

27 CRITICAL CONTEXTS: A DRAMA CASEBOOK

Even more than other forms of literature, drama has a relatively stable canon—that is, a select group of plays that the theater community thinks of as especially worthy of frequent performance. New plays join this canon, of course, but theater companies worldwide tend to perform the same ones over and over, especially those by Shakespeare, Ibsen, and Sophocles. The reasons are many, involving the plays' themes and continued appeal across times and cultures as well as their formal literary and theatrical accomplishments. But their repeated performance means that a relatively small number of plays become a lot better known than all the others and that there is a tradition of “talk” about those plays. A lot of this talk is informal and local, resulting from the fact that people see plays communally—that is, they see performances together—and often compare responses afterward. But more permanent and more formal records of canonical responses also exist; critics almost always review individual productions of plays in newspapers and magazines, on radio and television, and on the Internet. For the most part, reviews concentrate primarily on the details of a performance. But because every production of a play involves a particular interpretation of the text, cumulative accounts of performances add up to a body of interpretive criticism—that is, analytical commentary about many aspects of the play as text and as performance.

Any oral or written text can provoke disagreement, partly because of the slippery nature of verbal and visual language and partly because different readers and listeners bring different interests, experiences, and perspectives to the text. Differences in response may result from differing temperaments and preferences and from differing circumstances and cultural assumptions—all readers and viewers are influenced by the times and places in which they live. But plays in particular, because of their many productions in varied locations by different acting companies and directors, carry with them an especially varied accumulation of critical responses. New productions of a play often draw consciously on previous productions, sometimes imitating particular features and sometimes reacting against well-known interpretations. The many famous productions of *Hamlet*, for example, consciously compare themselves to each other in their emphasis on political intrigue, mother/son and father/son relationships, the hesitations or “indecisiveness” of the hero, and so forth. As a reader of plays in a textbook like this one, you may or may not bring to your reading an awareness of what others have thought about a particular play, but that body of material is available if you choose to use it as a way of getting additional perspectives on the text.

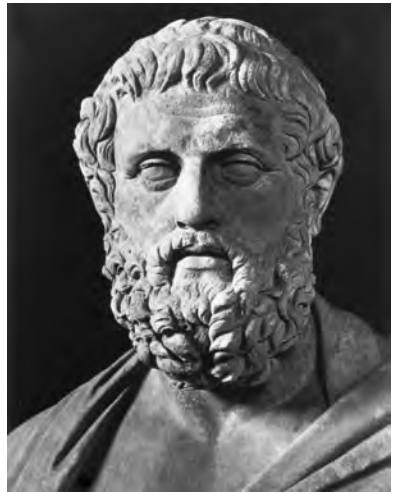
Sophocles' *Antigone*, for instance, attracts attention from a wide variety of perspectives—from Greek scholars, who view it in relation to classical myth or the ancient Greek language; from philosophers, who may see in it examinations of classic ideas and ethical problems; from theater historians, who may think about

it in relation to traditions of staging and visualization or the particulars of gestures and stage business; and from historians of rhetoric, who may consider the interactions between the chorus and the players. Some of these examinations draw on deep historical knowledge in order to study the play; others depend more on working out a particular critical theory or simply a coherent interpretation. You don't have to read this accumulated criticism to understand what happens in a text; indeed, some of this work may seem irrelevant to you. But reading what others have said about a text can help you—by offering historical information that you hadn't known or hadn't considered relevant, by pointing to problems or possibilities of interpretation you had not yet thought of, or by supporting a reading you had already arrived at. In a sense, reading published criticism is a lot like talking with your fellow students or being involved in a class discussion. In general, you shouldn't read "the critics" until after you have read the complete play at least once, just as you should read the text in full before you discuss it with others. That way, your initial responses to the play are your own; if you don't understand some things, you can always discuss them later or read a few pieces of good criticism.

Reading critics can be especially helpful when you have to write a paper. Critics will often guide you to crucial points of debate or to a place in the text that is a crux for deciding on a particular interpretation. You will likely get the most help if you read several critics with different perspectives—not because more is better, but because you will see their differences and, more important, the *grounds* for their differences in the kinds of evidence they use. Their disagreements will likely be very useful to you as a new interpreter. But don't regard critics as "authorities" (an interpretation is not true simply because it is published or written by somebody famous); instead, look to critics and their work for indicators of what the issues are.

Often, when you're just starting to think about the paper you want to write, reading a few pieces of criticism can help you see some of the critical issues in the play. Critics frequently disagree on the interpretation of particular issues or passages or even on what the issues really are, but reading their work can make your own thoughts concrete, especially when you're just starting to sort things out. Reacting to someone else's view, especially one that it is strongly argued, can help you articulate what you think and can suggest a line of interpretation and argument for your own writing.

Sorting out the important issues can be complicated, and issues do shift from era to era and culture to culture. But often the arguments posed in one era interest subsequent critics in whatever age and from whatever perspective. *Antigone's* per-



A bust of Sophocles

A play should give you something to think about. When I see a play and understand it the first time, then I know it can't be much good.

—T. S. ELIOT

formance history goes back more than twenty-four centuries, and over that time readers and viewers have recorded many thousands of responses. Following the text of the play below, we reprint only a small sample, all from the twentieth century. But earlier views are often referred to and sometimes still argued about. The famous comments of the German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), for example, continue to set the agenda for an astonishing number of interpreters. Many answer him directly; others use him to sharpen, complicate, or detail their views or simply to position themselves in some larger debate about specific issues in the play or about literary criticism or philosophy more generally.

In the following selections you will find various interpretations of crucial scenes and issues in *Antigone*. Especially prominent are questions about how to read the opinions of the chorus, how to interpret the character of Antigone, and how to assess Creon's flaws. As you read the critics, pay attention to the way they argue—the kinds of textual evidence they use to back up their points and how they structure their arguments—as well as the main interpretive points they make.



A production of *Antigone*
(New York Shakespeare Festival, 1982)

If you draw on published criticism in your papers (or to back up a point in class or in a discussion with a fellow student), you will want to acknowledge the critic upfront and then work his or her words into your paper or conversation the way you have learned to do with lines or phrases from a text. Sometimes a particular critic can be especially helpful in focusing your thoughts because you so clearly disagree with what she or he says. In that case, you may well get a good paper out of a rebuttal in which you answer or attack that critic's argument point by point. Pitting one critic against another—sorting out the issues that different interpreters disagree on and showing what their differences consist of—can also be a good way to focus on your own contribution. But remember that the point of reading criticism is to *use* it for your own interpretive purposes, to make your responses more sensitive and resonant, to make you a more-informed reader of the play, and to make you a better reader in general.

SOPHOCLES

*Antigone*¹

CHARACTERS

ANTIGONE	HAEMON
ISMENE	TEIRESIAS
CHORUS OF THEBAN ELDERS	A MESSENGER
CREON	EURYDICE
A SENTRY	SECOND MESSENGER

The two sisters ANTIGONE and ISMENE meet in front of the palace gates in Thebes.

- ANTIGONE: Ismene, my dear sister,
 whose father was my father, can you think of any
 of all the evils that stem from Oedipus²
 that Zeus does not bring to pass for us, while we yet live?
 No pain, no ruin, no shame, and no dishonor 5
 but I have seen it in our mischiefs,
 yours and mine.
 And now what is the proclamation that they tell of
 made lately by the commander, publicly,
 to all the people? Do you know it? Have you heard it? 10
 Don't you notice when the evils due to enemies
 are headed towards those we love?
- ISMENE: Not a word, Antigone, of those we love,
 either sweet or bitter, has come to me since the moment
 when we lost our two brothers, 15
 on one day, by their hands dealing mutual death.
 Since the Argive army fled in this past night,
 I know of nothing further, nothing
 of better fortune or of more destruction.
- ANTIGONE: *I* knew it well; that is why I sent for you 20
 to come outside the palace gates
 to listen to me, privately.
- ISMENE: What is it? Certainly your words
 come of dark thoughts.
- ANTIGONE: Yes, indeed; for those two brothers of ours, in burial 25
 has not Creon honored the one, dishonored the other?
 Eteocles, they say he has used justly
 with lawful rites and hid him in the earth
 to have his honor among the dead men there.

1. Translated by David Grene.

2. In Greek legend, Oedipus became king of Thebes by inadvertently fulfilling his destiny that he would kill his father and marry his mother (as depicted in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*); for these offenses against nature and the gods, Creon sent Oedipus, along with his daughters Antigone and Ismene, into exile at Colonus. Soon Oedipus's sons, Eteocles and Polyneices, battled to the death for the throne of Thebes.

- 30 But the unhappy corpse of Polyneices
 he has proclaimed to all the citizens,
 they say, no man may hide
 in a grave nor mourn in funeral,
 but leave unwept, unburied, a dainty treasure
 35 for the birds that see him, for their feast's delight.
 That is what, they say, the worthy Creon
 has proclaimed for you and me—for me, I tell you—
 and he comes here to clarify to the unknowing
 his proclamation; he takes it seriously;
 40 for whoever breaks the edict death is prescribed,
 and death by stoning publicly.
 There you have it; soon you will show yourself
 as noble both in your nature and your birth,
 or yourself as base, although of noble parents.
- 45 ISMENE: If things are as you say, poor sister, how
 can I better them? how loose or tie the knot?
 ANTIGONE: Decide if you will share the work, the deed.
 ISMENE: What kind of danger is there? How far have your thoughts gone?
 ANTIGONE: Here is this hand. Will you help it to lift the dead man?
- 50 ISMENE: Would you bury him, when it is forbidden the city?
 ANTIGONE: At least he is my brother—and yours, too,
 though you deny him. *I will not prove false to him.*
 ISMENE: You are so headstrong. Creon has forbidden it.
 ANTIGONE: It is not for him to keep me from my own.
- 55 ISMENE: O God!
 Consider, sister, how our father died,
 hated and infamous; how he brought to light
 his own offenses; how he himself struck out
 the sight of his two eyes;
 60 his own hand was their executioner.
 Then, mother and wife, two names in one, did shame
 violently on her life, with twisted cords.
 Third, our two brothers, on a single day,
 poor wretches, themselves worked out their mutual doom.
 65 Each killed the other, hand against brother's hand.
 Now there are only the two of us, left behind,
 and see how miserable our end shall be
 if in the teeth of law we shall transgress
 against the sovereign's decree and power.
- 70 You ought to realize we are only women,
 not meant in nature to fight against men,
 and that we are ruled, by those who are stronger,
 to obedience in this and even more painful matters.
 I do indeed beg those beneath the earth
 75 to give me their forgiveness,
 since force constrains me,
 that I shall yield in this to the authorities.
 Extravagant action is not sensible.

- ANTIGONE: I would not urge you now; nor if you wanted
to act would I be glad to have you with me. 80
Be as you choose to be; but for myself
I myself will bury him. It will be good
to die, so doing. I shall lie by his side,
loving him as he loved me; I shall be
a criminal—but a religious one. 85
The time in which I must please those that are dead
is longer than I must please those of this world.
For there I shall lie forever. You, if you like,
can cast dishonor on what the gods have honored.
- ISMENE: I will not put dishonor on them, but 90
to act in defiance of the citizenry,
my nature does not give me means for that.
- ANTIGONE: Let that be your excuse. But I will go
to heap the earth on the grave of my loved brother.
- ISMENE: How I fear for you, my poor sister! 95
- ANTIGONE: Do not fear for me. Make straight your own path to destiny.
- ISMENE: At least do not speak of this act to anyone else;
bury him in secret; I will be silent, too.
- ANTIGONE: Oh, oh, no! shout it out. I will hate you still worse
for silence—should you not proclaim it, 100
to everyone.
- ISMENE: You have a warm heart for such chilly deeds.
- ANTIGONE: I know I am pleasing those I should please most.
- ISMENE: *If* you can do it. But you are in love
with the impossible. 105
- ANTIGONE: No. When I can no more, then I will stop.
- ISMENE: It is better not to hunt the impossible
at all.
- ANTIGONE: If you will talk like this I will loathe you,
and you will be adjudged an enemy— 110
justly—by the dead's decision. Let me alone
and my folly with me, to endure this terror.
No suffering of mine will be enough
to make me die ignobly.
- ISMENE: Well, if you will, go on. 115
Know this; that though you are wrong to go, your friends
are right to love you.
- CHORUS: Sun's beam, fairest of all
that ever till now shone
on seven-gated Thebes; 120
O golden eye of day, you shone
coming over Dirce's stream;³
You drove in headlong rout
the whiteshielded man from Argos,
complete in arms; 125

3. River near Thebes.

his bits rang sharper
under your urging.

130 Polyneices brought him here
against our land, Polyneices,
roused by contentious quarrel;
like an eagle he flew into our country,
with many men-at-arms,
with many a helmet crowned with horsehair.

135 He stood above the halls, gaping with murderous lances,
encompassing the city's
seven-gated mouth.

But before his jaws would be sated
with our blood, before the fire,
140 pine fed, should capture our crown of towers,
he went hence—
such clamor of war stretched behind his back,
from his dragon foe, a thing he could not overcome.

For Zeus, who hates the most
the boasts of a great tongue,
145 saw them coming in a great tide,
insolent in the clang of golden armor.
The god struck him down with hurled fire,
as he strove to raise the victory cry,
now at the very winning post.

150 The earth rose to strike him as he fell swinging.
In his frantic onslaught, possessed, he breathed upon us
with blasting winds of hate.
Sometimes the great god of war was on one side,
and sometimes he struck a staggering blow on the other;
155 the god was a very wheel horse⁴ on the right trace.

At seven gates stood seven captains,
ranged equals against equals, and there left
their brazen suits of armor
to Zeus, the god of trophies.
160 Only those two wretches born of one father and mother
set their spears to win a victory on both sides;
they worked out their share in a common death.

Now Victory, whose name is great, has come
to Thebes of many chariots
165 with joy to answer her joy,
to bring forgetfulness of these wars;
let us go to all the shrines of the gods
and dance all night long.

4. The strongest and ablest horse in a team pulling a vehicle, harnessed nearest the front wheels "on the right trace."

Let Bacchus lead the dance,
shaking Thebes to trembling. 170

But here is the king of our land,
Creon,⁵ son of Menoeceus;
in our new contingencies with the gods,
he is our new ruler.

He comes to set in motion some design— 175
what design is it? Because he has proposed
the convocation of the elders.

He sent a public summons for our discussion.

CREON: Gentlemen: as for our city's fortune,
the gods have shaken her, when the great waves broke, 180
but the gods have brought her through again to safety.

For yourselves, I chose you out of all and summoned you
to come to me, partly because I knew you

as always loyal to the throne—at first,
when Laius⁶ was king, and then again 185

when Oedipus saved our city and then again
when he died and you remained with steadfast truth

to their descendants,
until they met their double fate upon one day,

striking and stricken, defiled each by a brother's murder. 190
Now here I am, holding all authority

and the throne, in virtue of kinship with the dead.

It is impossible to know any man—
I mean his soul, intelligence, and judgment—

until he shows his skill in rule and law. 195

I think that a man supreme ruler of a whole city,

if he does not reach for the best counsel for her,

but through some fear, keeps his tongue under lock and key,
him I judge the worst of any;

I have always judged so; and anyone thinking 200

another man more a friend than his own country,

I rate him nowhere. For my part, God is my witness,

who sees all, always, I would not be silent

if I saw ruin, not safety, on the way

towards my fellow citizens. I would not count 205

any enemy of my country as a friend—

because of what I know, that she it is

which gives us our security. If she sails upright

and we sail on her, friends will be ours for the making.

In the light of rules like these, I will make her greater still. 210

In consonance with this, I here proclaim

to the citizens about Oedipus' sons.

For Eteocles, who died this city's champion,

5. The brother of Jocasta, mother and wife of Oedipus; he became king of Thebes after the deaths of Oedipus's sons. 6. The father of Oedipus.

- showing his valor's supremacy everywhere,
 215 he shall be buried in his grave with every rite
 of sanctity given to heroes under earth.
 However, his brother, Polyneices, a returned exile,
 who sought to burn with fire from top to bottom
 his native city, and the gods of his own people;
 220 who sought to taste the blood he shared with us,
 and lead the rest of us to slavery—
 I here proclaim to the city that this man
 shall no one honor with a grave and none shall mourn.
 You shall leave him without burial; you shall watch him
 225 chewed up by birds and dogs and violated.
 Such is my mind in the matter; never by me
 shall the wicked man have precedence in honor
 over the just. But he that is loyal to the state
 in death, in life alike, shall have my honor.
 230 CHORUS: Son of Menoeceus, so it is your pleasure
 to deal with foe and friend of this our city.
 To use any legal means lies in your power,
 both about the dead and those of us who live.
 CREON: I understand, then, you will do my bidding.
 235 CHORUS: Please lay this burden on some younger man.
 CREON: Oh, watchers of the corpse I have already.
 CHORUS: What else, then, do your commands entail?
 CREON: That you should not side with those who disagree.
 CHORUS: There is none so foolish as to love his own death.
 240 CREON: Yes, indeed those are the wages, but often greed
 has with its hopes brought men to ruin.

[The SENTRY whose speeches follow represents a remarkable experiment in Greek tragedy in the direction of naturalism of speech. He speaks with marked clumsiness, partly because he is excited and talks almost colloquially. But also the royal presence makes him think apparently that he should be rather grand in his show of respect. He uses odd bits of archaism or somewhat stale poetical passages, particularly in catch phrases. He sounds something like lower-level Shakespearean characters, e.g. Constable Elbow, with his uncertainty about benefactor and malefactor.]

- SENTRY: My lord, I will never claim my shortness of breath
 is due to hurrying, nor were there wings in my feet.
 I stopped at many a lay-by in my thinking;
 245 I circled myself till I met myself coming back.
 My soul accosted me with different speeches.
 “Poor fool, yourself, why are you going somewhere
 when once you get there you will pay the piper?”
 “Well, aren’t you the daring fellow! stopping again?”
 250 and suppose Creon hears the news from someone else—
 don’t you realize that you will smart for that?”
 I turned the whole matter over. I suppose I may say
 “I made haste slowly” and the short road became long.
 However, at last I came to a resolve:

I must go to you; even if what I say
is nothing, really, still I shall say it. 255
I come here, a man with a firm clutch on the hope
that nothing can betide him save what is fated.
CREON: What is it then that makes you so afraid?
SENTRY: No, I want first of all to tell you my side of it. 260
I didn't do the thing; I never saw who did it.
It would not be fair for me to get into trouble.
CREON: You hedge, and barricade the thing itself.
Clearly you have some ugly news for me.
SENTRY: Well, you know how disasters make a man 265
hesitate to be their messenger.
CREON: For God's sake, tell me and get out of here!
SENTRY: Yes, I *will* tell you. Someone just now
buried the corpse and vanished. He scattered on the skin
some thirsty dust; he did the ritual, 270
duly, to purge the body of desecration.
CREON: What! Now who on earth could have done that?
SENTRY: I do not know. For there was there no mark
of axe's stroke nor casting up of earth
of any mattock; the ground was hard and dry, 275
unbroken; there were no signs of wagon wheels.
The doer of the deed had left no trace.
But when the first sentry of the day pointed it out,
there was for all of us a disagreeable
wonder. For the body had disappeared; 280
not in a grave, of course; but there lay upon him
a little dust as of a hand avoiding
the curse of violating the dead body's sanctity.
There were no signs of any beast nor dog 285
that came there; he had clearly not been torn.
There was a tide of bad words at one another,
guard taunting guard, and it might well have ended
in blows, for there was no one there to stop it.
Each one of us was the criminal but no one
manifestly so; all denied knowledge of it. 290
We were ready to take hot bars in our hands
or walk through fire,⁷ and call on the gods with oaths
that we had neither done it nor were privy
to a plot with anyone, neither in planning
nor yet in execution. 295
At last when nothing came of all our searching,
there was one man who spoke, made every head
bow to the ground in fear. For we could not

7. Ancient legal customs in which an accused person was required to undergo a "trial by ordeal," such as walking through fire; if the resulting injuries were not serious, the person was thought to be innocent and therefore divinely protected.

- either contradict him nor yet could we see how
 300 if we did what he said we would come out all right.
 His word was that we must lay information
 about the matter to yourself; we could not cover it.
 This view prevailed and the lot of the draw chose me,
 unlucky me, to win that prize. So here
 305 I am. I did not want to come,
 and you don't want to have me. I know that.
 For no one likes the messenger of bad news.
 CHORUS: My lord: I wonder, could this be God's doing?
 This is the thought that keeps on haunting me.
 310 CREON: Stop, before your words fill even me with rage,
 that you should be exposed as a fool, and you so old.
 For what you say is surely insupportable
 when you say the gods took forethought for this corpse.
 Is it out of excess of honor for the man,
 315 for the favors that he did them, they should cover him?
 This man who came to burn their pillared temples,
 their dedicated offerings—and this land
 and laws he would have scattered to the winds?
 Or do you see the gods as honoring
 320 criminals? This is not so. But what I am doing
 now, and other things before this, some men disliked,
 within this very city, and muttered against me,
 secretly shaking their heads; they would not bow
 justly beneath the yoke to submit to me.
 325 I am very sure that these men hired others
 to do this thing. I tell you the worse currency
 that ever grew among mankind is money. This
 sacks cities, this drives people from their homes,
 this teaches and corrupts the minds of the loyal
 330 to acts of shame. This displays
 all kinds of evil for the use of men,
 instructs in the knowledge of every impious act.
 Those that have done this deed have been paid to do it,
 but in the end they will pay for what they have done.
 335 It is as sure as I still reverence Zeus—
 know this right well—and I speak under oath—
 if you and your fellows do not find this man
 who with his own hand did the burial
 and bring him here before me face to face,
 340 your death alone will not be enough for me.
 You will hang alive till you open up this outrage.
 That will teach you in the days to come from what
 you may draw profit—safely—from your plundering.
 It's not from anything and everything
 345 you can grow rich. You will find out
 that ill-gotten gains ruin more than they save.

SENTRY: Have I your leave to say something—or should
I just turn and go?

CREON: Don't you know your talk is painful enough already?

SENTRY: Is the ache in your ears or in your mind? 350

CREON: Why do you dissect the whereabouts of my pain?

SENTRY: Because it is he who did the deed who hurts your
mind. I only hurt your ears that listen.

CREON: I am sure you have been a chatterbox since you were born.

SENTRY: All the same, I did not do this thing. 355

CREON: You might have done this, too, if you sold your soul.

SENTRY: It's a bad thing if one judges and judges wrongly.

CREON: You may talk as wittily as you like of judgment.

Only, if you don't bring to light those men
who have done this, you will yet come to say 360
that your wretched gains have brought bad consequences.

SENTRY: [*Aside.*] It were best that he were found, but whether
the criminal is taken or he isn't—

for that chance will decide—one thing is certain,
you'll never see me coming here again. 365

I never hoped to escape, never thought I could.

But now I have come off safe, I thank God heartily.

CHORUS: Many are the wonders, none
is more wonderful than what is man.

This it is that crosses the sea 370
with the south winds storming and the waves swelling,
breaking around him in roaring surf.

He it is again who wears away
the Earth, oldest of gods, immortal, unwearied,
as the ploughs wind across her from year to year 375
when he works her with the breed that comes from horses.

The tribe of the lighthearted birds he snares
and takes prisoner the races of savage beasts
and the brood of the fish of the sea,
with the close-spun web of nets. 380

A cunning fellow is man. His contrivances
make him master of beasts of the field
and those that move in the mountains.

So he brings the horse with the shaggy neck
to bend underneath the yoke; 385

and also the untamed mountain bull;
and speech and windswift thought
and the tempers that go with city living
he has taught himself, and how to avoid
the sharp frost, when lodging is cold 390
under the open sky

and pelting strokes of the rain.

He has a way against everything,
and he faces nothing that is to come

- 395 without contrivance.
 Only against death
 can he call on no means of escape;
 but escape from hopeless diseases
 he has found in the depths of his mind.
- 400 With some sort of cunning, inventive
 beyond all expectation
 he reaches sometimes evil,
 and sometimes good.
- If he honors the laws of earth,
 405 and the justice of the gods he has confirmed by oath,
 high is his city; no city
 has he with whom dwells dishonor
 prompted by recklessness.
 He who is so, may he never
 410 share my hearth!
 may he never think my thoughts!
- Is this a portent sent by God?
 I cannot tell.
 I know her. How can I say
 415 that this is not Antigone?
 Unhappy girl, child of unhappy Oedipus,
 what is this?
 Surely it is not you they bring here
 as disobedient to the royal edict,
 420 surely not you, taken in such folly.
- SENTRY: She is the one who did the deed;
 we took her burying him. But where is Creon?
- CHORUS: He is just coming from the house, when you most need him.
- CREON: What is this? What has happened that I come
 425 so opportunely?
- SENTRY: My lord, there is nothing
 that a man should swear he would never do.
 Second thoughts make liars of the first resolution.
 I would have vowed it would be long enough
 430 before I came again, lashed hence by your threats.
 But since the joy that comes past hope, and against all hope,
 is like no other pleasure in extent,
 I have come here, though I break my oath in coming.
 I bring this girl here who has been captured
 435 giving the grace of burial to the dead man.
 This time no lot chose me; this was my jackpot,
 and no one else's. Now, my lord, take her
 and as you please judge her and test her; I
 am justly free and clear of all this trouble.
- 440 CREON: This girl—how did you take her and from where?
 SENTRY: She was burying the man. Now you know all.
 CREON: Do you know what you are saying? Do you mean it?
 SENTRY: She is the one; I saw her burying

the dead man you forbade the burial of.

Now, do I speak plainly and clearly enough?

445

CREON: How was she seen? How was she caught in the act?

SENTRY: This is how it was. When we came there,

with those dreadful threats of yours upon us,

we brushed off all the dust that lay upon

the dead man's body, heedfully

450

leaving it moist and naked.

We sat on the brow of the hill, to windward,

that we might shun the smell of the corpse upon us.

Each of us wakefully urged his fellow

with torrents of abuse, not to be careless

455

in this work of ours. So it went on,

until in the midst of the sky the sun's bright circle

stood still; the heat was burning. Suddenly

a squall lifted out of the earth a storm of dust,

a trouble in the sky. It filled the plain,

460

ruining all the foliage of the wood

that was around it. The great empty air

was filled with it. We closed our eyes, enduring

this plague sent by the gods. When at long last

we were quit of it, why, then we saw the girl.

465

She was crying out with the shrill cry

of an embittered bird

that sees its nest robbed of its nestlings

and the bed empty. So, too, when she saw

the body stripped of its cover, she burst out in groans,

470

calling terrible curses on those that had done that deed;

and with her hands immediately

brought thirsty dust to the body; from a shapely brazen

urn, held high over it, poured a triple stream

of funeral offerings; and crowned the corpse.

475

When we saw that, we rushed upon her and

caught our quarry then and there, not a bit disturbed.

We charged her with what she had done, then and the first time.

She did not deny a word of it—to my joy,

but to my pain as well. It is most pleasant

480

to have escaped oneself out of such troubles

but painful to bring into it those whom we love.

However, it is but natural for me

to count all this less than my own escape.

CREON: You there, that turn your eyes upon the ground,

485

do you confess or deny what you have done?

ANTIGONE: Yes, I confess; I will not deny my deed.

CREON: [*To the SENTRY.*] You take yourself off where you like.

You are free of a heavy charge.

Now, Antigone, tell me shortly and to the point,

490

did you know the proclamation against your action?

ANTIGONE: I knew it; of course I did. For it was public.

CREON: And did you dare to disobey that law?

ANTIGONE: Yes, it was not Zeus that made the proclamation;

495 nor did Justice, which lives with those below, enact
such laws as that, for mankind. I did not believe
your proclamation had such power to enable
one who will someday die to override
God's ordinances, unwritten and secure.
500 *They* are not of today and yesterday;
they live forever; none knows when first they were.
These are the laws whose penalties I would not
incur from the gods, through fear of any man's temper.

I know that I will die—of course I do—
505 even if you had not doomed me by proclamation.
If I shall die before my time, I count that
a profit. How can such as I, that live
among such troubles, not find a profit in death?
So for such as me, to face such a fate as this
510 is pain that does not count. But if I dared to leave
the dead man, my mother's son, dead and unburied,
that would have been real pain. The other is not.
Now, if you think me a fool to act like this,
perhaps it is a fool that judges so.

515 CHORUS: The savage spirit of a savage father
shows itself in this girl. She does not know
how to yield to trouble.

CREON: I would have you know the most fanatic spirits
fall most of all. It is the toughest iron,
520 baked in the fire to hardness, you may see
most shattered, twisted, shivered to fragments.
I know hot horses are restrained
by a small curb. For he that is his neighbor's slave cannot
be high in spirit. This girl had learned her insolence
525 before this, when she broke the established laws.
But here is still another insolence
in that she boasts of it, laughs at what she did.
I swear I am no man and she the man
if she can win this and not pay for it.
530 No; though she were my sister's child or closer
in blood than all that my hearth god acknowledges
as mine, neither she nor her sister should escape
the utmost sentence—death. For indeed I accuse her,
the sister, equally of plotting the burial.
535 Summon her. I saw her inside, just now,
crazy, distraught. When people plot
mischief in the dark, it is the mind which first
is convicted of deceit. But surely I hate indeed
the one that is caught in evil and then makes
540 that evil look like good.

ANTIGONE: Do you want anything

beyond my taking and my execution?

CREON: Oh, nothing! Once I have that I have everything.

ANTIGONE: Why do you wait, then? Nothing that you say
pleases me; God forbid it ever should.

545

So my words, too, naturally offend you.

Yet how could I win a greater share of glory

than putting my own brother in his grave?

All that are here would surely say that's true,

if fear did not lock their tongues up. A prince's power

550

is blessed in many things, not least in this,

that he can say and do whatever he likes.

CREON: You are alone among the people of Thebes
to see things in that way.

ANTIGONE: No, these do, too,

555

but keep their mouths shut for the fear of you.

CREON: Are you not ashamed to think so differently
from them?

ANTIGONE: There is nothing shameful in honoring my brother.

CREON: Was not he that died on the other side your brother?

560

ANTIGONE: Yes, indeed, of my own blood from father and mother.

CREON: Why then do you show a grace that must be impious
in *his* sight?

ANTIGONE: *That* other dead man

would never bear you witness in what you say.

565

CREON: Yes he would, if you put him only on equality
with one that was a desecrator.

ANTIGONE: It was his brother, not his slave, that died.

CREON: He died destroying the country the other defended.

ANTIGONE: The god of death demands these rites for both.

570

CREON: But the good man does not seek an *equal* share only,
with the bad.

ANTIGONE: Who knows

if in that other world this is true piety?

CREON: My enemy is still my enemy, even in death.

ANTIGONE: My nature is to join in love, not hate.

575

CREON: Go then to the world below, yourself, if you

must love. Love *them*. When I am alive no woman shall rule.

CHORUS: Here before the gates comes Ismene
shedding tears for the love of a brother.

A cloud over her brow casts shame

580

on her flushed face, as the tears wet

her fair cheeks.

CREON: You there, who lurked in my house, viper-like—

secretly drawing its lifeblood; I never thought

585

that I was raising two sources of destruction,

two rebels against my throne. Come tell me now,

will you, too, say you bore a hand in the burial

or will you swear that you know nothing of it?

- ISMENE: I did it, yes—if she will say I did it
 590 I bear my share in it, bear the guilt, too.
 ANTIGONE: Justice will not allow you what you refused
 and I will have none of your partnership.
 ISMENE: But in your troubles I am not ashamed
 to sail with you the sea of suffering.
 595 ANTIGONE: Where the act was death, the dead are witnesses.
 I do not love a friend who loves in words.
 ISMENE: Sister, do not dishonor me, denying me
 a common death with you, a common honoring
 of the dead man.
 600 ANTIGONE: Don't die with me, nor make your own
 what you have never touched. I that die am enough.
 ISMENE: What life is there for me, once I have lost you?
 ANTIGONE: Ask Creon; all your care was on his behalf.
 ISMENE: Why do you hurt me, when you gain nothing by it?
 605 ANTIGONE: I am hurt by my own mockery—if I mock you.
 ISMENE: Even now—what can I do to help you still?
 ANTIGONE: Save yourself; I do not grudge you your escape.
 ISMENE: I cannot bear it! Not even to share your death!
 ANTIGONE: Life was your choice, and death was mine.
 610 ISMENE: You cannot say I accepted that choice in silence.
 ANTIGONE: You were right in the eyes of one party, I in the other.
 ISMENE: Well then, the fault is equally between us.
 ANTIGONE: Take heart; you are alive, but my life died
 long ago, to serve the dead.
 615 CREON: Here are two girls; I think that one of them
 has suddenly lost her wits—the other was always so.
 ISMENE: Yes, for, my lord, the wits that they are born with
 do not stay firm for the unfortunate.
 They go astray.
 CREON: Certainly yours do,
 620 when you share troubles with the troublemaker.
 ISMENE: What life can be mine alone without her?
 CREON: Do not
 speak of *her*. *She* isn't, anymore.
 ISMENE: Will you kill your son's wife to be?⁸
 CREON: Yes, there are other fields for him to plough.
 625 ISMENE: Not with the mutual love of him and her.
 CREON: I hate a bad wife for a son of mine.
 ANTIGONE: Dear Haemon, how your father dishonors you.
 CREON: There is too much of you—and of your marriage!
 CHORUS: Will you rob your son of this girl?
 630 CREON: Death—it is death that will stop the marriage for me.
 CHORUS: Your decision it seems is taken: she shall die.
 CREON: Both you and I have decided it. No more delay.

8. Antigone, betrothed to Creon's son Haemon.

[*He turns to the SERVANTS.*]

Bring her inside, you. From this time forth,
these must be women, and not free to roam.
For even the stout of heart shrink when they see
the approach of death close to their lives.

635

CHORUS: Lucky are those whose lives

know no taste of sorrow.

But for those whose house has been shaken by God
there is never cessation of ruin;

640

it steals on generation after generation

within a breed. Even as the swell

is driven over the dark deep

by the fierce Thracian winds

I see the ancient evils of Labdacus' house⁹

645

are heaped on the evils of the dead.

No generation frees another, some god

strikes them down; there is no deliverance.

Here was the light of hope stretched

over the last roots of Oedipus' house,

650

and the bloody dust due to the gods below

has mowed it down—that and the folly of speech

and ruin's enchantment of the mind.

Your power, O Zeus, what sin of man can limit?

All-aging sleep does not overtake it,

655

nor the unwearied months of the gods; and you,

for whom time brings no age,

you hold the glowing brightness of Olympus.

For the future near and far,

and the past, this law holds good:

660

nothing very great

comes to the life of mortal man

without ruin to accompany it.

For Hope, widely wandering, comes to many of mankind

as a blessing,

665

but to many as the deceiver,

using light-minded lusts;

she comes to him that knows nothing

till he burns his foot in the glowing fire.

With wisdom has someone declared

670

a word of distinction:

that evil seems good to one whose mind

the god leads to ruin,

and but for the briefest moment of time

is his life outside of calamity.

675

Here is Haemon, youngest of your sons.

9. The Theban royal lineage that included Labdacus, his son, Laius, and his grandson, Oedipus.

Does he come grieving
 for the fate of his bride to be,
 in agony at being cheated of his marriage?

680 CREON: Soon we will know that better than the prophets.

My son, can it be that you have not heard
 of my final decision on your betrothed?
 Can you have come here in your fury against your father?
 Or have I your love still, no matter what I do?

685 HAEMON: Father, I am yours; with your excellent judgment
 you lay the right before me, and I shall follow it.
 No marriage will ever be so valued by me
 as to override the goodness of your leadership.

CREON: Yes, my son, this should always be
 690 in your very heart, that everything else
 shall be second to your father's decision.
 It is for this that fathers pray to have
 obedient sons begotten in their halls,
 that they may requite with ill their father's enemy
 695 and honor his friend no less than he would himself.
 If a man have sons that are no use to him,
 what can one say of him but that he has bred
 so many sorrows to himself, laughter to his enemies?
 Do not, my son, banish your good sense
 700 through pleasure in a woman, since you know
 that the embrace grows cold
 when an evil woman shares your bed and home.
 What greater wound can there be than a false friend?
 No. Spit on her, throw her out like an enemy,
 705 this girl, to marry someone in Death's house.
 I caught her openly in disobedience
 alone out of all this city and I shall not make
 myself a liar in the city's sight. No, I will kill her.
 So let her cry if she will on the Zeus of kinship;
 710 for if I rear those of my race and breeding
 to be rebels, surely I will do so with those outside it.
 For he who is in his household a good man
 will be found a just man, too, in the city.
 But he that breaches the law or does it violence
 715 or thinks to dictate to those who govern him
 shall never have my good word.
 The man the city sets up in authority
 must be obeyed in small things and in just
 but also in their opposites.
 720 I am confident such a man of whom I speak
 will be a good ruler, and willing to be well ruled.
 He will stand on his country's side, faithful and just,
 in the storm of battle. There is nothing worse
 than disobedience to authority.
 725 It destroys cities, it demolishes homes;

it breaks and routs one's allies. Of successful lives
the most of them are saved by discipline.

So we must stand on the side of what is orderly;

we cannot give victory to a woman.

If we must accept defeat, let it be from a man;

we must not let people say that a woman beat us.

730

CHORUS: We think, if we are not victims of Time the Thief,
that you speak intelligently of what you speak.

HAEMON: Father, the natural sense that the gods breed
in men is surely the best of their possessions.

735

I certainly could not declare you wrong—

may I never know how to do so!—Still there might
be something useful that some other than you might think.

It is natural for me to be watchful on your behalf
concerning what all men say or do or find to blame.

740

Your face is terrible to a simple citizen;

it frightens him from words you dislike to hear.

But what *I* can hear, in the dark, are things like these:

the city mourns for this girl; they think she is dying
most wrongly and most undeservedly

745

of all womenkind, for the most glorious acts.

Here is one who would not leave her brother unburied,
a brother who had fallen in bloody conflict,

to meet his end by greedy dogs or by

the bird that chanced that way. Surely what she merits

750

is golden honor, isn't it? That's the dark rumor

that spreads in secret. Nothing I own

I value more highly, father, than your success.

What greater distinction can a son have than the glory

of a successful father, and for a father

the distinction of successful children?

755

Do not bear this single habit of mind, to think

that what you say and nothing else is true

A man who thinks that he alone is right,

or what he says, or what he *is* himself,

760

unique, such men, when opened up, are seen

to be quite empty. For a man, though he be wise,

it is no shame to learn—learn many things,

and not maintain his views too rigidly.

You notice how by streams in wintertime

765

the trees that yield preserve their branches safely,

but those that fight the tempest perish utterly.

The man who keeps the sheet¹ of his sail tight

and never slackens capsizes his boat

and makes the rest of his trip keel uppermost.

770

Yield something of your anger, give way a little.

If a much younger man, like me, may have

1. Rope attached to the corner of a sail to hold it at the proper angle to the wind.

- a judgment, I would say it were far better
to be one altogether wise by nature, but,
775 as things incline not to be so, then it is good
also to learn from those who advise well.
- CHORUS: My lord, if he says anything to the point,
you should learn from him, and you, too, Haemon,
learn from your father. Both of you
780 have spoken well.
- CREON: Should we that are my age learn wisdom
from young men such as he is?
- HAEMON: Not learn injustice, certainly. If I am young,
do not look at my years but what I do.
- CREON: Is what you do to have respect for rebels?
- 785 HAEMON: I
would not urge you to be scrupulous
towards the wicked.
- CREON: Is *she* not tainted by the disease of wickedness?
- HAEMON: The entire people of Thebes says no to that.
- 790 CREON: Should the city tell me how I am to rule them?
- HAEMON: Do you see what a young man's words these are of yours?
- CREON: Must I rule the land by someone else's judgment
rather than my own?
- HAEMON: There is no city
possessed by one man only.
- 795 CREON: Is not the city thought to be the ruler's?
- HAEMON: You would be a fine dictator of a desert.
- CREON: It seems this boy is on the woman's side.
- HAEMON: If you are a woman—my care is all for you.
- CREON: You villain, to bandy words with your own father!
- 800 HAEMON: I see your acts as mistaken and unjust.
- CREON: Am I mistaken, reverencing my own office?
- HAEMON: There is no reverence in trampling on God's honor.
- CREON: Your nature is vile, in yielding to a woman.
- HAEMON: You will not find me yield to what is shameful.
- 805 CREON: At least, your argument is all for her.
- HAEMON: Yes, and for you and me—and for the gods below.
- CREON: You will never marry her while her life lasts.
- HAEMON: Then she must die—and dying destroy another.
- CREON: Has your daring gone so far, to threaten me?
- 810 HAEMON: What threat is it to speak against empty judgments?
- CREON: Empty of sense yourself, you will regret
your schooling of me in sense.
- HAEMON: If you were not
my father, I would say you are insane.
- CREON: You woman's slave, do not try to wheedle me.
- 815 HAEMON: You want to talk but never to hear and listen.
- CREON: Is that so? By the heavens above you will not—
be sure of that—get off scot-free, insulting,
abusing me.

[*He speaks to the SERVANTS.*]

- You people bring out this creature,
 this hated creature, that she may die before
 his very eyes, right now, next her would-be husband. 820
- HAEMON: Not at my side! Never think that! She will not
 die by my side. But you will never again
 set eyes upon my face. Go then and rage
 with such of your friends as are willing to endure it.
- CHORUS: The man is gone, my lord, quick in his anger. 825
 A young man's mind is fierce when he is hurt.
- CREON: Let him go, and do and think things superhuman.
 But these two girls he shall not save from death.
- CHORUS: Both of them? Do you mean to kill them both?
- CREON: No, not the one that didn't do anything. 830
 You are quite right there.
- CHORUS: And by what form of death do you mean to kill her?
- CREON: I will bring her where the path is loneliest,
 and hide her alive in a rocky cavern there.
 I'll give just enough of food as shall suffice 835
 for a bare expiation, that the city may avoid pollution.
 In that place she shall call on Hades, god of death,
 in her prayers. That god only she reveres.
 Perhaps she will win from him escape from death
 or at least in that last moment will recognize 840
 her honoring of the dead is labor lost.
- CHORUS: Love undefeated in the fight,
 Love that makes havoc of possessions,
 Love who lives at night in a young girl's soft cheeks,
 Who travels over sea, or in huts in the countryside— 845
 there is no god able to escape you
 nor anyone of men, whose life is a day only,
 and whom you possess is mad.
- You wrench the minds of just men to injustice,
 to their disgrace; this conflict among kinsmen 850
 it is you who stirred to turmoil.
 The winner is desire. She gleaming kindles
 from the eyes of the girl good to bed.
 Love shares the throne with the great powers that rule.
 For the golden Aphrodite² holds her play there 855
 and then no one can overcome her.
- Here I too am borne out of the course of lawfulness
 when I see these things, and I cannot control
 the springs of my tears
 when I see Antigone making her way 860

2. Goddess of love and beauty.

to her bed—but the bed
that is rest for everyone.

ANTIGONE: You see me, you people of my country,
as I set out on my last road of all,
865 looking for the last time on this light of this sun—
never again. I am alive but Hades who gives sleep to everyone
is leading me to the shores of Acheron,³
though I have known nothing of marriage songs
nor the chant that brings the bride to bed.
870 My husband is to be the Lord of Death.

CHORUS: Yes, you go to the place where the dead are hidden,
but you go with distinction and praise.
You have not been stricken by wasting sickness;
you have not earned the wages of the sword;
875 it was your own choice and alone among mankind
you will descend, alive,
to that world of death.

ANTIGONE: But indeed I have heard of the saddest of deaths—
of the Phrygian stranger,⁴ daughter of Tantalus,
880 whom the rocky growth subdued, like clinging ivy.
The rains never leave her, the snow never fails,
as she wastes away. That is how men tell the story.
From streaming eyes her tears wet the crags;
most like to her the god brings me to rest.

885 CHORUS: Yes, but she was a god, and god born,
and you are mortal and mortal born.
Surely it is great renown
for a woman that dies, that in life and death
her lot is a lot shared with demigods.

890 ANTIGONE: You mock me. In the name of our fathers' gods
why do you not wait till I am gone to insult me?
Must you do it face to face?
My city! Rich citizens of my city!
You springs of Dirce, you holy groves of Thebes,
895 famed for its chariots! I would still have you as my witnesses,
with what dry-eyed friends, under what laws
I make my way to my prison sealed like a tomb.
Pity me. Neither among the living nor the dead
do I have a home in common—
900 neither with the living nor the dead.

CHORUS: You went to the extreme of daring
and against the high throne of Justice
you fell, my daughter, grievously.
But perhaps it was for some ordeal of your father
905 that you are paying requital.

3. River in Hades.

4. Niobe, whose children were slain because of her boastfulness and who was herself turned into a stone on Mount Siphylus. Her tears became the mountain's streams.

ANTIGONE: You have touched the most painful of my cares—
 the pity for my father, ever reawakened,
 and the fate of all of our race, the famous Labdacids;
 the doomed self-destruction of my mother's bed
 when she slept with her own son,
 my father.

910

What parents I was born of, God help me!
 To them I am going to share their home,
 the curse on me, too, and unmarried.
 Brother, it was a luckless marriage you made,
 and dying killed my life.

915

CHORUS: There *is* a certain reverence for piety.

But for him in authority,
 he cannot see that authority defied;
 it is your own self-willed temper
 that has destroyed you.

920

ANTIGONE: No tears for me, no friends, no marriage. Brokenhearted
 I am led along the road ready before me.
 I shall never again be suffered
 to look on the holy eye of the day.
 But my fate claims no tears—
 no friend cries for me.

925

CREON: [*To the SERVANTS.*] Don't you know that weeping and wailing before
 death

would never stop if one is allowed to weep and wail?

Lead her away at once. Enfold her
 in that rocky tomb of hers—as I told you to.

930

There leave her alone, solitary,
 to die if she so wishes

or live a buried life in such a home;
 we are guiltless in respect of her, this girl.

935

But living above, among the rest of us, this life
 she shall certainly lose.

ANTIGONE: Tomb, bridal chamber, prison forever
 dug in rock, it is to you I am going
 to join my people, that great number that have died,
 whom in their death Persephone⁵ received.

940

I am the last of them and I go down
 in the worst death of all—for I have not lived
 the due term of my life. But when I come
 to that other world my hope is strong
 that my coming will be welcome to my father,
 and dear to you, my mother, and dear to you,
 my brother deeply loved. For when you died,
 with my own hands I washed and dressed you all,
 and poured the lustral offerings on your graves.

945

950

5. Abducted by Pluto (known to the Greeks as Hades), god of the underworld.

And now, Polyneices, it was for such care of your body
that I have earned these wages.

Yet those who think rightly will think I did right
in honoring you. Had I been a mother

955 of children, and my husband been dead and rotten,

I would not have taken this weary task upon me

against the will of the city. What law backs me

when I say this? I will tell you:

If my husband were dead, I might have had another,

960 and child from another man, if I lost the first.

But when father and mother both were hidden in death

no brother's life would bloom for me again.

That is the law under which I gave you precedence,

my dearest brother, and that is why Creon thinks me

965 wrong, even a criminal, and now takes me

by the hand and leads me away,

unbedded, without bridal, without share

in marriage and in nurturing of children;

as lonely as you see me; without friends;

970 with fate against me I go to the vault of death

while still alive. What law of God have I broken?

Why should I still look to the gods in my misery?

Whom should I summon as ally? For indeed

because of piety I was called impious.

975 If this proceeding is good in the gods' eyes

I shall know my sin, once I have suffered.

But if Creon and his people are the wrongdoers

let their suffering be no worse than the injustice

they are meting out to me.

980 CHORUS: It is the same blasts, the tempests of the soul,

possess her.

CREON: Then for this her guards,

who are so slow, will find themselves in trouble.

ANTIGONE: [*Cries out.*] Oh, that word has come

very close to death.

985 CREON: I will not comfort you

with hope that the sentence will not be accomplished.

ANTIGONE: O my father's city, in Theban land,

O gods that sired my race,

I am led away, I have no more stay.

990 Look on me, princes of Thebes,

the last remnant of the old royal line;

see what I suffer and who makes me suffer

because I gave reverence to what claims reverence.

CHORUS: Danae suffered, too, when, her beauty lost, she gave

995 the light of heaven in exchange for brassbound walls,

and in the tomb-like cell was she hidden and held;

yet she was honored in her breeding, child,

and she kept, as guardian, the seed of Zeus

that came to her in a golden shower.⁶
 But there is some terrible power in destiny
 and neither wealth nor war
 nor tower nor black ships, beaten by the sea,
 can give escape from it. 1000

The hot-tempered son of Dryas,⁷ the Edonian king,
 in fury mocked Dionysus,
 who then held him in restraint
 in a rocky dungeon. 1005

So the terrible force and flower of his madness
 drained away. He came to know the god
 whom in frenzy he had touched with his mocking tongue,
 when he would have checked the inspired women 1010

and the fire of Dionysus,
 when he provoked the Muses⁸ that love the lyre.

By the black rocks, dividing the sea in two,
 are the shores of the Bosphorus, Thracian Salmydessus.⁹ 1015

There the god of war who lives near the city
 saw the terrible blinding wound
 dealt by his savage wife
 on Phineus' two sons.¹

She blinded and tore with the points of her shuttle,
 and her bloodied hands, those eyes
 that else would have looked on her vengefully. 1020

As they wasted away, they lamented
 their unhappy fate that they were doomed
 to be born of a mother cursed in her marriage. 1025

She traced her descent from the seed
 of the ancient Erechtheidae.

In far-distant caves she was raised
 among her father's storms, that child of Boreas
 quick as a horse, over the steep hills,
 a daughter of the gods. 1030

But, my child, the long-lived Fates²
 bore hard upon her, too.

[Enter TEIRESIAS, *the blind prophet, led by a BOY.*]

TEIRESIAS: My lords of Thebes, we have come here together,
 one pair of eyes serving us both. For the blind 1035

6. Danae was locked away because it was prophesized that her son would kill her father. Zeus entered her cell as a shower of gold, impregnated her, and thus fathered Perseus, the child who fulfilled the prophecy.

7. Stricken with madness by Dionysus. 8. Nine sister goddesses of poetry, music, and the arts.

9. City in the land of Thrace, in ancient times erroneously believed to lie on the Bosphorus, the strait separating Europe and Asia at the outlet of the Black Sea.

1. King Phineus's second wife blinded the children of his first wife, whom Phineus had imprisoned in a cave.

2. Supernatural forces, usually represented as three old women, who determine the quality and length of life.

such must be the way of going, by a guide's leading.

CREON: What is the news, my old Teiresias?

TEIRESIAS: I will tell you; and you, listen to the prophet.

CREON: Never in the past have I turned from your advice.

1040 TEIRESIAS: And so you have steered well the ship of state.

CREON: I have benefited and can testify to that.

TEIRESIAS: Then realize you are on the razor edge
of danger.

CREON: What can that be? I shudder to hear those words.

1045 TEIRESIAS: When you learn the signs recognized by my art
you will understand.

I sat at my ancient place of divination
for watching the birds, where every bird finds shelter;

and I heard an unwonted voice among them;

1050 they were horribly distressed, and screamed unmeaningly.

I knew they were tearing each other murderously;

the beating of their wings was a clear sign.

I was full of fear; at once on all the altars,

as they were fully kindled, I tasted the offerings,

1055 but the god of fire refused to burn from the sacrifice,

and from the thighbones a dark stream of moisture

oozed from the embers, smoked and sputtered.

The gall bladder burst and scattered to the air

and the streaming thighbones lay exposed

1060 from the fat wrapped round them—

so much I learned from this boy here,

the fading prophecies of a rite that failed.

This boy here is my guide, as I am others'.

This is the city's sickness—and your plans are the cause of it.

1065 For our altars and our sacrificial hearths

are filled with the carrion meat of birds and dogs,

torn from the flesh of Oedipus' poor son.

So the gods will not take our prayers or sacrifice

nor yet the flame from the thighbones, and no bird

1070 cries shrill and clear, so gluttoned

are they with fat of the blood of the killed man.

Reflect on these things, son. All men

can make mistakes; but, once mistaken,

a man is no longer stupid nor accursed

1075 who, having fallen on ill, tries to cure that ill,

not taking a fine undeviating stand.

It is obstinacy that convicts of folly.

Yield to the dead man; do not stab him—

now he is gone—what bravery is this,

1080 to inflict another death upon the dead?

I mean you well and speak well for your good.

It is never sweeter to learn from a good counselor

than when he counsels to your benefit.

CREON: Old man, you are all archers, and I am your mark.

- I must be tried by your prophecies as well. 1085
 By the breed of you I have been bought and sold
 and made a merchandise, for ages now.
 But I tell you: make your profit from silver-gold
 from Sardis and the gold from India
 if you will. But this dead man you shall not hide 1090
 in a grave, not though the eagles of Zeus should bear
 the carrion, snatching it to the throne of Zeus itself.
 Even so, I shall not so tremble at the pollution
 to let you bury him.
- No, I am certain
 no human has the power to pollute the gods. 1095
 They fall, you old Teiresias, those men,
 —so very clever—in a bad fall whenever
 they eloquently speak vile words for profit.
- TEIRESIAS: I wonder if there's a man who dares consider—
 CREON: What do you mean? What sort of generalization 1100
 is this talk of yours?
- TEIRESIAS: How much the best of possessions is the ability
 to listen to wise advice?
- CREON: As I should imagine that the worst
 injury must be native stupidity. 1105
- TEIRESIAS: Now that is exactly where your mind is sick.
- CREON: I do not like to answer a seer with insults.
- TEIRESIAS: But you do, when you say my prophecies are lies.
- CREON: Well,
 the whole breed of prophets certainly loves money. 1110
- TEIRESIAS: And the breed that comes from princes loves to take
 advantage—base advantage.
- CREON: Do you realize
 you are speaking in such terms of your own prince?
- TEIRESIAS: I know. But it is through me you have saved the city.
- CREON: You are a wise prophet, but what you love is wrong. 1115
- TEIRESIAS: You will force me to declare what should be hidden
 in my own heart.
- CREON: Out with it—
 but only if your words are not for gain.
- TEIRESIAS: They won't be for *your* gain—that I am sure of.
- CREON: But realize you will not make a merchandise 1120
 of my decisions.
- TEIRESIAS: And you must realize
 that you will not outlive many cycles more
 of this swift sun before you give in exchange
 one of your own loins bred, a corpse for a corpse,
 for you have thrust one that belongs above 1125
 below the earth, and bitterly dishonored
 a living soul by lodging her in the grave;
 while one that belonged indeed to the underworld
 gods you have kept on this earth without due share

- 1130 of rites of burial, of due funeral offerings,
a corpse unhallowed. With all of this you, Creon,
have nothing to do, nor have the gods above.
These acts of yours are violence, on your part.
And in requital the avenging Spirits
- 1135 of Death itself and the gods' Furies shall
after *your* deeds, lie in ambush for you, and
in their hands you shall be taken cruelly.
Now, look at this and tell me I was bribed
to say it! The delay will not be long
- 1140 before the cries of mourning in your house,
of men and women. All the cities will stir in hatred
against you, because their sons in mangled shreds
received their burial rites from dogs, from wild beasts
or when some bird of the air brought a vile stink
- 1145 to each city that contained the hearths of the dead.
These are the arrows that archer-like I launched—
you vexed me so to anger—at your heart.
You shall not escape their sting. You, boy,
lead me away to my house, so he may discharge
- 1150 his anger on younger men; so may he come to know
to bear a quieter tongue in his head and a better
mind than that now he carries in him.
- CHORUS: That was a terrible prophecy, my lord.
The man has gone. Since these hairs of mine grew white
- 1155 from the black they once were, he has never spoken
a word of a lie to our city.
- CREON: I know, I know.
My mind is all bewildered. To yield is terrible.
But by opposition to destroy my very being
- 1160 with a self-destructive curse must also be reckoned
in what is terrible.
- CHORUS: You need good counsel, son of Menoeceus,
and need to take it.
- CREON: What must I do, then? Tell me; I shall agree.
- 1165 CHORUS: The girl—go now and bring her up from her cave,
and for the exposed dead man, give him his burial.
- CREON: That is really your advice? You would have me yield.
- CHORUS: And quickly as you may, my lord. Swift harms
sent by the gods cut off the paths of the foolish.
- 1170 CREON: Oh, it is hard; I must give up what my heart
would have me do. But it is ill to fight
against what must be.
- CHORUS: Go now, and do this;
do not give the task to others.
- 1175 CREON: I will go,
just as I am. Come, servants, all of you;
take axes in your hands; away with you
to the place you see, there.

For my part, since my intention is so changed,
 as I bound her myself, myself will free her. 1180
 I am afraid it may be best, in the end
 of life, to have kept the old accepted laws.

CHORUS: You of many names,³ glory of the Cadmeian
 bride, breed of loud thundering Zeus;
 you who watch over famous Italy; 1185
 you who rule where all are welcome in Eleusis;
 in the sheltered plains of Deo—
 O Bacchus that dwells in Thebes,
 the mother city of Bacchanals,
 by the flowing stream of Ismenus, 1190
 in the ground sown by the fierce dragon's teeth.

You are he on whom the murky gleam of torches glares,
 above the twin peaks of the crag
 where come the Corycean nymphs
 to worship you, the Bacchanals; 1195
 and the stream of Castalia has seen you, too;
 and you are he that the ivy-clad
 slopes of Nisaeon hills,
 and the green shore ivy-clustered,
 sent to watch over the roads of Thebes, 1200
 where the immortal Evioe chant⁴ rings out.

It is Thebes which you honor most of all cities,
 you and your mother both,
 she who died by the blast of Zeus' thunderbolt.
 And now when the city, with all its folk, 1205
 is gripped by a violent plague,
 come with healing foot, over the slopes of Parnassus,⁵
 over the moaning strait.
 You lead the dance of the fire-breathing stars,
 you are master of the voices of the night. 1210
 True-born child of Zeus, appear,
 my lord, with your Thyiad attendants,
 who in frenzy all night long
 dance in your house, Iacchus,
 dispenser of gifts. 1215

MESSENGER: You who live by the house of Cadmus and Amphion,⁶
 hear me. There is no condition of man's life
 that stands secure. As such I would not
 praise it or blame. It is chance that sets upright;
 it is chance that brings down the lucky and the unlucky, 1220
 each in his turn. For men, that belong to death,
 there is no prophet of established things.

3. Refers to Dionysus. 4. Come forth, come forth!

5. Mountain in central Greece sacred to Apollo, Dionysus, and the Muses; Apollo's shrine, Delphi, lies at the foot of Parnassus. 6. A name for Thebes.

Once Creon was a man worthy of envy—
 of my envy, at least. For he saved this city
 1225 of Thebes from her enemies, and attained
 the throne of the land, with all a king's power.
 He guided it right. His race bloomed
 with good children. But when a man forfeits joy
 I do not count his life as life, but only
 1230 a life trapped in a corpse.
 Be rich within your house, yes greatly rich,
 if so you will, and live in a prince's style.
 If the gladness of these things is gone, I would not
 give the shadow of smoke for the rest,
 1235 as against joy.

CHORUS: What is the sorrow of our princes
 of which you are the messenger?

MESSENGER: Death; and the living are guilty of their deaths.

CHORUS: But who is the murderer? Who the murdered? Tell us.

1240 MESSENGER: Haemon is dead; the hand that shed his blood
 was his very own.

CHORUS: Truly his own hand? Or his father's?

MESSENGER: His own hand, in his anger
 against his father for a murder.

1245 CHORUS: Prophet, how truly you have made good your word!

MESSENGER: These things are so; you may debate the rest.

Here I see Creon's wife Eurydice
 approaching. Unhappy woman!

Does she come from the house as hearing about her son
 1250 or has she come by chance?

EURYDICE: I heard your words, all you men of Thebes, as I
 was going out to greet Pallas⁷ with my prayers.

I was just drawing back the bolts of the gate
 to open it when a cry struck through my ears
 1255 telling of my household's ruin. I fell backward
 in terror into the arms of my servants; I fainted.
 But tell me again, what is the story? I
 will hear it as one who is no stranger to sorrow.

MESSENGER: Dear mistress, I will tell you, for I was there,
 1260 and I will leave out no word of the truth.

Why should I comfort you and then tomorrow
 be proved a liar? The truth is always best.

I followed your husband, at his heels, to the end of the plain
 where Polyneices' body still lay unpitied,
 1265 and torn by dogs. We prayed to Hecate, goddess
 of the crossroads, and also to Pluto⁸
 that they might restrain their anger and turn kind.
 And him we washed with sacred lustral water

7. Athena, goddess of wisdom.

8. King of the underworld, known to the Greeks as Hades. *Hecate*: goddess of witchcraft.

- and with fresh-cut boughs we burned what was left of him
 and raised a high mound of his native earth; 1270
 then we set out again for the hollowed rock,
 death's stone bridal chamber for the girl.
 Someone then heard a voice of bitter weeping
 while we were still far off, coming from that unblest room.
 The man came to tell our master Creon of it. 1275
 As the king drew nearer, there swarmed about him
 a cry of misery but no clear words.
 He groaned and in an anguished mourning voice
 cried "Oh, am I a true prophet? Is this the road
 that I must travel, saddest of all my wayfaring? 1280
 It is my son's voice that haunts my ear. Servants,
 get closer, quickly. Stand around the tomb
 and look. There is a gap there where the stones
 have been wrenched away; enter there, by the very mouth,
 and see whether I recognize the voice of Haemon 1285
 or if the gods deceive me." On the command
 of our despairing master we went to look.
 In the furthest part of the tomb we saw her, hanging
 by her neck. She had tied a noose of muslin on it.
 Haemon's hands were about her waist embracing her, 1290
 while he cried for the loss of his bride gone to the dead,
 and for all his father had done, and his own sad love.
 When Creon saw him he gave a bitter cry,
 went in and called to him with a groan: "Poor son!
 what have you done? What can you have meant? 1295
 What happened to destroy you? Come out, I pray you!"
 The boy glared at him with savage eyes, and then
 spat in his face, without a word of answer.
 He drew his double-hilted sword. As his father
 ran to escape him, Haemon failed to strike him, 1300
 and the poor wretch in anger at himself
 leaned on his sword and drove it halfway in,
 into his ribs. Then he folded the girl to him,
 in his arms, while he was conscious still,
 and gasping poured a sharp stream of bloody drops 1305
 on her white cheeks. There they lie,
 the dead upon the dead. So he has won
 the pitiful fulfillment of his marriage
 within death's house. In this human world he has shown
 how the wrong choice in plans is for a man 1310
 his greatest evil.
- CHORUS: What do you make of this? My lady is gone,
 without a word of good or bad.
- MESSENGER: I, too,
 am lost in wonder. I am inclined to hope
 that hearing of her son's death she could not 1315
 open her sorrow to the city, but chose rather

within her house to lay upon her maids
the mourning for the household grief. Her judgment
is good; she will not make any false step.

1320 CHORUS: I do not know. To me this over-heavy silence
seems just as dangerous as much empty wailing.

MESSANGER: I will go in and learn if in her passionate
heart she keeps hidden some secret purpose.

You are right; there is sometimes danger in too much silence.

1325 CHORUS: Here comes our king himself. He bears in his hands
a memorial all too clear;
it is a ruin of none other's making,
purely his own if one dare to say that.

CREON: The mistakes of a blinded man
1330 are themselves rigid and laden with death.
You look at us the killer and the killed
of the one blood. Oh, the awful blindness
of those plans of mine. My son, you were so young,
so young to die. You were freed from the bonds of life
1335 through no folly of your own—only through mine.

CHORUS: I think you have learned justice—but too late.

CREON: Yes, I have learned it to my bitterness. At this moment
God has sprung on my head with a vast weight
and struck me down. He shook me in my savage ways;
1340 he has overturned my joy, has trampled it,
underfoot. The pains men suffer
are pains indeed.

SECOND MESSENGER: My lord, you have troubles and a store besides;
some are there in your hands, but there are others

1345 you will surely see when you come to your house.

CREON: What trouble can there be beside these troubles?

SECOND MESSENGER: The queen is dead. She was indeed true mother
of the dead son. She died, poor lady,
by recent violence upon herself.

1350 CREON: Haven of death, you can never have enough.
Why, why do you destroy me?
You messenger, who have brought me bitter news,
what is this tale you tell?

It is a dead man that you kill again—
1355 what new message of yours is this, boy?
Is this new slaughter of a woman
a doom to lie on the pile of the dead?

CHORUS: You can see. It is no longer
hidden in a corner.

*[By some stage device, perhaps the so-called eccyclema, the inside of the palace is
shown, with the body of the dead QUEEN.]*

1360 CREON: Here is yet another horror
for my unhappy eyes to see.
What doom still waits for me?

- I have but now taken in my arms my son,
and again I look upon another dead face.
Poor mother and poor son! 1365
- SECOND MESSENGER: She stood at the altar, and with keen whetted knife
she suffered her darkening eyes to close.
First she cried in agony recalling the noble fate of Megareus,⁹
who died before all this,
and then for the fate of this son; and in the end 1370
she cursed you for the evil you had done
in killing her sons.
- CREON: I am distracted with fear. Why does not someone
strike a two-edged sword right through me?
I am dissolved in an agony of misery. 1375
- SECOND MESSENGER: You were indeed accused
by her that is dead
of Haemon's and of Megareus' death.
- CREON: By what kind of violence did she find her end?
- SECOND MESSENGER: Her own hand struck her to the entrails 1380
when she heard of her son's lamentable death.
- CREON: These acts can never be made to fit another
to free me from the guilt. It was I that killed her.
Poor wretch that I am, I say it is true!
Servants, lead me away, quickly, quickly. 1385
I am no more a live man than one dead.
- CHORUS: What you say is for the best—if there be a best
in evil such as this. For the shortest way
is best with troubles that lie at our feet.
- CREON: O, let it come, let it come, 1390
that best of fates that waits on my last day.
Surely best fate of all. Let it come, let it come!
That I may never see one more day's light!
- CHORUS: These things are for the future. We must deal
with what impends. What in the future is to care for 1395
rests with those whose duty it is
to care for them.
- CREON: At least, all that *I* want
is in that prayer of mine.
- CHORUS: Pray for no more at all. For what is destined 1400
for us, men mortal, there is no escape.
- CREON: Lead me away, a vain silly man
who killed you, son, and you, too, lady.
I did not mean to, but I did.
I do not know where to turn my eyes 1405
to look to, for support.
Everything in my hands is crossed. A most unwelcome fate
has leaped upon me.
- CHORUS: Wisdom is far the chief element in happiness

9. Another son of Creon who died defending Thebes.

1410 and, secondly, no irreverence towards the gods.
 But great words of haughty men exact
 in retribution blows as great
 and in old age teach wisdom.

THE END

ca. 441 B.C.

RICHARD C. JEBB

*From The Antigone of Sophocles**

The issue defined in the opening scene,—the conflict of divine with human law,—remains the central interest throughout. The action, so simple in plan, is varied by masterly character-drawing, both in the two principal figures, and in those lesser persons who contribute gradations of light and shade to the picture. There is no halting in the march of the drama; at each successive step we become more and more keenly interested to see how this great conflict is to end; and when the tragic climax is reached, it is worthy of such a progress.

The simplicity of the plot is due to the clearness with which two principles are opposed to each other. *Creon represents the duty of obeying the State's laws; Antigone, the duty of listening to the private conscience.* The definiteness and the power with which the play puts the case on each side are conclusive proofs that the question had assumed a distinct shape before the poet's mind. It is the only instance in which a Greek play has for its central theme a practical problem of conduct, involving issues, moral and political, which might be discussed on similar grounds in any age and in any country of the world. Greek Tragedy, owing partly to the limitations which it placed on detail, was better suited than modern drama to raise such a question in a general form. The *Antigone*, indeed, raises the question in a form as nearly abstract as is compatible with the nature of drama. The case of Antigone is a thoroughly typical one for the private conscience, because the particular thing which she believes that she ought to do was, in itself, a thing which every Greek of that age recognised as a most sacred duty,—viz.,¹ to render burial rites to kinsfolk. This advantage was not devised by Sophocles; it came to him as part of the story which he was to dramatise; but it forms an additional reason for thinking that, when he dramatised that story in the precise manner which he has chosen, he had a consciously dialectical purpose. Such a purpose was wholly consistent, in this instance, with the artist's first aim,—to produce a work of art. It is because Creon and Antigone are so human that the controversy which they represent becomes so vivid.

But how did Sophocles intend us to view the result? What is the drift of the words at the end, which say that “wisdom is the supreme part of happiness”? If this wisdom, or prudence, means, generally, the observance of due limit, may not

*From Sir Richard C. Jebb, ed., *The Antigone of Sophocles*, abr. by E. S. Shuckburgh (orig. ed., 1902; repr. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 1984) xvii–xix.

1. Namely (abbreviation of the Latin *videlicet*) [Editor's note].

the suggested moral be that both the parties to the conflict were censurable? As Creon overstepped the due limit when, by his edict, he infringed the divine law, so Antigone also overstepped it when she defied the edict. The drama would thus be a conflict between two persons, each of whom defends an intrinsically sound principle, but defends it in a mistaken way; and both persons are therefore punished. This view, of which Boeckh² is the chief representative, has found several supporters. Among them is Hegel:—"In the view of the Eternal Justice, both were wrong, because they were one-sided, but at the same time both were right."³

Or does the poet rather intend us to feel that Antigone is wholly in the right,—*i.e.*, that nothing of which the human lawgiver could complain in her was of a moment's account beside the supreme duty which she was fulfilling;—and that Creon was wholly in the wrong,—*i.e.*, that the intrinsically sound maxims of government on which he relies lose all validity when opposed to the higher law which he was breaking? If that was the poet's meaning, then the "wisdom" taught by the issue of the drama means the sense which duly subordinates human to divine law,—teaching that, if the two come into conflict, human law must yield.

A careful study of the play itself will suffice (I think) to show that the second of these two views is the true one. Sophocles has allowed Creon to put his case ably, and (in a measure from which an inferior artist might have shrunk) he has been content to make Antigone merely a nobly heroic woman, not a being exempt from human passion and human weakness; but none the less does he mean us to feel that, in this controversy, the right is wholly with her, and the wrong wholly with her judge.

MAURICE BOWRA

*From Sophoclean Tragedy**

Modern critics who do not share Sophocles' conviction about the paramount duty of burying the dead and who attach more importance than he did to the claims of political authority have tended to underestimate the way in which he justifies Antigone against Creon. To their support they have called in the great name of Hegel, who was fascinated by the play and advanced remarkable views on it. His remarks have been taken out of their context, and he has been made responsible for the opinion that Sophocles dramatized a conflict not between right and wrong but between right and right, that Antigone and Creon are equally justified in their actions and that the tragedy arises out of this irreconcilable conflict. Hegel's own words lend some support to this view: "In the view of eternal justice both were wrong, because they were one-sided; but at the same time both were right." But if we look at Hegel's observations in their own place, we find that this summary hardly conveys his full meaning. He was thinking of something much vaster than the play, of the whole logic of history which is here symbolized in a concrete example. In this the conflict of opposites ends by pro-

2. August Boeckh (1785–1867), German classical scholar [Editor's note].

3. *Religionsphilosophie*, II. 114 [Jebb's note].

*From Maurice Bowra, *Sophoclean Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1944) 65–67.

ducing a synthesis which is itself right. The conclusion is what matters, and that is different from saying that both sides in the conflict are themselves right. The tragic conclusion is, so to speak, a lesson of history, a fact which cannot be denied, real and therefore right, but the conflict which precedes it cannot be judged in isolation and neither side in it is right or wrong except in a relative sense. Hegel used the *Antigone* to illustrate his view of tragedy and his view of existence. He drew his own conclusions about the actions portrayed in it, as he was fully entitled to do. But his views are not those of Sophocles, and he should not be thought to maintain that Creon and Antigone were equally right in the eyes of their creator.

Sophocles leaves no doubt what conclusion should be drawn from the *Antigone*. He closes with a moral on the lips of the Chorus which tells the audience what to think:

Wisdom has first place in happiness,
And to fail not in reverence to the gods.
The big words of the arrogant
Lay big stripes on the boasters' backs.
They pay the price
And learn in old age to be wise.¹

This can refer to no one but Creon, whose lack of wisdom has brought him to misery, who has shown irreverence to the gods in refusing burial to Polynices, been chastened for his proud words, and learned wisdom in his old age. To this lesson the preceding action in which Creon has lost son and wife and happiness has already made its effective contribution. We may be sure that the Chorus speak for the poet. It is as silent about Antigone as it is emphatic about Creon. There is no hint that she has in any way acted wrongly or that her death should be regarded as a righteous punishment. Of course the final words do not sum up everything important in the play, but we may reasonably assume that they pass judgement on its salient events as they appear in retrospect when the action is finished. There is no real problem about the ethical intention of the *Antigone*. It shows the fall of a proud man, and its lesson is that the gods punish pride and irreverence. But what matters much more than the actual conclusion is the means by which it is reached, the presentation of the different parties in the conflict, the view that we take of each, the feelings that are forced on us. The interest and power of the *Antigone* lie in the tangled issues which are unravelled in it.

A conclusion so clear as this is only worth reaching if it has been preceded by a drama in which the issues are violent and complex. The rights and wrongs of the case must not throughout be so obvious as they are at the end; the audience must feel that the issue is difficult, that there is much to be said on both sides, that the ways of the gods are hard to discern. Without this the play will fail in dramatic and human interest. And Sophocles has taken great care to show the issues in their full difficulty before he provides a solution for them. He makes the two protagonists appear in such a light that at intervals we doubt if all the right is really with Antigone and all the wrong with Creon. To Creon, who defies the divine ordinance of burial, he gives arguments and sentiments which sound

1. Bowra's translation.

convincing enough when they are put forward, and many must feel that he has some good reason to act as he does. On the other hand Antigone, who fearlessly vindicates the laws of the gods, is by no means a gentle womanly creature who suffers martyrdom for the right. She may be right, but there are moments when we qualify our approval of her, when she seems proud and forbidding in her determination to do her duty and to do it alone. For these variations in our feelings Sophocles is responsible. He makes us find some right in Creon, some wrong in Antigone, even if we are misled about both. He built his play on a contrast not between obvious wrong and obvious right but between the real arrogance of Creon and the apparent arrogance of Antigone. The first deceives by its fine persuasive sentiments; the second works through Antigone's refusal to offer concessions or to consider any point of view but her own. This contrast runs through much of the play, accounts for misunderstandings of what takes place in it, provides false clues and suggests wrong conclusions, and adds greatly to the intensity of the drama. When a play is written round a moral issue, that issue must be a real problem about which more than one view is tenable until all the relevant facts are known. So the *Antigone* dramatizes a conflict which was familiar to the Periclean age,² would excite divergent judgements and feelings, and make some support Antigone, some Creon, until the end makes all clear.

BERNARD KNOX

*Introduction to The Three Theban Plays**

The opening scenes show us the conflicting claims and loyalties of the two adversaries, solidly based, in both cases, on opposed political and religious principles. This is of course the basic insight of Hegel's famous analysis of the play: he sees it as "a collision between the two highest moral powers." What is wrong with them, in his view, is that they are both "one-sided." But Hegel goes much further than that. He was writing in the first half of the nineteenth century, a period of fervent German nationalism in which the foundations of the unified German state were laid: his views on loyalty to the state were very much those of Creon. "Creon," he says, "is not a tyrant, he is really a moral power. He is not in the wrong."

However, as the action develops the favorable impression created by Creon's opening speech is quickly dissipated. His announcement of his decision to expose the corpse, the concluding section of his speech, is couched in violent, vindictive terms—"carion for the birds and dogs to tear"¹—which stand in shocking contrast to the ethical generalities that precede it. This hint of a cruel disposition underlying the statesmanlike façade is broadened by the threat of torture leveled at the sentry and the order to execute Antigone in the presence of Haemon, her

2. The height of Athenian culture and political power in the time of the Athenian statesman Pericles (ca. 495–429 B.C.E.).

* From Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus*, trans. by Robert Fagles, intro. and notes by Bernard Knox (New York: Penguin, 1982) 41–47, 53.

1. Knox's references are to Robert Fagles's translation, printed in *The Three Theban Plays*.

betrothed. And as he meets resistance from a series of opponents—Antigone’s contemptuous defiance, the rational, political advice of his son Haemon, the imperious summons to obedience of the gods’ spokesman, Tiresias—he swiftly abandons the temperate rhetoric of his inaugural address for increasingly savage invective. Against the two sanctions invoked by Antigone, the demands of blood relationship, the rights and privileges of the gods below, he rages in terms ranging from near-blasphemous defiance to scornful mockery.

Sister’s child or closer in blood
than all my family clustered at my altar
worshipping Guardian Zeus—she’ll never escape,
... the most barbaric death.

He will live to regret this wholesale denial of the family bond, for it is precisely through that family clustered at his altar that his punishment will be administered, in the suicides of his son and his wife, both of whom die cursing him.

And for Antigone’s appeals to Hades, the great god of the underworld to whom the dead belong, Creon has nothing but contempt; for him “Hades” is simply a word meaning “death,” a sentence he is prepared to pass on anyone who stands in his way. He threatens the sentry with torture as a prelude: “simple death won’t be enough for you.” When asked if he really intends to deprive Haemon of his bride he answers sarcastically: “Death will do it for me.” He expects to see Antigone and Ismene turn coward “once they see Death coming for their lives.” With a derisive comment he tells his son to abandon Antigone: “Spit her out, / ... Let her find a husband down among the dead [in Hades’ house].” And he dismisses Antigone’s reverence for Hades and the rights of the dead with mockery as he condemns her to be buried alive: “There let her pray to the one god she worships: / Death.” But this Hades is not something to be so lightly referred to, used or mocked. In the great choral ode which celebrated Man’s progress and powers this was the one insurmountable obstacle that confronted him:

ready, Never without man!
Never without resources
never an impasse as he marches on the future—
only Death, from Death alone he will find no rescue ...

And Creon, in the end, looking at the corpse of his son and hearing the news of his wife’s suicide, speaks of Hades for the first time with the fearful respect that is his due, not as an instrument of policy or a subject for sardonic word-play, but as a divine power, a dreadful presence: “harbor of Death, so choked, so hard to cleanse!— / why me? why are you killing me?”

Creon is forced at last to recognize the strength of those social and religious imperatives that Antigone obeys, but long before this happens he has abandoned the principles which he had proclaimed as authority for his own actions. His claim to be representative of the whole community is forgotten as he refuses to accept Haemon’s report that the citizens, though they dare not speak out, disapprove of his action; he denies the relevance of such a report even if true—“And is Thebes about to tell me how to rule?”—and finally repudiates his principles in specific terms by an assertion that the city belongs to him—“The city *is* the king’s—that’s the law!” This autocratic phrase puts the finishing touch to the

picture Sophocles is drawing for his audience: Creon has now displayed all the characteristics of the “tyrant,” a despotic ruler who seizes power and retains it by intimidation and force. Athens had lived under the rule of a “tyrant” before the democracy was established in 508 B.C., and the name and institution were still regarded with abhorrence. Creon goes on to abandon the gods whose temples crown the city’s high places, the gods he once claimed as his own, and his language is even more violent. The blind prophet Tiresias tells him that the birds and dogs are fouling the altars of the city’s gods with the carrion flesh of Poly-nices; he must bury the corpse. His furious reply begins with a characteristic accusation that the prophet has been bribed (the sentry had this same accusation flung at him), but what follows is a hideously blasphemous defiance of those gods Creon once claimed to serve:

You’ll never bury that body in the grave,
not even if Zeus’s eagles rip the corpse
and wing their rotten pickings off to the throne of god!

At this high point in his stubborn rage (he will break by the end of the scene and try, too late, to avoid the divine wrath), he is sustained by nothing except his tyrannical insistence on his own will, come what may, and his outraged refusal to be defeated by a woman. “No woman,” he says, “is going to lord it over me.” “I’m not the man, not now: she is the man / if this victory goes to her and she goes free.”

Antigone, on her side, is just as indifferent to Creon’s principles of action as he is to hers. She mentions the city only in her last agonized laments before she is led off to her living death:

O my city, all your fine rich sons!
... springs of the Dirce,
holy grove of Thebes ...

But here she is appealing for sympathy to the city over the heads of the chorus, the city’s symbolic representative on stage. In all her arguments with Creon and Ismene she speaks as one wholly unconscious of the rights and duties membership in the city confers and imposes, as if no unit larger than the family existed. It is a position just as extreme as Creon’s insistence that the demands of the city take precedence over all others, for the living and the dead alike.

Like Creon, she acts in the name of gods, but they are different gods. There is more than a little truth in Creon’s mocking comment that Hades is “the one god she worships.” She is from the beginning “much possessed by death”; together with Ismene she is the last survivor of a doomed family, burdened with such sorrow that she finds life hardly worth living. “Who on earth,” she says to Creon, “alive in the midst of so much grief as I, / could fail to find his death a rich reward?” She has performed the funeral rites for mother, father and her brother Eteocles:

I washed you with my hands,
I dressed you all, I poured the cups
across your tombs.

She now sacrifices her life to perform a symbolic burial, a handful of dust sprinkled on the corpse, for Poly-nices, the brother left to rot on the battlefield. She

looks forward to her reunion with her beloved dead in that dark kingdom where Persephone, the bride of Hades, welcomes the ghosts. It is in the name of Hades, one of the three great gods who rule the universe, that she defends the right of Polynices and of all human beings to proper burial. "Death [Hades] longs for the same rites for all," she tells Creon—for patriot and traitor alike; she rejects Ismene's plea to be allowed to share her fate with an appeal to the same stern authority: "Who did the work? / Let the dead and the god of death bear witness!" In Creon's gods, the city's patrons and defenders, she shows no interest at all. Zeus she mentions twice: once as the source of all the calamities that have fallen and are still to fall on the house of Oedipus, and once again at the beginning of her famous speech about the unwritten laws. But the context here suggests strongly that she is thinking about Zeus in his special relationship to the underworld, Zeus *Chthonios* (Underworld Zeus). "It wasn't Zeus," she says,

who made this proclamation. . . .
Nor did that Justice, dwelling with the gods
beneath the earth, ordain such laws for men.

From first to last her religious devotion and duty are to the divine powers of the world below, the masters of that world where lie her family dead, to which she herself, reluctant but fascinated, is irresistibly drawn.

But, like Creon, she ends by denying the great sanctions she invoked to justify her action. In his case the process was spread out over the course of several scenes, as he reacted to each fresh pressure that was brought to bear on him; Antigone turns her back on the claims of blood relationship and the nether gods in one sentence: three lines in Greek, no more. They are the emotional high point of the speech she makes just before she is led off to her death.

Never, I tell you,
if I had been the mother of children
or if my husband died, exposed and rotting—
I'd never have taken this ordeal upon myself,
never defied our people's will.

These unexpected words are part of the long speech that concludes a scene of lyric lamentation and is in effect her farewell to the land of the living. They are certainly a total repudiation of her proud claim that she acted as the champion of the unwritten laws and the infernal gods, for, as she herself told Creon, those laws and those gods have no preferences, they long "for the same rites for all." And her assertion that she would not have done for her children what she has done for Polynices is a spectacular betrayal of that fanatical loyalty to blood relationship which she urged on Ismene and defended against Creon, for there is no closer relationship imaginable than that between the mother and the children of her own body. Creon turned his back on his guiding principles step by step, in reaction to opposition based on those principles; Antigone's rejection of her public values is just as complete, but it is the sudden product of a lonely, brooding introspection, a last-minute assessment of her motives, on which the imminence of death confers a merciless clarity. She did it because Polynices was her brother; she would not have done it for husband or child. She goes on to justify this disturbing statement by an argument which is more disturbing still: husband and children, she says, could be replaced by others but, since her parents

are dead, she could never have another brother. It so happens that we can identify the source of this strange piece of reasoning; it is a story in the *Histories* of Sophocles' friend Herodotus (a work from which Sophocles borrowed material more than once). Darius the Great King had condemned to death for treason a Persian noble, Intaphrenes, and all the men of his family. The wife of Intaphrenes begged importunately for their lives; offered one, she chose her brother's. When Darius asked her why, she replied in words that are unmistakably the original of Antigone's lines. But what makes sense in the story makes less in the play. The wife of Intaphrenes saves her brother's life, but Polynices is already dead; Antigone's phrase "no brother could ever spring to light again" would be fully appropriate only if Antigone had managed to save Polynices' life rather than bury his corpse.

For this reason, and also because of some stylistic anomalies in this part of the speech, but most of all because they felt that the words are unworthy of the Antigone who spoke so nobly for the unwritten laws, many great scholars and also a great poet and dramatist, Goethe, have refused to believe that Sophocles wrote them. "I would give a great deal," Goethe told his friend Eckermann in 1827, "if some talented scholar could prove that these lines were interpolated, not genuine." Goethe did not know that the attempt had already been made, six years earlier; many others have tried since—Sir Richard Jebb, the greatest English editor of Sophocles, pronounced against them—and opinion today is still divided. Obviously a decision on this point is of vital significance for the interpretation of the play as a whole: with these lines removed, Antigone goes to her prison-tomb with no flicker of self-doubt, the flawless champion of the family bond and the unwritten laws, "whole as the marble, founded as the rock"—unlike Creon, she is not, in the end, reduced to recognizing that her motive is purely personal.

The gods do not praise Antigone, nor does anyone else in the play—except the young man who loves her so passionately that he cannot bear to live without her. Haemon tells his father what the Thebans are saying behind his back, the "murmurs in the dark": that Antigone deserves not death but "a glowing crown of gold!" Whether this is a true report (and the chorus does not praise Antigone even when they have been convinced that she was right) or just his own feelings attributed to others for the sake of his argument, it is a timely reminder of Antigone's heroic status. In the somber world of the play, against the background of so many sudden deaths and the dark mystery of the divine dispensation, her courage and steadfastness are a gleam of light; she is the embodiment of the only consolation tragedy can offer—that in certain heroic natures unmerited suffering and death can be met with a greatness of soul which, because it is purely human, brings honor to us all.

MARTHA C. NUSSBAUM

*From The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy**

[A]lmost all interpreters of [*Antigone*] have agreed that the play shows Creon to be morally defective, though they might not agree about the particular nature of his defect. The situation of *Antigone* is more controversial. Hegel assimilated her defect to Creon's; some more recent writers uncritically hold her up as a blameless heroine. Without entering into an exhaustive study of her role in the tragedy, I should like to claim (with the support of an increasing number of recent critics) that there is at least some justification for the Hegelian assimilation—though the criticism needs to be focused more clearly and specifically than it is in Hegel's brief remarks. I want to suggest that *Antigone*, like Creon, has engaged in a ruthless simplification of the world of value which effectively eliminates conflicting obligations. Like Creon, she can be blamed for refusal of vision. But there are important differences, as well, between her project and Creon's. When these are seen, it will also emerge that this criticism of *Antigone* is not incompatible with the judgment that she is morally superior to Creon.

O kindred, own-sisterly head of Ismene, do you know that there is not one of the evils left by Oedipus that Zeus does not fulfill for us while we live? . . . Do you grasp anything? Have you heard anything? Or has it escaped your notice that the evils that belong to enemies are advancing against our friends?¹

A person is addressed with a periphrasis that is both intimate and impersonal. In the most emphatic terms available, it characterizes her as a close relative of the speaker. And yet its attitude towards the addressee is strangely remote. *Antigone* sees Ismene simply as the form of a close family relation. As such, she presses on her, with anxious insistence, the knowledge of the family: that "loved ones" (*philoí*) are being penalized as if they were enemies (*echthroi*). Loving relatives must "see" the shame and dishonour of "the evils that are yours and mine."

There has been a war. On one side was an army led by Eteocles, brother of *Antigone* and Ismene. On the other side was an invading army, made up partly of foreigners, but led by a Theban brother, Polynices. This heterogeneity is denied, in different ways, by both Creon and *Antigone*. Creon's strategy is to draw, in thought, a line between the invading and defending forces. What falls to one side of this line is a foe, bad, unjust; what falls to the other (if loyal to the city's cause) becomes, indiscriminately, friend or loved one. *Antigone*, on the other hand, denies the relevance of this distinction entirely. She draws, in imagination, a small circle around the members of her family: what is inside (with further restrictions which we shall mention) is family, therefore loved one and friend; what is outside is non-family, therefore, in any conflict with the family, enemy. If one listened only to *Antigone*, one would not know that a war had

*From Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 1986) 63–67.

1. All translations are Nussbaum's, based on the Oxford Classical Text of A. C. Pearson.

taken place or that anything called "city" was ever in danger. To her it is a simple injustice that Polynices should not be treated like a friend.

"Friend" (*philos*) and "enemy," then, are functions solely of family relationship. When Antigone says, "It is my nature to join in loving, not to join in hating," she is expressing not a general attachment to love, but a devotion to the *philia* of the family. It is the nature of these *philia* bonds to make claims on one's commitments and actions regardless of one's occurrent desires. This sort of love is not something one decides about; the relationships involved may have little to do with liking or fondness. We might say (to use terminology borrowed from Kant²) that Antigone, in speaking of love, means "practical," not "pathological" love (a love that has its source in fondness or inclination). "He is my own brother," she says to Ismene in explanation of her defiance of the city's decree, "and yours too, even if you don't want it. I certainly will never be found a traitor to him." Relationship is itself a source of obligation, regardless of the feelings involved. When Antigone speaks of Polynices as "my dearest brother," even when she proclaims, "I shall lie with him as a loved one with a loved one," there is no sense of closeness, no personal memory, no particularity animating her speech. Ismene, the one person who ought, historically, to be close to her, is treated from the beginning with remote coldness; she is even called enemy when she takes the wrong stand on matters of pious obligation. It is Ismene whom we see weeping "sister-loving tears," who acts out of commitment to a felt love. "What life is worth living for me, bereft of you?" she asks with an intensity of feeling that never animates her sister's piety. To Haemon, the man who passionately loves and desires her, Antigone never addresses a word throughout the entire play. It is Haemon, not Antigone, whom the Chorus views as inspired by *erōs*. Antigone is as far from *erōs* as Creon. For Antigone, the dead are "those whom it is most important to please." "You have a warm heart for the cold," observes her sister, failing to comprehend this impersonal and single-minded passion.

Duty to the family dead is the supreme law and the supreme passion. And Antigone structures her entire life and her vision of the world in accordance with this simple, self-contained system of duties. Even within this system, should a conflict ever arise, she is ready with a fixed priority ordering that will clearly dictate her choice. The strange speech in which she ranks duties to different family dead, placing duty to brother above duties to husband and children, is in this sense (if genuine) highly revealing: it makes us suspect that she is capable of a strangely ruthless simplification of duties, corresponding not so much to any known religious law as to the exigencies of her own practical imagination.

Other values fall into place, confirming these suspicions. Her single-minded identification with duties to the dead (and only some of these) effects a strange reorganization of piety, as well as of honor and justice. She is truly, in her own words, *hosia panourgēsasa*, one who will do anything for the sake of the pious; and her piety takes in only a part of conventional religion. She speaks of her allegiance to Zeus, but she refuses to recognize his role as guardian of the city and backer of Eteocles. The very expression of her devotion is suspect: "Zeus did not decree this, as far as I am concerned." She sets herself up as the arbiter of what Zeus can and cannot have decreed, just as Creon took it upon himself to say whom the gods could and could not have covered: no other character bears out her

2. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), German philosopher who uses these terms in his *Critique of Pure Reason*.

view of Zeus as single-mindedly backing the rights of the dead. She speaks, too, of the goddess *Dikē*, Justice; but *Dikē* for her is, simply, “the Justice who lives together with the gods below.” The Chorus recognizes another *Dikē*. Later they will say to her, “Having advanced to the utmost limit of boldness, you struck hard against the altar of *Dikē* on high, o child.” Justice is up here in the city, as well as below the earth. It is not as simple as she says it is. Antigone, accordingly, is seen by them not as a conventionally pious person, but as one who improvised her piety, making her own decisions about what to honor. She is a “maker of her own law”; her defiance is “self-invented passion.” Finally they tell her unequivocally that her pious respect is incomplete: “[This] reverent action is a part of piety.” Antigone’s rigid adherence to a single narrow set of duties has caused her to misinterpret the nature of piety itself, a virtue within which a more comprehensive understanding would see the possibility of conflict.

Creon’s strategy of simplification led him to regard others as material for his aggressive exploitation. Antigone’s dutiful subservience to the dead leads to an equally strange, though different (and certainly less hideous) result. Her relation to others in the world above is characterized by an odd coldness. “You are alive,” she tells her sister, “but my life is long since dead, to the end of serving the dead.” The safely dutiful human life requires, or is, life’s annihilation. Creon’s attitude towards others is like necrophilia: he aspires to possess the inert and unresisting. Antigone’s subservience to duty is, finally, the ambition to be a *nekros*, a corpse beloved of corpses. (Her apparent similarity to martyrs in our own tradition, who expect a fully active life after death, should not conceal from us the strangeness of this goal.) In the world below, there are no risks of failure or wrongdoing.

Neither Creon nor Antigone, then, is a loving or passionate being in anything like the usual sense. Not one of the gods, not one human being escapes the power of *erōs*, says the Chorus; but these two oddly inhuman beings do, it appears, escape. Creon sees loved persons as functions of the civic good, replaceable producers of citizens. For Antigone, they are either dead, fellow servants of the dead, or objects of complete indifference. No living being is loved for his or her personal qualities, loved with the sort of love that Haemon feels and Ismene praises. By altering their beliefs about the nature and value of persons, they have, it seems, altered or restructured the human passions themselves. They achieve harmony in this way; but at a cost. The Chorus speaks of *erōs* as a force as important and obligating as the ancient *thesmoi* or laws of right, a force against which it is both foolish and, apparently, blameworthy to rebel.

Antigone learns too—like Creon, by being forced to recognize a problem that lies at the heart of her single-minded concern. Creon saw that the city itself is pious and loving; that he could not be its champion without valuing what it values, in all its complexity. Antigone comes to see that the service of the dead requires the city, that her own religious aims cannot be fulfilled without civic institutions. By being her own law, she has not only ignored a part of piety, she has also jeopardized the fulfillment of the very pious duties to which she is so attached. Cut off from friends, from the possibility of having children, she cannot keep herself alive in order to do further service to the dead; nor can she guarantee the pious treatment of her own corpse. In her last speeches she laments not so much the fact of imminent death as, repeatedly, her isolation from the continuity of offspring, from friends and mourners. She emphasizes the fact that she will never marry; she will remain childless. Acheron will be her husband, the tomb

her bridal chamber. Unless she can successfully appeal to the citizens whose needs as citizens she had refused to consider, she will die without anyone to mourn her death or to replace her as guardian of her family religion. She turns therefore increasingly, in this final scene, to the citizens and the gods of the city, until her last words closely echo an earlier speech made by Creon and blend his concerns with hers:

O city of my fathers in this land of Thebes. O gods, progenitors of our race. I am led away, and wait no longer. Look, leaders of Thebes, the last of your royal line. Look what I suffer, at whose hands, for having respect for piety.

We have, then, two narrowly limited practical worlds, two strategies of avoidance and simplification. In one, a single human value has become *the* final end; in the other, a single set of duties has eclipsed all others. But we can now acknowledge that we admire Antigone, nonetheless, in a way that we do not admire Creon. It seems important to look for the basis of this difference.

First, in the world of the play, it seems clear that Antigone's actual choice is preferable to Creon's. The dishonour to civic values involved in giving pious burial to an enemy's corpse is far less radical than the violation of religion involved in Creon's act. Antigone shows a deeper understanding of the community and its values than Creon does when she argues that the obligation to bury the dead is an unwritten law, which cannot be set aside by the decree of a particular ruler. The belief that not all values are utility-relative, that there are certain claims whose neglect will prove deeply destructive of communal attunement and individual character, is a part of Antigone's position left untouched by the play's implicit criticism of her single-mindedness.

Furthermore, Antigone's pursuit of virtue is her own. It involves nobody else and commits her to abusing no other person. Rulership must be rulership *of* something; Antigone's pious actions are executed alone, out of a solitary commitment. She may be strangely remote from the world; but she does no violence to it.

Finally, and perhaps most important, Antigone remains ready to risk and to sacrifice her ends in a way that is not possible for Creon, given the singleness of his conception of value. There is a complexity in Antigone's virtue that permits genuine sacrifice *within* the defense of piety. She dies recanting nothing; but still she is torn by a conflict. Her virtue is, then, prepared to admit a contingent conflict, at least in the extreme case where its adequate exercise requires the cancellation of the conditions of its exercise. From within her single-minded devotion to the dead, she recognizes the power of these contingent circumstances and yields to them, comparing herself to Niobe wasted away by nature's snow and rain. (Earlier she had been compared, in her grief, to a mother bird crying out over an empty nest; so she is, while heroically acting, linked with the openness and vulnerability of the female.) The Chorus here briefly tries to console her with the suggestion that her bad luck does not really matter, in view of her future fame; she calls their rationalization a mockery of her loss. This vulnerability in virtue, this ability to acknowledge the world of nature by mourning the constraints that it imposes on virtue, surely contributes to making her the more humanly rational and the richer of the two protagonists: both active and receptive, neither exploiter nor simply victim.

REBECCA W. BUSHNELL

*From Prophesying Tragedy: Sign and Voice in Sophocles' Theban Plays**

It is primarily through the power of speech, against silence, that Creon's suffering is distinguished from Antigone's, as Creon becomes "nothing" in his disaster, whereas Antigone leaves the stage as herself. She has clearly lost in her battle for any kind of political autonomy, in her effort to counteract Creon's *kērygma*¹ (the Chorus, not Antigone, makes him change his mind). Further, neither the other characters in the play nor the gods confer heroic status on her. While the "punishment" of Creon may be seen as her vindication, Creon never mentions her again, nor does Tiresias defend her directly in his prophecy. Yet she leaves the stage, neither abject nor resigned to oblivion, but proclaiming her importance as the last of the Cadmeans. While Creon speaks his "sentence" of death, Antigone responds by invoking the gods and the city of Thebes, calling upon the Chorus to look on her and acknowledge her right to have buried Polynices. Antigone's last act on stage is thus an act of apostrophe or invocation, meant to establish the presence and power of her own voice. For her, it matters little that neither god nor city responds; for one last time, Antigone relies on her voice to define herself, as she claims her link to her city, her lineage, and the gods of her race. Antigone is denied personal and political autonomy in the city of Thebes—what she cannot have as a woman; yet at the same time Antigone maintains her freedom of speech in public, which was the essence of freedom in Athens, where the worst punishment of exile was considered the loss of *parrēsia* or "free speech," Antigone speaks, too, as the bride of death, both in this world and beyond; like Hector, she has the authority that those on the brink of death possess over the living, and yet she already stands apart from the rest of the citizens, who must find a way to rule in the days to come.

Creon's loss of his power to invoke and command marks the loss of his role in the family and the city. Creon, too, laments his disaster, but his speech lacks the ceremony and self-reflection of Antigone's. Crying forth the ritual sound of wailing, *aiai*, he calls himself wretched (*deilaïos*). Creon's penultimate gesture, matching Antigone's, is to utter a prayer for death. It may be addressed to the gods, but it is heard only by the Chorus, who refuse to answer the prayer: "That will come," they say, "but now we must do what is before us." When Creon protests that he prayed for what he desires most, the Chorus answers that he must not pray now. Creon thus ends in the world he created for himself, where "fate" is inflexible, yet there are no gods to hear his prayers. The gods will not help Creon, and he can no longer help himself. His words become meaningless when he himself becomes "nothing," having lost his family and his city. Earlier, Haemon compared Creon to writing tablets which, when unfolded, are blank. In the end, Creon fulfills that image, becoming someone who is nothing, a voice which is *asēmos*, "without significance."

*From Rebecca W. Bushnell, *Prophesying Tragedy: Sign and Voice in Sophocles' Theban Plays* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988) 64–66. All notes are the editor's. 1. Proclamation.

In the *Iliad*, Hector's defiance of prophecy² plays out a conflict of discourse in the struggle between man and god for the right to declare *anankē*.³ In *Antigone*, Sophocles dramatizes that conflict in the context of the city, where the king strives to emulate the gods in making the signs of "fate," and king, prophet, and citizen compete for the right to speak for the city's needs and future. Antigone loses this battle when Creon condemns her to death, just as Hector must die, according to the sentence of "fate." But Creon is silenced by the gods—and by the playwright. Both Creon and Antigone threaten the order of the city and are destroyed, but Sophocles gives the victory to her, in the dramatic authority of her voice. Although the gods themselves never answer her pleas for recognition, her voice commands the audience's and Chorus' attention. Creon, however, trails off in inarticulate confusion, just as he has no recognizable "self" when stripped of his roles of *tyrannos*,⁴ husband, and father. Antigone never loses her ability to speak for herself, and in this way, is given her freedom. Thus it is she, not Creon, who is Hector's heir, and she who most closely imitates his defiance of fatal authority. But Antigone is not only Hector's heir; she is also the forerunner⁵ of her own father, Oedipus, who in *Oedipus the King* masters human speech in his pride and his shame.

MARY WHITLOCK BLUNDELL

*From Helping Friends and Harming Enemies: A Study in Sophocles and Greek Ethics**

Creon and Antigone are alike in several ways, especially the inconsistency of their values and the way they are driven by passion below a surface of rational argument. Both are also one-sided in their commitments. The poet could have given the champion of the *polis*¹ a much stronger case. But he could also have let Antigone meet and conquer Creon on his own ground (for example by arguing that her two brothers were equally responsible for the war). The narrowness of both is revealed by their failure really to engage in argument. Creon's two main statements of principle actually occur in Antigone's absence. When they do confront each other, in the brief passage of *stichomythia*² with which we began, they argue at cross purposes, repeatedly missing each other's point.

This does not mean, however, that they are equally limited in the values to which they adhere. Antigone is sometimes accused of being as narrowly one-sided as Creon in her allegiance to the family and disregard for the interests and *nomoi*³ of the *polis*: "If one listened only to Antigone, one would not know that a war had taken place or that anything called 'city' was ever in danger" (Nuss-

2. Perhaps a reference to Book 22 of the *Iliad*, in which Hector mistakenly disbelieves Achilles' boast that Zeus will allow Achilles to kill Hector in battle. 3. Necessity, fate. 4. Ruler.

5. In that the play *Antigone* was written and first performed more than ten years before *Oedipus the King*.

*From Mary Whitlock Blundell, *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies: A Study in Sophocles and Greek Ethics* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 1989) 145–48. All notes are the editor's.

1. City-state. 2. Dialogue delivered in alternating lines; often used to show vigorous dispute.

3. Laws, standards (singular, *nomos*) (Greek).

baum, pp. 1462–63, above). Nor can it be denied that she ignores competing concepts of *nomos* and justice which have their claims, no matter how shoddily Creon may represent them. Creon's misapplication of his principles does not undermine their claim to consideration, and the rightness of Antigone's cause does not of itself justify the passionate narrowness with which she pursues it. But although she does not acknowledge the authority of the *polis*, she never explicitly rejects it, as Creon does the family. Moreover she acts ultimately to the city's advantage. As Creon himself so ironically puts it, "the man who is worthwhile in family matters will also turn out to be just in the *polis*." It is Creon's own scorn not just for the family but for public opinion which finally brings the *polis* "doom instead of *soteria*."⁴ He who began by saving Thebes from its enemies ends by stirring up other cities with enmity. He tells Antigone she is alone in her views, but she retorts that, on the contrary, all those present (namely the chorus of the city's elders) are on her side. Moreover she foresees great glory from her deed, which the context suggests is to derive from none other than her fellow citizens. Creon can make no such claims for himself. Indeed Haemon will hint that his father's behaviour may be destroying a glorious reputation. With the loss of his son's loyalty, Creon also loses the last shreds of his claim to represent the *polis*. But Antigone's words are vindicated when Haemon reports the admiration of the ordinary citizens, echoing her own evaluation of her deed. Even the chorus, while withholding direct approval of Antigone's actions, promise her praise and glory for the manner of her death.

Antigone does once suggest that she is violating the will of the *polis* as represented by its citizens. But she does so only in the extremity of her isolation, lamenting that she is "friendless" and even questioning her divine support. She has cut herself off from her sister and quarrelled with the chorus, and has not, of course, heard Haemon's report of public sympathy for her fate. Under the circumstances it is not unreasonable that she should now believe she is defying the will of the citizens. But she claims that she would do so under the most extreme provocation, implying respect for the *polis* if not its present king. She restricts her defiance to the drastic circumstances of the present crisis, acknowledging the potential conflict between her own priorities and the demands of civic life.

As Antigone goes to her death, she emphatically calls the city itself, its gods and its most prominent citizens, the chorus, to bear witness to her fate. Does this tell us that she has learned the limitations of her own narrow principles? Or is it a reproach to the apathetic chorus? Surely the latter. She shows no sign of regret or new-found insight into the civic value of obedience. But she addresses the chorus in ways suggesting their special responsibility not just as citizens, but as Theban aristocrats who might be expected to play a role in public life. She calls them "citizens of the fatherland," "wealthy men of the *polis*," "leading men of Thebes." When she refers to herself as "the last remaining daughter of the royal house," she is reasserting her status as a member of the ruling family, to which the chorus are supposedly loyal, and to which Creon is tied only by marriage. This royal status is linked with her reverence for the gods, especially her ancestral gods. Her obligations to the *polis* and her dead family are not mutually exclusive. She has not failed the citizens, for the burial was both in their best

4. Salvation; the root, *soter*, means "savior."

interest and called for by their “established laws.” But they, intimidated by Creon, have abandoned her. She therefore accuses the chorus of mockery and *hubris*,⁵ the same hostile laughter that she inflicted on her sister and (in his view) on Creon.

One-sided and “autonomous” though she may be, Antigone’s obsession is less sterile and destructive than Creon’s. He, as he so much likes to remind us, is the sole ruler of the *polis*. In order to achieve a just and stable social order, such a ruler must acknowledge and balance competing claims and values. If these are ultimately incommensurable, he must attempt a compromise, however uneasy. As Haemon eloquently insists, he must know how to bend with the storm. He must respect the ties of natural *philia*,⁶ and at the same time promote political *philia* by adopting policies that meet the citizens’ approval. Antigone abides heroically by the first variety of *philia* as she interprets it, and can make some claim to the second, but Creon is a failure at both.

5. A complex term in Greek ethical thought that implies an impious overreaching of human limits.

6. Love, affinity.