

The Antigone of Sophocles

(1947)

by Bertolt Brecht

*Liberated from
capitalist control
to educate the masses
by
Socialist Stories*

Characters:

TWO SISTERS

SS MAN

ANTIGONE

ISMENE

CREON

TIRESIAS

HAEMON

GUARDS

THE ELDERS OF THEBES

MESSENGER

MAIDS

PRELUDE

Berlin. April 1945.

Daybreak.

Two sisters come back to their home from the air-raid shelter.

FIRST SISTER:

And when we came up from the air-raid shelter
And the house was whole and in a brighter
Light than dawn from the fire opposite
It was my sister who first noticed it.

SECOND SISTER:

Sister, why is our door open wide?

FIRST SISTER:

The draught of the fire has hit it from outside.

SECOND SISTER:

Sister, what made the tracks there in the dust?

FIRST SISTER:

Nothing but someone who went up there fast.

SECOND SISTER:

Sister, the sack in the corner there, what's that?

FIRST SISTER:

Better that something's there than something's not.

SECOND SISTER:

A joint of bacon, sister, and a loaf of bread.

FIRST SISTER:

That's not a thing to make me feel afraid.

SECOND SISTER:

Sister, who's been here?

FIRST SISTER:

How should I know that?

Someone who's treated us to something good to eat.

SECOND SISTER:

But I know! We of little faith! Oh luck

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Is on us, sister. Our brother is back.

FIRST SISTER:

Then we embraced each other and were cheerful
For our brother was in the war, and he was well.
And we cut and ate of the bacon and the bread
That he had brought us to feed us in our need.

SECOND SISTER:

Take more for yourself. The factory's killing you.

FIRST SISTER:

No you.

SECOND SISTER:

It's easier on me. Cut deeper.

FIRST SISTER:

No.

SECOND SISTER:

How could he come?

FIRST SISTER:

With his unit.

SECOND SISTER:

Now

Where is he, do you think?

FIRST SISTER:

Where they are fighting.

SECOND SISTER:

Oh.

FIRST SISTER:

But there was no noise of fighting to be heard.

SECOND SISTER:

I shouldn't have asked.

FIRST SISTER:

I didn't want you scared.

And as we sat there saying nothing a sound came
In through the door that froze the bloodstream.

A screaming from outside.

SECOND SISTER:

Sister, there's someone screaming. Let's see who.

FIRST SISTER:

Sit still. You go and see, you get seen too.

So we did not go outside the door

To see what things were happening out there.
 But we ate no more either and we did not
 Look at each other again but we stood up and got
 Ready to go to work as we did daily
 And my sister took the plates and I bethought me
 And took our brother's sack to the cupboard
 Where his old things are stored.
 And I felt, so it seemed, my heartbeat stop:
 In there his army coat was hanging up.
 Sister, he isn't in the fight
 He's run for it, he's cleared out
 His war's over, he has quit.

SECOND SISTER:

Those still there, he's left them to it.

FIRST SISTER:

They had death lined up for him.

SECOND SISTER:

But he disappointed them.

FIRST SISTER:

There was still an inch or two . . .

SECOND SISTER:

That was where he crawled through.

FIRST SISTER:

Some still in, he's left them to it.

SECOND SISTER:

His war's over, he has quit.

FIRST SISTER:

And we laughed and we were cheerful:
 Our brother was out of the war and he was well.
 And as we stood there such a sound came
 It felt like ice in the bloodstream.
A screaming from outside.

SECOND SISTER:

Sister, who is it screaming outside our door?

FIRST SISTER:

Again they are tormenting folk for pleasure.

SECOND SISTER:

Sister, should we not go and find out who?

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FIRST SISTER:

Stay in. You go and find out, you get found out too.
So we waited a while and did not go and see
What the things that were happening outside might be.
Then we had to leave for work and I was the one who saw
What it was outside our door.
Sister, sister don't go out.
Our brother is home but he is not
Safe and sound but hanging there
From a meat hook. But my sister
Went out of the door
And screamed herself at what she saw.

SECOND SISTER:

They have hanged him, sister. That was
Why he cried out loud for us.
Give me the knife, give it here
And I'll cut him down so he won't hang there
And I will carry his body in
And rub him back to life again.

FIRST SISTER:

Sister, leave the knife.
You'll not bring him back to life.
If they see us standing by him
We'll get what he got from them.

SECOND SISTER:

Let me go. I didn't while
They were hanging him. Now I will.

FIRST SISTER:

And as she made for the door
An SS man stood there.
Enter an SS man.

SS MAN:

We know who he is. Say who you are.
He came out of here.
Seems to me very probable
You know that traitor to his people.

FIRST SISTER:

Sir, we are not the ones to question.
We do not know the man.

SS MAN:

So what's she doing with the knife, her there?

FIRST SISTER:

Then I looked at my sister.

Should she on pain of death go now

And free our brother who

May be dead or no?

Outside Creon's palace. Daybreak.

ANTIGONE *collecting dust in an iron pot:*

Sister, Ismene, twin shoot

From the stem of Oedipus, do you know any thing

Error, sad travail, any disgraceful thing

Not visited by the Father of the Earth

On us who have lived to here?

In a long war, one man among many

Eteocles fell, our brother. In the tyrant's train

He fell young. And younger than him Polynices

Sees his brother pulped under horses' hooves. Weeping

He rides from an unfinished battle, for this to one

And that to another the battle spook deals when he comes
at him hard

With his just deserts and smashes his hands. Headlong

Already the fugitive

Had crossed the streams of Dirce and breathing again

He sees the seven gates of Thebes still standing, then Creon

There at the rear lashing them into the fight

Seizes him splashed with the blood of his brother and hacks
him to pieces.

Have they told you or have they not told you

What more shall be heaped on Oedipus'

Dwindling breed?

ISMENE:

I did not show myself in the marketplace, Antigone.

No further word has come to me of loved ones

No kind word and no sad one either.

I am not happier and not more troubled.

ANTIGONE:

Hear it from me then. And whether your heart's

Beat stops or beats

Deeper in misery, show me that.

ISMENE:

You with the dust in your collecting hand, you seem
To dye your words with red.

ANTIGONE:

This then: our two brothers
Dragged both into Creon's war for the grey metal
Against remote Argos and slaughtered both
Shall not be covered both of them with earth.
The one who did not fear the fight, Eteocles
He, it is said, shall be wreathed and buried as is the custom.
Of the other's though, who has died wretchedly,
Of Polynices' corpse they say they have
Broadcast it in the city he shall not
Be hidden in any grave and not lamented.
He shall be left unwept without a grave
Sweet dish for the birds. But whosoever
Does anything about this will be stoned.
So tell me then what you will do about it.

ISMENE:

Sister, are you testing me?

ANTIGONE:

Would I have your help?

ISMENE:

In what dangerous endeavour?

ANTIGONE:

To cover him.

ISMENE:

Whom the city has abjured?

ANTIGONE:

Whom they have failed.

ISMENE:

The man in rebellion.

ANTIGONE:

Yes. My brother and also yours.

ISMENE:

Sister, you will be caught in lawlessness.

ANTIGONE:

But not
In faithlessness.

ISMENE:

Unlucky girl, are you impelled
 To gather us all below now
 Of Oedipus' stock?
 Let be what's past.

ANTIGONE:

You are younger, you have seen
 Less horror. What is past, let be
 Does not stay past.

ISMENE:

Think of this too: we are women
 And must not make a quarrel against men
 Not being strong enough and thus in thrall
 In this and much else harsher too. Therefore
 I beg them down below whom only earth oppresses
 They will forgive me. Under this duress
 I will follow the ruler. For doing
 Things in vain is unwise.

ANTIGONE:

I shall not go on asking. You
 Follow whoever gives the orders and do
 Whatever he orders. But I
 Will follow the custom and bury my brother.
 And if I die in it, so what? I will be quietened
 Lying with the quiet ones. Behind me I will have
 Accomplished what is holy. Then a longer time
 I shall be liked by those down there than here
 For there I'll dwell for ever. But you
 Laugh at disgrace and live.

ISMENE:

Antigone, it is bitter
 To suffer a wild disgrace, but also
 There is a limit on the salt of tears, they do not spring
 From the eyes inexhaustibly. The edge of the axe
 Ends sweet life but it opens
 The veins of pain in the ones it leaves behind. They must
 lament

Without rest but even lamenting they hear
 Above them the twittering of birds and again
 Through the veil of their tears appear

The ancient elms and the roofs of home.

ANTIGONE:

I hate you, shamelessly showing me
A lap of skirt full of holes and in it your
Dwindling stock of grief. Meanwhile
On bare stones flesh of your flesh is lying
Served up to the birds of the far and wide skies, he is to you
Already a yesterday thing.

ISMENE:

Only
To raise myself in revolt I am not good enough, and clumsy
And fear for you.

ANTIGONE:

Don't counsel me. Come out with your own life!
But let me do the very least and honour what is mine
Where it has been reviled. I am in all things
Not so delicate, I hope, that I could not
Die an unlovely death.

ISMENE:

Go then with your dust. But listen: your speech
Is all awry, but lovely on what we love.
*Exit Antigone with her jug. Ismene goes indoors. Enter the
Elders.*

ELDERS:

But victory big in booty has come
And favoured the numerous chariots of Thebes
And after the war
Now let there be a forgetting.
Into all the gods' temples
With choirs through the night
Come and let Thebes whose nakedness laurels have clothed
Be shaken with the stamp and dancing of Bacchus!
But the bringer of victory
Creon, Menoeceus' son, must have hurried here
From the battlefield to proclaim
Booty and at last the return of the soldiers
Since he has called and commanded this gathering of
the Elders.

Creon comes out of the palace.

CREON:

Sirs, share this with everyone: there is
 No Argos any more. The settling up
 Was total. From eleven townships
 Few got away, oh very few!
 As it is said of Thebes: you bear to Good Luck
 Twins in a trice, and Bad Luck
 Does not flatten you, it
 Itself is flattened. Your spear's thirst
 Was quenched at the first drinking. And was not denied
 Repeated drinking. Thebes, you laid to rest
 The people of Argos on a hard place. Now without town or
 tomb
 What mocked you lies in the open air.
 And looking where
 Their city was
 What you see are dogs
 With glistening countenances.
 The noblest vultures wing their way to her, they tread
 From corpse to corpse
 And from the rich servings there
 They cannot lift into the air.

ELDERS:

Sweet picture, sir, of vast and terrible things.
 And it will please the city when it comes to them
 If shrewdly mixed with something else: chariots
 Climbing the streets here carrying our own.

CREON:

Soon, friends, soon. But now to business. Not yet
 Will you see me hang my sword up in the temple.
 There are two reasons why I summoned you
 From among all. For one, because I know
 You don't keep count how many wheels the war god's
 Foe-crushing chariots need and don't begrudge him
 Your sons' blood in the battle, but when he comes
 With losses home under the well-defended roof
 There is much reckoning up in the market place. Swiftly
 Therefore make clear to Thebes the blood-spillage
 Does not exceed the usual. Then this, because

All too forgiving Thebes, being saved
 Again, will hurry as always to wipe the gasping home-
 comers'

Sweat off their brows and will not especially note
 Whether the sweat is the sweat of the angry fighter or
 Only the sweat of fear and with it mixed
 The dust of flight. Therefore I covered
 And you are to approve it, Eteocles
 Who died for the city, with wreath and grave
 But the poltroon Polynices, to him
 And to me related and a friend to the people of Argos
 Will lie unburied as they lie. Like them
 He was an enemy, to me was and to Thebes.
 My wish therefore is no one mourn him, also
 That he be left unburied and on show
 A meal, a meat torn up by birds and dogs.
 For who rates higher than his native city
 His life, I count him nothing.
 Who means my city well though, dead or alive
 Equally always he has my esteem.
 I hope that you approve that.

ELDERS:

We do approve it.

CREON:

Be overseers then in the aforesaid.

ELDERS:

Fill suchlike posts with young men.

CREON:

Not that. The corpse already has a watch out there.

ELDERS:

And we're the watchers on the living, are we?

CREON:

Yes. There are certain people it displeases.

ELDERS:

There's no such fool here he will gladly die.

CREON:

None openly. But many a one there is
 Goes on shaking his head till it falls off.
 And that brings me to this: more still needs doing, alas.

The city must be cleansed . . .

Enter a guard.

GUARD:

Sir!

My führer, breathlessly

I hurry to hand in the swiftest news, don't ask why not

Even swifter, my feet

Ahead of my head or else

It tugging them after, for

Wherever I am going and how long

Still in the sun and out of breath

Going I am at least nevertheless.

CREON:

Why so out of breath or

So hesitant?

GUARD:

I hush nothing up. Why, say I

Not say straight out what wasn't done by me?

And don't know either for I do not even know

Who did this thing to you. Harsh sentence

On one so ignorant would be

Discouraging.

CREON:

Taking no chances are you? The eager messenger

Of your own misdeed you want the prize

For good legwork.

GUARD:

Sir

You laid a vast thing on your watchers. But

Vast things do also give a lot of trouble.

CREON:

Speak, will you, finally, then go again.

GUARD:

I'll speak then. Somebody who got away

Just now has buried the dead man, sprinkling

His skin with dust so the vultures would not spy him.

CREON:

What's that you say? Who was it dared do this?

GUARD:

I do not know. A spade had not dug there
 Nor any shovel flung. And smooth the ground
 Not ridden over by wheels. No sign
 Who did it. Not a burial mound
 Only a gentle dust as though someone had shied
 Before the ban and had not brought much dust.
 And nowhere prints of any beasts
 Nor dogs that had come and torn.
 When first light showed us this it had
 To all of us an eerie feel. And I
 Was chosen by lot to tell you, führer
 And no one loves the bearer of dire words.

ELDERS:

Oh Creon, son of Menoeceus, might not
 The gods be in this happening?

CREON:

Enough of that. Don't make me angrier still
 And say the spirits are gentle on the coward
 Who coldly would have let be violated
 The groups of columns of their temples and the offerings.

No

Some in the city take some things amiss
 And mutter and in the harness will not bow
 Their necks for me. I know for sure
 These got this up, with bribes.
 For among all things ever stamped for use
 None is so bad as silver. Whole towns
 It leads astray and goads men from their houses
 To know the knack of every godless work.
 Hear this though, if you do not bring me in
 Earthly and alive, whoever did it
 Yoked and guilty, you'll be hanged and go
 With a rope around your neck to the underworld.
 Then see where you can draw your profit from
 Share out the spoils with one another and learn
 Not everything is there to buy and sell.

GUARD:

Sir, our kind have a lot to be afraid of.
 The place, the down-below place, you allude to

For us has far too many entrances. I'm less
 Not to say not at all, afraid this minute that
 I was given any silver – but if you think so
 I'd better turn my pockets out twice more
 In case there's something in there after all –
 Than that I'll make you cross by contradicting.
 But what I fear more is when I start looking
 It's rope I might be given, in high hands
 There being more of rope for such as us
 Than silver. If you take my meaning.

CREON:

You, so transparent, are you setting me conundrums?

GUARD:

The high-up dead man had his high-up friends.

CREON:

Catch them around the shins if you can't reach higher
 Up them. There are, I know, one place or another
 Malcontents. Some hear of my victory
 Quaking with joy and put the laurel on
 With fearful haste. I'll find them out.
Exit into the palace.

GUARD:

Unhealthy place this where the high
 Are scrapping with the mighty. I'm
 So it seems, still here. To my surprise.
Exit.

ELDERS:

Monstrous, a lot. But nothing
 More monstrous than man.
 For he, across the night
 Of the sea, when into the winter the
 Southerlies blow, he puts out
 In winged and whirring houses.
 And the noble earth of the gods in heaven
 The unspoilable tireless earth
 He rubs out with the striving plough
 From year to year driving
 The race of horses to and fro.
 And the breed of the lightly made birds
 He ensnares and hunts

And the tribe of wild beasts
 And Pontus' nature that thrives in salt
 With ropes slyly slung
 This knowing man.
 And catches the game with his arts
 That sleeps and roams on the mountains.
 And over the rough-maned horse he flings
 The yoke on its neck, and over the mountain-
 Wandering and untamed bull.
 And speech and the airy flight
 Of thought and statutes to order a state
 He has learned and to flee the damp airs
 Of ill-blowing hills and
 The bolts of rain. All-travelled
 Untravelled. He comes to nothing.
 Always he knows what to do
 Nothing nonplusses him.
 In all this he is boundless but
 A measure is set.
 For when he wants for an enemy
 He rises up as his own. Like the bull's
 He bows the neck of his fellowmen but these fellowmen
 Rip out his guts. When he steps forth
 He treads on his own kind, hard. By himself alone
 His belly will never be filled but he builds a wall
 Around what he owns and the wall
 Must be torn down. The roof
 Opened to the rain. Humanity
 Weighs with him not a jot. Monstrous thereby
 He becomes to himself.

But it stands before me now like God's temptation
 That I should know and yet shall say
 This is not the child. Antigone
 O unhappy girl of the unhappy
 Father Oedipus, what is this bearing
 Over you and where is it leading you
 For disobeying the statutes of the state?

Enter the guard, leading Antigone.

GUARD:

She did it. She did. We seized her
Making the grave. But where is Creon?

ELDERS:

Here, even as you ask, back from the house.
Creon comes out of the palace.

CREON:

How is it you fetch her here? Where did you seize her?

GUARD:

She made the grave. Now you know everything.

CREON:

Your word is clear but was it you who saw her?

GUARD:

As she mounded the grave, which you forbade.
A man in luck is clear at once as well.

CREON:

Give your account.

GUARD:

The affair was so. When I had gone away
From you, from your colossal threats
And we had wiped the dust off the dead man
Lying already rotting, we sat up in the air
On a high hill because a stink
Came off the dead man strongly. We agreed
In case of sleep to jab each other in the ribs
With the elbow. Suddenly then we opened
Our eyes wide, and why? Because a warm wind
Suddenly lifted up the mist from the ground
Covering the valley in a twisting storm
Tearing the hair out from the valley's trees and all
The vast ether was full of it so we were blinded
And rubbed our eyes, just so, and after that
Then she was seen and stood and wept out loud
With a sharp voice the way a bird will grieve
Seeing the empty nest and no young in it.
So she lamented, seeing the dead man bare
And gathered dust on him again from the iron jug
Three times with waterings so burying over
The dead man. Quickly we ran and seized her
Who seemed unabashed and charged her with

The present and with the already happened.
 But she denied nothing and was at once
 A sweet and an unhappy thing before me.

CREON:

Do you say or deny it that you did it?

ANTIGONE:

I say I did it and do not deny it.

CREON:

Then tell me now, not lengthily but briefly
 Do you know what was given out in public
 Concerning that particular dead man?

ANTIGONE:

I knew. How shouldn't I? Was it not clear?

CREON:

You dared to break my statute in this way?

ANTIGONE:

Because it was yours, because a mortal made it.
 A mortal then may break it and I am
 Hardly less mortal than you are. But if I die
 Before the time I think I will, that is
 I say, even a gain. Who lives like me
 With many ills surely receives
 Some small advantage, dying? Further, had I left
 Lying without a grave my mother's other dead
 That would have saddened me. But this
 Saddens me not at all. But if you think it foolish
 That I should fear the heavenly gods who from above
 Have no wish to observe uncovered that piecemeal man
 And so do not fear you, now let a fool
 Pass judgement on me.

ELDERS:

The wild father's ilk shows wildly in the child:
 Under a bad fate she has never learned compliance.

CREON:

But even the strongest iron
 Cooked in the furnace still its obstinacy
 Will break and fail. You see this every day.
 But she discovers a delight in muddying
 The laws prescribed. And having done it

Her second impudence is to boast and laugh
 That she did it. I hate a person caught in the wrong
 And making out the thing is something beautiful.
 But you, insulting me although my blood-relation
 Because my blood-relation I will not condemn at once
 But ask you: since you did this thing in secret
 That now is in the open, will you say
 And so avoid a heavy punishment, you are sorry?
Antigone remains silent.

ELDERS:

Say then why you are obstinate.

ANTIGONE:

For an example.

CREON:

Do you not care that I have you in my hands?

ANTIGONE:

What more can you do than kill me now you have me?

CREON:

Nothing. But having that I have it all.

ANTIGONE:

Why wait? Of all your words
 None pleases me, none will please me
 And so myself I am not agreeable to you
 Although I am to others for what I did.

CREON:

So you think others see it as you see it?

ANTIGONE:

These see it too, these too are smitten by it.

CREON:

Aren't you ashamed to interpret them unasked?

ANTIGONE:

Surely we honour humans of one flesh?

CREON:

He's also of one blood who died for the country.

ANTIGONE:

One blood. Child of the selfsame man and wife.

CREON:

And the one who spared himself you rate him with the
 other?

ANTIGONE:

Though he was not your serf he is still my brother.

CREON:

True if you count all one, godless and godly.

ANTIGONE:

Nor is death one and the same for the country or for you.

CREON:

So there's no war?

ANTIGONE:

Yes, yours.

CREON:

Not for the country?

ANTIGONE:

A foreign country. It did not content you
 Ruling over my brothers in Thebes
 A city of our own and sweet
 Not living in fear, the life beneath its trees. You
 Had to drag them to distant Argos to rule
 Over them there too. And the one you made into a butcher
 Of peaceful Argos and the terrified other
 Him you lay out now, quartered, a terror to his own.

CREON:

I advise you, you'll say nothing, to her there
 Speak nothing, if you know what's good for you.

ANTIGONE:

But I appeal to you to help me in my trouble
 And help yourselves, so doing. Who seeks power
 Drinks of a salty water, he cannot desist but must
 Drink it and drink it. My brother yesterday, today it's me.

CREON:

And I am waiting
 To see who sides with her.

ANTIGONE *when the Elders remain silent:*

So then you let it be and keep your mouths shut for him.
 Let that not be forgotten.

CREON:

She notes it against you.
 At odds she wants us under the roof of Thebes.

ANTIGONE:

Screaming for unity you live on discord.

CREON:

So first in discord here and then in the field against Argos!

ANTIGONE:

Of course. Exactly. When you have need of violence abroad
Then you'll have need of violence at home.

CREON:

And me, so it seems to me, in her goodness she'll give to the
vultures

And never mind then if Thebes, so at odds
Falls as a feast to foreign rule?

ANTIGONE:

You, the rulers, threaten and threaten the city will fall
At odds, will founder and feast on it others and foreigners
And we bow our necks and fetch you the sacrifices and thus
Weakened our city founders and foreigners feast on it.

CREON:

Do you tell me I am throwing the city to foreigners to feast
on?

ANTIGONE:

She throws herself to them, bowing her neck to you
For bowing the neck nobody sees what's coming
But only the earth and, alas, the earth will have him.

CREON:

Slander the earth in your wickedness, slander the home-
land!

ANTIGONE:

Wrong there. The earth is travail. The homeland is not just
Earth, nor the house. Not where a man poured his sweat
Not the house that helplessly watches the coming of fire
Not where he bowed his neck, he does not call that the
homeland.

CREON:

You however the homeland no longer calls her own
But you are cast out like a biting filth that pollutes.

ANTIGONE:

Who casts me out? There are fewer in the city now
That you rule and fewer will be still.
Why do you come here alone? You went out with many.

CREON:

You dare say that?

ANTIGONE:

Where are the youths, the men? Are they not coming back?

CREON:

How she lies! When everyone knows they are out still
Only to cleanse the battlefield wholly of the axes left.

ANTIGONE:

And to do your last misdeeds
And to be a terror until their fathers
No longer recognise them when at the end
Like animals run amok they are slaughtered finally.

CREON:

She defiles the dead!

ANTIGONE:

Fool of a man, I've no desire
To be proved right.

ELDERS:

She is unhappy. Don't hold her words against her.
But you, do not forget in your folly and because
Of your own grief Thebes' splendid triumph in battle.

CREON:

But she does not want
The people of Thebes to be seated in the houses of Argos.
She
Would rather see Thebes broken and beaten.

ANTIGONE:

Better we'd be sitting in the ruins of our own city
And safer too than with you
In the enemy's houses.

CREON:

Now she has said it. And you heard it.
Going beyond the measure she breaks every statute, she is
Like a guest not staying much longer, not wished to be seen
again
Who packing his bags in his insolence cuts through the
guy-ropes.

ANTIGONE:

But all that I took was mine and I had to steal it.

CREON:

Always all you see is the nose in front of you. The state's Order, that is from God, you do not see.

ANTIGONE:

From God it may be but I'd rather have it Human and humane, Creon, Menoeceus' son.

CREON:

Away now! You were our enemy and will be it still below Like him I hacked, and forgotten. There he is shunned as well.

ANTIGONE:

Who knows? Perhaps down there the custom's different.

CREON:

An enemy, even dead, will never be friend.

ANTIGONE:

One thing is sure: I live for love not hatred.

CREON:

Go down below then if you want to love And love down there. I'll not have ones like you Living for long up here.

Enter Ismene.

ELDERS:

But Ismene is coming from indoors
Sweet girl, who is for peace.
But tears are washing
Washing a face bloodshot with suffering.

CREON:

Yes, you, squatting in there at home. I've brought Two torments up, snake sisters.
Tell us forthwith
You shared the deed at the grave
Or are you thick with innocence?

ISMENE:

I did it, if my sister will agree.
I took my part, I take the blame on me.

ANTIGONE:

Her sister will not let that be however.
She would not do it. I did not take her with me.

CREON:

You settle it. I won't be petty in a petty matter.

ISMENE:

I'm not ashamed to share my sister's trouble
And beg her now to have me for a comrade.

ANTIGONE:

By those who have gone through with it
And talk with one another down below
I don't like anyone who loves with words.

ISMENE:

Sister, revolt not everyone is good for
But one like her it may fall to to die.

ANTIGONE:

Don't die in common. What's no concern of yours
Don't make it yours. My death will be enough.

ISMENE:

My sister is too severe, I love you.
Have I, if she is gone, a love left in my life?

ANTIGONE:

Creon, love him. Stay his, I leave you both.

ISMENE:

Perhaps it is my sister's pleasure to mock me.

ANTIGONE:

Perhaps her grief as well, and I desire my cup of suffering
full.

ISMENE:

But what I said to you is also part still.

ANTIGONE:

And that was good. But so I have decided.

ISMENE:

Is it because I failed I'm no loss to you now?

ANTIGONE:

Be of good cheer, and live. My soul has died
And now I'm servant only to the dead, sister.

CREON:

These women, I tell you, one is losing
Her wits right now, the other did long ago.

ISMENE:

I cannot live without her.

CREON:

The talk is not of her now. She is done with.

ISMENE:

You are killing your own son's bride-to-be as well.

CREON:

A man has more than one field he can plough in.
Get ready to die. But so that you will know
When it will be: it will be when for Bacchus she,
My drunken Thebes, joins me dancing. Now take
The women away.

Exit the guard into the palace with Antigone and Ismene.

Creon orders his bodyguard to give up his sword.

AN ELDER *taking the sword:*

Dolling yourself for the victory revels don't stamp
On the ground too hard and not where it's greening.
But strong as you are, whoever has angered you
Now let him praise you.

AN ELDER *handing Creon the staff of Bacchus:*

Don't fling him too deep
Where you lose sight of him.
Down there and when no falling further is possible
A man stripped naked has no more to fear. He sheds
All his shame. Terrified, terrible
The man flung down rises up. Made less than human
He remembers a shape his life had once and arises, new.

ELDERS:

In their charred house the sons of Lachmeus sat and
suffered it
Mouldering, feeding on lichens, forever the winters
Tipped ice on them and their women
Were absent at nights and sat in the day
In secret crimsons. And over their heads
Always the threatening rockface tilted.
But not before Pelias
Entered among them, dividing them with his staff and only
Touching them lightly, did they arise and
Slaughter all their tormentors.
This was the worst to them but often the least thing
Rounds up the sum of misery. The unseeing
Sleep of the wretched, as though in exhaustion

They lay in an ageless time, has an end.
 The moons wax, slowly, swiftly, unevenly
 Dwindle and all the time long
 The evil is growing and already
 Upon the last root left the light is trained
 In Oedipus' houses.

And greatness does not fall in on itself
 But on much besides. As when down there
 When the Thracian winds
 Blow evilly on the sea
 The night under the salt
 Befalls a little dwelling
 And turns the dark sand inside out and upside down
 Dishevelling it
 And all the thrashed coast groans.

Haemon is coming, of your sons
 The lastborn, troubled
 That the young Antigone should perish
 The wedding woman
 Sick that their bed will evade him.

Enter Haemon.

CREON:

Son, there was talk you might be coming to me
 For that young woman's sake, not to the ruler
 Rather to the father and if that were so
 You'd come in vain, wholly. Returning from the battle
 Which went our way by the bloody self-sacrifice of many
 I found her alone undutiful, begrudging
 Our house its victory, and bothering only with her own
 affairs
 And worse besides.

HAEMON:

It is in this affair nevertheless
 That I have come and hoping to the father
 The familiar voice of him he got
 Will not sound ill when to the ruler
 It brings ill rumours.

CREON:

True, if a man got insolent children

Of him what could be said but that he got
 Trouble for himself and made his enemies gleeful? Sour
 things
 Sear the palate. So they are necessary.

HAEMON:

Much is under your governance. If what you like
 Is only listening to what you like to hear
 Then take things easy: slacken
 Your sails like a man who has given up steering and drift.
 The people quail at your name. So if great things
 Flare up, the most they will ever report to you is small
 things.

But one advantage of the family is
 Not everything goes by deserts. Many a debt
 Is never called in and so sometimes
 We may hear truth from family because
 Though angry we curb ourselves for them.
 Now clearly it cannot be Megareus, my brother
 Who fought at Argos and is not back yet
 And knows no fear, who tells you. So I must.
 Be told: the city is full of inner disaffection.

CREON:

And you be told: when family goes bad
 It is my enemies I feed. Who are not definite
 Who are unknown to one another, never meet, and even
 In their grievances are not united, being sick of taxes these
 And those of serving in the war
 And all held under me and held apart
 By the power of my spear. But when
 There are gaps there and government itself appears
 At odds and wavers and is not definite then
 The pebbles gather and become a slide and press
 Against the house that let itself go. Speak
 But I hear the one I fathered and the one
 I set before the storms of spears, the son.

HAEMON:

Amid it all is truth. Do we not say
 Steel your tongue on the unlying anvil? She
 Who did not want her brother left to be eaten

By merciless dogs, the city
Is with her in that although condemning
The misdeed of the dead man.

CREON:

Isn't enough. I call that spinelessness.
Isn't enough that I hack off what's rotten —
It must be in the marketplace, to other rottenness
Quite unforgettable that I hack off what's rotten.
And my hand demonstrate that it never misses.
But you, knowing nothing of the situation
So knowing nothing, counsel: look around uncertainly
Adopt the thoughts of others, speak their language
As if authority could engage
The many bodies on a difficult commission
If all it is is a little ear and a cowardly.

ELDERS:

But it eats much strength up pondering cruel punishments.

CREON:

Pressing the plough to earth so that it ploughs takes
strength.

ELDERS:

Mild government works wonders and with ease.

CREON:

Governments are many. But: who does the governing?

HAEMON:

Even if not your son I'd answer: you.

CREON:

If it were laid on me I'd have to do it my way.

HAEMON:

Your way, but let that be the right way.

CREON:

Not knowing what I know you couldn't know it.
Are you my friend however I choose to act?

HAEMON:

I wish you'd act so that I were your friend
But don't say you are right and no one else.
For anyone who thinks alone he has
No thoughts and speech and soul like any other
If such a man were ever opened up

He would appear empty. It is no shame
 If someone there is someone wise, to learn
 A lot and not push anything too far.
 See by the stream in spate that's hurtling past
 The trees give way, and all of those
 Leaf up warmly but the strugglers against
 Are gone at once. Likewise a prosperous ship
 That throws its weight around and will give way to nothing
 All falling backwards from the banks of rowers
 Its certain course is wreck.

ELDERS:

Give way where your mind is, allow us change
 And have from us a creaturely hesitation.
 Hesitate with us.

CREON:

And have the horses
 Steer the charioteer. That's what you want?

HAEMON:

And the horses
 When they get a whiff of cadavers
 From the knacker's yard might rear up wondering
 Where they are being driven, being driven so hard
 And fling themselves in the abyss with wheels and driver.
 Be told: the city at war is maddened already worrying
 What peace may bring.

CREON:

There is no war now. Thanks for the advice.

HAEMON:

Then this, that you, parading for victory
 Intend a bloody cleaning out of everyone
 At home who ever crossed you
 Often the suspicion has been voiced to me.

CREON:

Who by? You might do some good there. Much more
 Than only being the mouth of them
 There so suspiciously gabbing about suspicion.

HAEMON:

Forget them.

ELDERS:

Of all a ruler's virtues

The healthiest, they say, is: know how to forget.

What's old, let it stay old.

CREON:

Since I'm so old

I find forgetting hard. But you

Could you not, if I asked you to

Forget her for whose sake you have gone so far out

That all who wish me ill mutter

He, so it seems, fights on the woman's side?

HAEMON:

On the side of right, wherever it shows itself.

CREON:

And has a hole.

HAEMON:

Even insulted my concern

For you will not be silent.

CREON:

Your bed would still be empty.

HAEMON:

Did that not come from the father I'd call it stupid.

CREON:

I'd call that brash if not from a woman's lackey.

HAEMON:

Who's happier hers than being your lackey.

CREON:

Now it is out and won't be got back in.

HAEMON:

Nor should it be. Say everything, that's you

And listen to nothing.

CREON:

Rid of the brood, and quickly!

HAEMON:

And I'll get rid of me so you need see

No one upright, and tremble.

Exit Haemon.

ELDERS:

Him leaving in anger, sir, he is your lastborn.

CREON:

Still he'll not save the women from their deaths.

ELDERS:

You think of killing both of them now, do you?

CREON:

Her who kept out of it, not that one, there you're right.

ELDERS:

Thinking of the other, how will you do the killing?

CREON:

Conduct her from the city where my people now
Are lifting their feet for Bacchus, she however
The guilty one, be stored where human tracks are lonely
Alive in a pit of rock with only millet and wine
The due of the dead, as though buried herself.

So I decree it

So that the city will not wholly be disgraced.

Exit Creon into the city.

ELDERS:

But like a mountain of clouds it stands before me now
That this is the hour when Oedipus' child in her chamber
Hears Bacchus in the distance and prepares for her last way.
For now he summons his own and as ever still thirsting for
joy

Our wasted city gives him a joyful answer.

For victory is great and Bacchus cannot be resisted

When he approaches our anxious city and hands her the
drink of forgetting.

Then the black she was sewing, the mourning black for her
sons

She flings it away and hastens to the orgies of Bacchus,
seeking exhaustion.

The Elders fetch themselves Bacchic staves.

Spirit of lusts of the flesh but always

Winner in any quarrel. Even the tied by blood

He flings all awry, so strongly he pleads.

He is never worsted, whoever he comes on

Are not themselves, they are seized, they rave

And under the yoke they stir and

Offer new necks, not fearing

The breath of the salt mine nor on

The black waters the thin-walled ship. Skins
 He mixes with others and flings
 Them all together but does not lay waste
 The kingdom of earth with violent hands but is
 From the first for peace and joins in the making
 Of great ends. For in them unwarlike
 Heavenly beauty plays her part too.

Enter Antigone led by the guard and followed by maids.

AN ELDER:

But now myself I lose
 The measure and can no longer stop
 The spring of tears for now
 Antigone must receive the gifts
 Of the dead, the millet and wine.

ANTIGONE:

My fellow citizens of home, oh see
 Me going the final way
 And seeing the sun's
 Last light.
 That never again? For he
 Who will bed us all one day, the god of death
 Is leading me living
 To the banks of Acheron.
 No wedding will be mine
 No bridal song will be sung for me
 I am the bride of Acheron.

ELDERS:

But you go famous and accompanied by praise
 Away to that chamber of the dead
 Not carried off by sickness nor given
 The iron wages of iron
 But living the life of your own
 You go down alive
 Into the world of the dead.

ANTIGONE:

Oh alas they are mocking me
 Not yet gone below
 Still in the daylight.
 Oh city, oh you my city's

Men of plenty! And yet one day
 You must be my witnesses how I
 Unwept by loved ones and in accordance with
 What sort of laws
 Must enter the opening dug for me
 The unheard of grave. I am
 Not joined with mortals
 Nor with the shades
 With life nor death.

ELDERS:

Power, when power is the issue
 Never gives. In the angry knowing herself
 She has destroyed herself.

ANTIGONE:

Oh my father, oh unhappy mother
 From whom with a darkened mind I came
 To them I am coming cursed
 To live with them without a man.
 Alas, alas my brother
 Sweet to live and fallen
 Me too who was still here
 You drag down with you.

AN ELDER *setting a dish of millet before her.*

But Danaë too she had to have
 On her body instead of the light of the sky
 The iron grid, and bear it. She lay in the dark.
 But, child, her birth was lofty.
 And she counted the strokes of the hours
 The golden strokes, for the author of time.

ANTIGONE:

Lamentably, so I have heard, she died
 Who came from Phrygia
 Tantalus' daughter
 On Sipylus' peaks
 She is crouched and shrunk
 To a slow stone, they put her in chains
 Of ivy and winter is with her
 Always, people say, and washes her throat
 With snow-bright tears

From under her lids. Like her exactly
A ghost brings me to bed.

AN ELDER *setting down a jug of wine before her:*

Named among the holy however, holy
In her birth, is she but we are earth and born earthly.
True, you perish, but as one of the great. And not
Unlike our offerings to the gods.

ANTIGONE:

Already, with sighs, you are giving me up.
You are gazing into the blue and never
Into my eyes. But all I did was do
In holiness what is holy.

ELDERS:

And the son of Dryas, when his mouth ran over
Scolding the wrong, by Dionysus
He was swiftly seized and buried under chutes of stone
And groping in madness, with a scolding tongue
He got to know the god.

ANTIGONE:

And better it would be if you
Collected together all the scolding of wrong and dried
It of tears for me and put it to use. You are not
Farseeing.

ELDERS:

But on chalky rocks
Where at both ends sea is, on the Bosphorus shores
Close to the city, there the god of battle
Watched while the eyes of the sons of Phineus
For seeing too far, the eagle eyes
Were stabbed with spears and it grew dark
In the brave orbs of their eyes.
For the force of fate is terrible.
Not wealth nor the god of battle
Or tower escapes it.

ANTIGONE:

Do not, I beg you, speak of fate.
I know it. Speak of him
Who lays me out, innocent, for death. Knit him
A fate! For do not think

Unhappy souls, you will be saved.
 Other bodies, hacked
 Will lie in heaps unburied around
 That one unburied. You having dragged the war
 For Creon over zones beyond our homeland
 However many battles he is lucky in, the last
 Will swallow you up. Calling for spoils
 It won't be chariots full you see coming but
 Empty. I weep for you, the living
 What you will see
 When my eyes are already filled with dust. Sweet Thebes
 My native city! And oh, you springs of Dirce
 And all around Thebes, where the chariots
 Parade, oh you groves of trees! It tightens my throat
 To think what will happen to you. Inhuman
 Human beings have come forth from you and so
 You must come to dust. Tell
 Whoever asks for Antigone we
 Saw her flee to the grave.
Exit Antigone with the guard and the maids.

ELDERS:

Turned and with long strides walked as though she
 Were leading her guard. Over the square
 She went where the victory columns
 Are raised already, brazen. There she walked faster;
 Vanished.
 But she also once
 Ate of the bread that was baked
 In the stony dark. And while unhappiness
 Harboured in the towers
 In their shadow she sat at ease until
 The deadly things that went forth from Labdacus' home
 Returned deadly. The bloody hand
 Dealt them among its own and they
 Did more than receive, they grabbed at it.
 Only after that did she
 Lie angrily in the open air and was also
 Flung into the good!
 The cold woke her.

Not until the last
 Patience was consumed and measured out the last
 Criminal act, did the child of unseeing Oedipus
 Remove the long since threadbare blindfold from her eyes
 To look into the abyss.

Now just as unseeing
 Thebes lifts her heels and staggering tastes
 The drink of victory that is mixed
 Of many herbs in the dark
 And gulps it down and exults.

Tiresias is coming, the blind man, the seer, impelled
 For sure by the stench of waxing discord
 And revolt boiling below.

Enter Tiresias led by a child and followed by Creon.

TIRESIAS:

Easy, child, go always and steadily
 Unshaken by the dancing, you
 Are the leader. The leader
 Must not follow Bacchus.
 A fall is certain for anyone lifting
 His heels too high from the ground.
 And don't hit against
 The victory columns. In the town
 They are shrieking victory
 In the town full of fools
 And the blind man
 Follows the sighted child but after the blind man
 Comes one blinder still.

CREON *who has followed him mockingly:*

What's that you're mumbling
 Moaner, about the war?

TIRESIAS:

This, that you are dancing
 Fool, before the victory.

CREON:

Old and troublesome
 Seer of things that are not but you do not see
 Columns set up all around
 And towering high.

TIRESIAS:

I do not. And my wits
 Are not addled. And therefore I have come
 Dear friends. For even the leaves
 Of the laurel when they are fleshy I rarely know them
 But only when dry, when they rustle for me
 Or I bite them and taste
 Bitterness in them and know: that is laurel.

CREON:

You dislike festivities. Then at once
 Your mouth's more terrible when you speak to us.

TIRESIAS:

I have seen terrible things. Hear what the birds
 Mean for Thebes so drunk
 With early victory and deaf
 With the droning din of the Bacchic dancing: I sat
 In the ancient chair and had before me a haven of all the
 birds.

I heard a stirring in the air then, murderous
 And came a raging, tearing with claws at one another
 And slaughter among the winged creatures. In fear
 I tried the altars that were swiftly lit. And
 In no place did I come upon a good fire. Only smoke
 Writhed upwards thickly and the thighs
 Of the sacrifices looked open from the fat that covered
 them.

ELDERS:

A very bad sign on the victory day
 And news that cankers our enjoyment.

TIRESIAS:

Creon, the signless orgies' deadly interpretation
 Would be that you are why the town is sick
 Because the altars are and fire places
 Defiled by dogs and birds who have fed full
 On the unseemly fallen son of Oedipus.
 Therefore the birds' wellmeaning cry no longer
 Comes rushing here for it has eaten of
 A dead man's fat. But the gods
 Can't stomach smoke like that. Therefore

Yield to the dead man, do not persecute
One who has gone.

CREON:

Old man, your birds
Fly how you like. I know that. Haven't they
Flown for me too? I am not that unschooled
In dealing and the arts of prophecy
Never having stinted. So pocket
Electrum from Sardis and gold from India
But don't think I will let the coward be buried.
I'm not afraid of sicknesses from heaven.
No human moves the gods. I know that much.
But among mortal men
Old man, even some very mighty fall
A very grievous fall if they speak sweetly
Words that desolate, for their own profit.

TIRESIAS:

I am too old to place myself to gain
A small time more.

CREON:

No one is so old
He would not like to live longer.

TIRESIAS:

I know.
But I know more besides.

ELDERS:

Say it, Tiresias.
Sir, let the seer be heard.

CREON:

Say it however you like. But leave off haggling.
All the clan of seers love silver, as we know.

TIRESIAS:

And tyrants offer it, so I have heard.

CREON:

And a blind man
Bites into the coin and knows
That's silver.

TIRESIAS:

And I'd rather you offered me none.

For no one knows in war what he'll hold on to.
Be it silver, be it sons, or be it power.

CREON:

The war is over.

TIRESIAS:

Is it?

I asked you something?

Since I, as you have said, know nothing

Our kind must ask. Since I, as you have said

Can't see into the future

I have to look into the present and the past and so

Maintain my art and am a seer. True, I see

Only what any child can see. That the bronze

On the victory columns is very thin. I say: because

Spears are being made still, many spears. That for the army

Fleeces are being sewn. I say: as though autumn were
coming.

And fish being dried, as though for winter quarters.

ELDERS:

I thought that was before the victory in battle

And cancelled now? And booty coming

With bronze and fish from Argos now?

TIRESIAS:

And there are guards in plenty but whether it's much

Or little they guard, nobody knows. But there is great

Loggerheads in your home and no forgetting

As there is usually after happy business. And it is said

That your son Haemon went from you distressed

Because you flung Antigone, betrothed to him

Into a pit of stone when for her brother

For Polynices, she wished to open a grave

Because you struck him down and left him graveless

When he rose up opposing you because

Your war lost him his brother Eteocles.

So I know you to be cruelly entwined in cruelty

And since my wits have not been spoiled by silver

I ask the second question. Why are you cruel

Creon, Menoeceus' son? I'll make it easier:

Is it because you want bronze for your war?

What is it you've done, what foolish thing or evil
That now in evil things you must go on and foolish?

CREON:

You two-tongued villain!

TIRESIAS:

Worse would be half a tongue.

But I've my twofold answer which is: none.

And I knit nothing with nothing and I say:

Misrule cries out for great men and finds none.

War goes forth from itself and breaks a leg.

From pillage pillage comes and harshness needs harsh-
ness

And more needs more and comes in the end to nothing.

And now I have looked back and all around me

You: look ahead, in terror.

Lead me from here, child.

Exit Tiresias, led by the child.

ELDERS:

Sir, had my hair

Just now been black still, now

It would be white. The man in anger

Said bad things

And worse things did not say.

CREON:

So I say what

Has not been said, why utter it?

ELDERS:

Creon, son of Menoëceus, when

Are the young men coming home

To the city empty of men and how

Fares your war, Creon, son of Menoëceus?

CREON:

Since he malevolently has directed

The gaze at this, I'll tell you: the war

Treacherous Argos made against us, the end

Of it is not yet now nor is

It going very well. When I decreed the peace

Only a little was still wanting and that

Because of Polynices' treachery.

But he lies chastised
And with him she who wept for him.

ELDERS:

And this too is not
Yet at an end, for he
Has turned himself away from you who leads
The storms of spears for you here, the younger born
Son, Haemon.

CREON:

Nor do I want him any more
At all. Out of my sight and yours
With him who abandoned me
For the petty bother of his bed.
Megareus 'still fights for me
My son incessantly pitching
In waves against the tottering walls of Argos
The bronze-clad youth of Thebes.

ELDERS:

Which is not inexhaustible.
Creon, son of Menoeceus
We always followed you. And there was
Good order in the city and you kept off our throats
Our enemies here under the Theban roof
A rapacious populace that has nothing and is provided for
in war
And those who live on discord, the loud mouths
Lean and hungry, long in the wind, in the marketplace
Speaking because they are paid to or not paid to.
Now they are loud in the mouth again and have
A dubious subject too. Son of Menoeceus, have you
perhaps
Broached an enormity?

CREON:

When I went against Argos
Who was it sent me? Metal in the spears
Went after metal in the mountains
At your bidding. For Argos
Is rich in metals.

ELDERS:

And therefore rich in spears, it seems. We heard
 Many a bad thing from there and dismissed it with
 The messengers, trusting you, and stopped our ears
 Fearful of fear. And shut our eyes when you drew in
 The reins tighter. Only one more
 Drawing in of the reins and one more battle
 You said, does it need, but now
 You are beginning to treat with us
 As with the enemy. And cruelly
 Waging a double war.

CREON:

Yours!

ELDERS:

Yours!

CREON:

Once I've got Argos
 No doubt it will have been yours again. Enough.
 So she, in her revolt
 Has muddled you and those who listened to her.

ELDERS:

Certainly the sister had a right to bring home her brother.

CREON:

Certainly the captain had a right to chastise a traitor.

ELDERS:

Asserted to the bone, this right and that flings us into the
 abyss.

CREON:

War makes new rights.

ELDERS:

And lives on the old.
 War eats itself not given what it needs.

CREON:

Ungrateful, all of you. You eat the meats but
 Don't like the bloody aprons of the cooks. I gave you
 Sandalwood for your houses which the din
 Of swords never enters, but it grew in Argos.
 And no one has sent me back the ore
 I fetched from Argos, but bending over it
 You blather of butchery there and lament my brutality.

I'm used to greater indignation if the loot is late.

ELDERS:

How long, tell us, will you have Thebes go without her men?

CREON:

Until her men have won rich Argos for her.

ELDERS:

Unlucky man, before they are lost, recall them.

CREON:

Empty-handed? You answer for it then.

ELDERS:

With empty hands or none, whatever's still flesh and blood.

CREON:

So I will. Soon Argos will fall. Then I will call them.

And my firstborn, Megareus, will bring them to you.

And be sure that your doors and portals are not too small –

High enough only for such as are low in their ways –

Or the shoulders of men of a larger stature might stave in

Here the gates of a palace and there a treasury door.

And perhaps their joy when they see you again will be such

When they grip you they'll shake your hands and your arms

Right out of the sockets. And when the armour presses

Boisterously against your fearful hearts beware of your ribs.

For on that joyful day you will see more naked iron

Than you did in the days of grief. Many a hesitant victor

Has gone in garlands of chains and danced with collapsing knees.

ELDERS:

Wretch, are you threatening us with our own? Are you goading

Our own on us now?

CREON:

I will

Discuss it with my son, with Megareus.

Enter a messenger from the battle.

MESSENGER:

Stiffen your neck, sir. I am sent here

By disaster. Stop the hasty celebrations

Of victory too soon credited. In another battle
 Your army is beaten before Argos, and in flight.
 Your son Megareus is done with. He lies
 In pieces on the hard ground of Argos. When you
 Acted to punish Polynices' flight
 And seized and hanged in public the many in the army
 This aggrieved and you yourself
 Had hurried back to Thebes, thereupon
 Your firstborn drove us forward once again.
 Our stormtroops, not having slept enough after
 The bloodbath in their own ranks, raised only wearily
 Their axes wet still with the blood of Thebans
 Against the people of Argos. And there were all too many
 Faces turned back on Megareus who
 To be more terrible to them than the enemy
 Goading them on, his voice was perhaps too harsh.
 And yet the luck of battle seemed with us at first.
 Fighting begets, of course, the love of fighting
 Blood smells the same, yours or another's blood
 And makes you drunk. What bravery can't do
 Fear can. But the terrain
 And gear and rations count for something.
 And, sir, the people of Argos fought a crafty fight.
 The women fought, also the children fought.
 Long since with nothing to eat in them
 From burned-out roof-timbers with boiling water
 Cooking pots fell on us. Even the unharmed houses
 Were fired behind us as though nobody
 Thought to house anywhere again. For the utensils
 And rooms of home were weaponry and stuff for barri-
 cades.
 But on and always on your son drove us and drove
 Us deeper into the city which so laid to waste
 Became a grave. The rubble heaps
 Began to cut us off from one another. Smoke
 From all the taken districts, seas of fire
 Veiled out our vision. Fleeing fires
 And looking for enemies we struck upon our own.
 And no one knows whose hand your son fell by.

The flower of Thebes, all vanished
 And Thebes herself cannot abide much longer for over her
 The people of Argos are coming now with men and
 chariots

On all the streets. And I who have seen this
 Am glad I am already done for.

He dies.

ELDERS:

Alas for us.

CREON:

Megareus! My son!

ELDERS:

Waste no

Time on laments. Gather the stormtroops.

CREON:

Gather the nothings. In a sieve.

ELDERS:

Drunk on victory

Thebes is jiggling and all upon us

The enemy is advancing with grey iron.

Deceiving us

You gave the sword away. Now

You may wish to remember your other son.

Fetch the younger.

CREON:

Yes, Haemon, the last! Yes, my latest born!

Come and be a help now in the great collapse. Forget

The things I said for when I was master

I was not master of my senses.

ELDERS:

To the stony ground

Hurry and quickly release the grave maker

Release Antigone.

CREON:

If I dig her out

Will you stand by me then? You, if not always

The movers, were always compliant. That

Implicates you.

ELDERS:

Go now.

CREON:

Axes! Axes!

Exit Creon.

ELDERS:

Stop the dancing.

ELDERS *clashing the cymbals:*

Spirit of joy, pride of the waters

That Cadmus loved

Come if you long to see her again

Your city, and travel fast and come

Before nightfall for later

She will not be there.

For here, O god of joy

In the mother city, in bacchantic

Thebes you were at home, at the cold beck of Ismenus.

By the smoke of sacrifices sweetly shaped

Over the shoulders of the roofs you have been seen.

Of her many houses you may meet with

Not even the fire nor the smoke of the fire

Nor of the smoke the shadow. Her children

Who for a thousand years to come

Saw themselves seated already by remotest oceans

They will tomorrow, they have today

Scarcely a stone to bed their heads upon.

On the Cocytus in your day

God of joy, you sat with the lovers

And in Castalia's woods. But also

You visited the smiths and tested

Smilingly with your thumb the sharpness of the swords.

Often according to the undying

Songs of Thebes

You walked in the streets where they were still rejoicing.

Alas, the iron hacked into its own

But exhaustion will eat the arm nevertheless.

Oh violence needs a miracle

And mercy only a little wisdom.

So now the often
 Beaten enemy stands
 Over our palaces and shows
 Full of bloody spears all around
 The seven mouths and gates
 And from there he will not depart
 Till he has filled
 His cheeks full of our blood.

But there one of the maids comes
 Parting the throng and press of those in flight
 Surely with a message from Haemon whom the father
 Set at the head of the stormtroops who will save us.

Enter a maid as messenger.

MESSENGER:

Oh so much all used up! Oh last sword broken!
 Haemon is dead, bleeding by his own hands.
 I am an eyewitness, what happened before
 I had it from the servants going with their lord
 To the high field where, its flesh being torn by dogs
 The poor dead body of Polynices lay.
 They washed him, no one speaking, and laid him
 What was left, among new leafy sprays
 And of the homeland's earth
 Carefully they raised a little hill.
 With others hurrying ahead the lord approached
 The grave in the stony hollow where we, the maids, were
 standing.

But one among us heard a voice and loud
 Lament and crying in the chamber
 And ran to meet the lord, to tell him.
 He hurried then, and as he neared the more
 In him he felt that dark and troubled voice
 And all around until, up close, he screamed
 And pitiably lamenting saw the bolt
 Torn from the wall and said with difficulty but as if
 He did believe himself: 'That is not Haemon's
 My child's voice.' We searched after
 The frightened master's words. Thereupon
 Back furthest in the graves we saw

Her, hanging by the neck, Antigone
 A noose of linen around her throat
 And him outstretched below her lifted feet
 Wailing over the bridebed and the abyss below
 And his father's work. He, seeing this
 Went in to him and spoke to him, saying:
 'Come out my child, I beg you on my knees.'
 But looking coldly, saying nothing back
 The son stared back at him
 And drew his sword, two-edged against him first.
 And when the father, frightened into flight
 Turned, he failed. Then saying nothing further
 He stood and into his own side
 He thrust the swordpoint, slowly. Fell without a word.
 Death lies with death now, shyly they came to
 Their wedding's consummation in the houses of
 The world below. The lord comes now himself.

ELDERS:

Our city is finished, used to reins and now
 Without any. Leaning on women
 Comes the man who is all in vain now and
 He is bearing in his hands a large memorial
 Of stupid raging . . .

Enter Creon carrying Haemon's cloak.

CREON:

See what I have here. It is the cloak. I thought
 It might have been a sword I went to fetch. The
 Child died on me early. One more battle
 And Argos would be in the dust. But all
 The bravery and uttermost that was mustered
 Was only against me.
 So now Thebes falls.
 And let it fall, let it with me, let it be finished
 And there for the vultures. That is my wish now.
Exit Creon with maids.

ELDERS:

And turned around and in
 His hands from all the house
 Of Labdacus only a bloodstained cloth

Into the foundering city he went away.
But we
Even now all follow him still and the way
Is down. Our biddable hand
Never to strike again
Will be hacked off. But she who saw everything
Could help nobody but the enemy who now
Is coming and quickly will wipe us out. For time is short
And disaster all around and never enough of time
To live on thoughtlessly and easily
From compliance to crime and
Become wise in old age.