *tīmē* have established.

Ismene

I do not take *tīmē* away from them. But to act in violation [*biā*] of the citizens' [*politai*, from *polis*] will—of that I am by nature incapable.

Antigone

|80 You can make that your pretext! Regardless, I will go now to heap a tomb over a brother who is most *philos* to me.

Ismene

Oh no, unhappy sister! I fear for you!

Antigone

Do not tremble for me. Straighten out your own destiny.

Ismene

Then at least disclose the deed to no one before you do it. |85 Conceal it, instead, in secrecy—and so, too, will I.

Antigone

² *turannos*, plural *turannoī* (Lydian word for 'king'): 'king' (from the viewpoint of most Greek dynasties); 'unconstitutional ruler' (from the viewpoint of Greek democracy)

Go on! Denounce it! You will be far more hated for your silence, if you fail to proclaim these things to everyone.

Ismene

You have a hot heart for chilling deeds.

Antigone

I know that I please those whom I am most bound to please.

Ismene

|90 Yes, even if you will have the power. But you crave the impossible.

Antigone

Why then, when my strength fails, I will have finished.

Ismene

An impossible hunt should not be tried in the first place [*arkhē*].

Antigone

If you mean that, you will have my hatred, and you will be in all justice [*dikē*] the enemy [*ekhthra*] of the dead. |95 But leave me and the bad plan I have authored to suffer [*paskhein*] this terrible / wonderful [*deinos*] thing, for I won't suffer [*paskhein*] anything so terrible that my death will lack honor.

Ismene

Go, then, if you so decide. And of this be sure: though your path is without *noos*, to your *philo*i you are *philē*—straight and true.

They exit. The Chorus of Theban elders enters.

Chorus

strophe 1

|100 Shaft of the sun, fairest light of all that have dawned on Thebes of the seven gates, you have shone forth at last, eye of golden day, advancing over Dirke's³ streams! |105 You have goaded with a sharper bit the warrior of the white shield, who came from Argos in full armor, driving him to headlong retreat.

anapests

|110 He set out against our land due to the strife-filled claims of Polyneikes, and like a screaming eagle he flew over into our land, covered by his snow-white wing,⁴ |115 with a mass of weapons and crested helmets.

antistrophe 1

He paused above our dwellings; he gaped around our sevenfold portals with spears thirsting for blood; but he left |120 before his jaws were ever glutted with our gore, or before Hephaistos' pine-fed flame had seized our crown of towers. |125 So fierce was Arēs' crash of battle swelling about his back, a match too hard to win for the rival of the dragon.

anapests

For Zeus detests above all the boasts of a proud tongue. And when he saw them advancing in a swollen flood, |130 arrogant in their clanging gold, he dashed with brandished fire one who was already starting to shout victory when he had reached our ramparts.

strophe 2

Staggered, he fell to the earth with a crash, |135 torch in hand, a man possessed by the frenzy of the mad attack, who just now was raging against us with the blasts of his tempestuous hate. But his threats did not fare as he had hoped, and to the other enemies mighty Arēs dispensed each their own dooms with hard blows, |140 Arēs, our mighty ally at the turning-point.

anapests

³ Spring and river west of Thebes, sacred to Dionysos. Dirke was the wife of king Lykos. See <http://www.theoi.com/Nymphe/NympheDirke.html> for details.

⁴ LSJ suggests that this eagle, with its snow white wing, is the device on Polyneikes shield.

For the seven captains, stationed against an equal number at the seven gates, left behind their brazen arms in tribute [*telos*, pl.] to Zeus the turner of battle—all but the accursed pair who, born of one father and one |145 mother, set against each other their spears, both victorious, and who now share in a common death.

antistrophe 2

But since Victory [*Nikē*] whose name is glory has come to us, smiling in joy equal to the joy of chariot-rich Thebes, |150 let us make for ourselves forgetfulness after the wars of just now, and visit all the temples of the gods with night-long *choroi*. And may Bacchus, who shakes the earth of Thebes, rule [*arkhein*] our dancing!

anapests

|155 But look, the king of the land is coming here, Creon, the son of Menoikeus, our new ruler in accordance with the new circumstances fated by the gods. What stratagem [*mētis*] is he setting in motion, |160 that he has proposed this special conference of elders, and summoned it by a general mandate?

Creon enters with attendants.

Creon

My fellow citizens! First, the gods, after tossing the fate of our *polis* on wild waves, have once more righted it. Second, I have ordered you through my messengers to come here |165 apart from all the rest, because I knew, first of all, how constant was your reverence for the power [*kratos*, pl.] of the throne of Laios; how, again, you were reverent, when Oedipus was guiding our *polis*; and lastly, how, when he was dead, you still maintained loyal thoughts [*phronēmata*] towards their children. |170 Since, then, these latter have fallen in one day by a double destiny [*moira*]—each striking, each hacking, both with the pollution [*miasma*] of a brother's murder—I now possess all the power [*kratos*, pl.] and the throne according to my kinship [*genos*] with the dead. |175 It is impossible to know fully any man's *psūkhē*, will [*phronēma*], or judgment, until he has been seen in the baring light of rule [*arkhē*, pl.] and law-giving [*nomoi*]. For if anyone who directs the entire *polis* does not cling to the best [*arista*] and wisest plans, |180 but because of some fear keeps his lips locked, then, in my judgment, he is and has long been the most evil [*kakos*] traitor. And if any man thinks a *philos* more important than his fatherland, that man, I say, is of no account. Zeus, god who sees all things always, be my witness— |185 I would not be silent if I saw disaster [*atē*], instead of salvation [*sōtēriā*], marching upon the citizens. Nor would I ever make a man who is hostile to my country a *philos* to myself, because I know this, that our country is the ship that brings us to salvation [*sōzein*], and that only when |190 we sail her on a straight course can we make true *philo*i. Such are the laws [*nomoi*] by which I strengthen this *polis*. Akin to these is the edict which I have now published to the citizenry concerning the sons of Oedipus: Eteokles, who fell fighting |195 on behalf of our *polis* and who was best in battle, they shall entomb and on top of it add every sacred offering that descends to the best [*aristos*, pl.] of the dead below. But as for his brother, Polyneikes, I mean, who on his return from exile wanted to burn to the ground |200 the land of his fathers and the gods of his family-line, and wanted to feed on kindred blood and lead the remnant into slavery—it has been proclaimed to the *polis* that no one shall give him funeral honors or lamentation, |205 but all must leave him unburied and a sight of shame, with his body there for birds and dogs to eat. This is my thinking [*phronēma*], and I will never allow evil men [*kakoi*] to stand with *tīmē* before those who have *dikē*. But whoever has a good *noos* towards this *polis*, |210 he shall get *tīmē* from me in death as in life.

Chorus

That is your will, Creon, son of Menoikeus, towards those who bear a harsh *noos* and those with a kindly *menos* with respect to this *polis*. And the power is yours, I believe, to make use of every law [*nomos*] whatsoever, both concerning the dead and all us who live.

Creon

|215 See, then, that you be guardians of my commands.

Chorus

Lay the weight of this task on some younger man.

Creon

That's not what I meant—the corpse's guards are already in place.

Chorus

Then what is this other command that you would give?

Creon

That you not give way to the breakers of my commands.

Chorus

|220 There's no one so foolish as to crave death.

Creon

I assure you, that is the wage for disobedience. Yet by just the hope of it, desire for gain [*kerdos*] has many times corrupted men.

A Guard enters.

Guard

My lord, I'll not say that I arrive breathless because of speed, or from the action of a swift foot. |225 For often I brought myself to a stop because of my thoughts, and wheeled round in my path to return. My *psūkhē* was telling me [*mūthos*, vb.] many things: "Fool, why do you go to where your arrival will mean your punishment [*dikē*]?" "You wretch, are you dallying again? If Creon learns it |230 from another, must you not suffer for it?" So debating, I made my way unhurriedly, slow, and thus a short road was made long. In the end [*telos*], however, the view prevailed that I should come here to you. Even if my report brings no good, still will I tell you, |235 since I come with a good grip on one hope, that I can suffer [*paskhein*] nothing except what is my fate.

Creon

And what is it that makes you so disheartened [without *thūmos*]?

Guard

I want to tell you first about myself: I didn't do the deed, nor did I see the doer, |240 so it wouldn't be right [*dikaios*, adv.] that I should come to any harm [*kakon*].

Creon

Like a bowman you aim well at your target from a distance, and all around you hedge yourself off well from the deed. It is clear that you have some unheard of thing to indicate [*sēmainein*].

Guard

That I do, for terrible [*deina*] news imposes great hesitation.

Creon

Then tell it, will you, and so unburdened go away?

Guard

|245 Well, here it is. The corpse—someone has just given it burial and disappeared after sprinkling thirsty dust on the flesh and performing the other rites that piety demands.

Creon

What are you saying? What man dared do this?

Guard

I don't know. For there was no scar of a pickaxe to be seen there, |250 no earth thrown up by a mattock. The ground was hard and dry, unbroken, not rolled over by wheels. The doer was someone who left behind no *sēma*. When the first day-watchman showed it to us, a discomfiting amazement fell on us all. |255 The

dead man was veiled from us—not shut within a tomb, but a light cover of dust was on him, as if put there by the hand of one who shunned a curse. And no signs [*sēmeia* = *sēmata*] were visible that any beast of prey or any dog had approached or torn him. Then evil [*kakoi*] words flew thick and loud among us, |260 guard accusing guard. It would even have come to blows in the end nor was there anyone there to prevent it: every man was the culprit, and no one was plainly guilty, while all disclaimed knowledge of the act. We were ready to take red-hot iron in our hands, |265 to walk through fire and to swear oaths by the gods that we had neither done the deed, nor shared knowledge of the planning or the doing. In the end [*telos*] when there was nothing further for us to investigate, someone spoke up and made us all bend our faces |270 in fear towards the earth. For we did not know how we could argue with him, nor yet prosper if we did what he said. His argument [*mūthos*] was that the deed must be reported to you and not hidden. This view prevailed, and so it was that |275 the lot doomed me, with a bad *daimōn*, to win this prize [*agathon*]. So here I stand, as unwelcome to you as I am unwilling, I well know. For no man delights in the bearer of bad [*kaka*] news [*epea*].

Chorus

My lord, my thoughts have long been deliberating whether this deed is somehow the work of the gods?

Creon

|280 Quiet, before your words truly fill me with rage, so that you not be found at the same time without *noos* as well as being old. You say what is intolerable when you claim that *daimones* have concern for that corpse. Was it in excessive *tīmē* for his benefactions |285 that they sought to hide him, when he had come to burn their columned shrines, their sacred treasures and their land, and scatter its laws [*nomoi*] to the winds? Or do you see the gods giving *tīmē* to evil men [*kakoi*]? It cannot be. No! From the very first |290 certain men of the *polis* were chafing at this edict and muttering against me, tossing their heads in secret, and they did not keep their necks duly [*dikaios*, adv.] under the yoke in submission to me. By those men, I am certain, they were led astray and bribed to do this deed. |295 Nothing so evil [*kakon*] as money ever grew to be a custom [*nomisma*, from *nomos*] among men. This destroys cities [*polis*, pl.], this drives men from their homes, this trains and warps honest *phrenes* to set themselves to works of shame, |300 this teaches people to practice villainies, and to know every act of unholiness. But all the men who did this job for hire have made sure that, sooner or later, they shall pay the penalty [*dikē*]. Now, as Zeus still has my reverence, know this well— |305 I tell you on my oath. If you do not find the very hand that made this burial, and reveal him before my eyes, mere death [*Hādēs*] shall not suffice for you, not before, hung up alive, you have made this *hubris* plain, |310 so that hereafter you may thief with better knowledge from where your gain [*kerdos*] should be received, and learn that it is best not to be a *philos* of gain [*kerdos*] from any and every source. For you will find that ill-gotten gains bring more men to disaster [*atē*] than to safety [*sōzein*].

Guard

|315 Will you allow me to speak? Or shall I just turn and go?

Creon

Don't you know even now how much your voice sickens me?

Guard

Is the pain in your ears, or in your *psūkhē*?

Creon

And why would you define the seat of my pain?

Guard

He who did it hurts your *phrenes*, but I, the ears.

Creon

|320 God! How plain it is that you are a born babblers.

Guard

Perhaps, but never the author of this action.

Creon

Yes, and what's more, you sold your *psūkhē* for silver.

Guard

Ah! It's truly terrible [*deinon*] when the judge judges wrong.

Creon

Expound on "judgment" as you will. But, if you fail to |325 show me the perpetrators of these crimes, you will avow that gain [*kerdos*, pl.] basely earned wrecks sorrows.

Creon exits.

Guard

Well, may the man be found! That would be best. But, whether he be caught or not—for fortune must decide [*krinein*] that—I assure you that you'll not see me come here again. |330 Saved [*sōzein*] just now beyond hope and belief, I owe the gods great thanks [*kharis*].

The Guard exits.

Chorus

strophe 1

Wonders / terrors [*deina*, pl.] are many, and none is more wonderful / terrible [*deinon*] than man. |335 This spans the sea [*pontos*], even when it surges white before the gales of the south wind, and makes a path under swells that threaten to engulf him. Earth [*Gaiā*], too, the eldest of the gods, the unwilting [*aphthitos*], the unwearied [*a-kamatos*], |340 he wears away to his own ends, turning the soil with the offspring [*genos*] of horses as the plows weave to and fro year after year.

antistrophe 1

The feather-brained [lacking *noos*] tribe of birds |345 and the clans of wild beasts and the sea-brood of the sea [*pontos*] he snares in the meshes of his twisted nets, and he leads them captive, very-skilled man. He masters by his arts |350 the beast who dwells in the wilds and roams the hills. He tames the shaggy-maned horse, putting the yoke upon its neck, and tames the tireless mountain bull.

strophe 2

Speech and thought [*phronēma*, from *phrēn*] fast as the wind |355 and the moods that give order to a city he has taught himself, and how to flee the arrows of the inhospitable frost under clear skies and the arrows of the storming rain. |360 He has resource for everything. Lacking resource in nothing he strides towards what must come. From Hādēs alone he shall procure no escape, but from hopeless diseases he has devised flights.

antistrophe 2

|365 Possessing resourceful skill [*sophon*], a subtlety beyond expectation, he moves now to evil [*kakon*], now to good [*esthlon*]. When he honors the laws [*nomoi*] of the land and the justice [*dikē*] of the gods to which he is bound by oath, |370 he stands high in his *polis*. But banned from his *polis* is he who, thanks to [*kharis*] his rashness, couples with disgrace. Never may he share my home, |375 never think my thoughts [*phrēn*, vb.part], who does these things!

The Guard enters, leading in Antigone.

anapests

What marvel sent by the *daimones* is this? My *noos* goes in two different directions! I know her. How can I deny that this girl is Antigone? O unhappy child |380 of your unhappy father, of Oedipus! What can this mean? What! Surely they aren't bringing you captive for disobeying the king's laws [*nomoi*] and being caught in foolishness?

Guard

Here she is, she did it. |385 We caught this one burying him. Where is Creon?

Creon enters from the palace.

Chorus

There, he's coming from the house again at our need.

Creon

What is it? What has happened that makes my coming timely?

Guard

My lord, there's nothing that a man can rightly swear he will not do. For afterthought belies one's first intent. |390 I could have vowed that I wouldn't ever be here again, due to your threats by which I had just been storm-tossed. But since this joy that exceeds and oversteps my hopes can be compared in fullness to no other pleasure, I'm back—though it is contrary to my sworn oath— |395 bringing this girl who was caught arranging the funeral rites with *kosmos*. This time there was no casting of lots. No, this piece of luck has fallen to me, and me alone. And now, my lord, as it pleases you, take her yourself, question [*krinein*] her and convict her. But *dikē* would see me |400 released free and clear from these troubles [*kaka*].

Creon

Your prisoner here—how and where did you take her?

Guard

She was burying the man. You know all there is to tell.

Creon

Are you clear and sure about what you are saying?

Guard

I am. I saw her burying the corpse that you |405 had forbidden to bury. Is that plain and sufficient proof?

Creon

And how was she observed? How taken in the act?

Guard

It happened like this. When we had come to the place with those terrible [*deina*] threats of yours still in our ears, we swept away all the dust that covered |410 the corpse and bared the damp body well. We then sat down on the brow of the hill to windward, fleeing the smell from him, lest it strike us. Each man was wide awake and kept his neighbor alert with torrents of threats [*kaka*], if any one should be careless of this labor [*ponos*]. |415 So time passed, until the disk of the sun stood bright in mid-sky and the heat began to burn. And then suddenly a whirlwind lifted from the earth a storm of dust, an *akhos* from the sky, and it filled the plain, marring all the foliage of the woods. |420 Soon the wide air was choked with it. We closed our eyes, and endured the plague from the gods. When, after a long while, this storm had passed, the girl was seen, and she wailed aloud with the sharp cry of a grieving bird, as when inside her empty |425 nest she sees the bed stripped of its nestlings. So she, too, when she saw the corpse bare, broke into a cry of lamentation and cursed with evil [*kakai*] curses those who had done it. Immediately she took thirsty dust in her hands |430 and from a pitcher of beaten bronze held high she crowned the dead with thrice-poured libations. We rushed forward when we saw it, and at once closed upon our quarry, who was not at all dismayed. We then charged her with her past and present doings, |435 but she made no denial of anything—at once to my joy and to my pain. For to have escaped from evil [*kaka*] oneself gives the greatest joy, but it stings to lead *philoī* to evil [*kakon*]. Naturally, though, all such things are |440 of less account to me than my own salvation [*sōtēriā*].

Creon

You, you with your face bent to the ground, do you admit, or deny that you did this?

Antigone

I declare it and make no denial.

Creon

To the Guard.

You can take yourself wherever you please, |445 free and clear of a heavy responsibility [*aitiā*].

The Guard exits.

To Antigone.

You, however, tell me—not at length, but briefly—did you know that an edict had forbidden this?

Antigone

I knew it. How could I not? It was public.

Creon

And even so you dared overstep that law [*nomoi*]?

Antigone

|450 Yes, since it was not Zeus that published that edict for me, and since not of that kind are the laws [*nomoi*] which *Dikē*, who shares an *oikos* with the gods below, established among men. Nor did I think that your decrees were of such force, that a mortal could override the unwritten |455 and unfailing rules [*nomima*, from *nomos*] of the gods. For their life is not of today or yesterday, but for all time, and no man knows when they were first put forth. Not for fear of any man's opinion [*phronēma*] was I about to owe a penalty [*dikē*] to the gods for breaking these. |460 Die I must, that I knew well—how could I not? That is true even without your edicts. But if I am to die before my time, I count that a gain [*kerdos*]. When anyone lives as I do, surrounded by evils [*kaka*], how can he not carry off profit [*kerdos*] by dying? |465 So for me to meet this doom is a grief of no account. But if I had endured that my mother's son should in death lie an unburied corpse, that would have pained me. Yet for this, I am not pained. And if my present actions are foolish in your sight, |470 it may be that it is a fool who accuses me of folly.

Chorus

She shows herself the wild offspring of a wild father, and does not know how to bend before evils [*kaka*].

Creon

Yet remember that over-stubborn spirits [*phronēmata*] most often collapse. It is the stiffest [*kratos*, adj.] iron, baked to |475 utter hardness in the fire, that you most often see snapped and shivered. And I have witnessed horses with great *thūmos* disciplined by a small bit. For there is no place for pride, when one is his neighbors' slave. |480 This girl was already practiced in *hubris* when she overstepped the laws [*nomoi*] that have been made public. And, that done, this now is a second *hubris*, that she glories in it and exults in her deed. In truth, then, I am no man, but she is, |485 if this power [*kratos* pl.] rests with her and brings no penalty. No! Whether she is my sister's child, or nearer to me in blood than any of my kin that worship Zeus at the altar of our house, she and her sister will not escape a doom most evil [*kakos*]. For in truth |490 I accuse that other of an equal share in the plotting of this burial. Call her out! I saw her inside just now, raging with *lussa* [wolf-like rage], and not in control of her *phrenes*. Before the deed, the *thūmos* is usually convicted of stealthy crimes when conspirators are plotting depravity in the dark. |495 But, truly, I detest it, too, when one who has been caught in evil treachery [*kaka*] then seeks to take pride in the crime.

Antigone

What more do you want than to capture and kill me?

Creon

I want nothing else. Having that, I have everything.

Antigone

Why then do you wait? In none of your words |500 is there anything that pleases me—and may there never be! Likewise to you as well my views must be displeasing. And yet, how could I have won a nobler *kleos*⁵ than by giving burial to my own brother? All here would admit that they approve, |505 if fear did not grip their tongues. But tyranny [from *turannos*], having such a good *daimōn*, has the power to do and say whatever it pleases.

Creon

You alone out of all these Kadmeians see it that way.

Antigone

They do, too, but for you they hold their tongues.

Creon

|510 Aren't you ashamed that your beliefs [*phrēn*, vb.] differ from theirs?

Antigone

No, there's nothing shameful in respecting your own flesh and blood.

Creon

Wasn't he your brother, too, who died in the opposite cause?

Antigone

A brother by the same mother and the same father.

Creon

Why, then, do you disrespect that one with this favor [*kharis*] of *tīmē*?

Antigone

|515 The dead man won't support you in that.

Creon

Yes, he will, if you give him *tīmē* equally with the wicked one.

Antigone

It was his brother, not his slave, who died.

Creon

But he died ravaging this land, while he fell in its defense.

Antigone

Hādēs craves [*potheîn*] these customs [*nomoi*], nevertheless.

Creon

|520 But the good man craves a portion not equal to that of an evil [*kakos*] one.

Antigone

Who knows but that these actions are pure to those below?

Creon

You cannot be *philos* to someone you have hated, not even after death.

Antigone

It's not my nature to join in being hateful, but in being *philē*.

⁵ Literally, “*kleos* with better *kleos*.”

Creon

Then, go down below and be *philē* to them, |525 if you must be *philē*. While I live, no woman will rule [arkhein] me.

Ismene is led in from the palace.

Chorus

anapests

Look, here's Ismene coming from the palace, shedding the tears of one who is *philē* to her brother. A cloud over her eyes mars her red-flushed face, |530 and it breaks into rain on her comely cheek.

Creon

You who were lurking like a viper in my own house [oikos] and secretly gulping up my life's blood, while I was oblivious that I was nurturing two aberrations [atē, dual], two revolutions [from stasis] against my throne—tell me now, will you also affirm |535 your share in this burial, or will you forswear all knowledge of it?

Ismene

I performed the deed—as long as she concurs—and I share and carry the burden of guilt [aitiā].

Antigone

No, *dikē* will not permit you to do this, since you weren't willing to help with the deed, nor did I give you a part in it.

Ismene

|540 But now with this sea of evils [kaka] around you, I am not ashamed to sail in a sea of suffering [pathos] at your side.

Antigone

To who owns the deed, Hādēs and the dead are witnesses. A *philē* in words is not the type of *philē* I love.

Ismene

No, sister, do not strip me of death's *tīmē*, |545 but let me die with you and make due consecration to the dead.

Antigone

Do not share my death. Do not claim deeds to which you did not put your hand. My death will suffice.

Ismene

And how can life be *philos* to me, once I am deprived of you?

Antigone

Ask Creon. Your concern is for him.

Ismene

|550 Why do you torture me like this, when it doesn't help you?

Antigone

No, if I mock you, it's to my own pain that I do so.

Ismene

Tell me, how can I help you, even now?

Antigone

Save [sōzein] yourself. I don't grudge your escape.

Ismene

Ah, misery! Will I fall short of sharing your fate?

Antigone

|555 Your choice was to live, mine to die.

Ismene

At least your choice was not made without my protests.

Antigone

One world approved your wisdom [*phrēn*, vb.], another approved mine.

Ismene

Nevertheless, the offense [*hamartiā*] is identical for both of us.

Antigone

Take heart! You live. But my *psūkhē* |560 died long ago, so that I might serve the dead.

Creon

One of these maidens, I declare, has just revealed herself to be without *noos*, the other has displayed it from the moment of her birth.

Ismene

Yes, my lord. Whatever reason [*noos*] nature may have given does not remain with those in evil [*kakos*, adv.] straits, but goes astray.

Creon

|565 Yours did, I know, when you chose evil actions [*kaka*] with evil [*kakoi*] allies.

Ismene

What life would there be for me alone, without her presence?

Creon

Do not speak of her “presence”. She lives no longer.

Ismene

What? You will kill your own son’s bride?

Creon

Why not? There are other fields for him to plow.

Ismene

|570 But not with such love as joined him to her.

Creon

I abhor evil [*kakai*] wives for my sons.

Antigone

Haimon, most *philos*! How your father strips you of *tīmē*!

Creon

Enough! Enough of you and of your marriage!

Chorus

Will you really cheat your son of this girl?

Creon

|575 Hādēs it is who ends these bridals for me.

Chorus

Then it seems that it is resolved that she will die.

Creon

Resolved, yes, by you and by me.

To the Attendants.

No more delay! Servants, take them inside! Hereafter they must be women, and not left at large. |580 For it is known that even the brave seek to flee, when they see Hādēs now closing on their life.

Antigone and Ismene are led out.

Chorus

strophe 1

Blessed [*eudaimones*] are those whose lifespan [*aiōn*] has not tasted evil [*kaka*]. For when a house has once been shaken by the gods, |585 no form of disaster [*atē*] is lacking, but it spreads over the bulk of the family-line [*genos*], just as, when the surge is driven over the darkness of the sea [*pontos*, adj.] by the fierce breath of Thracian sea-winds, |590 it rolls up the black sand from the depths, and the wind-beaten headlands that front the blows of the storm give out a mournful roar.

antistrophe 1

I see that the ancient sorrows of the house [*oikos*] of the Labdakidai |595 are heaped upon the sorrows of those who have wilted away [*phthitōi*]. Each generation [*genos*] does not set its family-line [*genos*] free, but some god hurls it down and it has no relief from sorrows. For now that light that had been spread |600 over the last roots in the house of Oedipus—that ray of hope, in its turn, is mown down by the bloody dust of the gods below, by lack of *noos* in speech and by a Fury [*Erinus*] in the *phrenes*.

strophe 2

|605 Your power, great Zeus—what human transgression can check it? Yours is power that neither Sleep, the all-ensnaring, nor the untiring [*a-kamatos* pl. adj.] months of the gods can defeat. Unaged through time, |610 you rule by your power and dwell thereby in the brilliant splendor of Olympus. And through the future, both near and distant, as through the past, shall this law [*nomos*] prevail: nothing that is vast comes to the life of mortals without disaster [*atē*].

antistrophe 2

|615 See how that hope whose wanderings are so wide is truly a delight to many men, but to an equal number it is a false lure of empty-headed [lacking *noos*] desires. The deception comes to one who is wholly unaware until he burns his foot on a hot fire. |620 For with *sophiā* did someone once reveal the maxim [*epos*], which now has *kleos*, that evil [*kakon*] at one time or another seems good [*esthlon*], to him whose *phrenes* a god leads to disaster [*atē*]. |625 But for the briefest moment such a man fares free of destruction [*atē*].

anapests

But here is Haimon, the last of your offspring. Does he come grieving [*akhos*, vb.] for the doom of Antigone, his promised bride, |630 and bitter for the deceived hope of their marriage?

Haimon enters.

Creon

We will soon know better than seers [*mantis*, pl.] could tell us. My son, can it be that after hearing the final [*telos*, adj.] judgment concerning your betrothed, you have come raging with *lussa* [wolf-like rage] against your father? Or am I still *philos* to you, whatever I do?

Haimon

|635 Father, I am yours, and you keep me upright with precepts good for me—precepts I shall follow. No marriage will be deemed by me more important than you when you guide me well.

Creon

|640 Yes, my son, this is the spirit you should maintain in your heart: to stand behind your father's will in all things. It is for this that men pray: to sire and raise in their homes children who are obedient, that they may requite their father's enemy [*ekhthros*] with evils [*kaka*] and give *tīmē* to his *philos*, just as their father does. |645 But the man who begets unhelpful children—what would you say that he has sown except struggles [*ponoi*] for himself and lots of laughter for his enemies [*ekhthroī*]? Never, then, my son, go reject your *phrenes* for pleasure on account of a woman, |650 knowing that this embrace soon becomes cold and brittle—an evil [*kakē*] woman to share your bed and home. For what wound could strike deeper than an evil [*kakos*] *philos*? No, spit her out as if she were your most hostile enemy, let her go find a husband in Hādēs. |655 For since I caught her alone of all the *polis* in open defiance, I will not make myself a liar to my *polis*. I will kill her. So let her call on Zeus who protects kindred blood. If I am to foster my own kin to spurn *kosmos* [order], |660 surely I will do the same for others' kin [*genos*]. For whoever shows his excellence in the case of his own household [*oikos*] will be found righteous [*dikaios*] in his *polis* as well. But if anyone oversteps and does violence [*biā*, vb.] to the laws [*nomoi*], or thinks [*noos*, vb.] to dictate to those in power, |665 such a one will never win praise [*epainos*] from me. No, whomever the *polis* may appoint, that man must be obeyed in matters small and great and in matters just [*dikaia*] and not. And I would feel confident that such a man would rule [*arkhein*] well no less than one willingly ruled [*arkhein*], |670 and that beneath a hail of spears he would stand his ground where posted, a loyal [*dikaios*] and brave [*agathos*] comrade in the battle line. But there is no evil [*kakon*] worse than loss of control [*anarkhiā*, from *arkhē*]. This destroys *poleis* [*polis*, pl.]; this overturns homes [*oikoi*]; this breaks |675 the ranks of allied spears into headlong rout. But the lives of men who prosper upright, most of these have been saved [*sōzein*] by obedience to control [*arkhē*]. Therefore we must defend those who act with *kosmos*, and in no way can we let a woman defeat us. It is better [*kratos*, adj.] to fall from power, if it is fated, by a man's hand; |680 then we would not be called weaker than women.

Chorus

To us, unless our years have stolen our wit, you seem to say what you say wisely.

Haimon

Father, the gods implant *phrenes* in men, the highest of all things that we call our own. |685 For my part, to state how you are wrong to say those things is beyond my power and my desire, although another man, too, might have a useful thought. In any case, it is my natural duty to watch on your behalf all that men say, or do, or find to blame. |690 For your terrible / wonderful [*deinon*] gaze forbids the ordinary citizen [*dēmōtēs*, from *dēmos*] to speak such words as would offend your ear. But I can hear these murmurs in the dark, how the *polis* moans for this girl, saying: “No woman ever merited death less, |695 none ever died [*phthinein*] so shamefully [*kakos*, adv.] for deeds of such *kleos* as hers, who, when her own brother had fallen in bloody battle, would not leave him unburied to be devoured by savage dogs, or by any bird. Doesn't she deserve to receive golden *tīmē*?” |700 Such is the rumor shrouded in darkness that silently spreads. For me, father, no possession [*ktēma*] has more *tīmē* than your prosperity. What, indeed, is a nobler ornament for children than the fair *kleos* of a thriving father, or for a father than that of his children? |705 Do not, then, bear one mood only in yourself: do not think that your word, and no other, must be right. For if any man thinks that he alone has *phrenes*—that in speech or in mind he has no peer—such a *psūkhē*, when laid open, is always found empty. |710 No, even when a man is *sophos*, it brings him no shame to learn many things, and not to be too rigid. You see how the trees that stand beside the torrential streams created by a winter storm yield to it and save [from *sōzein*] their twigs, while the stiff and rigid perish root and all? |715 And in the same way the pilot who keeps the sheet of his sail taut and never slackens it, upsets his boat, and voyages thereafter with his decking underwater. Father, give way and allow a change in your *thūmos*. For if even from me, a younger man, a worthy thought may be supplied, |720 by far the best thing, I believe, would be for men to be all-wise by nature. Otherwise—since it usually does not turn out that way—it is good to learn in addition from those who advise you well.

Chorus

My lord, it is honorable, if he speaks something appropriate, that you should learn from him ⁷²⁵ and that you, in turn, Haimon, should learn from your father. On both sides there have been wise words.

Creon

Men of my age—are we then to be schooled in wisdom [*phrēn*, vb.] by men of his?

Haimon

Yes, and in nothing that is not right [*dikaion*]. But if I am young, you should look to my conduct, not to my years.

Creon

⁷³⁰ Is it worthy conduct to respect those who are without *kosmos* [order]?

Haimon

I could not urge anyone to show reverence for the wicked [*kakoi*].

Creon

And isn't she in the grasp of that disease?

Haimon

All the people of this *polis* of Thebes deny it.

Creon

Shall Thebes prescribe to me how I must rule?

Haimon

⁷³⁵ See, there, how you have spoken so much like a child.

Creon

Am I to rule [*arkhein*] this land by the will of another than myself?

Haimon

That is no *polis* which belongs to one man.

Creon

Doesn't the *polis* by tradition [*nomos*, vb.] belong to the man acting with *kratos*?

Haimon

You would make a fine monarch [*arkhein*] in a desert.

Creon

⁷⁴⁰ This boy seems to be fighting on the side of the woman.

Haimon

If you are a woman, for my concern is for you.

Creon

You complete and utter villain [*pan + kakos*, superlative],⁶ attacking your father, laying charges [*dikē*] against him!

Haimon

Because I see you doing justice [*dikaia*] wrong [*hamartanein*].

Creon

⁶ Literally, one who is “altogether most *kakos*”; Jebb proposes “traitor.”

Am I doing wrong [*hamartanein*] when I respect my own prerogatives [*arkhē*, pl.]?

Haimon

[745 Yes. You do not respect them, when you trample on the gods' *tīmai*.

Creon

Polluted creature, submitting to a woman!

Haimon

You will never catch me submitting to shamelessness.

Creon

You do. Your every word, after all, pleads her case.

Haimon

And yours, and mine, and that of gods below.

Creon

[750 You can never marry her, not while she's still alive.

Haimon

Then she will die, and in death destroy another.

Creon

What! Does your audacity run to open threats?

Haimon

How is it a threat to speak against empty plans?

Creon

You will regret your unwise [without *phrenes*] instructions in wisdom [*phrenes*].

Haimon

[755 If you weren't my father, I would have called you insane [without good *phrenes*, vb.].

Creon

You woman's slave, do not try to cajole me.

Haimon

Do you want to have your say and then have done without a reply?

Creon

Is this true [*alēthes*]? By Olympus above—know this well—you will have no joy for taunting me over and above your censures. [760 Bring out that hated thing, so that with him looking on she may die right now in her bridegroom's presence at his side!

Haimon

No, not at my side will she die—don't ever imagine it. Nor shall you ever look at me and set eyes on my face again. [765 Indulge in your madness now with whatever of your *philoī* can endure it.

Haimon exits.

Chorus

The man is gone, Lord Creon, in anger and haste. A young *noos* like that is ominous when it is in pain.

Creon

Let him do, let him plan [*phrēn*, vb.], something more immense than befits a man. Good-bye to him! Still he will not save these two girls from death.

Chorus

|770 Then the pair of them—you really have the intent [*noos*, vb.] to kill them both?

Creon

Not the one who did not put her hands to the burial. You are right.

Chorus

And by what mode of death do you mean to kill the other?

Creon

I will take her where the path is deserted, unvisited by men, and entomb her alive in a rocky vault, |775 setting out a ration of food, but only as much as piety requires so that all the *polis* may escape defilement [*miasma*]. And praying there to Hādēs, the only god she worships, perhaps she will obtain immunity from death, or else will learn, at last, even this late, |780 that it is fruitless labor [*ponos*] to revere those who are in Hādēs' keeping.

Creon exits.

Chorus:

strophe 1

Erōs, the unconquered in battle, Erōs, you who descend upon riches [*ktēma*, pl.], and watch the night through on a girl's soft cheek, |785 you roam over the sea [*pontos*, adj.] and among the homes of men in the wilds [places of wild *nomos*]. Neither can any immortal escape you, |790 nor any man whose life lasts for a day. He who has known you is driven to madness.

antistrophe 1

You seize the *phrenes* of just [*dikaioi*] men and drag them to injustice [not *dikē*], to their ruin. You it is who have incited this conflict of men whose flesh and blood are one. |795 But victory belongs to radiant Desire swelling from the eyes of the sweet-bedded bride. Desire sits enthroned in power [*arkhai*] beside the mighty laws. |800 For in all this, divine Aphrodite plays her irresistible game.

Antigone enters under guard from the palace.

anapests

But now, witnessing this, I too am carried beyond the bounds of loyalty. The power fails me to keep back my streaming tears any longer, when I see |805 Antigone making her way to the chamber where all are laid to rest, now her bridal chamber.

Antigone

strophe 1

Citizens [*politai*, from *polis*] of my fatherland, see me setting out on my last journey, looking at my last sunlight, and never again. |810 No, Hādēs who lays all to rest leads me living to Acheron's shore, though I have not had my due portion of the chant that brings the bride, |815 nor has any hymn been mine for the crowning of marriage. Instead the lord of Acheron will be my groom.

Chorus

anapests

Then in *kleos* and with praise [*epainos*] you depart to that deep place of the dead, neither struck by wasting sickness, |820 nor having won the wages of the sword. No, guided by your own law [from *nomos*] and still alive, unlike any mortal before, you will descend to Hādēs.

Antigone

antistrophe 1

I have heard how most sorrowfully perished the Phrygian stranger [*xenos*, fem.], daughter of Tantalos, |825 on steep Sipylos—how, like clinging ivy, the sprouting stone subdued her. And the rains, as men tell, do not leave her melting form, nor does the snow, |830 but beneath her weeping brows she dampens her neck. Most like hers is the *daimōn*-sent fate that leads me to my rest.

Chorus:

anapests

Yet she was a goddess, as you know, and the offspring [*genos*] of gods, |835 while we are mortals and mortal-born [*genos*]. Still it is a great thing for a woman who has died [*phthinein*] to have it said of her that she shared the lot of the godlike in her life, and afterwards, in death.

Antigone

strophe 2

Ah, you mock me! In the name of our fathers' gods, |840 why don't you wait to inflict *hubris* on me until after I have gone, and not to my face, O my *polis*, and you, wealthy citizens of the *polis*? Ah, spring of Dirke, and you holy ground of Thebes whose chariots are many, |845 you, at least, will bear me witness how unwept by *philoï*, and by what laws [*nomoi*] I go to the rock-closed prison of my unheard-of tomb! Ah misery! |850 I have no home among men or with the shades, neither with the living nor with the dead.

Chorus

strophe 3

You have rushed headlong to the far limits of daring, and against the high throne of *Dikē*; |855 you have fallen, my daughter, fallen heavily. But in this ordeal [*āthlos*] you are paying for some ancestral wrong.

Antigone

antistrophe 2

You have touched on my most bitter thought |860 and moved my ever-renewed pity for my father and for entire doom ordained for us, the famed [*kleos*, adj.] house of Labdakos. Oh, the disasters [*atai*] of our mother's bed! Oh, the slumbers of the wretched mother at the side |865 of her own son, my own father! What manner of parents gave me my miserable being! It is to them that I go like this, accursed and unwed, to share their home. |870 Ah, my brother, the marriage you made was doomed, and by dying you killed me while I was still alive!

Chorus

antistrophe 3

Your pious action shows a certain reverence, but an offence against power [*kratos*] can in no way be tolerated by him who has power [*kratos*] in his keeping. |875 Your self-willed disposition is what has destroyed you.

Antigone

epode

Unwept, without *philoï*, without marriage-song, I am led in misery on this journey that cannot be put off. No longer is it something permitted [*themis*] for me, unhappy girl, |880 to look up at this sacred [*hieron*] eye of the burning sun. But for my fate no tear is shed, no *philoï* moan in sorrow.

Creon enters.

Creon

Don't you know that dirges and wailing before death would never come to an end, if it were allowed to make them freely? |885 Take her away as quickly as possible! And when you have enshrouded her, as I proclaimed, in her covered tomb, leave her alone, deserted—let her decide whether she wishes to die or to live entombed in such a home. It makes no difference, since our hands are clean so far as regards this girl. |890 But no matter what, she will be stripped of her home here above.

Antigone

Tomb, bridal-chamber, deep-dug eternal abode [*oikēsis* = *oikos*] where I go to find my own, whom in the greatest numbers destruction has seized and Persephone has welcomed among the dead! |895 Last of them all, and in by far the worst [*kakos*, adv.] circumstances, I will descend, even before the fated [*moira*] term of my life is spent. But I cherish strong hopes that I will arrive *philē* to my father, close *philē* to you, mother, and *philē*, brother, to you. |900 For, when each of you died, with my own hands I washed and dressed you and poured drink-offerings at your graves. But now, Polyneikes, it is for tending your corpse that I win such reward as this. And yet I gave you *tīmē* rightly, as those who have *phrenes* will understand. |905 Never, if I had been a mother of children, or if a husband had been rotting after death, would I have taken that burden [*ponos*] upon myself in violation [*biā*] of the citizens' [*politai*, from *polis*] will. For the sake [*kharis*] of what law [*nomos*], you ask, do I say that? A husband lost, another might have been found, |910 and if bereft of a child, there could be a second from some other man. But when father and mother are hidden in Hādēs, no brother could ever bloom for me again. Such was the law [*nomos*] whereby I held you first in *tīmē*, but for that Creon judged me guilty of wrongdoing [*hamartanein*] |915 and of dreadful [*deina*] outrage, dear brother! And now he leads me thus in his hands' strong grasp, when I have enjoyed no marriage-bed or bridal song and have not received any portion of marriage or the nurture of children. But deserted by *philoī*, |920 in misery I go living to the hollow graves of the dead. What *dikē* of the *daimones* have I transgressed? Why should I look to the gods any more? What ally should I call out to, when by my reverence I have earned a name for irreverence? |925 Well, then, if these events please the gods, once I have suffered [*paskhein*] my doom I will come to know my error [*hamartanein*]. But if the error [*hamartanein*] lies with my judges, I could wish that they suffer [*paskhein*] no greater evils [*kaka*] than they inflict, without *dikē*, on me.

Chorus

anapests

Still the same tempest of the *psūkhē* |930 grips this girl with the same fierce gusts.

Creon

Then because of this her guards will have reason to lament their slowness.

Antigone

Ah no! That command verges close on death.

Creon

|935 I cannot console [vb., from *mūthos*⁷] you with any hope that your doom is not to be fulfilled in that way.

Antigone

O city of my fathers, land of Thebes, and you gods, our ancestors! I am led away now, there is no more delay! |940 Look at me, you who are Thebes' lords—look at the only remaining daughter of the house of your kings. See what I suffer [*paskhein*], and at whose hands, because I revered reverence!

Antigone is led away by the guards.

Chorus

strophe 1

So too endured the beauty of Danae to change |945 the light of the sky for brass-bound walls, and in that chamber, both burial and bridal, she was held in strict confinement. And yet she was from a family-line of *tīmē*, my daughter, |950 and guarded a deposit of the seed of Zeus that had fallen in a golden rain. But dreadful / marvelous [*deina*] is the mysterious power of fate [*moira*, adj.]: there is no deliverance from it by wealth [*olbos*] or by war [*Arēs*], by towered city, or dark, sea-beaten ships.

antistrophe 1

⁷ The word used here, *para-mūth-eīsthai*, is constructed from the verbal form of *mūthos*, with the prefix *para*.

|955 And the swift-raging son of Dryas, the Edonian king, was tamed in recompense for his frenzied insults, when, by the will of Dionysus, he was shut in a rocky prison. There the dreadful [*deinon*] and swelling force [*menos*] of his madness trickled away. |960 That man came to know the god whom in his frenzy he had provoked with mockeries. For he had sought to quell the god-inspired women and the Bacchanalian fire, |965 and he angered the Muses who are *philai* to the flute.

strophe 2

And by the waters of the Dark Rocks, the waters of the twofold sea, are the shores of Bosphorus and the Thracian city Salmydessos, |970 where Arēs, neighbor of that *polis*, saw the accursed, blinding wound inflicted on the two sons of Phineus by his savage wife. It was a wound that brought darkness to the hollows, making them crave vengeance |975 for the eyes she crushed with her bloody hands and with her shuttle for a dagger.

antistrophe 2

|977 Wasting away in their misery, they bewailed their miserable suffering [*pathos*] |980 and their birth from their mother stripped of her marriage. But she traced her descent from the ancient [*arkhē*, adj.] line [*genos*] of the Erekhtheidai, and in far-distant caves she was raised amidst her father's gusts. She was the child of Boreas, |985 running swift as horses over the steep hills, a daughter of gods. Yet she, too, was assailed by the long-lived Fates [*Moirai*], my child.

Teiresias enters, led by a boy.

Teiresias

Lords of Thebes, we have come on a shared journey, two scouting the way by the eyes of one. |990 For this is the method of travel for the blind, using a guide.

Creon

What is it, old Teiresias? What is your news?

Teiresias

I will tell you. You, obey the seer [*mantis*].

Creon

It was not my habit before, to stand apart from your *phrenes*.

Teiresias

Therefore you captained this *polis* on an upright course.

Creon

|995 I have experienced [*paskhein*] and can attest your benefits.

Teiresias

Realize that once more now you are poised on fortune's razor-edge.

Creon

What do you mean? I shudder to hear you!

Teiresias

You will understand, when you hear the signs [*sēmeia* = *sēma*] revealed by my art. As I took my place on my old seat of augury |1000 where all birds regularly gather for me, I heard an unintelligible voice among them: they were screaming in evil [*kakos*] frenzy that made their language foreign to me. I realized that they were ripping each other with their talons, murderously—the rush of their wings did not lack a *sēma*. |1005 Quickly, in fear, I tried burnt-sacrifice on a duly kindled altar, but from my offerings Hephaistos did not blaze. Instead juice that had sweated from the thigh-flesh trickled out onto the embers and smoked and sputtered; |1010 the gall was scattered high up in the air; and the streaming thighs lay bared of the fat that

had been wrapped around them. Such was the failure of [*phthinein*] the mantic⁸ rites that yielded no *sēma*, as I learned from this boy. For he is my guide, as I am guide to others. |1015 And it is your *phrēn* that is the source of the sickness now afflicting the *polis*. For the altars of our city and our hearths have one and all been tainted by the birds and dogs with the carrion taken from the sadly-fallen son of Oedipus. And so the gods no more accept prayer and sacrifice at our hands, |1020 or the burning of thigh-meat, nor does any bird sound out clear signs [*eusēmoi*, from *sēma*] in its shrill cries, for they have tasted the fatness of a slain man's blood. Put your *phrenes*, therefore, to these things, my son. All men are liable to do wrong [*hamartanein*]. |1025 But when wrong is done [*hamartanein*], that man is no longer unwise or unfortunate [without *olbos*] who heals the evil [*kakon*] into which he has fallen and does not remain stubborn. Self-will, we know, invites the charge of foolishness. Concede the claim of the dead. Do not lash at the fallen. |1030 What prowess is it to kill the dead all over again? I have considered [*phrēn*, vb.] for your good, and what I advise is good. The sweetest thing is to learn from a good advisor when his advice is to your profit [*kerdos*].

Creon

Old man, you all shoot your arrows at me, like archers at their mark, and I am not safe |1035 even from the plottings of the seer's divine art [*mantikē*, from *mantis*], but by their tribe [*genos*] I have long been bought and sold and made their merchandise. Turn your profits [*kerdos*, vb.], make your deals for the white gold of Sardis and the gold of India, if it pleases you, but you shall not cover that man with a grave, |1040 not even if the eagles of Zeus wish to snatch and carry him to be devoured at the god's throne. No, not even then, for fear of that defilement [*miasma*], will I permit his burial, since I know with certainty that no mortal has the power to defile [*miasma*, vb.] the gods. |1045 But, old Teiresias, such men—so very clever⁹ [*deinoi*]⁹—fall with a shameful fall, when they couch shameful thoughts in fine phrasing for the sake of [*kharis*] gain [*kerdos*].

Teiresias

God! Does any man know, does any consider ...

Creon

What's this? What universal truth are you announcing?

Teiresias

|1050 ... by how much the most precious of our possessions [*ktēma*, pl.] is the power [*kratos*, adj.] to reason wisely?

Creon

By as much, I think, as lack of *phrenes* is the greatest affliction.

Teiresias

Yet you came into being full of that disease.

Creon

I have no desire to speak ill [*kakos*, adv.] with the seer [*mantis*].

Teiresias

Yet that is what you do in saying that I prophesy falsely.

Creon

|1055 Yes, for the tribe of seers [*mantikon genos*] holds money near and dear [*philon*].

Teiresias

And the family sprung from tyrants [*turannoī*] is *philon* to shameful gain [*kerdos*].

⁸ *manteumata* (pl.) here means the sacrificial object, that is, the meat, fat and bones, which cannot be read as an oracle because it will not burn.

⁹ The translation here follows David Grene (tr.), *Everyman's Library: The Theban Plays*, London 1904.

Creon

Do you know that you speak so about your ruler?

Teiresias

I am aware, since through me you have saved [*sōzein*] this *polis*.

Creon

You are a *sophos* seer [*mantis*], but fond of [*phileîn*] doing things without *dikē*.

Teiresias

|1060 You will stir me to utter the dire secret in my *phrenes*.

Creon

Out with it! But only if it is not for gain [*kerdos*] that you speak it.

Teiresias

Indeed, I think I speak without mention of desire for gain—where you are concerned.

Creon

Be certain that you will not trade in my *phrēn*.

Teiresias

Then know, yes, know it well! You will not accomplish [*telos*, vb.] many more |1065 courses of the sun's swift chariot, before you will give in return one sprung from your own loins, a corpse in requital for corpses. For you have thrust below one of those of the upper air, and without *tīmē* lodged a living *psūkhē* in the grave, |1070 while you detain in this world that which belongs to the infernal gods, a corpse unburied [without *moira*¹⁰], unmourned, unholy. In the dead you have no part, nor do the gods above, but in this you do them violence [*biā*, vb.]. For these crimes the avenging destroyers, |1075 the Furies [*Erinyes*] of Hādēs and of the gods, lie in ambush for you, waiting to seize you in these same evils [*kaka*]. And look closely if I tell you this bribed by silver. A time not long to be delayed will reveal in your house wailing over men and over women. |1080 All the *poleis* are stirred up as enemies [*ekhthrai*], whose mangled corpses the dogs or the wild beasts or some winged bird buried, carrying an unholy stench to the *polis* that held each man's hearth. There, now, are arrows for your heart—since you provoke me— |1085 launched at you, archer-like, by my *thūmos*. They fly true—you cannot run from their burning sting. Boy, lead me home, so that he may launch his *thūmos* against younger men, and learn to keep a quieter [*hēsukhos*] tongue |1090 and a better *noos* within his *phrenes* than he now bears.

Teiresias exits.

Chorus

The man is gone, my lord, leaving dreadful / marvelous [*deina*] prophecies behind. And for all the time that I have had this hair on my head, now white, once dark, I know that he has never been a false prophet to our *polis*.

Creon

|1095 I, too, know it well, and my *phrenes* are troubled. To yield is terrible [*deinon*], but, to resist, to strike my *thūmos* with disaster [*atē*]¹⁰—this, too, is a terrible [*deinon*] prospect.

Chorus

The moment, son of Menoikeus, requires that you reason wisely.

Creon

¹⁰ *amoiron*: Having no portion with the gods below. The next word, for which Jebb suggests “unmourned”, is known only in this context, but the verb generally appears to mean bury with honors.

What should I do, then? Speak, and I will obey.

Chorus

|1100 Go first and free the girl from her hollowed chamber. Then raise a tomb for the unburied dead.

Creon

And you recommend [*epaineîn*] this? You think that I should yield?

Chorus

Yes, my lord, and with all possible speed. For harms sent from the gods swiftly cut short the follies of men [*kakophrôn*, from *kakos* + *phrên*].

Creon

|1105 Ah, it is a struggle, but I depart from my heart's resolve and obey. We must not wage vain wars with necessity.

Chorus

Go, do these things and do not leave their performance to others.

Creon

Right away I'll go. Go, go, my servants, each and all of you! Take axes in your hands |1110 and hurry to that place there in view! But since my judgment has taken this turn, I will be there to set her free, as I myself confined her. I am held by the fear that it is best [*ariston*] to keep [*sōzein*] the established laws [*nomoi*] to life's very *telos*.¹¹

Chorus

strophe 1

|1115 God of many names, glory of the Kadmeian bride and offspring [*genos*] of loud-thundering Zeus, you who watch over far-famed Italy and reign |1120 in the valleys of Eleusinian Deo where all find welcome! O Bacchus, denizen of Thebes, the mother *polis* of your Bacchantes, dweller by the wet stream of Ismenos on the soil |1125 of the sowing of the savage dragon's teeth!

antistrophe 1

The smoky glare of torches sees you above the cliffs of the twin peaks, where the Korykian nymphs move inspired by your godhead, |1130 and Kastalia's stream sees you, too. The ivy-mantled slopes of Nysa's hills and the shore green with many-clustered vines send you, when, accompanied by the cries of your divine words, |1135 you visit the avenues of Thebes.

strophe 2

Thebes of all *poleis* [*polis*, pl.] you hold foremost in *tīmē*, together with your lightning-struck mother. |1140 And now when all the people [*dēmos*] of our *polis* are held subject to a violent [*biā*, adj.] plague, come, we ask, with purifying feet over steep Parnassus, |1145 or over the groaning straits!

antistrophe 2

O *chorēgos* [leader of the *choros*] of the stars whose breath is fire, Overseer of the voices in the night, son begotten of Zeus, |1150 appear, my lord, with your attendant Thyiads, who in night-long frenzy sing and dance you in the *choros* as Iacchus the Giver!

A Messenger enters.

Messenger

|1155 Neighbors of the house [*paroikoi*, from *oikos*] of Kadmos and of Amphion, there is no station of human life that I would ever praise or blame as being settled. Fortune sets upright and Fortune sinks the lucky and unlucky from day to day, |1160 and no one can prophesy [be a *mantis*] to men concerning the

11 The verbal form *teleîn* is used.

order that has just been established. For Creon, as I saw it, was once enviable: he had saved [*sōzein*] this Kadmeian land from its enemies [*ekhthroi*]; and having won sole rule [*monarkhia*] in the land, he guided it on a straight course and flourished in his noble crop of children. |1165 And now all this has been lost. When a man has forfeited his pleasures, I do not reckon his existence as life, but consider him just a breathing [with *psūkhē*, adj.] corpse. Heap up riches in your house [*oikos*], if you wish! Live with a tyrant's [*turannos*] pomp! But if there is no joy |1170 along with all of that, I would not pay even the shadow of smoke for all the rest, compared with joy.

Chorus

What is this new grief for our princes that you have come to report?

Messenger

They are dead, and the living are guilty of [*aitioi*] the deaths.

Chorus

Who is the murderer? Who the murdered? Tell us.

Messenger

|1175 Haimon is dead—his blood has been shed by a blood-relative's hand.

Chorus

Was it his father's, or his own [*oikos*, adj.]?

Messenger

He did it by his own, in anger [*mēnis*, vb.] with his father for the murder.

Chorus

Ah, seer [*mantis*], how true, then, you have proved your word!

Messenger

Knowing that these things are so, you must consider the rest.

Chorus

|1180 Wait, I see the unhappy Eurydice, Creon's wife, nearby. She comes from the house either knowing of her son, or merely by chance.

Eurydice enters.

Eurydice

People of Thebes, I heard your words as I was on my way to the gates to address divine Pallas Athena with my prayers. |1185 Just as I was loosening the bolts of the gate to open it, the sound of an evil [*kakon*] blow to our house [*oikos*, adj.] struck my ear. In terror I sank back into the arms of my handmaids, and my senses fled. |1190 But repeat what your announcement [*mūthos*] was, for I shall hear it with ears that are no strangers to evil [*kaka*].

Messenger

Philē mistress, I will tell what I witnessed and leave no *epos* of the truth [*alētheia*] unspoken. For what good would it do that I should soothe you with words in which I must later be found false? |1195 The truth [*alētheia*] is always best. I attended your husband as his guide to the furthest part of the plain, where unpitied the body of Polyneikes, torn by dogs, still lay. After we had prayed to the goddess of the roads |1200 and to Pluto to restrain their anger in mercy [*eumenēs*, from *menos*], we washed him with pure washing, and with freshly-plucked boughs we burned what remains there were. Lastly we heaped a high-mounded tomb of his native [*oikos*, adj.] earth. Afterwards we turned away to enter the maiden's stone-bedded |1205 bridal chamber, the caverned mansion of Hādēs' bride. From a distance, one of us servants heard a voice of loud wailing near that bride's unwept bed and came to signal [*sēmainein*] it to master Creon. And as he moved closer and closer, obscure signs [*asēma* from *sēma*] rising from a wretched cry

surrounded him. |1210 He groaned and uttered an *epos* in bitter lament, “Ah misery, am I now the seer [*mantis*] of evil? Am I going on the path most lined with grief of all that I have walked before? My son’s voice greets me. Go, my servants, |1215 hurry closer, and when you have reached the tomb, enter the opening where the stones of the mound have been torn away, up to the cell’s very mouth. See if it is Haimon’s voice that I recognize, or if I am cheated by the gods.” This search, at our desperate [without *thūmos*] master’s word, |1220 we went to make, and in the furthest part of the tomb we saw her hanging by the neck, fastened by a halter of fine linen threads, while he was embracing her with arms thrown around her waist, bewailing the loss of his bride to the spirits below, as well as his father’s deeds, and his grief-filled marriage. |1225 But his father, when he saw him, cried aloud with a dreadful cry, and went in and called to him with a voice of wailing: “Ah, unhappy boy, what have you done! What kind of intent [*noos*] did you have? By what misfortune have you lost your reason? |1230 Come out, my son, I pray you, I beg you!” But the boy glared at him with savage eyes, spat in his face, and without a word in response drew his twin-edged sword. As his father rushed out in flight, he missed his aim. Then the ill-fated boy was enraged with himself |1235 and immediately stretched himself over his sword and drove it, half its length, into his side. Still conscious, he clasped the maiden in his faint embrace, and, as he gasped, he shot onto her pale cheek a swift stream of oozing blood. |1240 Corpse enfolding corpse he lay, having won his wedding rites [*telos*, pl.], poor boy, not here, but in Hādēs’ palace, and having shown to mankind by how much the failure to reason wisely is the most severe evil [*kakon*] assigned to humanity.

Eurydice rushes into the palace.

Chorus

What would you infer from this? The lady |1245 has turned back and gone without a word, either for good [*esthlon*] or for evil [*kakon*].

Messenger

I, too, am startled. Still I am nourished by the hope that hearing the *akhos* of her son she thinks it unworthy to make her laments before the *polis*, but in the shelter of her home will set her handmaids to mourn the house’s [*oikos*] sorrow [*penthos*]. |1250 For she is not inexperienced in judgment, that she should do wrong [*hamartanein*].

Chorus

I do not know. But to me a silence too strict seems to promise trouble just as much as a fruitless abundance of weeping.

Messenger

I will find out whether she is not, in fact, hiding some repressed plan in the darkness of her heart full of *thūmos*. |1255 I will go in, since you are right—in an excess of silence, too, there may be trouble.

The Messenger exits. Creon enters carrying the body of Haimon.

Chorus:

anapests

Look, here is our lord himself approaching, his hands grasping a visible reminder, a preeminent *sēma* indicating that his—if it is permitted [*themis*] us to say it—and no one else’s, |1260 was the aberration [*atē*] of this error [*hamartanein*].

Creon

strophe 1

Ah, the errors [*hamartēmata*] of unthinking [with bad *phrēn*] *phrenes*, errors of rigidity, yielding death! Oh, you witnesses of the killers and the killed, both of one family-line! |1265 What deprivation of prosperity [without *olbos*] comes from my reasonings! Haimon, you have died after a young life, youngest and last of my sons! Alas, alas! You have departed not by your foolishness, but by my own!

Chorus

strophe 2

|1270 Ah, how late you seem to see the right [*dikē*]!

Creon

Ah, me! I have mastered the bitter lesson! But then, then, I think, some god struck me on my head with a crushing weight, and drove me into savage paths, |1275 —alas!—and overthrew my joy to be trampled on! Ah, the laborious ordeals [*dusponoi ponoī*] of men!

The Messenger enters from the palace.

Messenger

My master, you have come, I think, like one whose hands are not empty, but who has a ready store: first, you carry that burden visible in your arms; |1280 second, you will soon look upon further evils [*kaka*] in your household.

Creon

What new evil [*kakon*] is still to follow upon these evils [*kaka*]?

Messenger

Your wife is dead, true mother of that corpse, poor lady, by wounds newly cut.

Creon

antistrophe 1

O harbor of Hādēs, hard to purify! |1285 Why, why do you ruin me? Herald of evil [*kaka*], of *akhos*, what word do you say? Ah, you have done in a dead man anew! What are you saying, boy? What is this you report to me |1290 Alas, alas! What new slaughter, my wife’s doom, is heaped upon this ruin?

Chorus

The sight is at hand. It is no longer hidden inside.

The doors of the palace are opened, disclosing the corpse of Eurydice.

Creon

antistrophe 2

Ah, misery! |1295 There I see a new, a second evil [*kakon*]! What destiny, what, I ask, can still await me? I have just now taken my son in my arms, and now I see another corpse before me! |1300 Oh, wretched mother! Oh, my son!

Messenger

By the altar, with a sharp-whetted sword, she struck until her eyes went slack and dark. Before that she bewailed the noble [*kleos*, adj.] fate of Megareus who died earlier, and then the fate of this boy, and also, with her last breath, |1305 she called down evil [*kakai*] fortune upon you, the slayer of her sons.

Creon

strophe 3

Ah, no! I tremble with fear. Why does no one strike me full on my chest with a two-edged sword? |1310 I am miserable—alas!—and bathed in miserable anguish!

Messenger

Yes, because you are accused of responsibility [*aitiā*] for both this son’s death, and the other’s, by her whose corpse you see.

Creon

What was the manner of the violent deed by which she departed?

Messenger

|1315 Her own hand struck her to the heart upon learning her son’s sharply-lamented suffering [*pathos*].

Creon

strophe 4

Ah this guilt [*aitiā*] can never be fastened onto any other mortal so as to remove my own! It was I, yes, I, who killed you, I the wretch. |1320 I admit the truth. Lead me away, my servants, lead me from here with all haste, |1325 who am no more than a dead man!

Chorus

The course you recommend is to your gain [*kerdos*], if there can be gain [*kerdos*] amidst evil [*kakon*]. What is briefest is best [most *kratos*, adj.], when troubles [*kaka*] lie at your feet.

Creon

antistrophe 3

Let it come, let it appear, that fairest of fates for me, |1330 that brings my final day, the fate supreme! Oh, let it come, so that I may never see tomorrow's light!

Chorus

These things are in the future. We must see to present affairs. |1335 Fulfillment of these things rests in the hands where it should rest.

Creon

All that I crave, was summed in that prayer.

Chorus

Then pray no more; for mortals have no release from destined misfortune.

Creon

antistrophe 4

Lead me away, I beg you, a rash, useless man. |1340 I have murdered you, son, unwittingly, and you, too, my wife—the misery! I do not know which way I should look, or where I should seek support. All is |1345 amiss that is in my hands, and, again, a crushing fate has leapt upon my head.

Chorus

anapests

Sound thinking [*phrēn*, vb.] is provided as the chief part of happiness [*eudaimoniā*], and our dealings with the gods |1350 must be in no way unholy. The great words of arrogant men have to make repayment with great blows, and in old age teach sound thinking [*phrēn*, vb.].