Week 2 Assignment 2 Antigone the play

1. **Online link** classics.mit.edu/Sophocles/**antigone**.html‎

Antigone

By Sophocles

Translated by R. C. Jebb

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Dramatis Personae

daughters of Oedipus:

ANTIGONE

ISMENE

CREON, King of Thebes

EURYDICE, his wife

HAEMON, his son

TEIRESIAS, the blind prophet

GUARD, set to watch the corpse of Polyneices

FIRST MESSENGER

SECOND MESSENGER, from the house

CHORUS OF THEBAN ELDERS

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The same as in Oedipus the King, an open space before the royal palace,

once that of Oedipus, at Thebes. The backscene represents the front

of the palace, with three doors, of which the central and largest

is the principal entrance into the house. The time is at daybreak

on the morning after the fall of the two brothers, Eteocles and Polyneices,

and the flight of the defeated Argives. ANTIGONE calls ISMENE forth

from the palace, in order to speak to her alone.

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ANTIGONE Ismene, sister, mine own dear sister, knowest thou what

ill there is, of all bequeathed by Oedipus, that Zeus fulfils not

for us twain while we live? Nothing painful is there, nothing fraught

with ruin, no shame, no dishonour, that I have not seen in thy woes

and mine.

And now what new edict is this of which they tell, that our Captain

hath just published to all Thebes? Knowest thou aught? Hast thou heard?

Or is it hidden from thee that our friends are threatened with the

doom of our foes?

ISMENE No word of friends, Antigone, gladsome or painful, hath come

to me, since we two sisters were bereft of brothers twain, killed

in one day by twofold blow; and since in this last night the Argive

host hath fled, know no more, whether my fortune be brighter, or more

grievous.

ANTIGONE I knew it well, and therefore sought to bring thee beyond

the gates of the court, that thou mightest hear alone.

ISMENE What is it? 'Tis plain that thou art brooding on some dark

tidings.

ANTIGONE What, hath not Creon destined our brothers, the one to honoured

burial, the other to unburied shame? Eteocles, they say, with due

observance of right and custom, he hath laid in the earth, for his

honour among the dead below. But the hapless corpse of Polyneices-as

rumour saith, it hath been published to the town that none shall entomb

him or mourn, but leave unwept, unsepulchred, a welcome store for

the birds, as they espy him, to feast on at will.

Such, 'tis said, is the edict that the good Creon hath set forth for

thee and for me,-yes, for me,-and is coming hither to proclaim it

clearly to those who know it not; nor counts the matter light, but,

whoso disobeys in aught, his doom is death by stoning before all the

folk. Thou knowest it now; and thou wilt soon show whether thou art

nobly bred, or the base daughter of a noble line.

ISMENE Poor sister,-and if things stand thus, what could I help to

do or undo?

ANTIGONE Consider if thou wilt share the toil and the deed.

ISMENE In what venture? What can be thy meaning?

ANTIGONE Wilt thou aid this hand to lift the dead?

ISMENE Thou wouldst bury him,-when 'tis forbidden to Thebes?

ANTIGONE I will do my part,-and thine, if thou wilt not,-to a brother.

False to him will I never be found.

ISMENE Ah, over-bold! when Creon hath forbidden?

ANTIGONE Nay, he hath no right to keep me from mine own.

ISMENE Ah me! think, sister, how our father perished, amid hate and

scorn, when sins bared by his own search had moved him to strike both

eyes with self-blinding hand; then the mother wife, two names in one,

with twisted noose did despite unto her life; and last, our two brothers

in one day,-each shedding, hapless one, a kinsman's blood,-wrought

out with mutual hands their common doom. And now we in turn-we two

left all alone think how we shall perish, more miserably than all

the rest, if, in defiance of the law, we brave a king's decree or

his powers. Nay, we must remember, first, that we were born women,

as who should not strive with men; next, that we are ruled of the

stronger, so that we must obey in these things, and in things yet

sorer. I, therefore, asking the Spirits Infernal to pardon, seeing

that force is put on me herein, will hearken to our rulers. for 'tis

witless to be over busy.

ANTIGONE I will not urge thee,-no nor, if thou yet shouldst have

the mind, wouldst thou be welcome as a worker with me. Nay, be what

thou wilt; but I will bury him: well for me to die in doing that.

I shall rest, a loved one with him whom I have loved, sinless in my

crime; for I owe a longer allegiance to the dead than to the living:

in that world I shall abide for ever. But if thou wilt, be guilty

of dishonouring laws which the gods have stablished in honour.

ISMENE I do them no dishonour; but to defy the State,-I have no strength

for that.

ANTIGONE Such be thy plea:-I, then, will go to heap the earth above

the brother whom I love.

ISMENE Alas, unhappy one! How I fear for thee!

ANTIGONE Fear not for me: guide thine own fate aright.

ISMENE: At least, then, disclose this plan to none, but hide it closely,-and

so, too, will I.

ANTIGONE Oh, denounce it! Thou wilt be far more hateful for thy silence,

if thou proclaim not these things to all.

ISMENE Thou hast a hot heart for chilling deeds.

ANTIGONE I know that I please where I am most bound to please.

ISMENE Aye, if thou canst; but thou wouldst what thou canst not.

ANTIGONE Why, then, when my strength fails, I shall have done.

ISMENE A hopeless quest should not be made at all.

ANTIGONE If thus thou speakest, thou wilt have hatred from me, and

will justly be subject to the lasting hatred of the dead. But leave

me, and the folly that is mine alone, to suffer this dread thing;

for I shall not suffer aught so dreadful as an ignoble death.

ISMENE Go, then, if thou must; and of this be sure,-that though thine

errand is foolish, to thy dear ones thou art truly dear. (Exit ANTIGONE

on the spectators' left. ISMENE retires into the palace by one of

the two side-doors. When they have departed, the CHORUS OF THEBAN

ELDERS enters.)

CHORUS (singing, strophe 1)

Beam of the sun, fairest light that ever dawned on Thebe of the seven

gates, thou hast shone forth at last, eye of golden day, arisen above

Dirce's streams! The warrior of the white shield, who came from Argos

in his panoply, hath been stirred by thee to headlong flight, in swifter

career;

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (systema 1)

who set forth against our land by reason of the vexed claims of Polyneices;

and, like shrill-screaming eagle, he flew over into our land, in snow-white

pinion sheathed, with an armed throng, and with plumage of helms.

CHORUS (antistrophe 1)

He paused above our dwellings; he ravened around our sevenfold portals

with spears athirst for blood; but he went hence, or ever his jaws

were glutted with our gore, or the Fire-god's pine-fed flame had seized

our crown of towers. So fierce was the noise of battle raised behind

him, a thing too hard for him to conquer, as he wrestled with his

dragon foe.

LEADER (systema 2)

For Zeus utterly abhors the boasts of a proud tongue; and when he

beheld them coming on in a great stream, in the haughty pride of clanging

gold, he smote with brandished fire one who was now hasting to shout

victory at his goal upon our ramparts.

CHORUS (strophe 2)

Swung down, he fell on the earth with a crash, torch in hand, he

who so lately, in the frenzy of the mad onset, was raging against

us with the blasts of his tempestuous hate. But those threats fared

not as he hoped; and to other foes the mighty War-god dispensed their

several dooms, dealing havoc around, a mighty helper at our need.

LEADER (systema 3)

For seven captains at seven gates, matched against seven, left the

tribute of their panoplies to Zeus who turns the battle; save those

two of cruel fate, who, born of one sire and one mother, set against

each other their twain conquering spears, and are sharers in a common

death.

CHORUS (antistrophe 2)

But since Victory of glorious name hath come to us, with joy responsive

to the joy of Thebe whose chariots are many, let us enjoy forgetfulness

after the late wars, and visit all the temples of the gods with night-long

dance and song; and may Bacchus be our leader, whose dancing shakes

the land of Thebe.

LEADER (systema 4)

But lo, the king of the land comes yonder, Creon, son of Menoeceus,

our new ruler by the new fortunes that the gods have given; what counsel

is he pondering, that he hath proposed this special conference of

elders, summoned by his general mandate? (Enter CREON, from the central

doors of the palace, in the garb of king, with two attendants.)

CREON Sirs, the vessel of our State, after being tossed on wild waves,

hath once more been safely steadied by the gods: and ye, out of all

the folk, have been called apart by my summons, because I knew, first

of all, how true and constant was your reverence for the royal power

of Laius; how, again, when Oedipus was ruler of our land, and when

he had perished, your steadfast loyalty still upheld their children.

Since, then, his sons have fallen in one day by a twofold doom,-each

smitten by the other, each stained with a brother's blood,-I now possess

the throne and all its powers, by nearness of kinship to the dead.

No man can be fully known, in soul and spirit and mind, until he hath

been seen versed in rule and law-giving. For if any, being supreme

guide of the State, cleaves not to the best counsels, but, through

some fear, keeps his lips locked, I hold, and have ever held, him

most base; and if any makes a friend of more account than his fatherland,

that man hath no place in my regard. For I-be Zeus my witness, who

sees all things always-would not be silent if I saw ruin, instead

of safety, coming to the citizens; nor would I ever deem the country's

foe a friend to myself; remembering this, that our country is the

ship that bears us safe, and that only while she prospers in our voyage

can we make true friends.

Such are the rules by which I guard this city's greatness. And in

accord with them is the edict which I have now published to the folk

touching the sons of Oedipus;-that Eteocles, who hath fallen fighting

for our city, in all renown of arms, shall be entombed, and crowned

with every rite that follows the noblest dead to their rest. But for

his brother, Polyneices,-who came back from exile, and sought to consume

utterly with fire the city of his fathers and the shrines of his fathers'

gods,-sought to taste of kindred blood, and to lead the remnant into

slavery;-touching this man, it hath been proclaimed to our people

that none shall grace him with sepulture or lament, but leave him

unburied, a corpse for birds and dogs to eat, a ghastly sight of shame.

Such the spirit of my dealing; and never, by deed of mine, shall the

wicked stand in honour before the just; but whoso hath good will to

Thebes, he shall be honoured of me, in his life and in his death.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS Such is thy pleasure, Creon, son of Menoeceus,

touching this city's foe, and its friend; and thou hast power, I ween,

to take what order thou wilt, both for the dead, and for all us who

live.

CREON See, then, that ye be guardians of the mandate.

LEADER Lay the burden of this task on some younger man.

CREON Nay, watchers of the corpse have been found.

LEADER What, then, is this further charge that thou wouldst give?

CREON That ye side not with the breakers of these commands.

LEADER No man is so foolish that he is enamoured of death.

CREON In sooth, that is the meed; yet lucre hath oft ruined men through

their hopes. (A GUARD enters from the spectators' left.)

GUARD My liege, I will not say that I come breathless from speed,

or that have plied a nimble foot; for often did my thoughts make me

pause, and wheel round in my path, to return. My mind was holding

large discourse with me; 'Fool, why goest thou to thy certain doom?'

'Wretch, tarrying again? And if Creon hears this from another, must

not thou smart for it?' So debating, I went on my way with lagging

steps, and thus a short road was made long. At last, however, it carried

the day that I should come hither-to thee; and, though my tale be

nought, yet will I tell it; for I come with a good grip on one hope,-that

I can suffer nothing but what is my fate.

CREON And what is it that disquiets thee thus?

GUARD I wish to tell thee first about myself-I did not do the deed-I

did not see the doer-it were not right that I should come to any harm.

CREON Thou hast a shrewd eye for thy mark; well dost thou fence thyself

round against the blame; clearly thou hast some strange thing to tell.

GUARD Aye, truly; dread news makes one pause long.

CREON Then tell it, wilt thou, and so get thee gone?

GUARD Well, this is it.-The corpse-some one hath just given it burial,

and gone away,-after sprinkling thirsty dust on the flesh, with such

other rites as piety enjoins.

CREON What sayest thou? What living man hath dared this deed?

GUARD I know not; no stroke of pickaxe was seen there, no earth thrown

up by mattock; the ground was hard and dry, unbroken, without track

of wheels; the doer was one who had left no trace. And when the first

day-watchman showed it to us, sore wonder fell on all. The dead man

was veiled from us; not shut within a tomb, but lightly strewn with

dust, as by the hand of one who shunned a curse. And no sign met the

eye as though any beast of prey or any dog had come nigh to him, or

torn him.

Then evil words flew fast and loud among us, guard accusing guard;

und it would e'en have come to blows at last, nor was there any to

hinder. Every man was the culprit, and no one was convicted, but all

disclaimed knowledge of the deed. And we were ready to take red-hot

iron in our hands;-to walk through fire;-to make oath by the gods

that we had not done the deed,-that we were not privy to the planning

or the doing.

At last, when all our searching was fruitless, one spake, who made

us all bend our faces on the earth in fear; for we saw not how we

could gainsay him, or escape mischance if we obeyed. His counsel was

that this deed must be reported to thee, and not hidden. And this

seemed best; and the lot doomed my hapless self to win this prize.

So here I stand,-as unwelcome as unwilling, well I wot; for no man

delights in the bearer of bad news.

LEADER O king, my thoughts have long been whispering, can this deed,

perchance, be e'en the work of gods?

CREON Cease, ere thy words fill me utterly with wrath, lest thou

be found at once an old man and foolish. For thou sayest what is not

to be borne, in saying that the gods have care for this corpse. Was

it for high reward of trusty service that they sought to hide his

nakedness, who came to burn their pillared shrines and sacred treasures,

to burn their land, and scatter its laws to the winds? Or dost thou

behold the gods honouring the wicked? It cannot be. No! From the first

there were certain in the town that muttered against me, chafing at

this edict, wagging their heads in secret; and kept not their necks

duly under the yoke, like men contented with my sway.

'Tis by them, well I know, that these have been beguiled and bribed

to do this deed. Nothing so evil as money ever grew to be current

among men. This lays cities low, this drives men from their homes,

this trains and warps honest souls till they set themselves to works

of shame; this still teaches folk to practise villainies, and to know

every godless deed.

But all the men who wrought this thing for hire have made it sure

that, soon or late, they shall pay the price. Now, as Zeus still hath

my reverence, know this-I tell it thee on my oath:-If ye find not

the very author of this burial, and produce him before mine eyes,

death alone shall not be enough for you, till first, hung up alive,

ye have revealed this outrage,-that henceforth ye may thieve with

better knowledge whence lucre should be won, and learn that it is

not well to love gain from every source. For thou wilt find that ill-gotten

pelf brings more men to ruin than to weal.

GUARD May I speak? Or shall I just turn and go?

CREON Knowest thou not that even now thy voice offends?

GUARD Is thy smart in the ears, or in the soul?

CREON And why wouldst thou define the seat of my pain?

GUARD The doer vexes thy mind, but I, thine ears.

CREON Ah, thou art a born babbler, 'tis well seen.

GUARD May be, but never the doer of this deed.

CREON Yea, and more,-the seller of thy life for silver.

GUARD Alas! 'Tis sad, truly, that he who judges should misjudge.

CREON Let thy fancy play with 'judgment' as it will;-but, if ye show

me not the doers of these things, ye shall avow that dastardly gains

work sorrows. (CREON goes into the palace.)

GUARD Well, may he be found! so 'twere best. But, be he caught or

be he not-fortune must settle that-truly thou wilt not see me here

again. Saved, even now, beyond hope and thought, I owe the gods great

thanks. (The GUARD goes out on the spectators' left.)

CHORUS (singing, strophe 1)

Wonders are many, and none is more wonderful than man; the power

that crosses the white sea, driven by the stormy south-wind, making

a path under surges that threaten to engulf him; and Earth, the eldest

of the gods, the immortal, the unwearied, doth he wear, turning the

soil with the offspring of horses, as the ploughs go to and fro from

year to year.

(antistrophe 1)

And the light-hearted race of birds, and the tribes of savage beasts,

and the sea-brood of the deep, he snares in the meshes of his woven

toils, he leads captive, man excellent in wit. And he masters by his

arts the beast whose lair is in the wilds, who roams the hills; he

tames the horse of shaggy mane, he puts the yoke upon its neck, he

tames the tireless mountain bull.

(strophe 2)

And speech, and wind-swift thought, and all the moods that mould

a state, hath he taught himself; and how to flee the arrows of the

frost, when 'tis hard lodging under the clear sky, and the arrows

of the rushing rain; yea, he hath resource for all; without resource

he meets nothing that must come: only against Death shall he call

for aid in vain; but from baffling maladies he hath devised escapes.

(antistrophe 2)

Cunning beyond fancy's dream is the fertile skill which brings him,

now to evil, now to good. When he honours the laws of the land, and

that justice which he hath sworn by the gods to uphold, proudly stands

his city: no city hath he who, for his rashness, dwells with sin.

Never may he share my hearth, never think my thoughts, who doth these

things! (Enter the GUARD on the spectators' left, leading in ANTIGONE.)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS What portent from the gods is this?-my soul

is amazed. I know her-how can I deny that yon maiden is Antigone?

O hapless, and child of hapless sire,-Of Oedipus! What means this?

Thou brought a prisoner?-thou, disloyal to the king's laws, and taken

in folly?

GUARD Here she is, the doer of the deed:-caught this girl burying

him:-but where is Creon? (CREON enters hurriedly from the palace.)

LEADER Lo, he comes forth again from the house, at our need.

CREON What is it? What hath chanced, that makes my coming timely?

GUARD O king, against nothing should men pledge their word; for the

after-thought belies the first intent. I could have vowed that I should

not soon be here again,-scared by thy threats, with which I had just

been lashed: but,-since the joy that surprises and transcends our

hopes is like in fulness to no other pleasure,-I have come, though

'tis in breach of my sworn oath, bringing this maid; who was taken

showing grace to the dead. This time there was no casting of lots;

no, this luck hath fallen to me, and to none else. And now, sire,

take her thyself, question her, examine her, as thou wilt; but I have

a right to free and final quittance of this trouble.

CREON And thy prisoner here-how and whence hast thou taken her?

GUARD She was burying the man; thou knowest all.

CREON Dost thou mean what thou sayest? Dost thou speak aright?

GUARD I saw her burying the corpse that thou hadst forbidden to bury.

Is that plain and clear?

CREON And how was she seen? how taken in the act?

GUARD It befell on this wise. When we had come to the place,-with

those dread menaces of thine upon us,-we swept away all the dust that

covered the corpse, and bared the dank body well; and then sat us

down on the brow of the hill, to windward, heedful that the smell

from him should not strike us; every man was wide awake, and kept

his neighbour alert with torrents of threats, if anyone should be

careless of this task.

So went it, until the sun's bright orb stood in mid heaven, and the

heat began to burn: and then suddenly a whirlwind lifted from the

earth storm of dust, a trouble in the sky the plain, marring all the

leafage of its woods; and the wide air was choked therewith: we closed

our eyes, and bore the plague from the gods.

And when, after a long while, this storm had passed, the maid was

seen; and she cried aloud with the sharp cry of a bird in its bitterness,-even

as when, within the empty nest, it sees the bed stripped of its nestlings.

So she also, when she saw the corpse bare, lifted up a voice of wailing,

and called down curses on the doers of that deed. And straightway

she brought thirsty dust in her hands; and from a shapely ewer of

bronze, held high, with thrice-poured drink-offering she crowned the

dead.

We rushed forward when we saw it, and at once dosed upon our quarry,

who was in no wise dismayed. Then we taxed her with her past and present

doings; and she stood not on denial of aught,-at once to my joy and

to my pain. To have escaped from ills one's self is a great joy; but

'tis painful to bring friends to ill. Howbeit, all such things are

of less account to me than mine own safety.

CREON Thou-thou whose face is bent to earth-dost thou avow, or disavow,

this deed?

ANTIGONE I avow it; I make no denial.

CREON (to GUARD) Thou canst betake thee whither thou wilt, free

and clear of a grave charge. (Exit GUARD, To ANTIGONE) Now, tell

me thou-not in many words, but briefly-knewest thou that an edict

had forbidden this?

ANTIGONE I knew it: could I help it? It was public.

CREON And thou didst indeed dare to transgress that law?

ANTIGONE Yes; for it was not Zeus that had published me that edict;

not such are the laws set among men by the justice who dwells with

the gods below; nor deemed I that thy decrees were of such force,

that a mortal could override the unwritten and unfailing statutes

of heaven. For their life is not of to-day or yesterday, but from

all time, and no man knows when they were first put forth.

Not through dread of any human pride could I answer to the gods for

breaking these. Die I must,-I knew that well (how should I not?)-even

without thy edicts. But if I am to die before my time, I count that

a gain: for when any one lives, as I do, compassed about with evils,

can such an one find aught but gain in death?

So for me to meet this doom is trifling grief; but if I had suffered

my mother's son to lie in death an unburied corpse, that would have

grieved me; for this, I am not grieved. And if my present deeds are

foolish in thy sight, it may be that a foolish judge arraigns my folly.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS The maid shows herself passionate child of passionate

sire, and knows not how to bend before troubles.

CREON Yet I would have thee know that o'er-stubborn spirits are most

often humbled; 'tis the stiffest iron, baked to hardness in the fire,

that thou shalt oftenest see snapped and shivered; and I have known

horses that show temper brought to order by a little curb; there is

no room for pride when thou art thy neighbour's slave.-This girl was

already versed in insolence when she transgressed the laws that had

been set forth; and, that done, lo, a second insult,-to vaunt of this,

and exult in her deed.

Now verily I am no man, she is the man, if this victory shall rest

with her, and bring no penalty. No! be she sister's child, or nearer

to me in blood than any that worships Zeus at the altar of our house,-she

and her kinsfolk shall not avoid a doom most dire; for indeed I charge

that other with a like share in the plotting of this burial.

And summon her-for I saw her e'en now within,-raving, and not mistress

of her wits. So oft, before the deed, the mind stands self-convicted

in its treason, when folks are plotting mischief in the dark. But

verily this, too, is hateful,-when one who hath been caught in wickednes

then seeks to make the crime a glory.

ANTIGONE Wouldst thou do more than take and slay me?

CREON No more, indeed; having that, I have all.

ANTIGONE Why then dost thou delay? In thy discourse there is nought

that pleases me,-never may there be!-and so my words must needs be

unpleasing to thee. And yet, for glory-whence could I have won a nobler,

than by giving burial to mine own brother? All here would own that

they thought it well, were not their lips sealed by fear. But royalty,

blest in so much besides, hath the power to do and say what it will.

CREON Thou differest from all these Thebans in that view.

ANTIGONE These also share it; but they curb their tongues for thee.

CREON And art thou not ashamed to act apart from them?

ANTIGONE No; there is nothing shameful in piety to a brother.

CREON Was it not a brother, too, that died in the opposite cause?

ANTIGONE Brother by the same mother and the same sire.

CREON Why, then, dost thou render a grace that is impious in his

sight?

ANTIGONE The dead man will not say that he so deems it.

CREON Yea, if thou makest him but equal in honour with the wicked.

ANTIGONE It was his brother, not his slave, that perished.

CREON Wasting this land; while he fell as its champion.

ANTIGONE Nevertheless, Hades desires these rites.

CREON But the good desires not a like portion with the evil.

ANTIGONE Who knows but this seems blameless in the world below?

CREON A foe is never a friend-not even in death.

ANTIGONE Tis not my nature to join in hating, but in loving.

CREON Pass, then, to the world of the dead, and, it thou must needs

love, love them. While I live, no woman shall rule me. (Enter ISMENE

from the house, led in by two attendants.)

CHORUS (chanting) Lo, yonder Ismene comes forth, shedding such tears

as fond sisters weep; a cloud upon her brow casts its shadow over

her darkly-flushing face, and breaks in rain on her fair cheek.

CREON And thou, who, lurking like a viper in my house, wast secretly

draining my life-blood, while I knew not that I was nurturing two

pests, to rise against my throne-come, tell me now, wilt thou also

confess thy part in this burial, or wilt thou forswear all knowledge

of it?

ISMENE I have done the deed,-if she allows my claim,-and share the

burden of the charge.

ANTIGONE Nay, justice will not suffer thee to do that: thou didst

not consent to the deed, nor did I give thee part in it.

ISMENE But, now that ills beset thee, I am not ashamed to sail the

sea of trouble at thy side.

ANTIGONE Whose was the deed, Hades and the dead are witnesses: a

friend in words is not the friend that I love.

ISMENE Nay, sister, reject me not, but let me die with thee, and

duly honour the dead.

ANTIGONE Share not thou my death, nor claim deeds to which thou hast

not put thy hand: my death will suffice.

ISMENE And what life is dear to me, bereft of thee?

ANTIGONE Ask Creon; all thy care is for him.

ISMENE Why vex me thus, when it avails thee nought?

ANTIGONE Indeed, if I mock, 'tis with pain that I mock thee.

ISMENE Tell me,-how can I serve thee, even now?

ANTIGONE Save thyself: I grudge not thy escape.

ISMENE Ah, woe is me! And shall I have no share in thy fate?

ANTIGONE Thy choice was to live; mine, to die.

ISMENE At least thy choice was not made without my protest.

ANTIGONE One world approved thy wisdom; another, mine.

ISMENE Howbeit, the offence is the same for both of us.

ANTIGONE Be of good cheer; thou livest; but my life hath long been

given to death, that so I might serve the dead.

CREON Lo, one of these maidens hath newly shown herself foolish,

as the other hath been since her life began.

ISMENE Yea, O king, such reason as nature may have given abides not

with the unfortunate, but goes astray.

CREON Thine did, when thou chosest vile deeds with the vile.

ISMENE What life could I endure, without her presence?

CREON Nay, speak not of her 'presence'; she lives no more.

ISMENE But wilt thou slay the betrothed of thine own son?

CREON Nay, there are other fields for him to plough.

ISMENE But there can never be such love as bound him to her.

CREON I like not an evil wife for my son.

ANTIGONE Haemon, beloved! How thy father wrongs thee!

CREON Enough, enough of thee and of thy marriage!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS Wilt thou indeed rob thy son of this maiden?

CREON 'Tis Death that shall stay these bridals for me.

LEADER 'Tis determined, it seems, that she shall die.

CREON Determined, yes, for thee and for me.- (To the two attendants)

No more delay-servants, take them within! Henceforth they must be

women, and not range at large; for verily even the bold seek to fly,

when they see Death now closing on their life. (Exeunt attendants,

guarding ANTIGONE and ISMENE.-CREON remains.)

CHORUS (singing, strophe 1)

Blest are they whose days have not tasted of evil. For when a house

hath once been shaken from heaven, there the curse fails nevermore,

passing from life to life of the race; even as, when the surge is

driven over the darkness of the deep by the fierce breath of Thracian

sea-winds, it rolls up the black sand from the depths, and there is

sullen roar from wind-vexed headlands that front the blows of the

storm.

(antistrophe 1)

I see that from olden time the sorrows in the house of the Labdacidae

are heaped upon the sorrows of the dead; and generation is not freed

by generation, but some god strikes them down, and the race hath no

deliverance.

For now that hope of which the light had been spread above the last

root of the house of Oedipus-that hope, in turn, is brought low--by

the blood-stained dust due to the gods infernal, and by folly in speech,

and frenzy at the heart.

(strophe 2)

Thy power, O Zeus, what human trespass can limit? That power which

neither Sleep, the all-ensnaring, nor the untiring months of the gods

can master; but thou, a ruler to whom time brings not old age, dwellest

in the dazzling splendour of Olympus.

And through the future, near and far, as through the past, shall this

law hold good: Nothing that is vast enters into the life of mortals

without a curse.

(antistrophe 2)

For that hope whose wanderings are so wide is to many men a comfort,

but to many a false lure of giddy desires; and the disappointment

comes on one who knoweth nought till he burn his foot against the

hot fire.

For with wisdom hath some one given forth the famous saying, that

evil seems good, soon or late, to him whose mind the god draws to

mischief; and but for the briefest space doth he fare free of woe.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS But lo, Haemon, the last of thy sons;-Comes

he grieving for the doom of his promised bride, Antigone, and bitter

for the baffled hope of his marriage? (Enter HAEMON)

CREON We shall know soon, better than seers could tell us.-My son,

hearing the fixed doom of thy betrothed, art thou come in rage against

thy father? Or have I thy good will, act how I may?

HAEMON Father, I am thine; and thou, in thy wisdom, tracest for me

rules which I shall follow. No marriage shall be deemed by me a greater

gain than thy good guidance.

CREON Yea, this, my son, should be thy heart's fixed law,-in all

things to obey thy father's will. 'Tis for this that men pray to see

dutiful children grow up around them in their homes,-that such may

requite their father's foe with evil, and honour, as their father

doth, his friend. But he who begets unprofitable children-what shall

we say that he hath sown, but troubles for himself, and much triumph

for his foes? Then do not thou, my son, at pleasure's beck, dethrone

thy reason for a woman's sake; knowing that this is a joy that soon

grows cold in clasping arms,-an evil woman to share thy bed and thy

home. For what wound could strike deeper than a false friend? Nay,

with loathing, and as if she were thine enemy, let this girl go to

find a husband in the house of Hades. For since I have taken her,

alone of all the city, in open disobedience, I will not make myself

a liar to my people-I will slay her.

So let her appeal as she will to the majesty of kindred blood. If

I am to nurture mine own kindred in naughtiness, needs must I bear

with it in aliens. He who does his duty in his own household will

be found righteous in the State also. But if any one transgresses,

and does violence to the laws, or thinks to dictate to his rulers,

such an one can win no praise from me. No, whomsoever the city may

appoint, that man must be obeyed, in little things and great, in just

things and unjust; and I should feel sure that one who thus obeys

would be a good ruler no less than a good subject, and in the storm

of spears would stand his ground where he was set, loyal and dauntless

at his comrade's side.

But disobedience is the worst of evils. This it is that ruins cities;

this makes homes desolate; by this, the ranks of allies are broken

into head-long rout; but, of the lives whose course is fair, the greater

part owes safety to obedience. Therefore we must support the cause

of order, and in no wise suffer a woman to worst us. Better to fall

from power, if we must, by a man's hand; then we should not be called

weaker than a woman.

LEADER To us, unless our years have stolen our wit, thou seemest

to say wisely what thou sayest.

HAEMON Father, the gods implant reason in men, the highest of all

things that we call our own. Not mine the skill-far from me be the

quest!-to say wherein thou speakest not aright; and yet another man,

too, might have some useful thought. At least, it is my natural office

to watch, on thy behalf, all that men say, or do, or find to blame.

For the dread of thy frown forbids the citizen to speak such words

as would offend thine ear; but can hear these murmurs in the dark,

these moanings of the city for this maiden; 'no woman,' they say,

'ever merited her doom less,-none ever was to die so shamefully for

deeds so glorious as hers; who, when her own brother had fallen in

bloody strife, would not leave him unburied, to be devoured by carrion

dogs, or by any bird:-deserves not she the meed of golden honour?'

Such is the darkling rumour that spreads in secret. For me, my father,

no treasure is so precious as thy welfare. What, indeed, is a nobler

ornament for children than a prospering sire's fair fame, or for sire

than son's? Wear not, then, one mood only in thyself; think not that

thy word, and thine alone, must be right. For if any man thinks that

he alone is wise,-that in speech, or in mind, he hath no peer,-such

a soul, when laid open, is ever found empty.

No, though a man be wise, 'tis no shame for him to learn many things,

and to bend in season. Seest thou, beside the wintry torrent's course,

how the trees that yield to it save every twig, while the stiff-necked

perish root and branch? And even thus he who keeps the sheet of his

sail taut, and never slackens it, upsets his boat, and finishes his

voyage with keel uppermost.

Nay, forego thy wrath; permit thyself to change. For if I, a younger

man, may offer my thought, it were far best, I ween, that men should

be all-wise by nature; but, otherwise-and oft the scale inclines not

so-'tis good also to learn from those who speak aright.

LEADER Sire, 'tis meet that thou shouldest profit by his words, if

he speaks aught in season, and thou, Haemon, by thy father's; for

on both parts there hath been wise speech.

CREON Men of my age are we indeed to be schooled, then, by men of

his?

HAEMON In nothing that is not right; but if I am young, thou shouldest

look to my merits, not to my years.

CREON Is it a merit to honour the unruly?

HAEMON I could wish no one to show respect for evil-doers.

CREON Then is not she tainted with that malady?

HAEMON Our Theban folk, with one voice, denies it.

CREON Shall Thebes prescribe to me how I must rule?

HAEMON See, there thou hast spoken like a youth indeed.

CREON Am I to rule this land by other judgment than mine own?

HAEMON That is no city which belongs to one man.

CREON Is not the city held to be the ruler's?

HAEMON Thou wouldst make a good monarch of a desert.

CREON This boy, it seems, is the woman's champion.

HAEMON If thou art a woman; indeed, my care is for thee.

CREON Shameless, at open feud with thy father!

HAEMON Nay, I see thee offending against justice.

CREON Do I offend, when I respect mine own prerogatives?

HAEMON Thou dost not respect them, when thou tramplest on the gods'

honours,

CREON O dastard nature, yielding place to woman!

HAEMON Thou wilt never find me yield to baseness.

CREON All thy words, at least, plead for that girl.

HAEMON And for thee, and for me, and for the gods below.

CREON Thou canst never marry her, on this side the grave.

HAEMON Then she must die, and in death destroy another.

CREON How! doth thy boldness run to open threats?

HAEMON What threat is it, to combat vain resolves?

CREON Thou shalt rue thy witless teaching of wisdom.

HAEMON Wert thou not my father, I would have called thee unwise.

CREON Thou woman's slave, use not wheedling speech with me.

HAEMON Thou wouldest speak, and then hear no reply?

CREON Sayest thou so? Now, by the heaven above us-be sure of it-thou

shalt smart for taunting me in this opprobrious strain. Bring forth

that hated thing, that she may die forthwith in his presence-before

his eyes-at her bridegroom's side!

HAEMON No, not at my side-never think it-shall she perish; nor shalt

thou ever set eyes more upon my face:-rave, then, with such friends

as can endure thee. (Exit HAEMON)

LEADER The man is gone, O king, in angry haste; a youthful mind,

when stung, is fierce.

CREON Let him do, or dream, more than man-good speed to him!-But

he shall not save these two girls from their doom.

LEADER Dost thou indeed purpose to slay both?

CREON Not her whose hands are pure: thou sayest well.

LEADER And by what doom mean'st thou to slay the other?

CREON I will take her where the path is loneliest, and hide her,

living, in rocky vault, with so much food set forth as piety prescribes,

that the city may avoid a public stain. And there, praying to Hades,

the only god whom she worships, perchance she will obtain release

from death; or else will learn, at last, though late, that it is lost

labour to revere the dead. (CREON goes into the palace.)

CHORUS (singing, strophe)

Love, unconquered in the fight, Love, who makest havoc of wealth,

who keepest thy vigil on the soft cheek of a maiden; thou roamest

over the sea, and among the homes of dwellers in the wilds; no immortal

can escape thee, nor any among men whose life is for a day; and he

to whom thou hast come is mad.

(antistrophe)

The just themselves have their minds warped by thee to wrong, for

their ruin: 'tis thou that hast stirred up this present strife of

kinsmen; victorious is the love-kindling light from the eyes of the

fair bride; it is a power enthroned in sway beside the eternal laws;

for there the goddess Aphrodite is working her unconquerable will.

(ANTIGONE is led out of the palace by two Of CREON'S attendants who

are about to conduct her to her doom.) But now I also am carried

beyond the bounds of loyalty, and can no more keep back the streaming

tears, when I see Antigone thus passing to the bridal chamber where

all are laid to rest. (The following lines between ANTIGONE and the

CHORUS are chanted responsively.)

ANTIGONE (strophe 1)

See me, citizens of my fatherland, setting forth on my last way,

looking my last on the sunlight that is for me no more; no, Hades

who gives sleep to all leads me living to Acheron's shore; who have

had no portion in the chant that brings the bride, nor hath any song

been mine for the crowning of bridals; whom the lord of the Dark Lake

shall wed.

CHORUS (systema 1)

Glorious, therefore, and with praise, thou departest to that deep

place of the dead: wasting sickness hath not smitten thee; thou hast

not found the wages of the sword; no, mistress of thine own fate,

and still alive, thou shalt pass to Hades, as no other of mortal kind

hath passed.

ANTIGONE (antistrophe 1)

I have heard in other days how dread a doom befell our Phrygian guest,

the daughter of Tantalus, on the Sipylian heights; I how, like clinging

ivy, the growth of stone subdued her; and the rains fail not, as men

tell, from her wasting form, nor fails the snow, while beneath her

weeping lids the tears bedew her bosom; and most like to hers is the

fate that brings me to my rest.

CHORUS (systema 2)

Yet she was a goddess, thou knowest, and born of gods; we are mortals,

and of mortal race. But 'tis great renown for a woman who hath perished

that she should have shared the doom of the godlike, in her life,

and afterward in death.

ANTIGONE (strophe 2)

Ah, I am mocked! In the name of our fathers' gods, can ye not wait

till I am gone,-must ye taunt me to my face, O my city, and ye, her

wealthy sons? Ah, fount of Dirce, and thou holy ground of Thebe whose

chariots are many; ye, at least, will bear me witness, in what sort,

unwept of friends, and by what laws I pass to the rock-closed prison

of my strange tomb, ah me unhappy! who have no home on the earth or

in the shades, no home with the living or with the dead.

CHORUS (strophe 3)

Thou hast rushed forward to the utmost verge of daring; and against

that throne where justice sits on high thou hast fallen, my daughter,

with a grievous fall. But in this ordeal thou art paying, haply, for

thy father's sin.

ANTIGONE (antistrophe 2)

Thou hast touched on my bitterest thought,-awaking the ever-new lament

for my sire and for all the doom given to us, the famed house of Labdacus.

Alas for the horrors of the mother's bed! alas for the wretched mother's

slumber at the side of her own son,-and my sire! From what manner

of parents did I take my miserable being! And to them I go thus, accursed,

unwed, to share their home. Alas, my brother, ill-starred in thy marriage,

in thy death thou hast undone my life!

CHORUS (antistrophe 3)

Reverent action claims a certain praise for reverence; but an offence

against power cannot be brooked by him who hath power in his keeping.

Thy self-willed temper hath wrought thy ruin.

ANTIGONE (epode)

Unwept, unfriended, without marriage-song, I am led forth in my sorrow

on this journey that can be delayed no more. No longer, hapless one,

may I behold yon day-star's sacred eye; but for my fate no tear is

shed, no friend makes moan. (CREON enters from the palace.)

CREON Know ye not that songs and wailings before death would never

cease, if it profited to utter them? Away with her-away! And when

ye have enclosed her, according to my word, in her vaulted grave,

leave her alone, forlorn-whether she wishes to die, or to live a buried

life in such a home. Our hands are clean as touching this maiden.

But this is certain-she shall be deprived of her sojourn in the light.

ANTIGONE Tomb, bridal-chamber, eternal prison in the caverned rock,

whither go to find mine own, those many who have perished, and whom

Persephone hath received among the dead! Last of all shall I pass

thither, and far most miserably of all, before the term of my life

is spent. But I cherish good hope that my coming will be welcome to

my father, and pleasant to thee, my mother, and welcome, brother,

to thee; for, when ye died, with mine own hands I washed and dressed

you, and poured drink-offerings at your graves; and now, Polyneices,

'tis for tending thy corpse that I win such recompense as this.

And yet I honoured thee, as the wise will deem, rightly. Never, had

been a mother of children, or if a husband had been mouldering in

death, would I have taken this task upon me in the city's despite.

What law, ye ask, is my warrant for that word? The husband lost, another

might have been found, and child from another, to replace the first-born:

but, father and mother hidden with Hades, no brother's life could

ever bloom for me again. Such was the law whereby I held thee first

in honour; but Creon deemed me guilty of error therein, and of outrage,

ah brother mine! And now he leads me thus, a captive in his hands;

no bridal bed, no bridal song hath been mine, no joy of marriage,

no portion in the nurture of children; but thus, forlorn of friends,

unhappy one, I go living to the vaults of death.

And what law of heaven have I transgressed? Why, hapless one, should

I look to the gods any more,-what ally should I invoke,-when by piety

I have earned the name of impious? Nay, then, if these things are

pleasing to the gods, when I have suffered my doom, I shall come to

know my sin; but if the sin is with my judges, I could wish them no

fuller measure of evil than they, on their part, mete wrongfully to

me.

CHORUS Still the same tempest of the soul vexes this maiden with

the same fierce gusts.

CREON Then for this shall her guards have cause to rue their slowness.

ANTIGONE Ah me! that word hath come very near to death.

CREON I can cheer thee with no hope that this doom is not thus to

be fulfilled.

ANTIGONE O city of my fathers in the land of Thebe! O ye gods, eldest

of our race!-they lead me henc--now, now-they tarry not! Behold me,

princes of Thebes, the last daughter of the house of your kings,-see

what I suffer, and from whom, because I feared to cast away the fear

of Heaven! (ANTIGONE is led away by the guards.)

CHORUS (singing, strophe 1)

Even thus endured Danae in her beauty to change the light of day

for brass-bound walls; and in that chamber, secret as the grave, she

was held close prisoner; yet was she of a proud lineage, O my daughter,

and charged with the keeping of the seed of Zeus, that fell in the

golden rain.

But dreadful is the mysterious power of fate: there is no deliverance

from it by wealth or by war, by fenced city, or dark, sea-beaten ships.

(antistrophe 1)

And bonds tamed the son of Dryas, swift to wrath, that king of the

Edonians; so paid he for his frenzied taunts, when, by the will of

Dionysus, he was pent in a rocky prison. There the fierce exuberance

of his madness slowly passed away. That man learned to know the god,

whom in his frenzy he had provoked with mockeries; for he had sought

to quell the god-possessed women, and the Bacchanalian fire; and he

angered the Muses that love the flute.

(strophe 2)

And by the waters of the Dark Rocks, the waters of the twofold sea,

are the shores of Bosporus, and Thracian Salmydessus; where Ares,

neighbour to the city, saw the accurst, blinding wound dealt to the

two sons of Phineus by his fierce wife,-the wound that brought darkness

to those vengeance-craving orbs, smitten with her bloody hands, smitten

with her shuttle for a dagger.

(antistrophe 2)

Pining in their misery, they bewailed their cruel doom, those sons

of a mother hapless in her marriage; but she traced her descent from

the ancient line of the Erechtheidae; and in far-distant caves she

was nursed amid her father's storms, that child of Boreas, swift as

a steed over the steep hills, a daughter of gods; yet upon her also

the gray Fates bore hard, my daughter. (Enter TEIRESIAS, led by a

Boy, on the spectators' right.)

TEIRESIAS Princes of Thebes, we have come with linked steps, both

served by the eyes of one; for thus, by a guide's help, the blind

must walk.

CREON And what, aged Teiresias, are thy tidings?

TEIRESIAS I will tell thee; and do thou hearken to the seer.

CREON Indeed, it has not been my wont to slight thy counsel.

TEIRESIAS Therefore didst thou steer our city's course aright.

CREON I have felt, and can attest, thy benefits.

TEIRESIAS Mark that now, once more, thou standest on fate's fine

edge.

CREON What means this? How I shudder at thy message!

TEIRESIAS Thou wilt learn, when thou hearest the warnings of mine

art. As I took my place on mine old seat of augury, where all birds

have been wont to gather within my ken, I heard a strange voice among

them; they were screaming with dire, feverish rage, that drowned their

language in jargon; and I knew that they were rending each other with

their talons, murderously; the whirr of wings told no doubtful tale.

Forthwith, in fear, I essayed burnt-sacrifice on a duly kindled altar:

but from my offerings the Fire-god showed no flame; a dank moisture,

oozing from the thigh-flesh, trickled forth upon the embers, and smoked,

and sputtered; the gall was scattered to the air; and the streaming

thighs lay bared of the fat that had been wrapped round them.

Such was the failure of the rites by which I vainly asked a sign,

as from this boy I learned; for he is my guide, as I am guide to others.

And 'tis thy counsel that hath brought this sickness on our State.

For the altars of our city and of our hearths have been tainted, one

and all, by birds and dogs, with carrion from the hapless corpse,

the son of Oedipus: and therefore the gods no more accept prayer and

sacrifice at our hands, or the flame of meat-offering; nor doth any

bird give a clear sign by its shrill cry, for they have tasted the

fatness of a slain man's blood.

Think, then, on these things, my son. All men are liable to err; but

when an error hath been made, that man is no longer witless or unblest

who heals the ill into which he hath fallen, and remains not stubborn.

Self-will, we know, incurs the charge of folly. Nay, allow the claim

of the dead; stab not the fallen; what prowess is it to slay the slain

anew? I have sought thy good, and for thy good I speak: and never

is it sweeter to learn from a good counsellor than when he counsels

for thine own gain.

CREON Old man, ye all shoot your shafts at me, as archers at the

butts;-Ye must needs practise on me with seer-craft also;-aye, the

seer-tribe hath long trafficked in me, and made me their merchandise.

Gain your gains, drive your trade, if ye list, in the silver-gold

of Sardis and the gold of India; but ye shall not hide that man in

the grave,-no, though the eagles of Zeus should bear the carrion morsels

to their Master's throne-no, not for dread of that defilement will

I suffer his burial:-for well I know that no mortal can defile the

gods.-But, aged Teiresias, the wisest fall with shameful fall, when

they clothe shameful thoughts in fair words, for lucre's sake.

TEIRESIAS Alas! Doth any man know, doth any consider...

CREON Whereof? What general truth dost thou announce?

TEIRESIAS How precious, above all wealth, is good counsel.

CREON As folly, I think, is the worst mischief.

TEIRESIAS Yet thou art tainted with that distemper.

CREON I would not answer the seer with a taunt.

TEIRESIAS But thou dost, in saying that I prophesy falsely.

CREON Well, the prophet-tribe was ever fond of money.

TEIRESIAS And the race bred of tyrants loves base gain.

CREON Knowest thou that thy speech is spoken of thy king?

TEIRESIAS I know it; for through me thou hast saved Thebes.

CREON Thou art a wise seer; but thou lovest evil deeds.

TEIRESIAS Thou wilt rouse me to utter the dread secret in my soul.

CREON Out with it!-Only speak it not for gain.

TEIRESIAS Indeed, methinks, I shall not,-as touching thee.

CREON Know that thou shalt not trade on my resolve.

TEIRESIAS Then know thou-aye, know it well-that thou shalt not live

through many more courses of the sun's swift chariot, ere one begotten

of thine own loins shall have been given by thee, a corpse for corpses;

because thou hast thrust children of the sunlight to the shades, and

ruthlessly lodged a living soul in the grave; but keepest in this

world one who belongs to the gods infernal, a corpse unburied, unhonoured,

all unhallowed. In such thou hast no part, nor have the gods above,

but this is a violence done to them by thee. Therefore the avenging

destroyers lie in wait for thee, the Furies of Hades and of the gods,

that thou mayest be taken in these same ills.

And mark well if I speak these things as a hireling. A time not long

to be delayed shall awaken the wailing of men and of women in thy

house. And a tumult of hatred against thee stirs all the cities whose

mangled sons had the burial-rite from dogs, or from wild beasts, or

from some winged bird that bore a polluting breath to each city that

contains the hearths of the dead.

Such arrows for thy heart-since thou provokest me-have I launched

at thee, archer-like, in my anger,-sure arrows, of which thou shalt

not escape the smart.-Boy, lead me home, that he may spend his rage

on younger men, and learn to keep a tongue more temperate, and to

bear within his breast a better mind than now he bears. (The Boy

leads TEIRESIAS Out.)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS The man hath gone, O King, with dread prophecies.

And, since the hair on this head, once dark, hath been white, I know

that he hath never been a false prophet to our city.

CREON I, too, know it well, and am troubled in soul. 'Tis dire to

yield; but, by resistance, to smite my pride with ruin-this, too,

is a dire choice.

LEADER Son of Menoeceus, it behoves thee to take wise counsel.

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

LEADER Go thou, and free the maiden from her rocky chamber, and make

a tomb for the unburied dead.

CREON And this is thy counsel? Thou wouldst have me yield?

LEADER Yea, King, and with all speed; for swift harms from the gods

cut short the folly of men.

CREON Ah me, 'tis hard, but I resign my cherished resolve,-I obey.

We must not wage a vain war with destiny.

LEADER Go, thou, and do these things; leave them not to others.

CREON Even as I am I'll go:-on, on, my servants, each and all of

you,-take axes in your hands, and hasten to the ground that ye see

yonder! Since our judgment hath taken this turn, I will be present

to unloose her, as myself bound her. My heart misgives me, 'tis best

to keep the established laws, even to life's end. (CREON and his

servants hasten out on the spectators' left.)

CHORUS (singing, strophe 1)

O thou of many names, glory of the Cadmeian bride, offspring of loud-thundering

Zeus! thou who watchest over famed Italia, and reignest, where all

guests are welcomed, in the sheltered plain of Eleusinian Deo! O Bacchus,

dweller in Thebe, mother-city of Bacchants, by the softly-gliding

stream of Ismenus, on the soil where the fierce dragon's teeth were

sown!

(antistrophe 1)

Thou hast been seen where torch-flames glare through smoke, above

the crests of the twin peaks, where move the Corycian nymphs, thy

votaries, hard by Castalia's stream.

Thou comest from the ivy-mantled slopes of Nysa's hills, and from

the shore green with many-clustered vines, while thy name is lifted

up on strains of more than mortal power, as thou visitest the ways

of Thebe:

(strophe 2)

Thebe, of all cities, thou holdest first in honour, thou and thy

mother whom the lightning smote; and now, when all our people is captive

to a violent plague, come thou with healing feet over the Parnassian

height, or over the moaning strait!

(antistrophe 2)

O thou with whom the stars rejoice as they move, the stars whose

breath is fire; O master of the voices of the night; son begotten

of Zeus; appear, O king, with thine attendant Thyiads, who in night-long

frenzy dance before thee, the giver of good gifts, Iacchus! (Enter

MESSENGER, on the spectators' left.)

MESSENGER Dwellers by the house of Cadmus and of Amphion, there is

no estate of mortal life that I would ever praise or blame as settled.

Fortune raises and Fortune humbles the lucky or unlucky from day to

day, and no one can prophesy to men concerning those things which

are established. For

CREON was blest once, as I count bliss; he had saved this land of

Cadmus from its foes; he was clothed with sole dominion in the land;

he reigned, the glorious sire of princely children. And now all hath

been lost. For when a man hath forfeited his pleasures, I count him

not as living,-I hold him but a breathing corpse. Heap up riches in

thy house, if thou wilt; live in kingly state; yet, if there be no

gladness therewith, I would not give the shadow of a vapour for all

the rest, compared with joy.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS And what is this new grief that thou hast to

tell for our princes?

MESSENGER Death; and the living are guilty for the dead.

LEADER And who is the slayer? Who the stricken? Speak.

MESSENGER Haemon hath perished; his blood hath been shed by no stranger.

LEADER By his father's hand, or by his own?

MESSENGER By his own, in wrath with his sire for the murder.

LEADER O prophet, how true, then, hast thou proved thy word!

MESSENGER These things stand thus; ye must consider of the rest.

LEADER Lo, I see the hapless Eurydice, Creon's wife, approaching;

she comes from the house by chance, haply,-or because she knows the

tidings of her son. (Enter EURYDICE from the palace.)

EURYDICE People of Thebes, I heard your words as I was going forth,

to salute the goddess Pallas with my prayers. Even as I was loosing

the fastenings of the gate, to open it, the message of a household

woe smote on mine ear: I sank back, terror-stricken, into the arms

of my handmaids, and my senses fled. But say again what the tidings

were; I shall hear them as one who is no stranger to sorrow.

MESSENGER Dear lady, I will witness of what I saw, and will leave

no word of the truth untold. Why, indeed, should I soothe thee with

words in which must presently be found false? Truth is ever best.-I

attended thy lord as his guide to the furthest part of the plain,

where the body of Polyneices, torn by dogs, still lay unpitied. We

prayed the goddess of the roads, and Pluto, in mercy to restrain their

wrath; we washed the dead with holy washing; and with freshly-plucked

boughs we solemnly burned such relics as there were. We raised a high

mound of his native earth; and then we turned away to enter the maiden's

nuptial chamber with rocky couch, the caverned mansion of the bride

of Death. And, from afar off, one of us heard a voice of loud wailing

at that bride's unhallowed bower; and came to tell our master Creon.

And as the king drew nearer, doubtful sounds of a bitter cry floated

around him; he groaned, and said in accents of anguish, 'Wretched

that I am, can my foreboding be true? Am I going on the wofullest

way that ever I went? My son's voice greets me.-Go, my servants,-haste

ye nearer, and when ye have reached the tomb, pass through the gap,

where the stones have been wrenched away, to the cell's very mouth,-and

look. and see if 'tis Haemon's voice that I know, or if mine ear is

cheated by the gods.'

This search, at our despairing master's word, we went to make; and

in the furthest part of the tomb we descried her hanging by the neck,

slung by a thread-wrought halter of fine linen: while he was embracing

her with arms thrown around her waist, bewailing the loss of his bride

who is with the dead, and his father's deeds, and his own ill-starred

love.

But his father, when he saw him, cried aloud with a dread cry and

went in, and called to him with a voice of wailing:-'Unhappy, what

deed hast thou done! What thought hath come to thee? What manner of

mischance hath marred thy reason? Come forth, my child! I pray thee-I

implore!' But the boy glared at him with fierce eyes, spat in his

face, and, without a word of answer, drew his cross-hilted sword:-as

his father rushed forth in flight, he missed his aim;-then, hapless

one, wroth with himself, he straightway leaned with all his weight

against his sword, and drove it, half its length, into his side; and,

while sense lingered, he clasped the maiden to his faint embrace,

and, as he gasped, sent forth on her pale cheek the swift stream of

the oozing blood.

Corpse enfolding corpse he lies; he hath won his nuptial rites, poor

youth, not here, yet in the halls of Death; and he hath witnessed

to mankind that, of all curses which cleave to man, ill counsel is

the sovereign curse. (EURYDICE retires into the house.)

LEADER What wouldst thou augur from this? The lady hath turned back,

and is gone, without a word, good or evil.

MESSENGER I, too, am startled; yet I nourish the hope that, at these

sore tidings of her son, she cannot deign to give her sorrow public

vent, but in the privacy of the house will set her handmaids to mourn

the household grief. For she is not untaught of discretion, that she

should err.

LEADER I know not; but to me, at least, a strained silence seems

to portend peril, no less than vain abundance of lament.

MESSENGER Well, I will enter the house, and learn whether indeed

she is not hiding some repressed purpose in the depths of a passionate

heart. Yea, thou sayest well: excess of silence, too, may have a perilous

meaning. (The MESSENGER goes into the palace. Enter CREON, on the

spectators' left, with attendants, carrying the shrouded body of HAEMON

on bier. The following lines between CREON and the CHORUS are chanted

responsively.)

CHORUS Lo, yonder the king himself draws near, bearing that which

tells too clear a tale,-the work of no stranger's madness,-if we may

say it,-but of his own misdeeds.

CREON (strophe 1)

Woe for the sins of a darkened soul, stubborn sins, fraught with

death! Ah, ye behold us, the sire who hath slain, the son who hath

perished! Woe is me, for the wretched blindness of my counsels! Alas,

my son, thou hast died in thy youth, by a timeless doom, woe is me!-thy

spirit hath fled,-not by thy folly, but by mine own!

CHORUS (strophe 2)

Ah me, how all too late thou seemest to see the right!

CREON Ah me, I have learned the bitter lesson! But then, methinks,

oh then, some god smote me from above with crushing weight, and hurled

me into ways of cruelty, woe is me,-overthrowing and trampling on

my joy! Woe, woe, for the troublous toils of men! (Enter MESSENGER

from the house.)

MESSENGER Sire, thou hast come, methinks, as one whose hands are

not empty, but who hath store laid up besides; thou bearest yonder

burden with thee-and thou art soon to look upon the woes within thy

house.

CREON And what worse ill is yet to follow upon ills?

MESSENGER Thy queen hath died, true mother of yon corpse-ah, hapless

lady by blows newly dealt.

CREON (antistrophe 1)

Oh Hades, all-receiving whom no sacrifice can appease! Hast thou,

then, no mercy for me? O thou herald of evil, bitter tidings, what

word dost thou utter? Alas, I was already as dead, and thou hast smitten

me anew! What sayest thou, my son? What is this new message that thou

bringest-woe, woe is me!-Of a wife's doom-of slaughter headed on slaughter?

CHORUS Thou canst behold: 'tis no longer hidden within. (The doors

of the palace are opened, and the corpse of EURYDICE is disclosed.)

CREON (antistrophe 2)

Ah me,-yonder I behold a new, a second woe! What destiny, ah what,

can yet await me? I have but now raised my son in my arms,-and there,

again, I see a corpse before me! Alas, alas, unhappy mother! Alas,

my child!

MESSENGER There, at the altar, self-stabbed with a keen knife, she

suffered her darkening eyes to close, when she had wailed for the

noble fate of Megareus who died before, and then for his fate who

lies there,-and when, with her last breath, she had invoked evil fortunes

upon thee, the slayer of thy sons.

CREON (strophe 3)

Woe, woe! I thrill with dread. Is there none to strike me to the

heart with two-edged sword?-O miserable that I am, and steeped in

miserable anguish!

MESSENGER Yea, both this son's doom, and that other's, were laid

to thy charge by her whose corpse thou seest.

CREON And what was the manner of the violent deed by which she passed

away?

MESSENGER Her own hand struck her to the heart, when she had learned

her son's sorely lamented fate.

CREON (strophe 4)

Ah me, this guilt can never be fixed on any other of mortal kind,

for my acquittal! I, even I, was thy slayer, wretched that I am-I

own the truth. Lead me away, O my servants, lead me hence with all

speed, whose life is but as death!

CHORUS Thy counsels are good, if there can be good with ills; briefest

is best, when trouble is in our path.

CREON (antistrophe 3)

Oh, let it come, let it appear, that fairest of fates for me, that

brings my last day,-aye, best fate of all! Oh, let it come, that I

may never look upon to-morrow's light.

CHORUS These things are in the future; present tasks claim our care:

the ordering of the future rests where it should rest.

CREON All my desires, at least, were summed in that prayer.

CHORUS Pray thou no more; for mortals have no escape from destined

woe.

CREON (antistrophe 4)

Lead me away, I pray you; a rash, foolish man; who have slain thee,

ah my son, unwittingly, and thee, too, my wife-unhappy that I am!

I know not which way I should bend my gaze, or where I should seek

support; for all is amiss with that which is in my hands,-and yonder,

again, a crushing fate hath leapt upon my head. (As CREON is being

conducted into the palace, the LEADER OF THE CHORUS speaks the closing

verses.)

LEADER Wisdom is the supreme part of happiness; and reverence towards

the gods must be inviolate. Great words of prideful men are ever punished

with great blows, and, in old age, teach the chastened to be wise.

THE END

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Literary Analysis

The major assignment for this week is to compose a 900-word essay on *Antigone*. In this paper you will write an in-depth analysis using your own ideas and excerpts from the play in the form of quotes, paraphrase, or summary.

As you prepare to write this essay, make sure you understand what you are being asked to do.

**Pick a Topic**

First, identify a topic in consultation with your instructor or write about *one* of the following options:

1. *Antigone* clearly scrutinizes the cultural institution of gender, for the play’s debate about the nature of justice and good governance hinges on Antigone’s defiance of the king, making the play one of only a few ancient Greek dramas that put a woman center stage (apologies for the bad pun!). Moreover, there are important moments in the play that underscore its focus on gender inequality. For instance, at one point Creon accuses his son, Haemon, of considering “some women” more important than the rule of law. Creon goes on to complain that Haemon puts Antigone before all others. In another passage, Ismene, invoking the argument that women should obey men, urges Antigone to submit to Creon. Examine representations of gender and the gender conflict in *Antigone* in detail.
2. Scholarship developed from the nineteenth century through the present offers multiple interpretations of Antigone’s character. One of the abiding questions about her is whether her desire to bury Polyneices properly is political or if her defiance of the king is motivated, as she claims, solely by divine edict. Advocates of the first position see her as “speaking truth to power” as she engages in civil disobedience. But scholars who support the second explanation tend to consider Antigone’s concerns as primarily domestic—about her family—rather than political. Yet another interpretation of Antigone is that she, like so many other figures in ancient Greek drama, is guilty of excessive pride—*hubris*—as she tries to impose divine law on Creon.

Develop a character analysis of *Antigone*. You may argue for or against one of the positions stated above or you may take another direction. One thing to consider in your discussion is whether she is successful despite her suicide.

**Develop a Tentative Thesis**

As you consider different options for your thesis:

* Develop a few hypotheses about the text that are based on your own perspectives and relate to the topic that you chose to explore for this assignment.
* In addition to considering the text’s plot, reflect on what genre and other elements of literature (see the online lecture on this topic) reveal about ancient Greek cultures and important philosophies and values associated with this era and region.
* Review the lecture on literary movements and determine if examining other ancient Greek plays, particularly Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, can shed light on *Antigone* and/or test your hypotheses about it.

**Prewriting**

Gather evidence that is likely to support your tentative thesis. At this point, there is no need to use “outside” sources to complete the essay. You will have an opportunity to do that next week. For now, your evidence should consist of experiential knowledge (what you have learned through life experience) and quotes, paraphrase, or summary from the play’s text.

Next, choose one of the prewriting techniques discussed in chapter 3c, "Invent and Prewrite," of *The New Century Handbook* and begin prewriting.

**Rough Draft**

Write your rough draft. You are not required to submit it, but you should acquire the habit of writing one for every essay you compose in this and other classes.

**Revise and Edit**

Proofread the rough draft to ensure:

* The thesis is clear and well focused and the introduction includes all the necessary information.
* The discussion of evidence includes quotes, paraphrase, or summary and synthesizes this material and your ideas.
* The conclusion is appropriate and reinforces the paper's main ideas without repeating the introduction word for word.
* The essay is formatted in APA style throughout. It uses appropriate grammar, spelling and mechanics, and quoted material does not exceed 25% of the paper.

**Name your document SU\_ENG2002\_W2\_Clark\_P.doc**

**Requirement from instructor Please follow!!!**

**Please use literary terminology in writing essay such as tone, style, genre, point of view, and imagery, in your essay’s discussion of evidence.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Used key passages and quotations from the text in your essay’s discussion of evidence, limiting quoted material to 25% of the paper or less. |  |
| Examined in your essay’s discussion of evidence what the text suggests about the culture, era, and region in which it was written. |  |
| Considered in your essay’s discussion of evidence literary movements associated with *Antigone* and/or philosophies that may have influenced the play.  |  |
| Organized the paper effectively with unified paragraphs, each of which has a topic sentence and effective transitions to the next paragraph. |  |
| Provided an appropriate conclusion that reinforces the paper's main ideas without repeating the introduction word for word. |  |
| Met the word requirement.  |  |
| Communicated clearly using your own words for the majority of the paper with correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling throughout. |  |