



**THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA
INSTITUTE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION**

**BACHELOR OF ARTS WITH EDUCATION
(B.A EDUCATION)**

MODULE NO: 5

LIT 1100 – STUDIES IN WRITING SKILLS AND LITERATURE

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Module Structure

- I. Introduction
- II. The Aim of the Module
- III. Module Objectives [Learning outcomes]
- IV. Assessment
- V. Prescribed and Recommended Readings
- VI. Time frame
- VII. Study skills [Learning tips]
- VIII. Need help [Studying at a distance]

The module is divided into 8 units. Each unit addresses some of the learning outcomes. You will be asked to complete various tasks so that you can demonstrate your competence in achieving the learning outcomes.

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Introduction

Welcome to Module 5 on Studies in Writing Skills and Literature.

The main purpose of this module is to provide you with the opportunity to interact with the texts of *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone*, two of the most famous and most loved of the tragic plays written by the Greek playwright Sophocles. The module accords you the opportunity to relate the text to the contents of LIT 1100 module 4, which is on drama; specifically, the sections relating to Greek tragedy. The module also enables you to analyse the two texts through essay topics and study questions.

Aim

The aim of this module is to enable you gain a better understanding of Greek tragedy by interacting with the texts of *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone* as well as questions relating to it.



Objectives

By the end of the module, you should be able to:

- I. Demonstrate a reasonable understanding of the texts of *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone*.
- II. Relate the concepts of Greek tragedy learnt in module 4 to the contents of module 5.
- III. Analyse the contents of *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone*.



Assessment

Your work in this module will be assessed as follows:

- One test worth 10%
- Two essays worth 40%
- A written examination set by the University of Zambia at the end of the module (worth 50% of the final mark).

In summary, you will be assessed as follows:

Continuous Assessment: 50%
2 essays – 20% each

1 test – 10%

Final Examination: 50%



Prescribed Readings

1. The text of *Oedipus the King*, as provided in the module or other available texts such as: Sophocles, Oedipus the King, trans. E F Watling (1947). Hammondsworth: Penguin Books.
2. The text of 'Antigone,' as provided in the module or other available texts such as: Sophocles, Oedipus the King, trans. E F Watling (1947). Hammondsworth: Penguin Books.



Recommended Readings

1. Abrams, M H and Stephen Greenbelt (Eds) (2000). The Norton Anthology of English Literature, 7th Edition, Vol 2. New York: W W Norton & Company.
2. Barnet, Sylvan, Morton Berman and William Burto (Eds.) (1981) An Introduction to Literature, Seventh Edition: Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

You are encouraged, however, to read beyond the prescribed and recommended readings listed above in order to deepen and broaden your understanding of drama. You may find the references provided at the end of the module beneficial, but you are also encouraged to utilise other sources of information such as the University library, which is a wealthy source of data both from published books and unpublished theses. You may also do well to utilise public libraries, where available. Finally, learn how to use the internet as a vital source of data.



Time frame

You are expected to spend at least 30 hours of study time on this module. However, you will also have contact with lecturers from the University of Zambia from time to time

in the course of studying the module. You are advised to maximise the time available for study as well as contact with the lecturers in order to fully benefit from the course.

Study Skills

In case you have not studied by distance before, we shall avail you a number of ideas on how to maximise your learning experience:

1. Set goals such as: I will succeed in this course. At the beginning of the module, break the lessons into manageable chunks. You might not have time to do a full lesson in one night, so plan how much you can do, then stick to it until you are done.
2. Establish a regular study/learning schedule.
3. Determine what time is best for you to study.
4. Have a dedicated study place with all the supplies you might need.
5. Tell people what you are doing because only then are you more likely to stick to a course.
6. Ask someone to proofread your work before you submit it.
7. If you do not understand something ask your local learning centre or your tutor, who will be able to help you.
8. Search for the meaning of principles and concepts instead of merely memorising them.



Need help?

In case you have difficulties during the duration of the course, please get in touch with the Director, Institute of Distance Education, or the resident lecturer in your province.

All enquiries in connection with the payment of fees should be directed to the Director, Institute of Distance Education:

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Unit 1

Oedipus the King

1.1 Introduction

In order to effectively look at the two texts, *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone*, we shall study them separately and individually. Thus in units 1-4 our focus shall be on the study of *Oedipus the King* whereas in units 5-8 we shall be concerned with *Antigone*. An online version of each text is provided for your use. In addition, we shall look at essay questions aimed at enabling you to assess the level of your understanding of the text and the contents of the module 5 in relation to what you learnt in module 4. We shall now turn our attention to *Oedipus the King*.



1.2 Objectives

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

1. Explain the contents of the text of *Oedipus the King*.
2. Relate the contents of the unit to the contents of module 4 on the elements and structure of the Greek tragedy.
3. Discuss the questions and essay topics with a degree of competence.



1.3 Reflection

Oedipus the King is classified as a tragedy. What is the difference between the ordinary use of the word tragedy and the Greek use?

1.4 Context of *Oedipus the King*

You will recall that module 4 provides you with the necessary background information to the Greek tragedy or tragic play. The Greek word tragedy, as Skeat (2007: 543) says, literally means 'goat-song' probably because a goat was sacrificed to Dionysus, the Greek god of fertility, wine, conviviality, sexual vitality, ecstasy, and freedom (Roberts

and Jacobs 2007: 1276). Dionysus was one of the twelve principal Athenian deities who was believed to transform human personality and free people from care and grief.

The three greatest and best known playwrights associated with the Greek tragic play are Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. Aeschylus lived in the period 525-456 BC., Sophocles ca. 496-406/5 BC., and Euripides ca. 484-406 BC. Most of their works have not survived – only a small number, thirty-three, have survived. 'The combined output of the three classic playwrights was slightly more than three hundred plays, of which three-fourths were tragedies and one-fourth were satyr plays' (Roberts and Jacobs 2007: 1350). However, there were about 150 other Greek writers of tragedy whose names are known but none of whose works is available (Finley 1963: 105).

Of the three famous tragedians, or writers of Greek tragedies, Aeschylus was associated with the early forms of tragedy, Sophocles with middle tragedy, and Euripides with late forms of tragedy before the emergence of Comedy, associated with Aristophanes. The three tragedians adopted different styles and approaches to tragedy. Kitto (1950: 121) makes the following distinction:

Aeschylus is a profound religious dramatist, Euripides a brilliant, uneven representative of the new spirit which was so uncomfortable in the old forms, and Sophocles was an artist. We all know what an artist is: he is one who makes things which are beautiful or at least pretty, and if he is an artist of the right kind what he makes is good for us.

You will notice, if you pay close attention, that *Oedipus the King* is a good work of art. It is part of Sophocles' Theban plays along with *Antigone* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. The three plays are based on the life of King Oedipus and his family and set in and around the ancient Greek city-state of Thebes – that is, a city that functioned as an independent state, similar to a small country within a country. The three plays are collectively referred to as the Theban plays and, in line with Sophocles' classification as an artist, they are known for their strong plots, tightly knit structure, superb style, vivid portraits of tragic women and human conflicts, and insights into how the world works (Campbell 2000: 572). They are known as Theban plays for the simple reason that they are built on happenings in and around Thebes.

The plays were written in the following order: *Antigone*, *Oedipus the King* (also known as *Oedipus Rex* or *Oedipus Tyrannus*) and *Oedipus at Colonus*. As Zarrilli (2006) explains, however, the order in which the plays were written does not follow the chronological progression of Oedipus' life, which should be: *Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Antigone*. When Sophocles wrote *Antigone* he was a young man, middle-aged when he wrote *Oedipus the King*, and elderly when he completed *Oedipus*

at *Colonus*. He died at the age of ninety (Watling 1947: 7), having written 125 plays, though only seven remain (Campbell 2000: 572).

The three plays are more commonly referred to as the Theban plays than a trilogy because, apart from the fact that they all deal with the history of Oedipus' family, 'there is no unity of theme or treatment between them, and, except for the obvious links of fact connecting them, each constitutes a fresh approach to a distinct and self-contained problem' (Watling 1947: 13). As Campbell (2000: 569) argues, 'since the themes differ from play to play, it is not a true trilogy.' However, they can be read as a continuous narrative if placed in the appropriate order, as demonstrated above.

Oedipus the King, which evolves around a plague afflicting Thebes, was first staged in Athens in 427 BC (Zarrilli et al 2006: 85). The story, however, was borne of a common Greek idea: 'something unpleasant is predicted, the persons concerned try to avert it and think themselves safe, but in some natural though surprising fashion the prediction is fulfilled' (Kitto 1950: 142).

1.5 The Legend of Oedipus

Oedipus the King is based on the legend of Oedipus which existed long before Sophocles was born. Thus, Sophocles did not originate the legend, but he is credited for presenting it in his own unique way. As an artist, he presented the legend in a way that made it captivating.

According to the legend, it was prophesied by an oracle of the god Apollo that Laius and Jocasta, king and queen of Thebes respectively, would give birth to a son who would grow up to murder his father and marry his mother. In other words, the son would commit patricide and incest, both terrible sins before the gods.

The prophecy came as a curse or punishment for an abomination committed by Laius: he abducted Chrysippus, son of Pelops and the nymph Axioche, whom he had instructed in driving a chariot (www.mythindex.com/greek-mythology/C/Chrysippus.html). According to the myth, Laius was so taken by the boy's beauty that he raped him. Overwhelmed by shame, Chrysippus committed suicide (www.mythologydictionary.com/chrysippus-mythology.html).

Afraid of the oracle, Laius and his wife Jocasta, upon bearing a son, nailed his feet together – hence the name Oedipus, which means 'swollen foot.' They leave him to die on a lonely mountainside outside Thebes. However, a wandering shepherd from the nearby city of Corinth finds the child and hands him over to Polybus king of Corinth. Being childless, King Polybus and his wife, Queen Merope, decide to adopt Oedipus. They raise him as a prince in their palace and never tell him they are not his real parents.

When he grows into a young adult, Oedipus learns of the prophecy and, assuming that it applies to Polybus and Merope, whom he believes to be his biological parents, flees from Corinth. As he wanders around Greece, he meets a group of travellers at a crossroads and quarrels with them. He kills an old man and all the others except one man, who manages to escape. Unknown to him, however, the old man is Laius, his biological father, King of Thebes. Neither did Laius know that the young man he encountered at the crossroads was in fact his own son Oedipus, long believed dead.

Oedipus continues with his wandering, entering the city of Thebes at a time when the city is under the spell of the Sphinx, a monster whose riddle must be solved if the city is to be saved. The city dwellers, now without a king due to the murder of King Laius, are unable to solve the riddle. They declare that anyone who would solve the riddle would be made king to take the place of Laius.

As fate would have it, Oedipus is the only one who manages to solve the riddle, upon which the spell is broken and the Sphinx dies. Consequently, he is enthroned king and, as a bonus, given the hand of the recently widowed Jocasta. Neither Oedipus nor Jocasta know the real truth of their relationship; they go on to produce four children – Antigone and Ismene (daughters) and Eteocles and Polyneices (sons).

Thus is fulfilled the first part of the oracle: Oedipus, as prophesied, kills his father and marries his mother, siring children with her. The play, *Oedipus the King*, is about the second part of the oracle – that is, the punishment of Oedipus himself. When the play opens Oedipus has been successfully ruling Thebes for some fifteen years (Watling 24) but now the curse has taken its toll; things have gone wrong in the kingdom, and the citizens of Thebes assemble in front of the king's palace to seek a solution. Thebes' existence is threatened by pestilence and famine. It is Oedipus' quest for a solution that is the main preoccupation of *Oedipus the King*.

Now you can turn to the text of the play to see how Oedipus attempts to deal with the consequences of the Oracle of Delphi. Please note that this is an online version and by no means the only version. There are several other versions, and the translations are not necessarily the same.

1.6 Text of *Oedipus the King*

OEDIPUS THE KING

*Translation by F. Storr, BA
Formerly Scholar of Trinity College, Cambridge*

*From the Loeb Library Edition
Originally published by Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA and William
Heinemann Ltd, London*

First published in 1912

ARGUMENT

To Laius, King of Thebes, an oracle foretold that the child born to him by his queen Jocasta would slay his father and wed his mother. So when in time a son was born the infant's feet were riveted together and he was left to die on Mount Cithaeron. But a shepherd found the babe and tended him, and delivered him to another shepherd who took him to his master, the King of Corinth. Polybus being childless adopted the boy, who grew up believing that he was indeed the King's son. Afterwards doubting his parentage he inquired of the Delphic god and heard himself the weird declared before to Laius. Wherefore he fled from what he deemed his father's house and in his flight he encountered and unwillingly slew his father Laius. Arriving at Thebes he answered the riddle of the Sphinx and the grateful Thebans made their deliverer king. So he reigned in the room of Laius, and espoused the widowed queen. Children were born to them and Thebes prospered under his rule, but again a grievous plague fell upon the city. Again the oracle was consulted and it bade them purge themselves of blood-guiltiness. Oedipus denounces the crime of which he is unaware, and undertakes to track out the criminal. Step by step it is brought home to him that he is the man. The closing scene reveals Jocasta slain by her own hand and Oedipus blinded by his own act and praying for death or exile.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Oedipus.
The Priest of Zeus.
Creon.
Chorus of Theban Elders.
Teiresias.
Jocasta.
Messenger.
Herd of Laius.
Second Messenger.

Scene: Thebes. Before the Palace of Oedipus.

OEDIPUS THE KING

Suppliants of all ages are seated round the altar at the palace doors, at their head a PRIEST OF ZEUS. To them enter OEDIPUS.

OEDIPUS

My children, latest born to Cadmus old, Why sit ye here as suppliants, in your hands Branches of olive filleted with wool? What means this reek of incense everywhere, And everywhere laments and litanies? Children, it were not meet that I should learn From others, and am hither come, myself, I Oedipus, your world-renowned king. Ho! aged sire, whose venerable locks Proclaim thee spokesman of this company, Explain your mood and purport. Is it dread Of ill that moves you or a boon ye crave? My zeal in your behalf ye cannot doubt; Ruthless indeed were I and obdurate If such petitioners as you I spurned.

PRIEST

Yea, Oedipus, my sovereign lord and king, Thou seest how both extremes of age besiege Thy palace altars--fledglings hardly winged, and greybeards bowed with years; priests, as am I of Zeus, and these the flower of our youth. Meanwhile, the common folk, with wreathed boughs Crowd our two market-places, or before Both shrines of Pallas congregate, or where Ismenus gives his oracles by fire. For, as thou seest thyself, our ship of State, Sore buffeted, can no more lift her head, Foundered beneath a weltering surge of blood. A blight is on our harvest in the ear, A blight upon the grazing flocks and herds, A blight on wives in travail; and withal Armed with his blazing torch the God of Plague Hath swooped upon our city emptying The house of Cadmus, and the murky realm Of Pluto is full fed with groans and tears.

Therefore, O King, here at thy hearth we sit, I and these children; not as deeming thee A new divinity, but the first of men; First in the common accidents of life, And first in visitations of the Gods. Art thou not he who coming to the town of Cadmus freed us from the tax we paid To the fell songstress? Nor hadst thou received Prompting from us or been by others schooled; No, by a god inspired (so all men deem, And testify) didst thou renew our life. And now, O Oedipus, our peerless king, All we thy votaries beseech thee, find Some succor, whether by a voice from heaven Whispered, or haply known by human wit. Tried counselors, methinks, are aptest found [1] To furnish for the future pregnant rede. Upraise, O chief of men, upraise our State! Look to thy laurels! for thy zeal of yore Our country's savior thou art justly hailed: O never may we thus record thy reign:-- "He raised us up only to cast us down." Uplift us, build our city on a rock. Thy happy star ascendant brought us luck, O let it not decline! If thou wouldst rule This land, as now thou reignest, better sure To rule a peopled than a desert realm. Nor battlements nor galleys aught avail, If men to man and guards to guard them tail.

OEDIPUS

Ah! my poor children, known, ah, known too well, The quest that brings you hither and your need. Ye sicken all, well wot I, yet my pain, How great soever yours, outtops it all. Your sorrow touches each man severally, Him and none other, but I grieve at once Both for the general and myself and you. Therefore ye rouse no sluggard from day-dreams. Many, my children, are the tears I've wept, And threaded many a maze of weary thought. Thus pondering one clue of hope I caught, And tracked it up; I have sent Menoeceus' son, Creon, my consort's brother, to inquire Of Pythian Phoebus at his Delphic shrine, How I might save the State by act or word. And now I reckon up the tale of days Since he set forth, and marvel how he fares. 'Tis strange, this endless tarrying, passing strange. But when he comes, then I were base indeed, If I perform not all the god declares.

PRIEST

Thy words are well timed; even as thou speakest That shouting tells me Creon is at hand.

OEDIPUS

O King Apollo! may his joyous looks Be presage of the joyous news he brings!

PRIEST

As I surmise, 'tis welcome; else his head Had scarce been crowned with berry-laden bays.

OEDIPUS

We soon shall know; he's now in earshot range. [Enter CREON]
My royal cousin, say, Menoeceus' child, What message hast thou brought us from the god?

CREON

Good news, for e'en intolerable ills, Finding right issue, tend to naught but good.

OEDIPUS

How runs the oracle? thus far thy words Give me no ground for confidence or fear.

CREON

If thou wouldst hear my message publicly, I'll tell thee straight, or with thee pass within.

OEDIPUS

Speak before all; the burden that I bear Is more for these my subjects than myself.

CREON

Let me report then all the god declared. King Phoebus bids us straitly extirpate A fell pollution that infests the land, And no more harbor an inveterate sore.

OEDIPUS

What expiation means he? What's amiss?

CREON

Banishment, or the shedding blood for blood. This stain of blood makes shipwreck of our state.

OEDIPUS

Whom can he mean, the miscreant thus denounced?

CREON

Before thou didst assume the helm of State, The sovereign of this land was Laius.

OEDIPUS

I heard as much, but never saw the man.

CREON

He fell; and now the god's command is plain: Punish his takers-off, whoe'er they be.

OEDIPUS

Where are they? Where in the wide world to find The far, faint traces of a bygone crime?

CREON

In this land, said the god; "who seeks shall find; Who sits with folded hands or sleeps is blind."

OEDIPUS

Was he within his palace, or afield, Or traveling, when Laius met his fate?

CREON

Abroad; he started, so he told us, bound For Delphi, but he never thence returned.

OEDIPUS

Came there no news, no fellow-traveler To give some clue that might be followed up?

CREON

But one escape, who flying for dear life, Could tell of all he saw but one thing sure.

OEDIPUS

And what was that? One clue might lead us far, With but a spark of hope to guide our quest.

CREON

Robbers, he told us, not one bandit but A troop of knaves, attacked and murdered him.

OEDIPUS

Did any bandit dare so bold a stroke, Unless indeed he were suborned from Thebes?

CREON

So 'twas surmised, but none was found to avenge His murder mid the trouble that ensued.

OEDIPUS

What trouble can have hindered a full quest, When royalty had fallen thus miserably?

CREON

The riddling Sphinx compelled us to let slide The dim past and attend to instant needs.

OEDIPUS

Well, / will start afresh and once again Make dark things clear. Right worthy the concern Of Phoebus, worthy thine too, for the dead; I also, as is meet, will lend my aid To avenge this wrong to Thebes and to the god. Not for some far-off kinsman, but myself, Shall I expel this poison in the blood; For whoso slew that king might have a mind To strike me too with his assassin hand. Therefore in righting him I serve myself. Up, children, haste ye, quit these altar stairs, Take hence your suppliant wands, go summon hither The Theban commons. With the god's good help Success is sure; 'tis ruin if we fail. [Exeunt OEDIPUS and CREON]

PRIEST

Come, children, let us hence; these gracious words Forestall the very purpose of our suit. And may the god who sent this oracle Save us withal and rid us of this pest. [Exeunt PRIEST and SUPPLIANTS]

CHORUS

(Str. 1)
Sweet-voiced daughter of Zeus from thy gold-paved Pythian shrine

Wafted to Thebes divine,

What dost thou bring me? My soul is racked and shivers with fear.

(Healer of Delos, hear!)

Hast thou some pain unknown before, Or with the circling years renewest a penance of yore? Offspring of golden Hope, thou voice immortal, O tell me.

(Ant. 1)
First on Athene I call; O Zeus-born goddess, defend!

Goddess and sister, befriend,

Artemis, Lady of Thebes, high-throned in the midst of our mart!

Lord of the death-winged dart! Your threefold aid I crave

From death and ruin our city to save. If in the days of old when we nigh had perished,
ye drave From our land the fiery plague, be near us now and defend us!

(Str. 2)

Ah me, what countless woes are mine! All our host is in decline;
Weaponless my spirit lies.

Earth her gracious fruits denies; Women wail in barren throes; Life on life downstricken
goes, Swifter than the wind bird's flight, Swifter than the Fire-God's might, To the
westerling shores of Night.

(Ant. 2)

Wasted thus by death on death All our city perisheth.

Corpses spread infection round; None to tend or mourn is found. Wailing on the altar
stair

Wives and grandams rend the air-- Long-drawn moans and piercing cries Blent with
prayers and litanies. Golden child of Zeus, O hear Let thine angel face appear!

(Str.

3)

And grant that Ares whose hot breath I feel,

Though without targe or steel

He stalks, whose voice is as the battle shout, May turn in sudden rout,
To the unharbored Thracian waters sped,

Or Amphitrite's bed.

For what night leaves undone, Smit by the morrow's sun
Perisheth. Father Zeus, whose hand Doth wield the lightning brand,
Slay him beneath thy levin bold, we pray,

Slay him, O slay!

(Ant.

3)

O that thine arrows too, Lycean King,

From that taut bow's gold string,

Might fly abroad, the champions of our rights;

Yea, and the flashing lights

Of Artemis, wherewith the huntress sweeps

Across the Lycian steeps.

Thee too I call with golden-snooded hair,

Whose name our land doth bear,

Bacchus to whom thy Maenads Evoe shout;

Come with thy bright torch, rout, Blithe god whom we adore, The god whom gods abhor.

[Enter

OEDIPUS.]

OEDIPUS

Ye pray; 'tis well, but would ye hear my words And heed them and apply the remedy, Ye might perchance find comfort and relief. Mind you, I speak as one who comes a stranger To this report, no less than to the crime; For how unaided could I track it far Without a clue? Which lacking (for too late Was I enrolled a citizen of Thebes) This proclamation I address to all:-- Thebans, if any knows the man by whom Laius, son of Labdacus, was slain, I summon him to make clean shrift to me. And if he shrinks, let him reflect that thus Confessing he shall 'scape the capital charge; For the worst penalty that shall befall him Is banishment--unscathed he shall depart. But if an alien from a foreign land Be known to any as the murderer,

Let him who knows speak out, and he shall have Due recompense from me and thanks to boot. But if ye still keep silence, if through fear For self or friends ye disregard my hest, Hear what I then resolve; I lay my ban On the assassin whosoe'er he be.

Let no man in this land, whereof I hold The sovereign rule, harbor or speak to him; Give him no part in prayer or sacrifice Or lustral rites, but hound him from your homes. For this is our defilement, so the god Hath lately shown to me by oracles. Thus as their champion I maintain the cause Both of the god and of the murdered King. And on the murderer this curse I lay (On him and all the partners in his guilt):-- Wretch, may he pine in utter wretchedness! And for myself, if with my privy He gain admittance to my hearth, I pray The curse I laid on others fall on me. See that ye give effect to all my hest, For my sake and the god's and for our land, A desert blasted by the wrath of heaven. For, let alone the god's express command, It were a scandal ye should leave unpurged The murder of a great man and your king, Nor track it home. And now that I am lord, Successor to his throne, his bed, his wife, (And had he not been frustrate in the hope Of issue, common children of one womb Had forced a closer bond twixt him and me, But Fate swooped down upon him), therefore I His blood-avenger will maintain his cause As though he were my sire, and leave no stone Unturned to track the assassin or avenge The son of Labdacus, of Polydore, Of Cadmus, and Agenor first of the race. And for the disobedient thus I pray: May the gods send them neither timely fruits Of earth, nor teeming increase of the womb, But may they waste and pine, as now they waste, Aye

and worse stricken; but to all of you, My loyal subjects who approve my acts, May Justice, our ally, and all the gods Be gracious and attend you evermore.

CHORUS

The oath thou profferest, sire, I take and swear. I slew him not myself, nor can I name The slayer. For the quest, 'twere well, methinks That Phoebus, who proposed the riddle, himself Should give the answer--who the murderer was.

OEDIPUS

Well argued; but no living man can hope To force the gods to speak against their will.

CHORUS

May I then say what seems next best to me?

OEDIPUS

Aye, if there be a third best, tell it too.

CHORUS

My liege, if any man sees eye to eye With our lord Phoebus, 'tis our prophet, lord Teiresias; he of all men best might guide A searcher of this matter to the light.

OEDIPUS

Here too my zeal has nothing lagged, for twice At Creon's instance have I sent to fetch him, And long I marvel why he is not here.

CHORUS

I mind me too of rumors long ago-- Mere gossip.

OEDIPUS

Tell them, I would fain know all.

CHORUS

'Twas said he fell by travelers.

OEDIPUS

So I heard,

But none has seen the man who saw him fall.

CHORUS

Well, if he knows what fear is, he will quail And flee before the terror of thy curse.

OEDIPUS

Words scare not him who blenches not at deeds.

CHORUS

But here is one to arraign him. Lo, at length They bring the god-inspired seer in whom
Above all other men is truth inborn. [Enter TEIRESIAS, led by a boy.]

OEDIPUS

Teiresias, seer who comprehendest all, Lore of the wise and hidden mysteries, High
things of heaven and low things of the earth, Thou knowest, though thy blinded eyes
see naught, What plague infects our city; and we turn To thee, O seer, our one defense
and shield. The purport of the answer that the God Returned to us who sought his
oracle, The messengers have doubtless told thee--how One course alone could rid us
of the pest, To find the murderers of Laius,
And slay them or expel them from the land. Therefore begrudging neither augury Nor
other divination that is thine, O save thyself, thy country, and thy king, Save all from this
defilement of blood shed. On thee we rest. This is man's highest end, To others' service
all his powers to lend.

TEIRESIAS

Alas, alas, what misery to be wise When wisdom profits nothing! This old lore I had
forgotten; else I were not here.

OEDIPUS

What ails thee? Why this melancholy mood?

TEIRESIAS

Let me go home; prevent me not; 'twere best That thou shouldst bear thy burden and I
mine.

OEDIPUS

For shame! no true-born Theban patriot Would thus withhold the word of prophecy.

TEIRESIAS

Thy words, O king, are wide of the mark, and I For fear lest I too trip like thee...

OEDIPUS

Oh speak,

Withhold not, I adjure thee, if thou know'st, Thy knowledge. We are all thy suppliants.

TEIRESIAS

Aye, for ye all are witless, but my voice Will ne'er reveal my miseries--or thine. [2]

OEDIPUS

What then, thou knowest, and yet willst not speak! Wouldst thou betray us and destroy
the State?

TEIRESIAS

I will not vex myself nor thee. Why ask Thus idly what from me thou shalt not learn?

OEDIPUS

Monster! thy silence would incense a flint. Will nothing loose thy tongue? Can nothing melt thee, Or shake thy dogged taciturnity?

TEIRESIAS

Thou blam'st my mood and seest not thine own Wherewith thou art mated; no, thou taxest me.

OEDIPUS

And who could stay his choler when he heard How insolently thou dost flout the State?

TEIRESIAS

Well, it will come what will, though I be mute.

OEDIPUS

Since come it must, thy duty is to tell me.

TEIRESIAS

I have no more to say; storm as thou willst, And give the rein to all thy pent-up rage.

OEDIPUS

Yea, I am wroth, and will not stint my words, But speak my whole mind. Thou methinks thou art he, Who planned the crime, aye, and performed it too, All save the assassination; and if thou Hadst not been blind, I had been sworn to boot That thou alone didst do the bloody deed.

TEIRESIAS

Is it so? Then I charge thee to abide By thine own proclamation; from this day Speak not to these or me. Thou art the man, Thou the accursed polluter of this land.

OEDIPUS

Vile slanderer, thou blurtest forth these taunts, And think'st forsooth as seer to go scot free.

TEIRESIAS

Yea, I am free, strong in the strength of truth.

OEDIPUS

Who was thy teacher? not methinks thy art.

TEIRESIAS

Thou, goading me against my will to speak.

OEDIPUS

What speech? repeat it and resolve my doubt.

TEIRESIAS

Didst miss my sense wouldst thou goad me on?

OEDIPUS

I but half caught thy meaning; say it again.

TEIRESIAS

I say thou art the murderer of the man Whose murderer thou pursuest.

OEDIPUS

Thou shalt rue it

Twice to repeat so gross a calumny.

TEIRESIAS

Must I say more to aggravate thy rage?

OEDIPUS

Say all thou wilt; it will be but waste of breath.

TEIRESIAS

I say thou livest with thy nearest kin In infamy, unwitting in thy shame.

OEDIPUS

Think'st thou for aye unscathed to wag thy tongue?

TEIRESIAS

Yea, if the might of truth can aught prevail.

OEDIPUS

With other men, but not with thee, for thou In ear, wit, eye, in everything art blind.

TEIRESIAS

Poor fool to utter gibes at me which all Here present will cast back on thee ere long.

OEDIPUS

Offspring of endless Night, thou hast no power O'er me or any man who sees the sun.

TEIRESIAS

No, for thy weird is not to fall by me. I leave to Apollo what concerns the god.

OEDIPUS

Is this a plot of Creon, or thine own?

TEIRESIAS

Not Creon, thou thyself art thine own bane.

OEDIPUS

O wealth and empyr and skill by skill Outwitted in the battlefield of life, What spite and envy follow in your train! See, for this crown the State conferred on me. A gift, a thing I sought not, for this crown The trusty Creon, my familiar friend, Hath lain in wait to oust me and suborned This mountebank, this juggling charlatan, This tricky beggar-priest, for gain alone Keen-eyed, but in his proper art stone-blind. Say, sirrah, hast thou ever proved thyself A prophet? When the riddling Sphinx was here Why hadst thou no deliverance for this folk? And yet the riddle was not to be solved By guess-work but required the prophet's art; Wherein thou wast found lacking; neither birds Nor sign from heaven helped thee, but / came, The simple Oedipus; / stopped her mouth By mother wit, untaught of auguries. This is the man whom thou wouldst undermine, In hope to reign with Creon in my stead. Methinks that thou and thine abettor soon Will rue your plot to drive the scapegoat out. Thank thy grey hairs that thou hast still to learn What chastisement such arrogance deserves.

CHORUS

To us it seems that both the seer and thou, O Oedipus, have spoken angry words. This is no time to wrangle but consult How best we may fulfill the oracle.

TEIRESIAS

King as thou art, free speech at least is mine To make reply; in this I am thy peer. I own no lord but Loxias; him I serve And ne'er can stand enrolled as Creon's man. Thus then I answer: since thou hast not spared To twit me with my blindness--thou hast eyes, Yet see'st not in what misery thou art fallen, Nor where thou dwellest nor with whom for mate. Dost know thy lineage? Nay, thou know'st it not, And all unwitting art a double foe To thine own kin, the living and the dead; Aye and the dogging curse of mother and sire One day shall drive thee, like a two-edged sword, Beyond our borders, and the eyes that now See clear shall henceforward endless night. Ah whither shall thy bitter cry not reach, What crag in all Cithaeron but shall then Reverberate thy wail, when thou hast found With what a hymeneal thou wast borne Home, but to no fair haven, on the gale! Aye, and a flood of ills thou guessest not Shall set thyself and children in one line. Flout then both Creon and my words, for none Of mortals shall be stricken worse than thou.

OEDIPUS

Must I endure this fellow's insolence? A murrain on thee! Get thee hence! Begone Avaunt! and never cross my threshold more.

TEIRESIAS

I ne'er had come hadst thou not bidden me.

OEDIPUS

I know not thou wouldst utter folly, else Long hadst thou waited to be summoned here.

TEIRESIAS

Such am I--as it seems to thee a fool, But to the parents who begat thee, wise.

OEDIPUS

What sayest thou--"parents"? Who begat me, speak?

TEIRESIAS

This day shall be thy birth-day, and thy grave.

OEDIPUS

Thou lov'st to speak in riddles and dark words.

TEIRESIAS

In reading riddles who so skilled as thou?

OEDIPUS

Twit me with that wherein my greatness lies.

TEIRESIAS

And yet this very greatness proved thy bane.

OEDIPUS

No matter if I saved the commonwealth.

TEIRESIAS

'Tis time I left thee. Come, boy, take me home.

OEDIPUS

Aye, take him quickly, for his presence irks And lets me; gone, thou canst not plague me more.

TEIRESIAS

I go, but first will tell thee why I came. Thy frown I dread not, for thou canst not harm me. Hear then: this man whom thou hast sought to arrest With threats and warrants this long while, the wretch Who murdered Laius--that man is here. He passes for an alien in the land But soon shall prove a Theban, native born. And yet his fortune brings him little joy; For blind of seeing, clad in beggar's weeds, For purple robes, and leaning on his staff, To a strange land he soon shall grope his way. And of the children, inmates of his home, He shall be proved the brother and the sire, Of her who bare him son and husband both, Co-partner, and assassin of his sire. Go in and ponder this, and if thou find That I have missed the mark, henceforth declare I have no wit nor skill in prophecy. [Exeunt TEIRESIAS and OEDIPUS]

CHORUS

(Str. 1)
Who is he by voice immortal named from Pythia's rocky cell, Doer of foul deeds of bloodshed, horrors that no tongue can tell?

A foot for flight he needs Fleeter than storm-swift steeds, For on his heels doth follow,
Armed with the lightnings of his Sire, Apollo.

Like sleuth-hounds too
The Fates pursue.

(Ant. 1)
Yea, but now flashed forth the summons from Parnassus' snowy peak, "Near and far the undiscovered doer of this murder seek!"

Now like a sullen bull he roves Through forest brakes and upland groves, And vainly seeks to fly The doom that ever nigh Flits o'er his head,

Still by the avenging Phoebus sped,

The voice divine,
From Earth's mid shrine.

(Str. 2)
Sore perplexed am I by the words of the master seer. Are they true, are they false? I know not and bridle my tongue for

fear, Fluttered with vague surmise; nor present nor future is clear. Quarrel of ancient date or in days still near know I none Twixt the Labdacidan house and our ruler, Polybus' son. Proof is there none: how then can I challenge our King's good name, How in a blood-feud join for an untracked deed of shame?

(Ant. 2)
All wise are Zeus and Apollo, and nothing is hid from their ken; They are gods; and in wits a man may surpass his fellow men; But that a mortal seer knows more than I know-where Hath this been proven? Or how without sign assured, can I blame Him who saved our State when the winged songstress came, Tested and tried in the light of us all, like gold assayed? How can I now assent when a crime is on Oedipus laid?

CREON

Friends, countrymen, I learn King Oedipus Hath laid against me a most grievous charge, And come to you protesting. If he deems That I have harmed or injured him in aught By word or deed in this our present trouble, I care not to prolong the span of life, Thus ill-reputed; for the calumny Hits not a single blot, but blasts my name, If by the general voice I am denounced False to the State and false by you my friends.

CHORUS

This taunt, it well may be, was blurted out In petulance, not spoken advisedly.

CREON

Did any dare pretend that it was I Prompted the seer to utter a forged charge?

CHORUS

Such things were said; with what intent I know not.

CREON

Were not his wits and vision all astray When upon me he fixed this monstrous charge?

CHORUS

I know not; to my sovereign's acts I am blind. But lo, he comes to answer for himself.
[Enter OEDIPUS.]

OEDIPUS

Sirrah, what mak'st thou here? Dost thou presume To approach my doors, thou brazen-faced rogue, My murderer and the filcher of my crown? Come, answer this, didst thou detect in me Some touch of cowardice or witlessness, That made thee undertake this enterprise? I seemed forsooth too simple to perceive The serpent stealing on me in the dark, Or else too weak to scotch it when I saw. This *thou* art witless seeking to possess Without a following or friends the crown, A prize that followers and wealth must win.

CREON

Attend me. Thou hast spoken, 'tis my turn To make reply. Then having heard me, judge.

OEDIPUS

Thou art glib of tongue, but I am slow to learn Of thee; I know too well thy venomous hate.

CREON

First I would argue out this very point.

OEDIPUS

O argue not that thou art not a rogue.

CREON

If thou dost count a virtue stubbornness, Unschool'd by reason, thou art much astray.

OEDIPUS

If thou dost hold a kinsman may be wronged, And no pains follow, thou art much to seek.

CREON

Therein thou judgest rightly, but this wrong That thou allegest--tell me what it is.

OEDIPUS
Didst thou or didst thou not advise that I Should call the priest?

CREON

Yes, and I stand to it.

OEDIPUS
Tell me how long is it since Laius...

CREON
Since Laius...? I follow not thy drift.

OEDIPUS
By violent hands was spirited away.

CREON
In the dim past, a many years ago.

OEDIPUS
Did the same prophet then pursue his craft?

CREON
Yes, skilled as now and in no less repute.

OEDIPUS
Did he at that time ever glance at me?

CREON
Not to my knowledge, not when I was by.

OEDIPUS
But was no search and inquisition made?

CREON
Surely full quest was made, but nothing learnt.

OEDIPUS
Why failed the seer to tell his story *then*?

CREON
I know not, and not knowing hold my tongue.

OEDIPUS
This much thou knowest and canst surely tell.

CREON

What's mean'st thou? All I know I will declare.

OEDIPUS

But for thy prompting never had the seer Ascribed to me the death of Laius.

CREON

If so he thou knowest best; but I Would put thee to the question in my turn.

OEDIPUS

Question and prove me murderer if thou canst.

CREON

Then let me ask thee, didst thou wed my sister?

OEDIPUS

A fact so plain I cannot well deny.

CREON

And as thy consort queen she shares the throne?

OEDIPUS

I grant her freely all her heart desires.

CREON

And with you twain I share the triple rule?

OEDIPUS

Yea, and it is that proves thee a false friend.

CREON

Not so, if thou wouldst reason with thyself, As I with myself. First, I bid thee think, Would any mortal choose a troubled reign Of terrors rather than secure repose, If the same power were given him? As for me, I have no natural craving for the name Of king, preferring to do kingly deeds, And so thinks every sober-minded man. Now all my needs are satisfied through thee, And I have naught to fear; but were I king, My acts would oft run counter to my will. How could a title then have charms for me Above the sweets of boundless influence? I am not so infatuate as to grasp The shadow when I hold the substance fast. Now all men cry me Godspeed! wish me well, And every suitor seeks to gain my ear, If he would hope to win a grace from thee. Why should I leave the better, choose the worse? That were sheer madness, and I am not mad. No such ambition ever tempted me, Nor would I have a share in such intrigue. And if thou doubt me, first to Delphi go, There ascertain if my report was true Of the god's answer; next investigate If with the seer I plotted or conspired, And if it prove so, sentence me to death, Not by thy voice alone, but mine and thine. But O condemn me not, without appeal, On bare suspicion. 'Tis not right to adjudge Bad men at random good, or good men bad. I would

as lief a man should cast away The thing he counts most precious, his own life, As
spurn a true friend. Thou wilt learn in time The truth, for time alone reveals the just; A
villain is detected in a day.

CHORUS

To one who walketh warily his words Commend themselves; swift counsels are not
sure.

OEDIPUS

When with swift strides the stealthy plotter stalks I must be quick too with my
counterplot. To wait his onset passively, for him Is sure success, for me assured defeat.

CREON

What then's thy will? To banish me from the land?

OEDIPUS

I would not have thee banished, no, but dead, That men may mark the wages envy
reaps.

CREON

I see thou wilt not yield, nor credit me.

OEDIPUS

[None but a fool would credit such as thou.] [3]

CREON

Thou art not wise.

OEDIPUS

Wise for myself at least.

CREON

Why not for me too?

OEDIPUS

Why for such a knave?

CREON

Suppose thou lackest sense.

OEDIPUS

Yet kings must rule.

CREON
Not if they rule ill.

OEDIPUS

Oh my Thebans, hear him!

CREON
Thy Thebans? am not I a Theban too?

CHORUS
Cease, princes; lo there comes, and none too soon, Jocasta from the palace. Who so fit
As peacemaker to reconcile your feud? [Enter JOCASTA.]

JOCASTA
Misguided princes, why have ye upraised This wordy wrangle? Are ye not ashamed,
While the whole land lies stricken, thus to voice Your private injuries? Go in, my lord; Go
home, my brother, and forebear to make A public scandal of a petty grief.

CREON
My royal sister, Oedipus, thy lord, Hath bid me choose (O dread alternative!) An
outlaw's exile or a felon's death.

OEDIPUS
Yes, lady; I have caught him practicing Against my royal person his vile arts.

CREON
May I ne'er speed but die accursed, if I In any way am guilty of this charge.

JOCASTA
Believe him, I adjure thee, Oedipus, First for his solemn oath's sake, then for mine, And
for thine elders' sake who wait on thee.

CHORUS
(Str. 1)
Hearken, King, reflect, we pray thee, but not stubborn but relent.

OEDIPUS
Say to what should I consent?

CHORUS
Respect a man whose probity and troth Are known to all and now confirmed by oath.

OEDIPUS
Dost know what grace thou cravest?

CHORUS

Yea, I know.

OEDIPUS

Declare it then and make thy meaning plain.

CHORUS

Brand not a friend whom babbling tongues assail; Let not suspicion 'gainst his oath prevail.

OEDIPUS

Bethink you that in seeking this ye seek In very sooth my death or banishment?

CHORUS

No, by the leader of the host divine! (Str. 2)

Witness, thou Sun, such thought was never mine, Unblest, unfriended may I perish, If ever I such wish did cherish!

But O my heart is desolate

Musing on our stricken State,

Doubly fall'n should discord grow Twixt you twain, to crown our woe.

OEDIPUS

Well, let him go, no matter what it cost me, Or certain death or shameful banishment, For your sake I relent, not his; and him, Where'er he be, my heart shall still abhor.

CREON

Thou art as sullen in thy yielding mood As in thine anger thou wast truculent. Such tempers justly plague themselves the most.

OEDIPUS

Leave me in peace and get thee gone.

CREON

I go,

By thee misjudged, but justified by these. [Exeunt CREON]

CHORUS

(Ant.

Lady, lead indoors thy consort; wherefore longer here delay?

1)

JOCASTA

Tell me first how rose the fray.

CHORUS

Rumors bred unjust suspicious and injustice rankles sore.

JOCASTA

Were both at fault?

CHORUS

Both.

JOCASTA

What was the tale?

CHORUS

Ask me no more. The land is sore distressed; 'Twere better sleeping ills to leave at rest.

OEDIPUS

Strange counsel, friend! I know thou mean'st me well, And yet would'st mitigate and blunt my zeal.

CHORUS

(Ant. 2)

King, I say it once again,
Witless were I proved, insane,
If I lightly put away
Thee my country's prop and stay,
Pilot who, in danger sought,
To a quiet haven brought
Our distracted State; and now
Who can guide us right but thou?

JOCASTA

Let me too, I adjure thee, know, O king, What cause has stirred this unrelenting wrath.

OEDIPUS

I will, for thou art more to me than these. Lady, the cause is Creon and his plots.

JOCASTA

But what provoked the quarrel? make this clear.

OEDIPUS

He points me out as Laius' murderer.

JOCASTA

Of his own knowledge or upon report?

OEDIPUS

He is too cunning to commit himself, And makes a mouthpiece of a knavish seer.

JOCASTA

Then thou mayest ease thy conscience on that score. Listen and I'll convince thee that no man Hath scot or lot in the prophetic art. Here is the proof in brief. An oracle Once came to Laius (I will not say 'Twas from the Delphic god himself, but from His ministers) declaring he was doomed To perish by the hand of his own son, A child that should be born to him by me. Now Laius--so at least report affirmed-- Was murdered on a day by highwaymen, No natives, at a spot where three roads meet. As for the child, it was but three days old, When Laius, its ankles pierced and pinned Together, gave it to be cast away By others on the trackless mountain side. So then Apollo brought it not to pass The child should be his father's murderer, Or the dread terror find accomplishment, And Laius be slain by his own son. Such was the prophet's horoscope. O king, Regard it not. Whate'er the god deems fit To search, himself unaided will reveal.

OEDIPUS

What memories, what wild tumult of the soul Came o'er me, lady, as I heard thee speak!

JOCASTA

What mean'st thou? What has shocked and startled thee?

OEDIPUS

Methought I heard thee say that Laius Was murdered at the meeting of three roads.

JOCASTA

So ran the story that is current still.

OEDIPUS

Where did this happen? Dost thou know the place?

JOCASTA

Phocis the land is called; the spot is where Branch roads from Delphi and from Daulis meet.

OEDIPUS

And how long is it since these things befell?

JOCASTA

'Twas but a brief while were thou wast proclaimed Our country's ruler that the news was brought.

OEDIPUS

O Zeus, what hast thou willed to do with me!

JOCASTA

What is it, Oedipus, that moves thee so?

OEDIPUS

Ask me not yet; tell me the build and height Of Laius? Was he still in manhood's prime?

JOCASTA

Tall was he, and his hair was lightly strewn With silver; and not unlike thee in form.

OEDIPUS

O woe is me! Methinks unwittingly I laid but now a dread curse on myself.

JOCASTA

What say'st thou? When I look upon thee, my king, I tremble.

OEDIPUS

'Tis a dread presentiment

That in the end the seer will prove not blind. One further question to resolve my doubt.

JOCASTA

I quail; but ask, and I will answer all.

OEDIPUS

Had he but few attendants or a train Of armed retainers with him, like a prince?

JOCASTA

They were but five in all, and one of them A herald; Laius in a mule-car rode.

OEDIPUS

Alas! 'tis clear as noonday now. But say, Lady, who carried this report to Thebes?

JOCASTA

A serf, the sole survivor who returned.

OEDIPUS

Haply he is at hand or in the house?

JOCASTA

No, for as soon as he returned and found Thee reigning in the stead of Laius slain, He clasped my hand and supplicated me To send him to the alps and pastures, where He might be farthest from the sight of Thebes. And so I sent him. 'Twas an honest slave And well deserved some better recompense.

OEDIPUS

Fetch him at once. I fain would see the man.

JOCASTA

He shall be brought; but wherefore summon him?

OEDIPUS

Lady, I fear my tongue has overrun Discretion; therefore I would question him.

JOCASTA

Well, he shall come, but may not I too claim To share the burden of thy heart, my king?

OEDIPUS

And thou shalt not be frustrate of thy wish. Now my imaginings have gone so far. Who has a higher claim that thou to hear My tale of dire adventures? Listen then. My sire was Polybus of Corinth, and My mother Merope, a Dorian; And I was held the foremost citizen, Till a strange thing befell me, strange indeed, Yet scarce deserving all the heat it stirred. A roisterer at some banquet, flown with wine, Shouted "Thou art not true son of thy sire." It irked me, but I stomached for the nonce The insult; on the morrow I sought out My mother and my sire and questioned them. They were indignant at the random slur Cast on my parentage and did their best To comfort me, but still the venom'd barb Rankled, for still the scandal spread and grew. So privily without their leave I went To Delphi, and Apollo sent me back Baulked of the knowledge that I came to seek. But other grievous things he prophesied, Woes, lamentations, mourning, portents dire; To wit I should defile my mother's bed And raise up seed too loathsome to behold, And slay the father from whose loins I sprang. Then, lady,--thou shalt hear the very truth-- As I drew near the triple-branching roads, A herald met me and a man who sat In a car drawn by colts--as in thy tale-- The man in front and the old man himself Threatened to thrust me rudely from the path, Then jostled by the charioteer in wrath I struck him, and the old man, seeing this, Watched till I passed and from his car brought down

Full on my head the double-pointed goad. Yet was I quits with him and more; one stroke

Of my good staff sufficed to fling him clean Out of the chariot seat and laid him prone. And so I slew them every one. But if Betwixt this stranger there was aught in common With Laius, who more miserable than I, What mortal could you find more god-abhorred? Wretch whom no sojourner, no citizen May harbor or address, whom all are bound To harry from their homes. And this same curse Was laid on me, and laid by none but me. Yea with these hands all gory I pollute The bed of him I slew. Say, am I vile? Am I not utterly unclean, a wretch Doomed to be banished, and in banishment Forgo the sight of all my dearest ones, And never tread again my native earth; Or else to wed my mother and slay my sire, Polybus, who begat me and upreared? If one should say, this is the handiwork Of some inhuman power, who could blame His judgment? But, ye pure and awful gods, Forbid, forbid that I should see that day! May I be blotted out from living men Ere such a plague spot set on me its brand!

CHORUS

We too, O king, are troubled; but till thou Hast questioned the survivor, still hope on.

OEDIPUS

My hope is faint, but still enough survives To bid me bide the coming of this herd.

JOCASTA

Suppose him here, what wouldst thou learn of him?

OEDIPUS

I'll tell thee, lady; if his tale agrees With thine, I shall have 'scaped calamity.

JOCASTA

And what of special import did I say?

OEDIPUS

In thy report of what the herdsman said Laius was slain by robbers; now if he Still speaks of robbers, not a robber, I Slew him not; "one" with "many" cannot square. But if he says one lonely wayfarer, The last link wanting to my guilt is forged.

JOCASTA

Well, rest assured, his tale ran thus at first, Nor can he now retract what then he said; Not I alone but all our townfolk heard it. E'en should he vary somewhat in his story, He cannot make the death of Laius In any wise jump with the oracle. For Loxias said expressly he was doomed To die by my child's hand, but he, poor babe, He shed no blood, but perished first himself. So much for divination. Henceforth I Will look for signs neither to right nor left.

OEDIPUS

Thou reasonest well. Still I would have thee send And fetch the bondsman hither. See to it.

JOCASTA

That will I straightway. Come, let us within. I would do nothing that my lord mislikes.
[Exeunt OEDIPUS and JOCASTA]

CHORUS

(Str.

1)

My lot be still to lead

The life of innocence and fly Irreverence in word or deed,

To follow still those laws ordained on high Whose birthplace is the bright ethereal sky
No mortal birth they own,
Olympus their progenitor alone: Ne'er shall they slumber in oblivion cold, The god in them is strong and grows not old.

(Ant. 1)

Of insolence is bred The tyrant; insolence full blown,

With empty riches surfeited, Scales the precipitous height and grasps the throne. Then topples o'er and lies in ruin prone; No foothold on that dizzy steep. But O may Heaven the true patriot keep Who burns with emulous zeal to serve the State. God is my help and hope, on him I wait.

(Str. 2)

But the proud sinner, or in word or deed, That will not Justice heed,
Nor reverence the shrine
Of images divine,
Perdition seize his vain imaginings, If, urged by greed profane,
He grasps at ill-got gain,
And lays an impious hand on holiest things. Who when such deeds are done Can hope heaven's bolts to shun? If sin like this to honor can aspire, Why dance I still and lead the sacred choir?

(Ant. 2)

No more I'll seek earth's central oracle, Or Abae's hallowed cell,
Nor to Olympia bring
My votive offering.
If before all God's truth be not bade plain. O Zeus, reveal thy might,
King, if thou'rt named aright Omnipotent, all-seeing, as of old; For Laius is forgot;
His weird, men heed it not;
Apollo is forsook and faith grows cold. [Enter JOCASTA.]

JOCASTA

My lords, ye look amazed to see your queen With wreaths and gifts of incense in her hands. I had a mind to visit the high shrines, For Oedipus is overwrought, alarmed With terrors manifold. He will not use His past experience, like a man of sense, To judge the present need, but lends an ear To any croaker if he augurs ill. Since then my counsels naught avail, I turn To thee, our present help in time of trouble, Apollo, Lord Lycean, and to thee My prayers and supplications here I bring. Lighten us, lord, and cleanse us from this curse! For now we all are cowed like mariners Who see their helmsman dumbstruck in the storm. [Enter Corinthian MESSENGER.]

MESSENGER

My masters, tell me where the palace is Of Oedipus; or better, where's the king.

CHORUS

Here is the palace and he bides within; This is his queen the mother of his children.

MESSENGER

All happiness attend her and the house, Blessed is her husband and her marriage-bed.

JOCASTA

My greetings to thee, stranger; thy fair words Deserve a like response. But tell me why Thou comest--what thy need or what thy news.

MESSENGER

Good for thy consort and the royal house.

JOCASTA

What may it be? Whose messenger art thou?

MESSENGER

The Isthmian commons have resolved to make Thy husband king--so 'twas reported there.

JOCASTA

What! is not aged Polybus still king?

MESSENGER

No, verily; he's dead and in his grave.

JOCASTA

What! is he dead, the sire of Oedipus?

MESSENGER

If I speak falsely, may I die myself.

JOCASTA

Quick, maiden, bear these tidings to my lord. Ye god-sent oracles, where stand ye now! This is the man whom Oedipus long shunned, In dread to prove his murderer; and now He dies in nature's course, not by his hand. [Enter OEDIPUS.]

OEDIPUS

My wife, my queen, Jocasta, why hast thou Summoned me from my palace?

JOCASTA

Hear this man,

And as thou hearest judge what has become Of all those awe-inspiring oracles.

OEDIPUS

Who is this man, and what his news for me?

JOCASTA

He comes from Corinth and his message this: Thy father Polybus hath passed away.

OEDIPUS

What? let me have it, stranger, from thy mouth.

MESSENGER

If I must first make plain beyond a doubt My message, know that Polybus is dead.

OEDIPUS

By treachery, or by sickness visited?

MESSENGER

One touch will send an old man to his rest.

OEDIPUS

So of some malady he died, poor man.

MESSENGER

Yes, having measured the full span of years.

OEDIPUS

Out on it, lady! why should one regard The Pythian hearth or birds that scream i' the air?
Did they not point at me as doomed to slay My father? but he's dead and in his grave
And here am I who ne'er unsheathed a sword; Unless the longing for his absent son
Killed him and so / slew him in a sense. But, as they stand, the oracles are dead-- Dust,
ashes, nothing, dead as Polybus.

JOCASTA

Say, did not I foretell this long ago?

OEDIPUS

Thou didst: but I was misled by my fear.

JOCASTA

Then let I no more weigh upon thy soul.

OEDIPUS

Must I not fear my mother's marriage bed.

JOCASTA

Why should a mortal man, the sport of chance, With no assured foreknowledge, be
afraid? Best live a careless life from hand to mouth. This wedlock with thy mother fear
not thou. How oft it chanceth that in dreams a man Has wed his mother! He who least
regards Such brainsick phantasies lives most at ease.

OEDIPUS

I should have shared in full thy confidence, Were not my mother living; since she lives
Though half convinced I still must live in dread.

JOCASTA

And yet thy sire's death lights out darkness much.

OEDIPUS

Much, but my fear is touching her who lives.

MESSENGER

Who may this woman be whom thus you fear?

OEDIPUS

Merope, stranger, wife of Polybus.

MESSENGER

And what of her can cause you any fear?

OEDIPUS

A heaven-sent oracle of dread import.

MESSENGER

A mystery, or may a stranger hear it?

OEDIPUS

Aye, 'tis no secret. Loxias once foretold That I should mate with mine own mother, and
shed With my own hands the blood of my own sire. Hence Corinth was for many a year
to me A home distant; and I trove abroad, But missed the sweetest sight, my parents'
face.

MESSENGER

Was this the fear that exiled thee from home?

OEDIPUS

Yea, and the dread of slaying my own sire.

MESSENGER

Why, since I came to give thee pleasure, King, Have I not rid thee of this second fear?

OEDIPUS

Well, thou shalt have due guerdon for thy pains.

MESSENGER

Well, I confess what chiefly made me come Was hope to profit by thy coming home.

OEDIPUS

Nay, I will ne'er go near my parents more.

MESSENGER

My son, 'tis plain, thou know'st not what thou doest.

OEDIPUS

How so, old man? For heaven's sake tell me all.

MESSENGER

If this is why thou dreadest to return.

OEDIPUS

Yea, lest the god's word be fulfilled in me.

MESSENGER

Lest through thy parents thou shouldst be accursed?

OEDIPUS

This and none other is my constant dread.

MESSENGER

Dost thou not know thy fears are baseless all?

OEDIPUS

How baseless, if I am their very son?

MESSENGER

Since Polybus was naught to thee in blood.

OEDIPUS

What say'st thou? was not Polybus my sire?

MESSENGER

As much thy sire as I am, and no more.

OEDIPUS

My sire no more to me than one who is naught?

MESSENGER

Since I begat thee not, no more did he.

OEDIPUS

What reason had he then to call me son?

MESSENGER

Know that he took thee from my hands, a gift.

OEDIPUS

Yet, if no child of his, he loved me well.

MESSENGER

A childless man till then, he warmed to thee.

OEDIPUS

A foundling or a purchased slave, this child?

MESSENGER

I found thee in Cithaeron's wooded glens.

OEDIPUS

What led thee to explore those upland glades?

MESSENGER

My business was to tend the mountain flocks.

OEDIPUS

A vagrant shepherd journeying for hire?

MESSENGER

True, but thy savior in that hour, my son.

OEDIPUS

My savior? from what harm? what ailed me then?

MESSENGER

Those ankle joints are evidence enow.

OEDIPUS

Ah, why remind me of that ancient sore?

MESSENGER

I loosed the pin that riveted thy feet.

OEDIPUS

Yes, from my cradle that dread brand I bore.

MESSENGER

Whence thou deriv'st the name that still is thine.

OEDIPUS

Who did it? I adjure thee, tell me who Say, was it father, mother?

MESSENGER

I know not.

The man from whom I had thee may know more.

OEDIPUS

What, did another find me, not thyself?

MESSENGER

Not I; another shepherd gave thee me.

OEDIPUS

Who was he? Would'st thou know again the man?

MESSENGER

He passed indeed for one of Laius' house.

OEDIPUS

The king who ruled the country long ago?

MESSENGER

The same: he was a herdsman of the king.

OEDIPUS

And is he living still for me to see him?

MESSENGER

His fellow-countrymen should best know that.

OEDIPUS

Doth any bystander among you know The herd he speaks of, or by seeing him Afield or in the city? answer straight! The hour hath come to clear this business up.

CHORUS

Methinks he means none other than the hind Whom thou anon wert fain to see; but that Our queen Jocasta best of all could tell.

OEDIPUS

Madam, dost know the man we sent to fetch? Is the same of whom the stranger speaks?

JOCASTA

Who is the man? What matter? Let it be. 'Twere waste of thought to weigh such idle words.

OEDIPUS

No, with such guiding clues I cannot fail To bring to light the secret of my birth.

JOCASTA

Oh, as thou carest for thy life, give o'er This quest. Enough the anguish / endure.

OEDIPUS

Be of good cheer; though I be proved the son Of a bondwoman, aye, through three descents Triply a slave, thy honor is unsmirched.

JOCASTA

Yet humor me, I pray thee; do not this.

OEDIPUS

I cannot; I must probe this matter home.

JOCASTA

'Tis for thy sake I advise thee for the best.

OEDIPUS

I grow impatient of this best advice.

JOCASTA

Ah mayst thou ne'er discover who thou art!

OEDIPUS

Go, fetch me here the herd, and leave yon woman To glory in her pride of ancestry.

JOCASTA

O woe is thee, poor wretch! With that last word I leave thee, henceforth silent evermore.
[Exit JOCASTA]

CHORUS

Why, Oedipus, why stung with passionate grief Hath the queen thus departed? Much I fear From this dead calm will burst a storm of woes.

OEDIPUS

Let the storm burst, my fixed resolve still holds, To learn my lineage, be it ne'er so low. It may be she with all a woman's pride Thinks scorn of my base parentage. But I Who rank myself as Fortune's favorite child, The giver of good gifts, shall not be shamed. She is my mother and the changing moons My brethren, and with them I wax and wane. Thus sprung why should I fear to trace my birth? Nothing can make me other than I am.

CHORUS

(Str.)

If my soul prophetic err not, if my wisdom aught avail,

Thee, Cithaeron, I shall hail, As the nurse and foster-mother of our Oedipus shall greet
Ere tomorrow's full moon rises, and exalt thee as is meet. Dance and song shall hymn
thy praises, lover of our royal race.

Phoebus, may my words find grace!

(Ant.)

Child, who bare thee, nymph or goddess? sure thy sure was more than man,

Haply the hill-roamer Pan.

Of did Loxias beget thee, for he haunts the upland wold; Or Cyllene's lord, or Bacchus,
dweller on the hilltops cold? Did some Heliconian Oread give him thee, a new-born joy?

Nymphs with whom he love to toy?

OEDIPUS

Elders, if I, who never yet before Have met the man, may make a guess, methinks I see
the herdsman who we long have sought; His time-worn aspect matches with the years
Of yonder aged messenger; besides I seem to recognize the men who bring him As
servants of my own. But you, perchance, Having in past days known or seen the herd,
May better by sure knowledge my surmise.

CHORUS

I recognize him; one of Laius' house; A simple hind, but true as any man. [Enter
HERDSMAN.]

OEDIPUS

Corinthian, stranger, I address thee first, Is this the man thou meanest!

MESSENGER

This is he.

OEDIPUS

And now old man, look up and answer all I ask thee. Wast thou once of Laius' house?

HERDSMAN

I was, a thrall, not purchased but home-bred.

OEDIPUS

What was thy business? how wast thou employed?

HERDSMAN

The best part of my life I tended sheep.

OEDIPUS

What were the pastures thou didst most frequent?

HERDSMAN

Cithaeron and the neighboring alps.

OEDIPUS

Then there Thou must have known yon man, at least by fame?

HERDSMAN

Yon man? in what way? what man dost thou mean?

OEDIPUS

The man here, having met him in past times...

HERDSMAN

Off-hand I cannot call him well to mind.

MESSENGER

No wonder, master. But I will revive His blunted memories. Sure he can recall What time together both we drove our flocks, He two, I one, on the Cithaeron range, For three long summers; I his mate from spring Till rose Arcturus; then in winter time I led mine home, he his to Laius' folds. Did these things happen as I say, or no?

HERDSMAN

'Tis long ago, but all thou say'st is true.

MESSENGER

Well, thou mast then remember giving me A child to rear as my own foster-son?

HERDSMAN

Why dost thou ask this question? What of that?

MESSENGER

Friend, he that stands before thee was that child.

HERDSMAN

A plague upon thee! Hold thy wanton tongue!

OEDIPUS

Softly, old man, rebuke him not; thy words Are more deserving chastisement than his.

HERDSMAN

O best of masters, what is my offense?

OEDIPUS

Not answering what he asks about the child.

HERDSMAN

He speaks at random, babbles like a fool.

OEDIPUS

If thou lack'st grace to speak, I'll loose thy tongue.

HERDSMAN

For mercy's sake abuse not an old man.

OEDIPUS

Arrest the villain, seize and pinion him!

HERDSMAN

Alack, alack!

What have I done? what wouldst thou further learn?

OEDIPUS

Didst give this man the child of whom he asks?

HERDSMAN

I did; and would that I had died that day!

OEDIPUS

And die thou shalt unless thou tell the truth.

HERDSMAN

But, if I tell it, I am doubly lost.

OEDIPUS

The knave methinks will still prevaricate.

HERDSMAN

Nay, I confessed I gave it long ago.

OEDIPUS

Whence came it? was it thine, or given to thee?

HERDSMAN

I had it from another, 'twas not mine.

OEDIPUS
From whom of these our townsmen, and what house?

HERDSMAN
Forbear for God's sake, master, ask no more.

OEDIPUS
If I must question thee again, thou'rt lost.

HERDSMAN
Well then--it was a child of Laius' house.

OEDIPUS
Slave-born or one of Laius' own race?

HERDSMAN
Ah
I stand upon the perilous edge of speech. me!

OEDIPUS
And I of hearing, but I still must hear.

HERDSMAN
Know then the child was by repute his own, But she within, thy consort best could tell.

OEDIPUS
What! she, she gave it thee?

HERDSMAN
'Tis so, my king.

OEDIPUS
With what intent?

HERDSMAN
To make away with it.

OEDIPUS
What, she its mother.

HERDSMAN
Fearing a dread weird.

OEDIPUS
What weird?

HERDSMAN

'Twas told that he should slay his sire.

OEDIPUS
What didst thou give it then to this old man?

HERDSMAN
Through pity, master, for the babe. I thought He'd take it to the country whence he came; But he preserved it for the worst of woes. For if thou art in sooth what this man saith, God pity thee! thou wast to misery born.

OEDIPUS
Ah me! ah me! all brought to pass, all true! O light, may I behold thee nevermore! I stand a wretch, in birth, in wedlock cursed, A parricide, incestuously, triply cursed! [Exit OEDIPUS]

CHORUS
(Str. 1)

Races of mortal man
Whose life is but a span,

I count ye but the shadow of a shade!

For he who most doth know Of bliss, hath but the show;

A moment, and the visions pale and fade. Thy fall, O Oedipus, thy piteous fall Warns me none born of women blest to call.

(Ant. 1)

For he of marksmen best, O Zeus, outshot the rest,

And won the prize supreme of wealth and power.

By him the vulture maid Was quelled, her witchery laid;

He rose our savior and the land's strong tower. We hailed thee king and from that day adored Of mighty Thebes the universal lord.

(Str. 2)

O heavy hand of fate!
Who now more desolate,

Whose tale more sad than thine, whose lot more dire?

O Oedipus, discrowned head, Thy cradle was thy marriage bed;

One harborage sufficed for son and sire. How could the soil thy father eared so long
Endure to bear in silence such a wrong?

(Ant. 2)

All-seeing Time hath caught Guilt, and to justice brought

The son and sire commingled in one bed.

O child of Laius' ill-starred race Would I had ne'er beheld thy face;

I raise for thee a dirge as o'er the dead. Yet, sooth to say, through thee I drew new
breath, And now through thee I feel a second death. [Enter SECOND MESSENGER.]

SECOND MESSENGER

Most grave and reverend senators of Thebes, What Deeds ye soon must hear, what
sights behold How will ye mourn, if, true-born patriots, Ye reverence still the race of
Labdacus! Not Ister nor all Phasis' flood, I ween, Could wash away the blood-stains
from this house, The ills it shrouds or soon will bring to light, Ills wrought of malice, not
unwittingly. The worst to bear are self-inflicted wounds.

CHORUS

Grievous enough for all our tears and groans Our past calamities; what canst thou add?

SECOND MESSENGER

My tale is quickly told and quickly heard. Our sovereign lady queen Jocasta's dead.

CHORUS

Alas, poor queen! how came she by her death?

SECOND MESSENGER

By her own hand. And all the horror of it, Not having seen, yet cannot comprehend.
Nathless, as far as my poor memory serves, I will relate the unhappy lady's woe. When
in her frenzy she had passed inside The vestibule, she hurried straight to win The
bridal-chamber, clutching at her hair With both her hands, and, once within the room,
She shut the doors behind her with a crash. "Laius," she cried, and called her husband
dead Long, long ago; her thought was of that child By him begot, the son by whom the
sire Was murdered and the mother left to breed With her own seed, a monstrous
progeny. Then she bewailed the marriage bed whereon Poor wretch, she had

conceived a double brood, Husband by husband, children by her child. What happened after that I cannot tell, Nor how the end befell, for with a shriek Burst on us Oedipus; all eyes were fixed On Oedipus, as up and down he strode, Nor could we mark her agony to the end. For stalking to and fro "A sword!" he cried, "Where is the wife, no wife, the teeming womb That bore a double harvest, me and mine?" And in his frenzy some supernal power (No mortal, surely, none of us who watched him) Guided his footsteps; with a terrible shriek, As though one beckoned him, he crashed against The folding doors, and from their staples forced The wrenched bolts and hurled himself within. Then we beheld the woman hanging there, A running noose entwined about her neck. But when he saw her, with a maddened roar He loosed the cord; and when her wretched corpse Lay stretched on earth, what followed--O 'twas dread! He tore the golden brooches that upheld Her queenly robes, upraised them high and smote Full on his eye-balls, uttering words like these: "No more shall ye behold such sights of woe, Deeds I have suffered and myself have wrought; Henceforward quenched in darkness shall ye see Those ye should ne'er have seen; now blind to those Whom, when I saw, I vainly yearned to know."

Such was the burden of his moan, whereto, Not once but oft, he struck with his hand uplift His eyes, and at each stroke the ensanguined orbs Bedewed his beard, not oozing drop by drop, But one black gory downpour, thick as hail. Such evils, issuing from the double source, Have whelmed them both, confounding man and wife. Till now the storied fortune of this house Was fortunate indeed; but from this day Woe, lamentation, ruin, death, disgrace, All ills that can be named, all, all are theirs.

CHORUS

But hath he still no respite from his pain?

SECOND MESSENGER

He cries, "Unbar the doors and let all Thebes Behold the slayer of his sire, his mother's--" That shameful word my lips may not repeat. He vows to fly self-banished from the land, Nor stay to bring upon his house the curse Himself had uttered; but he has no strength Nor one to guide him, and his torture's more Than man can suffer, as yourselves will see. For lo, the palace portals are unbarred, And soon ye shall behold a sight so sad That he who must abhorred would pity it. [Enter OEDIPUS blinded.]

CHORUS

Woeful sight! more woeful none These sad eyes have looked upon. Whence this madness? None can tell Who did cast on thee his spell, prowling all thy life around, Leaping with a demon bound. Hapless wretch! how can I brook On thy misery to look? Though to gaze on thee I yearn, Much to question, much to learn, Horror-struck away I turn.

OEDIPUS

Ah me! ah woe is me!
Ah whither am I borne!

How like a ghost forlorn
My voice flits from me on the air! On, on the demon goads. The end, ah where?

CHORUS
An end too dread to tell, too dark to see.

OEDIPUS
(Str. 1)
Dark, dark! The horror of darkness, like a shroud, Wraps me and bears me on through
mist and cloud. Ah me, ah me! What spasms athwart me shoot, What pangs of
agonizing memory?

CHORUS
No marvel if in such a plight thou feel'st The double weight of past and present woes.

OEDIPUS
(Ant. 1)
Ah friend, still loyal, constant still and kind,

Thou carest for the blind.

I know thee near, and though bereft of eyes,

Thy voice I recognize.

CHORUS
O doer of dread deeds, how couldst thou mar Thy vision thus? What demon goaded
thee?

OEDIPUS
(Str. 2)
Apollo, friend, Apollo, he it was

That brought these ills to pass;

But the right hand that dealt the blow

Was mine, none other. How,

How, could I longer see when sight

Brought no delight?

CHORUS
Alas! 'tis as thou sayest.

OEDIPUS

Say, friends, can any look or voice Or touch of love henceforth my heart rejoice?

Haste, friends, no fond delay,

Take the twice cursed away Far from all men,

The man abhorred of gods, accursed of men.

CHORUS

O thy despair well suits thy desperate case. Would I had never looked upon thy face!

OEDIPUS

(Ant. 2)

My curse on him whoe'er unrived

The waif's fell fetters and my life revived! He meant me well, yet had he left me there,
He had saved my friends and me a world of care.

CHORUS

I too had wished it so.

OEDIPUS

Then had I never come to shed

My father's blood nor climbed my mother's bed; The monstrous offspring of a womb
defiled, Co-mate of him who gendered me, and child. Was ever man before afflicted
thus, Like Oedipus.

CHORUS

I cannot say that thou hast counseled well, For thou wert better dead than living blind.

OEDIPUS

What's done was well done. Thou canst never shake My firm belief. A truce to
argument. For, had I sight, I know not with what eyes I could have met my father in the
shades, Or my poor mother, since against the twain I sinned, a sin no gallows could
atone. Aye, but, ye say, the sight of children joys A parent's eyes. What, born as mine
were born? No, such a sight could never bring me joy; Nor this fair city with its
battlements, Its temples and the statues of its gods, Sights from which I, now
wretchedst of all, Once ranked the foremost Theban in all Thebes, By my own sentence
am cut off, condemned By my own proclamation 'gainst the wretch, The miscreant by
heaven itself declared Unclean--and of the race of Laius. Thus branded as a felon by
myself, How had I dared to look you in the face? Nay, had I known a way to choke the
springs Of hearing, I had never shrunk to make A dungeon of this miserable frame, Cut
off from sight and hearing; for 'tis bliss to bide in regions sorrow cannot reach. Why didst
thou harbor me, Cithaeron, why Didst thou not take and slay me? Then I never Had
shown to men the secret of my birth. O Polybus, O Corinth, O my home,

Home of my ancestors (so wast thou called) How fair a nursling then I seemed, how foul
The canker that lay festering in the bud! Now is the blight revealed of root and fruit. Ye
triple high-roads, and thou hidden glen, Coppice, and pass where meet the three-
branched ways, Ye drank my blood, the life-blood these hands spilt, My father's; do ye
call to mind perchance Those deeds of mine ye witnessed and the work I wrought
thereafter when I came to Thebes? O fatal wedlock, thou didst give me birth, And,
having borne me, sowed again my seed, Mingling the blood of fathers, brothers,
children, Brides, wives and mothers, an incestuous brood, All horrors that are wrought
beneath the sun, Horrors so foul to name them were unmeet. O, I adjure you, hide me
anywhere Far from this land, or slay me straight, or cast me Down to the depths of
ocean out of sight. Come hither, deign to touch an abject wretch; Draw near and fear
not; I myself must bear The load of guilt that none but I can share. [Enter CREON.]

CREON

Lo, here is Creon, the one man to grant Thy prayer by action or advice, for he is left the
State's sole guardian in thy stead.

OEDIPUS

Ah me! what words to accost him can I find? What cause has he to trust me? In the past
I have been proved his rancorous enemy.

CREON

Not in derision, Oedipus, I come
Nor to upbraid thee with thy past misdeeds. (To BYSTANDERS) But shame upon you! if
ye feel no sense Of human decencies, at least revere The Sun whose light beholds and
nurtures all. Leave not thus nakedly for all to gaze at A horror neither earth nor rain from
heaven Nor light will suffer. Lead him straight within, For it is seemly that a kinsman's
woes Be heard by kin and seen by kin alone.

OEDIPUS

O listen, since thy presence comes to me A shock of glad surprise--so noble thou, And I
so vile--O grant me one small boon. I ask it not on my behalf, but thine.

CREON

And what the favor thou wouldst crave of me?

OEDIPUS

Forth from thy borders thrust me with all speed; Set me within some vasty desert where
No mortal voice shall greet me any more.

CREON

This had I done already, but I deemed It first behooved me to consult the god.

OEDIPUS

His will was set forth fully--to destroy The parricide, the scoundrel; and I am he.

CREON

Yea, so he spake, but in our present plight 'Twere better to consult the god anew.

OEDIPUS

Dare ye inquire concerning such a wretch?

CREON

Yea, for thyself wouldst credit now his word.

OEDIPUS

Aye, and on thee in all humility

I lay this charge: let her who lies within Receive such burial as thou shalt ordain; Such rites 'tis thine, as brother, to perform. But for myself, O never let my Thebes, The city of my sires, be doomed to bear The burden of my presence while I live. No, let me be a dweller on the hills, On yonder mount Cithaeron, famed as mine, My tomb predestined for me by my sire And mother, while they lived, that I may die Slain as they sought to slay me, when alive. This much I know full surely, nor disease Shall end my days, nor any common chance; For I had ne'er been snatched from death, unless I was predestined to some awful doom.

So be it. I reckon not how Fate deals with me But my unhappy children--for my sons Be not concerned, O Creon, they are men, And for themselves, where'er they be, can fend. But for my daughters twain, poor innocent maids, Who ever sat beside me at the board Sharing my viands, drinking of my cup, For them, I pray thee, care, and, if thou wilt, O might I feel their touch and make my moan. Hear me, O prince, my noble-hearted prince! Could I but blindly touch them with my hands I'd think they still were mine, as when I saw. [ANTIGONE and ISMENE are led in.] What say I? can it be my pretty ones Whose sobs I hear? Has Creon pitied me And sent me my two darlings? Can this be?

CREON

'Tis true; 'twas I procured thee this delight, Knowing the joy they were to thee of old.

OEDIPUS

God speed thee! and as meed for bringing them May Providence deal with thee kindlier Than it has dealt with me! O children mine, Where are ye? Let me clasp you with these hands, A brother's hands, a father's; hands that made Lack-luster sockets of his once bright eyes; Hands of a man who blindly, recklessly, Became your sire by her from whom he sprang. Though I cannot behold you, I must weep In thinking of the evil days to come, The slights and wrongs that men will put upon you. Where'er ye go to feast or festival, No merrymaking will it prove for you, But oft abashed in tears ye will return. And when ye come to marriageable years, Where's the bold wooers who will jeopardize To take unto himself such disrepute As to my children's children still must cling, For what of infamy is lacking here? "Their father slew his father, sowed the seed Where he himself was gendered, and begat These maidens at the source wherefrom he sprang." Such are the gibes that men will cast at you. Who then will wed you? None, I ween, but ye Must pine, poor maids, in single barrenness. O Prince, Menoeceus' son, to thee, I turn,

With the it rests to father them, for we Their natural parents, both of us, are lost. O leave them not to wander poor, unwed, Thy kin, nor let them share my low estate. O pity them so young, and but for thee All destitute. Thy hand upon it, Prince. To you, my children I had much to say, Were ye but ripe to hear. Let this suffice: Pray ye may find some home and live content, And may your lot prove happier than your sire's.

CREON

Thou hast had enough of weeping; pass within.

OEDIPUS

I must obey,

Though 'tis grievous.

CREON

Weep not, everything must have its day.

OEDIPUS

Well I go, but on conditions.

CREON

What thy terms for going, say.

OEDIPUS

Send me from the land an exile.

CREON

Ask this of the gods, not me.

OEDIPUS

But I am the gods' abhorrence.

CREON

Then they soon will grant thy plea.

OEDIPUS

Lead me hence, then, I am willing.

CREON

Come, but let thy children go.

OEDIPUS

Rob me not of these my children!

CREON

Crave not mastery in all,

For the mastery that raised thee was thy bane and wrought thy fall.

CHORUS

Look ye, countrymen and Thebans, this is Oedipus the great, He who knew the Sphinx's riddle and was mightiest in our state. Who of all our townsmen gazed not on his fame with envious eyes? Now, in what a sea of troubles sunk and overwhelmed he lies! Therefore wait to see life's ending ere thou count one mortal blest; Wait till free from pain and sorrow he has gained his final rest.



1.7 Reflection

Having read *Oedipus the King*, would you say you feel pity for Oedipus or you are of the view that he gets what he deserves? Would you say the gods were fair or unfair to him? Do you think he had the opportunity to change the course of events or not? If you were in his place, what would you have done differently?

Unit 2

Structure of *Oedipus the King*

2.1 Introduction

In this unit we focus on how *Oedipus the King* is related to the structure of the Greek tragedy as discussed in Unit 3 of module 4.



2.2 Objectives

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

1. Relate the general structure of the Greek tragic play as explained in Unit 3 of module 4 and the structure of *Oedipus the King*.
2. Discuss the significance of the various parts of the structure of *Oedipus the King*.

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2.3 Reflection

What is the difference between the plot and structure of a play? Can you recall the various parts of the structure of the Greek tragedy?

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2.4 Structure of the Greek Tragedy

Let us remind you of the various parts of the structure of the Greek tragic play as explained in Unit 3, module 4. According to Aristotle the Greek philosopher who studied Greek tragedy, the structure of the tragic play consists of five distinct parts: the prologos, parados, episode, stasimon, and exodus. Each of the five parts plays a particular function. In order to understand the play, or any Greek tragic play for that matter, it is imperative that you acquaint yourself with the structure. (Read module 4 to remind yourself of the details of each section of the structure).

2.5 Questions on the Structure of *Oedipus the King*

2.5.1 Prologos and Parados

Although it is not part of the play as written by Sophocles, the section subtitled 'ARGUMENT' would constitute the prologos as it provides the background information to the play before it begins with the appearance of Oedipus to address the people of Thebes gathered in front of the palace. The words, during a performance, would be spoken by the Chorus, who would have already entered the performance arena (parados).

2.5.2 Episode

Identify the episodes of the play. How many are they? What is their significance in the development of the story? What is the relationship between the Chorus and the episode?

2.5.3 Stasimon

Which parts of the play qualify to be classified as stasimon? How many are they? What is the significance of their role in the general structure of the play? What is the difference between in the role of the stasimon compared to the episode? What is the relationship between the stasimon and the Chorus in the play?

2.5.4 Exodos

The exodos in the play as reproduced above would come after the last stasimon, that is, the words of the Chorus, as quoted below.

CHORUS

Look ye, countrymen and Thebans, this is Oedipus the great,

He who knew the Sphinx's riddle and was mightiest in our state.

Who of all our townsmen gazed not on his fame with envious eyes?

Now, in what a sea of troubles sunk and overwhelmed he lies!

Therefore wait to see life's ending ere thou count one mortal blest;

Wait till free from pain and sorrow he has gained his final rest.

How do you think this stasimon summarises the play's events and sets the stage for the exodos?

Unit 3

Elements of Tragedy and *Oedipus the King*

3.1 Introduction

In this unit we focus on the relationship between *Oedipus the King* and the elements of the Greek tragedy as discussed in Unit 3, module 4.



3.2 Objectives

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

1. Relate the elements of the Greek tragic play as explained in module 4 unit 3 to the contents of *Oedipus the King*.
2. Discuss the significance of the various parts of *Oedipus the King* in relation to the elements of tragedy.



3.3 Reflection

Can you recall the elements of the Greek tragic play?

3.4 Elements of the Greek Tragedy

The elements of tragedy as explained in module 4 unit 3 are: tragic hero, hamartia, peripeteia, anagnorisis, catharsis, and the three unities. You are advised to re-read these elements as presented in module 4.

3.5 Questions on the Elements of *Oedipus the King*

3.5.1 Tragic Hero

Give reasons why Oedipus qualifies to be classified as a tragic hero.

3.5.2 Hamartia

What do you think is Oedipus' main weakness or character flaw? Is he guilty of hubris? Give specific examples of situations where Oedipus' character flaw is manifested in terms of both his actions and words.

3.5.3 Peripeteia

In which episode do you think the peripeteia occurs? Is there a specific occurrence which you think constitutes the peripeteia?

3.5.4 Anagnorisis

In which episode and at what specific point does Oedipus undergo and anagnorisis? What words does he utter which confirm his realisation of being wrong?

3.5.5 Catharsis

After reading the entire play, does it leave you with a feeling of catharsis? Do you feel as if justice has been done to Oedipus?

3.5.6 The Three Unities

(i) Time: The action of the play, from the time the suppliants gather in front of Oedipus' palace to the time Oedipus walks out in shame and the last stasimon, occurs within a period of twenty-four hours. This does not include the events mentioned in the prologos and the exposition as having occurred in the distant or immediate past.

What are the advantages and disadvantages, if any, of having all the action end with a twenty-four hour cycle?

(ii) Place: All the core action, as seen on stage, takes place in front of the King's palace or within. Events that take place away from the palace area re merely narrated.

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What complications do you think would be introduced in the staging of the play if all the actions that are merely narrated, such as the fight between Oedipus and Laius at the crossroads, were to be shown on stage?

(iii) Action: What do you think would happened to the development of the story-line and plot of *Oedipus the King* if the second episode were removed from the play? Would the play still maintain its essence?



3.6 Activity

Write down from memory the main points of what you have learnt in this unit.

Unit 4

Characters, Themes and Symbols of *Oedipus the King*

4.1 Introduction

The main aim of this unit is to give you an idea of the nature of the major themes, symbols and characters of *Oedipus the King*. This should enable you to get a better understanding of the contents of the play.



4.2 Objectives

By the end of the unit you should be able to:

1. Explain the key themes of the play.
2. Discuss the key characters of the play.
3. Explain the relationship between the themes and characters of the play.

4.3 Characters

4.3.1 Oedipus

The protagonist. He becomes king before the action of *Oedipus the King* begins. He is well known for his intelligence, wisdom and ability to solve riddles. Oedipus is also respected, powerful, self-confident, full of determination and compassionate toward the citizens of Thebes. However, he is also rash, self-opinionated, stubborn, arrogant and easily angered.

- (i) To what extent does Oedipus' past affect his present circumstances?
- (ii) To what extent, and in what ways, does Oedipus' stubbornness, self-opinionatedness, rashness and arrogance contribute to his eventual downfall?
- (iii) Do you think Oedipus could have avoided his fate?

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4.3.2 Jocasta

Oedipus' mother and wife, and Creon's sister. She is also wife of the deceased King Laius, father of Oedipus, with whom she schemed to thwart the oracle by killing

Oedipus when he was a baby. Unlike her husband, however, she lives to see the fulfilment of the prophecy she and Laius believed had been thwarted. She initially scoffs at Teiresias' prophecies and tries to reassure Oedipus of the falsity of the prophecies. However, as the truth slowly flows, she realises Oedipus' true identity before he does, and commits suicide.

- (i) Jocasta only gets involved in the action towards the end of the play. How do you think this affects the development of the story?
- (ii) Do you think there is any significance in the fact that, unlike her husband Laius who dies without realising that the prophecy about Oedipus was fulfilled, Jocasta realises the truth before she dies?

4.3.3 Creon

Oedipus' uncle and brother-in-law, a brother to Jocasta. He is calm and rational and, unlike Oedipus, does not make hasty decisions.

- (i) What factors contribute to the conflict between Oedipus and Creon?
- (ii) From the evidence in the text, would you say Creon is power-hungry?

4.3.4 Teiresias

The blind prophet of the god Apollo. As a divine messenger, despite his blindness, he 'sees' the truth of Oedipus' identity before anyone else does, and advises him not to pursue the issue of the curse plaguing Thebes. He eventually tells Oedipus that he is the cause of the curse.

- (i) What is ironic about the fact that, despite being blind, Teiresias knows more than people with eyesight?
- (ii) In what ways, and to what extent, does Teiresias influence events in the play?
- (iii) What are the factors behind the conflict between Teiresias and Oedipus?

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4.3.5 Chorus

The Chorus is not an individual but a group of men who speak collectively like an individual. Characterised generally as 'Elders of Thebes,' the Chorus act as a bridge between the spectator and the stage and also provide commentaries on the action,

hence filling in missing information. However, they also participate in the action, meaning they play the triple role of actor, observer and commentator.

- (i) What is the impact of the role of the Chorus as commentator on the unfolding of events in the play?
- (ii) Do you think the comments of the Chorus in the last stasimon (exodus) are 'fair'?

4.3.6 Polybus

King of Corinth and Oedipus' adoptive father. He is given the baby Oedipus by one of his subjects who finds the baby abandoned on the mountainside. Determined to keep Oedipus as his own son, he ensures that the young man never knows the truth of the circumstances that brought him to Corinth.

- (i) Would you say the relationship between Polybus and Oedipus is characterised by selfishness or selflessness?
- (ii) Do you think Polybus should have told Oedipus the truth?

4.3.7 Merope

Wife to Polybus and Queen of Corinth. She fully participates in the scheme of hiding the truth from Oedipus.

What do you think would have happened if Merope had told Oedipus the truth about his parentage? |

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4.4 Themes

4.4.1 Appearance versus reality

This is a predominant theme in the play. There is a gap between appearance and reality, leading to high levels of irony. For instance, Oedipus is misled by appearance and destroyed by the reality. Jocasta is fooled by appearances and destroyed by the revelation of the truth. As a blind person Teiresias appears to be ignorant of the happenings of the state, yet he is more knowledgeable than any of the sighted characters.

- (i) How does the tension between appearance and reality affect events in the play?
- (ii) How would the story be affected if the reality, rather than the appearance, was known from the start?

4.4.2 Determinism versus free will

Was Oedipus' fate predetermined by the gods or a result of his own free will – that is, freedom to choose what to do and where to go? If his life was predetermined, can he then be blamed – or punished – for killing his father and marrying his own mother? If what transpires in the play is completely a result of free will, how does one explain the fact that even with his best efforts and innocent intentions, Oedipus still ends up committing patricide and incest? On the other hand, is Oedipus' intention to flee Corinth, or his decision to fight and kill the old man at the crossroads, not evidence of free will and personal choice? Was it not possible for him to act otherwise?

- (i) Do you think what happens in the life of Oedipus is driven by Determinism or free will?
- (ii) Can Oedipus be blamed for committing murder and incest?

4.4.3 The willingness to ignore the truth

When Jocasta realises the truth, she initially tries to ignore it, even tries to 'protect' Oedipus by discouraging him from pursuing the truth. Similarly, Oedipus sees all the signs that Teiresias could be right, yet ignore the warnings in the hope that, at the end of his quest, he would be vindicated.

- (i) Why do you think Jocasta initially chooses to ignore the truth?
- (ii) Do you think it is within human nature to ignore the truth when it is unpleasant?

4.4.4 Sight versus blindness

The discovery of the truth, and the question of who has true knowledge, are at the centre of the plot of *Oedipus the King*. Can Teiresias' words be trusted when he is blind? Does the mere fact that Oedipus is sighted and Teiresias blind mean the former is more knowledgeable than the latter, or that the latter is ignorant?

- (i) Relate the theme of sight versus blindness to the concepts of light and darkness as revealed in the text. In other words, what is the relationship between light and sight, and darkness and blindness?
- (ii) Would you say the concepts of knowledge and ignorance are relative?

4.4.5 Suffering as an agent of transformation

It is very common in human discourse to perceive suffering as an agent of positive change; that people who suffer turn out to be better people at the end of their ordeal. Indeed, Oedipus not only sees the truth by the end of the play, but is also changed into a better person; he is humbler at the end than at the beginning.

- (i) Do you think Oedipus would have changed if he had not undergone suffering?
- (ii) Do you think the change in Oedipus' attitude is minor or major?

4.4.6 The nature of divine justice

The punishment suffered by Oedipus raises questions about the meaning of divine justice. Why should Oedipus suffer because of the sins of his father Laius? It would appear that, from the perspective of the gods, it is justified for Oedipus to suffer due to the curse of the oracle.

- (i) Do you think that, according to textual evidence, the gods administer justice fairly or unfairly?
- (ii) If you were a judge and Oedipus stood accused before you, how would you deal with his case?

4.4.7 Struggle between man and gods

Much of the action in *Oedipus the King* hinges on, and is shaped by, the struggle between man and the gods. Like his father and mother, Oedipus struggles against the gods. However, in such a conflict the gods always emerge triumphant.

- (i) Do you think it is fair for the gods to fight against human beings when they are more powerful?
- (ii) To what extent, and in what way, is Oedipus' struggle against Teiresias a struggle against the gods?

4.5 Symbols

4.5.1 Blindness

It is a symbol of defencelessness and to some extent helplessness. Yet, in the play, the blind prophet is not only powerful and influential but also full of inner insight.

4.5.2 Scarred feet

Although Oedipus was not crippled, his feet were scarred from being bound together when he was baby. Thus, the clue to his true identity is in his feet, especially because his name means 'swollen foot'. According to Campbell (2000: 575), Oedipus' scarred feet symbolise his 'inner wounds and torment'.

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4.5.3 Crossroads

The crossroads, being a place where roads meet, is generally associated with decision-making. In the play, Oedipus encounters his father at a place where three roads meet. This shows the tough nature of the decisions he has to make.

Unit 5

Antigone

5.1 Introduction

This unit will accord you the opportunity to look at the text of the second Greek tragic play in this module, Sophocles' *Antigone*. Additionally you will be able to interact with study and essay questions designed to assess your level of understanding of the text and its themes.

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5.2 Objectives

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

1. Explain the contents of the text of *Antigone*.
2. Relate the contents of the unit to the contents of module 4 on the elements and structure of the Greek tragedy.
3. Discuss the questions and essay topics with a degree of competence.

5.3 Reflection

Antigone is centred on the life of a young woman who challenges the King's authority. How does your community perceive women who challenge male authority?

5.4 Context of *Antigone*

As already indicated in the module 4, *Antigone* is one of the three Theban plays written by the Greek playwright Sophocles, and, although, it is placed third in the publication of the three plays, it was actually written first, followed by *Oedipus the King* and finally *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Antigone* was written in the period 442-441 BC (Watling 1947: 13).

While *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus* focus on the life of Oedipus, *Antigone* focuses on the life of one of Oedipus' four children, his daughter Antigone. In this play, you will read about a king, Creon, who sets out to protect the integrity and authority of

the state by making an order of terrible punishment on a traitor and rebel – Antigone’s brother Polynices, who is killed in battle while fighting against his brother Eteocles. Although both of them die, Polynices is punished for being the aggressor – invading the city of Thebes, his homeland. The battle occurs as a result of a power struggle between the two brothers, each of them determined to succeed their father, Oedipus.

According to Creon’s order, Polynices’ body is to be denied burial rites – which amounts to denying his soul solace. Antigone, who is more concerned about compassion and piety than political expediency, rebels against the order by proceeding to secretly bury her brother. Thus the stage is set for a classic conflict between Creon and his niece Antigone.

The play, however, is not just about the conflict between Creon and Antigone, but also between young and old, men and women, and the laws of the gods and those of men (Campbell 2000: 577). We shall now turn to the text to see how the conflicts play out, and how it is resolved.

5.5 Text of *Antigone*

ANTIGONE

Translation by F. Storr, BA. Formerly Scholar of Trinity College, Cambridge, from the Loeb Library Edition originally published by Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA and William Heinemann Ltd, London. First published in 1912.

ARGUMENT

Antigone, daughter of Oedipus, the late king of Thebes, in defiance of Creon who rules in his stead, resolves to bury her brother Polyneices, slain in his attack on Thebes. She is caught in the act by Creon’s watchmen and brought before the king. She justifies her action, asserting that she was bound to obey the eternal laws of right and wrong in spite of any human ordinance. Creon, unrelenting, condemns her to be immured in a rock-hewn chamber. His son Haemon, to whom Antigone is betrothed, pleads in vain for her life and threatens to die with her. Warned by the seer Teiresias Creon repents him and hurries to release Antigone from her rocky prison. But he is too late: he finds lying side by side Antigone who had hanged herself and Haemon who also has perished by his own hand. Returning to the palace he sees within the dead body of his queen who on learning of her son’s death has stabbed herself to the heart.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

ANTIGONE and ISMENE—daughters of Oedipus and sisters of Polyneices and Eteocles.

CREON, King of Thebes.

HAEMON, Son of Creon, betrothed to Antigone.

EURYDICE, wife of Creon.

TEIRESIAS, the prophet.

CHORUS, of Theban elders.

A WATCHMAN

A MESSENGER

A SECOND MESSENGER

ANTIGONE

ANTIGONE and ISMENE before the Palace gates.

ANTIGONE

Ismene, sister of my blood and heart,
See'st thou how Zeus would in our lives fulfill
The weird of Oedipus, a world of woes!
For what of pain, affliction, outrage, shame,
Is lacking in our fortunes, thine and mine?
And now this proclamation of today
Made by our Captain-General to the State,
What can its purport be? Didst hear and heed,
Or art thou deaf when friends are banned as foes?

ISMENE

To me, Antigone, no word of friends
Has come, or glad or grievous, since we twain
Were left of our two brethren in one day
By double fratricide; and since i' the night
Our Argive leaguers fled, no later news
Has reached me, to inspirit or deject.

ANTIGONE

I know 'twas so, and therefore summoned thee
Beyond the gates to breathe it in thine ear.

ISMENE

What is it? Some dark secret stirs thy breast.

ANTIGONE

What but the thought of our two brothers dead,
The one by Creon graced with funeral rites,
The other disappointed? Eteocles
He hath consigned to earth (as fame reports)
With obsequies that use and wont ordain,
So gracing him among the dead below.
But Polyneices, a dishonored corpse,
(So by report the royal edict runs)
No man may bury him or make lament—
Must leave him tombless and unwept, a feast
For kites to scent afar and swoop upon.
Such is the edict (if report speak true)
Of Creon, our most noble Creon, aimed
At thee and me, aye me too; and anon
He will be here to promulgate, for such
As have not heard, his mandate; 'tis in sooth
No passing humor, for the edict says
Whoe'er transgresses shall be stoned to death.
So stands it with us; now 'tis thine to show
If thou art worthy of thy blood or base.

ISMENE

But how, my rash, fond sister, in such case
Can I do anything to make or mar?

ANTIGONE

Say, wilt thou aid me and abet? Decide.

ISMENE

In what bold venture? What is in thy thought?

ANTIGONE

Lend me a hand to bear the corpse away.

ISMENE

What, bury him despite the interdict?

ANTIGONE

My brother, and, though thou deny him, thine
No man shall say that / betrayed a brother.

ISMENE

Wilt thou persist, though Creon has forbid?

ANTIGONE

What right has he to keep me from my own?

ISMENE

Bethink thee, sister, of our father's fate,
Abhorred, dishonored, self-convinced of sin,
Blinded, himself his executioner.
Think of his mother-wife (ill sorted names)
Done by a noose herself had twined to death
And last, our hapless brethren in one day,
Both in a mutual destiny involved,
Self-slaughtered, both the slayer and the slain.
Bethink thee, sister, we are left alone;
Shall we not perish wretchedest of all,
If in defiance of the law we cross
A monarch's will?—weak women, think of that,
Not framed by nature to contend with men.
Remember this too that the stronger rules;
We must obey his orders, these or worse.
Therefore I plead compulsion and entreat
The dead to pardon. I perforce obey
The powers that be. 'Tis foolishness, I ween,
To overstep in aught the golden mean.

ANTIGONE

I urge no more; nay, wert thou willing still,
I would not welcome such a fellowship.
Go thine own way; myself will bury him.
How sweet to die in such employ, to rest,—
Sister and brother linked in love's embrace—
A sinless sinner, banned awhile on earth,
But by the dead commended; and with them
I shall abide for ever. As for thee,

Scorn, if thou wilt, the eternal laws of Heaven.

ISMENE

I scorn them not, but to defy the State
Or break her ordinance I have no skill.

ANTIGONE

A specious pretext. I will go alone
To lap my dearest brother in the grave.

ISMENE

My poor, fond sister, how I fear for thee!

ANTIGONE

O waste no fears on me; look to thyself.

ISMENE

At least let no man know of thine intent,
But keep it close and secret, as will I.

ANTIGONE

O tell it, sister; I shall hate thee more
If thou proclaim it not to all the town.

ISMENE

Thou hast a fiery soul for numbing work.

ANTIGONE

I pleasure those whom I would liefest please.

ISMENE

If thou succeed; but thou art doomed to fail.

ANTIGONE

When strength shall fail me, yes, but not before.

ISMENE

But, if the venture's hopeless, why essay?

ANTIGONE

Sister, forbear, or I shall hate thee soon,
And the dead man will hate thee too, with cause.
Say I am mad and give my madness rein
To wreck itself; the worst that can befall
Is but to die an honorable death.

ISMENE

Have thine own way then; 'tis a mad endeavor,
Yet to thy lovers thou art dear as ever.
[Exeunt]

CHORUS

(Str. 1)

Sunbeam, of all that ever dawn upon
Our seven-gated Thebes the brightest ray,
O eye of golden day,
How fair thy light o'er Dirce's fountain shone,
Speeding upon their headlong homeward course,
Far quicker than they came, the Argive force;
Putting to flight
The argent shields, the host with scutcheons white.
Against our land the proud invader came
To vindicate fell Polyneices' claim.
Like to an eagle swooping low,
On pinions white as new fall'n snow.
With clanging scream, a horsetail plume his crest,
The aspiring lord of Argos onward pressed.

(Ant. 1)

Hovering around our city walls he waits,
His spearmen raven at our seven gates.
But ere a torch our crown of towers could burn,
Ere they had tasted of our blood, they turn
Forced by the Dragon; in their rear
The din of Ares panic-struck they hear.
For Zeus who hates the braggart's boast
Beheld that gold-bespangled host;

As at the goal the paeon they upraise,
He struck them with his forked lightning blaze.

(Str. 2)

To earthy from earth rebounding, down he crashed;
The fire-brand from his impious hand was dashed,
As like a Bacchic reveler on he came,
Outbreathing hate and flame,
And tottered. Elsewhere in the field,
Here, there, great Ares like a war-horse wheeled;
Beneath his car down thrust
Our foemen bit the dust.

Seven captains at our seven gates
Thundered; for each a champion waits,
Each left behind his armor bright,
Trophy for Zeus who turns the fight;
Save two alone, that ill-starred pair
One mother to one father bare,
Who lance in rest, one 'gainst the other
Drove, and both perished, brother slain by brother.

(Ant. 2)

Now Victory to Thebes returns again
And smiles upon her chariot-circled plain.
Now let feast and festal should
Memories of war blot out.
Let us to the temples throng,
Dance and sing the live night long.
God of Thebes, lead thou the round.
Bacchus, shaker of the ground!
Let us end our revels here;
Lo! Creon our new lord draws near,
Crowned by this strange chance, our king.
What, I marvel, pondering?
Why this summons? Wherefore call
Us, his elders, one and all,
Bidding us with him debate,
On some grave concern of State?

[Enter CREON]

CREON

Elders, the gods have righted one again
Our storm-tossed ship of state, now safe in port.
But you by special summons I convened
As my most trusted councilors; first, because
I knew you loyal to Laius of old;
Again, when Oedipus restored our State,
Both while he ruled and when his rule was o'er,
Ye still were constant to the royal line.
Now that his two sons perished in one day,
Brother by brother murderously slain,
By right of kinship to the Princes dead,
I claim and hold the throne and sovereignty.
Yet 'tis no easy matter to discern
The temper of a man, his mind and will,
Till he be proved by exercise of power;
And in my case, if one who reigns supreme
Swerve from the highest policy, tongue-tied
By fear of consequence, that man I hold,
And ever held, the basest of the base.
And I condemn the man who sets his friend
Before his country. For myself, I call
To witness Zeus, whose eyes are everywhere,
If I perceive some mischievous design
To sap the State, I will not hold my tongue;
Nor would I reckon as my private friend
A public foe, well knowing that the State
Is the good ship that holds our fortunes all:
Farewell to friendship, if she suffers wreck.
Such is the policy by which I seek
To serve the Commons and conformably
I have proclaimed an edict as concerns
The sons of Oedipus; Eteocles
Who in his country's battle fought and fell,
The foremost champion—duly bury him
With all observances and ceremonies
That are the guerdon of the heroic dead.
But for the miscreant exile who returned
Minded in flames and ashes to blot out
His father's city and his father's gods,
And glut his vengeance with his kinsmen's blood,
Or drag them captive at his chariot wheels—
For Polyneices 'tis ordained that none
Shall give him burial or make mourn for him,
But leave his corpse unburied, to be meat
For dogs and carrion crows, a ghastly sight.
So am I purposed; never by my will

Shall miscreants take precedence of true men,
But all good patriots, alive or dead,
Shall be by me preferred and honored.

CHORUS
Son of Menoeceus, thus thou will'st to deal
With him who loathed and him who loved our State.
Thy word is law; thou canst dispose of us
The living, as thou will'st, as of the dead.

CREON
See then ye execute what I ordain.

CHORUS
On younger shoulders lay this grievous charge.

CREON
Fear not, I've posted guards to watch the corpse.

CHORUS
What further duty would'st thou lay on us?

CREON
Not to connive at disobedience.

CHORUS
No man is mad enough to court his death.

CREON
The penalty *is* death: yet hope of gain
Hath lured men to their ruin oftentimes.
[Enter GUARD]

GUARD
My lord, I will not make pretense to pant
And puff as some light-footed messenger.

In sooth my soul beneath its pack of thought
Made many a halt and turned and turned again;
For conscience plied her spur and curb by turns.
"Why hurry headlong to thy fate, poor fool?"
She whispered. Then again, "If Creon learn
This from another, thou wilt rue it worse."
Thus leisurely I hastened on my road;
Much thought extends a furlong to a league.
But in the end the forward voice prevailed,
To face thee. I will speak though I say nothing.
For plucking courage from despair methought,
'Let the worst hap, thou canst but meet thy fate.'

CREON

What is thy news? Why this despondency?

GUARD

Let me premise a word about myself?
I neither did the deed nor saw it done,
Nor were it just that I should come to harm.

CREON

Thou art good at parry, and canst fence about
Some matter of grave import, as is plain.

GUARD

The bearer of dread tidings needs must quake.

CREON

Then, sirrah, shoot thy bolt and get thee gone.

GUARD

Well, it must out; the corpse is buried; someone
E'en now besprinkled it with thirsty dust,
Performed the proper ritual—and was gone.

CREON

What say'st thou? Who hath dared to do this thing?

GUARD

I cannot tell, for there was ne'er a trace
Of pick or mattock—hard unbroken ground,
Without a scratch or rut of chariot wheels,
No sign that human hands had been at work.
When the first sentry of the morning watch
Gave the alarm, we all were terror-stricken.
The corpse had vanished, not interred in earth,
But strewn with dust, as if by one who sought
To avert the curse that haunts the unburied dead:
Of hound or ravening jackal, not a sign.
Thereat arose an angry war of words;
Guard railed at guard and blows were like to end it,
For none was there to part us, each in turn
Suspected, but the guilt brought home to none,
From lack of evidence. We challenged each
The ordeal, or to handle red-hot iron,
Or pass through fire, affirming on our oath
Our innocence—we neither did the deed
Ourselves, nor know who did or compassed it.
Our quest was at a standstill, when one spake
And bowed us all to earth like quivering reeds,
For there was no gainsaying him nor way
To escape perdition: *Yeare bound to tell
The King, ye cannot hide it*; so he spake.
And he convinced us all; so lots were cast,
And I, unlucky scapegoat, drew the prize.
So here I am unwilling and withal
Unwelcome; no man cares to hear ill news.

CHORUS

I had misgivings from the first, my liege,
Of something more than natural at work.

CREON

O cease, you vex me with your babblement;
I am like to think you dote in your old age.
Is it not arrant folly to pretend
That gods would have a thought for this dead man?
Did they forsooth award him special grace,
And as some benefactor bury him,
Who came to fire their hallowed sanctuaries,

To sack their shrines, to desolate their land,
And scout their ordinances? Or perchance
The gods bestow their favors on the bad.
No! no! I have long noted malcontents
Who wagged their heads, and kicked against the yoke,
Misliking these my orders, and my rule.
'Tis they, I warrant, who suborned my guards
By bribes. Of evils current upon earth
The worst is money. Money 'tis that sacks
Cities, and drives men forth from hearth and home;
Warps and seduces native innocence,
And breeds a habit of dishonesty.
But they who sold themselves shall find their greed
Out-shot the mark, and rue it soon or late.
Yea, as I still revere the dread of Zeus,
By Zeus I swear, except ye find and bring
Before my presence here the very man
Who carried out this lawless burial,
Death for your punishment shall not suffice.
Hanged on a cross, alive ye first shall make
Confession of this outrage. This will teach you
What practices are like to serve your turn.
There are some villainies that bring no gain.
For by dishonesty the few may thrive,
The many come to ruin and disgrace.

GUARD

May I not speak, or must I turn and go
Without a word?—

CREON

 Begone! canst thou not see
That e'en this question irks me?

GUARD

 Where, my lord?
Is it thy ears that suffer, or thy heart?

CREON

Why seek to probe and find the seat of pain?

GUARD

I gall thine ears—this miscreant thy mind.

CREON

What an inveterate babbler! get thee gone!

GUARD

Babbler perchance, but innocent of the crime.

CREON

Twice guilty, having sold thy soul for gain.

GUARD

Alas! how sad when reasoners reason wrong.

CREON

Go, quibble with thy reason. If thou fail'st
To find these malefactors, thou shalt own
The wages of ill-gotten gains is death.

[Exit CREON]

GUARD

I pray he may be found. But caught or not
(And fortune must determine that) thou never
Shalt see me here returning; that is sure.
For past all hope or thought I have escaped,
And for my safety owe the gods much thanks.

CHORUS

(Str. 1)

Many wonders there be, but naught more wondrous than man;
Over the surging sea, with a whitening south wind wan,
Through the foam of the firth, man makes his perilous way;
And the eldest of deities Earth that knows not toil nor decay
Ever he furrows and scores, as his team, year in year out,
With breed of the yoked horse, the ploughshare turneth about.

(Ant. 1)

The light-witted birds of the air, the beasts of the weald and the wood
He traps with his woven snare, and the brood of the briny flood.
Master of cunning he: the savage bull, and the hart
Who roams the mountain free, are tamed by his infinite art;
And the shaggy rough-maned steed is broken to bear the bit.

(Str. 2)

Speech and the wind-swift speed of counsel and civic wit,
He hath learnt for himself all these; and the arrowy rain to fly
And the nipping airs that freeze, 'neath the open winter sky.
He hath provision for all: fell plague he hath learnt to endure;
Safe whate'er may befall: yet for death he hath found no cure.

(Ant. 2)

Passing the wildest flight thought are the cunning and skill,
That guide man now to the light, but now to counsels of ill.
If he honors the laws of the land, and reveres the Gods of the State
Proudly his city shall stand; but a cityless outcast I rate
Whoso bold in his pride from the path of right doth depart;
Ne'er may I sit by his side, or share the thoughts of his heart.

What strange vision meets my eyes,
Fills me with a wild surprise?
Sure I know her, sure 'tis she,
The maid Antigone.
Hapless child of hapless sire,
Didst thou recklessly conspire,
Madly brave the King's decree?
Therefore are they haling thee?

[Enter GUARD bringing ANTIGONE]

GUARD

Here is the culprit taken in the act
Of giving burial. But where's the King?

CHORUS

There from the palace he returns in time.
[Enter CREON]

CREON

Why is my presence timely? What has chanced?

GUARD

No man, my lord, should make a vow, for if
He ever swears he will not do a thing,
His afterthoughts belie his first resolve.
When from the hail-storm of thy threats I fled
I swore thou wouldst not see me here again;
But the wild rapture of a glad surprise
Intoxicates, and so I'm here forsworn.
And here's my prisoner, caught in the very act,
Decking the grave. No lottery this time;
This prize is mine by right of treasure-trove.
So take her, judge her, rack her, if thou wilt.
She's thine, my liege; but I may rightly claim
Hence to depart well quit of all these ills.

CREON

Say, how didst thou arrest the maid, and where?

GUARD

Burying the man. There's nothing more to tell.

CREON

Hast thou thy wits? Or know'st thou what thou say'st?

GUARD

I saw this woman burying the corpse
Against thy orders. Is that clear and plain?

CREON

But how was she surprised and caught in the act?

GUARD

It happened thus. No sooner had we come,
Driven from thy presence by those awful threats,
Than straight we swept away all trace of dust,
And bared the clammy body. Then we sat
High on the ridge to windward of the stench,

While each man kept he fellow alert and rated
Roundly the sluggard if he chanced to nap.
So all night long we watched, until the sun
Stood high in heaven, and his blazing beams
Smote us. A sudden whirlwind then upraised
A cloud of dust that blotted out the sky,
And swept the plain, and stripped the woodlands bare,
And shook the firmament. We closed our eyes
And waited till the heaven-sent plague should pass.
At last it ceased, and lo! there stood this maid.
A piercing cry she uttered, sad and shrill,
As when the mother bird beholds her nest
Robbed of its nestlings; even so the maid
Wailed as she saw the body stripped and bare,
And cursed the ruffians who had done this deed.
Anon she gathered handfuls of dry dust,
Then, holding high a well-wrought brazen urn,
Thrice on the dead she poured a lustral stream.
We at the sight swooped down on her and seized
Our quarry. Undismayed she stood, and when
We taxed her with the former crime and this,
She disowned nothing. I was glad—and grieved;
For 'tis most sweet to 'scape oneself scot-free,
And yet to bring disaster to a friend
Is grievous. Take it all in all, I deem
A man's first duty is to serve himself.

CREON

Speak, girl, with head bent low and downcast eyes,
Does thou plead guilty or deny the deed?

ANTIGONE

Guilty. I did it, I deny it not.

CREON (to GUARD)

Sirrah, begone whither thou wilt, and thank
Thy luck that thou hast 'scaped a heavy charge.

(To ANTIGONE)

Now answer this plain question, yes or no,
Wast thou acquainted with the interdict?

ANTIGONE

I knew, all knew; how should I fail to know?

CREON

And yet wert bold enough to break the law?

ANTIGONE

Yea, for these laws were not ordained of Zeus,
And she who sits enthroned with gods below,
Justice, enacted not these human laws.
Nor did I deem that thou, a mortal man,
Could'st by a breath annul and override
The immutable unwritten laws of Heaven.
They were not born today nor yesterday;
They die not; and none knoweth whence they sprang.
I was not like, who feared no mortal's frown,
To disobey these laws and so provoke
The wrath of Heaven. I knew that I must die,
E'en hadst thou not proclaimed it; and if death
Is thereby hastened, I shall count it gain.
For death is gain to him whose life, like mine,
Is full of misery. Thus my lot appears
Not sad, but blissful; for had I endured
To leave my mother's son unburied there,
I should have grieved with reason, but not now.
And if in this thou judgest me a fool,
Methinks the judge of folly's not acquit.

CHORUS

A stubborn daughter of a stubborn sire,
This ill-starred maiden kicks against the pricks.

CREON

Well, let her know the stubbornest of wills
Are soonest bended, as the hardest iron,
O'er-heated in the fire to brittleness,
Flies soonest into fragments, shivered through.
A snaffle curbs the fieriest steed, and he
Who in subjection lives must needs be meek.
But this proud girl, in insolence well-schooled,
First overstepped the established law, and then—
A second and worse act of insolence—
She boasts and glories in her wickedness.

Now if she thus can flout authority
Unpunished, I am woman, she the man.
But though she be my sister's child or nearer
Of kin than all who worship at my hearth,
Nor she nor yet her sister shall escape
The utmost penalty, for both I hold,
As arch-conspirators, of equal guilt.
Bring forth the older; even now I saw her
Within the palace, frenzied and distraught.
The workings of the mind discover oft
Dark deeds in darkness schemed, before the act.
More hateful still the miscreant who seeks
When caught, to make a virtue of a crime.

ANTIGONE

Would'st thou do more than slay thy prisoner?

CREON

Not I, thy life is mine, and that's enough.

ANTIGONE

Why dally then? To me no word of thine
Is pleasant: God forbid it e'er should please;
Nor am I more acceptable to thee.
And yet how otherwise had I achieved
A name so glorious as by burying
A brother? so my townsmen all would say,
Where they not gagged by terror, manifold
A king's prerogatives, and not the least
That all his acts and all his words are law.

CREON

Of all these Thebans none so deems but thou.

ANTIGONE

These think as I, but bate their breath to thee.

CREON

Hast thou no shame to differ from all these?

ANTIGONE

To reverence kith and kin can bring no shame.

CREON

Was his dead foeman not thy kinsman too?

ANTIGONE

One mother bare them and the self-same sire.

CREON

Why cast a slur on one by honoring one?

ANTIGONE

The dead man will not bear thee out in this.

CREON

Surely, if good and evil fare alive.

ANTIGONE

The slain man was no villain but a brother.

CREON

The patriot perished by the outlaw's brand.

ANTIGONE

Nathless the realms below these rites require.

CREON

Not that the base should fare as do the brave.

ANTIGONE

Who knows if this world's crimes are virtues there?

CREON

Not even death can make a foe a friend.

ANTIGONE

My nature is for mutual love, not hate.

CREON

Die then, and love the dead if thou must;
No woman shall be the master while I live.
[Enter ISMENE]

CHORUS

Lo from out the palace gate,
Weeping o'er her sister's fate,
Comes Ismene; see her brow,
Once serene, beclouded now,
See her beauteous face o'erspread
With a flush of angry red.

CREON

Woman, who like a viper unperceived
Didst harbor in my house and drain my blood,
Two plagues I nurtured blindly, so it proved,
To sap my throne. Say, didst thou too abet
This crime, or dost abjure all privity?

ISMENE

I did the deed, if she will have it so,
And with my sister claim to share the guilt.

ANTIGONE

That were unjust. Thou would'st not act with me
At first, and I refused thy partnership.

ISMENE

But now thy bark is stranded, I am bold
To claim my share as partner in the loss.

ANTIGONE

Who did the deed the under-world knows well:
A friend in word is never friend of mine.

ISMENE

O sister, scorn me not, let me but share
Thy work of piety, and with thee die.

ANTIGONE

Claim not a work in which thou hadst no hand;
One death sufficeth. Wherefore should'st thou die?

ISMENE

What would life profit me bereft of thee?

ANTIGONE

Ask Creon, he's thy kinsman and best friend.

ISMENE

Why taunt me? Find'st thou pleasure in these gibes?

ANTIGONE

'Tis a sad mockery, if indeed I mock.

ISMENE

O say if I can help thee even now.

ANTIGONE

No, save thyself; I grudge not thy escape.

ISMENE

Is e'en this boon denied, to share thy lot?

ANTIGONE

Yea, for thou chosed'st life, and I to die.

ISMENE

Thou canst not say that I did not protest.

ANTIGONE

Well, some approved thy wisdom, others mine.

ISMENE

But now we stand convicted, both alike.

ANTIGONE

Fear not; thou livest, I died long ago
Then when I gave my life to save the dead.

CREON

Both maids, methinks, are crazed. One suddenly
Has lost her wits, the other was born mad.

ISMENE

Yea, so it falls, sire, when misfortune comes,
The wisest even lose their mother wit.

CREON

I' faith thy wit forsook thee when thou mad'st
Thy choice with evil-doers to do ill.

ISMENE

What life for me without my sister here?

CREON

Say not thy sister *here*: thy sister's dead.

ISMENE

What, wilt thou slay thy own son's plighted bride?

CREON

Aye, let him raise him seed from other fields.

ISMENE

No new espousal can be like the old.

CREON

A plague on trulls who court and woo our sons.

ANTIGONE

O Haemon, how thy sire dishonors thee!

CREON

A plague on thee and thy accursed bride!

CHORUS

What, wilt thou rob thine own son of his bride?

CREON

'Tis death that bars this marriage, not his sire.

CHORUS

So her death-warrant, it would seem, is sealed.

CREON

By you, as first by me; off with them, guards,
And keep them close. Henceforward let them learn
To live as women use, not roam at large.
For e'en the bravest spirits run away
When they perceive death pressing on life's heels.

CHORUS

(Str. 1)

Thrice blest are they who never tasted pain!
If once the curse of Heaven attain a race,
The infection lingers on and speeds apace,
Age after age, and each the cup must drain.

So when Etesian blasts from Thrace downpour

Sweep o'er the blackening main and whirl to land
From Ocean's cavernous depths his ooze and sand,
Billow on billow thunders on the shore.

(Ant. 1)

On the Labdacidae I see descending
Woe upon woe; from days of old some god
Laid on the race a malison, and his rod
Scourges each age with sorrows never ending.

The light that dawned upon its last born son
Is vanished, and the bloody axe of Fate
Has felled the goodly tree that blossomed late.
O Oedipus, by reckless pride undone!

(Str. 2)

Thy might, O Zeus, what mortal power can quell?
Not sleep that lays all else beneath its spell,
Nor moons that never tire: untouched by Time,
Throned in the dazzling light
That crowns Olympus' height,
Thou reignest King, omnipotent, sublime.

Past, present, and to be,
All bow to thy decree,
All that exceeds the mean by Fate
Is punished, Love or Hate.

(Ant. 2)

Hope flits about never-wearying wings;
Profit to some, to some light loves she brings,
But no man knoweth how her gifts may turn,
Till 'neath his feet the treacherous ashes burn.
Sure 'twas a sage inspired that spake this word;
If evil good appear
To any, Fate is near,
And brief the respite from her flaming sword.

Hither comes in angry mood
Haemon, latest of thy brood;
Is it for his bride he's grieved,
Or her marriage-bed deceived,

Doth he make his mourn for thee,
Maid forlorn, Antigone?
[Enter HAEMON]

CREON
Soon shall we know, better than seer can tell.
Learning may fixed decree anent thy bride,
Thou mean'st not, son, to rave against thy sire?
Know'st not whate'er we do is done in love?

HAEMON
O father, I am thine, and I will take
Thy wisdom as the helm to steer withal.
Therefore no wedlock shall by me be held
More precious than thy loving goverance.

CREON
Well spoken: so right-minded sons should feel,
In all deferring to a father's will.
For 'tis the hope of parents they may rear
A brood of sons submissive, keen to avenge
Their father's wrongs, and count his friends their own.
But who begets unprofitable sons,
He verily breeds trouble for himself,
And for his foes much laughter. Son, be warned
And let no woman fool away thy wits.
Ill fares the husband mated with a shrew,
And her embraces very soon wax cold.
For what can wound so surely to the quick
As a false friend? So spue and cast her off,
Bid her go find a husband with the dead.
For since I caught her openly rebelling,
Of all my subjects the one malcontent,
I will not prove a traitor to the State.
She surely dies. Go, let her, if she will,
Appeal to Zeus the God of Kindred, for
If thus I nurse rebellion in my house,
Shall not I foster mutiny without?
For whoso rules his household worthily,
Will prove in civic matters no less wise.
But he who overbears the laws, or thinks
To overrule his rulers, such as one
I never will allow. Whome'er the State

Appoints must be obeyed in everything,
But small and great, just and unjust alike.
I warrant such a one in either case
Would shine, as King or subject; such a man
Would in the storm of battle stand his ground,
A comrade leal and true; but Anarchy—
What evils are not wrought by Anarchy!
She ruins States, and overthrows the home,
She dissipates and routs the embattled host;
While discipline preserves the ordered ranks.
Therefore we must maintain authority
And yield to title to a woman's will.
Better, if needs be, men should cast us out
Than hear it said, a woman proved his match.

CHORUS

To me, unless old age have dulled wits,
Thy words appear both reasonable and wise.

HAEMON

Father, the gods implant in mortal men
Reason, the choicest gift bestowed by heaven.
'Tis not for me to say thou errest, nor
Would I arraign thy wisdom, if I could;
And yet wise thoughts may come to other men
And, as thy son, it falls to me to mark
The acts, the words, the comments of the crowd.
The commons stand in terror of thy frown,
And dare not utter aught that might offend,
But I can overhear their muttered plaints,
Know how the people mourn this maiden doomed
For noblest deeds to die the worst of deaths.
When her own brother slain in battle lay
Unsepulchered, she suffered not his corse
To lie for carrion birds and dogs to maul:
Should not her name (they cry) be writ in gold?
Such the low murmurings that reach my ear.
O father, nothing is by me more prized
Than thy well-being, for what higher good
Can children covet than their sire's fair fame,
As fathers too take pride in glorious sons?
Therefore, my father, cling not to one mood,
And deemed not thou art right, all others wrong.
For whoso thinks that wisdom dwells with him,

That he alone can speak or think aright,
Such oracles are empty breath when tried.
The wisest man will let himself be swayed
By others' wisdom and relax in time.
See how the trees beside a stream in flood
Save, if they yield to force, each spray unharmed,
But by resisting perish root and branch.
The mariner who keeps his mainsheet taut,
And will not slacken in the gale, is like
To sail with thwarts reversed, keel uppermost.
Relent then and repent thee of thy wrath;
For, if one young in years may claim some sense,
I'll say 'tis best of all to be endowed
With absolute wisdom; but, if that's denied,
(And nature takes not readily that ply)
Next wise is he who lists to sage advice.

CHORUS

If he says aught in season, heed him, King.
(To HAEMON)
Heed thou thy sire too; both have spoken well.

CREON

What, would you have us at our age be schooled,
Lessoned in prudence by a beardless boy?

HAEMON

I plead for justice, father, nothing more.
Weigh me upon my merit, not my years.

CREON

Strange merit this to sanction lawlessness!

HAEMON

For evil-doers I would urge no plea.

CREON

Is not this maid an arrant law-breaker?

HAEMON
The Theban commons with one voice say, No.

CREON
What, shall the mob dictate my policy?

HAEMON
'Tis thou, methinks, who speakest like a boy.

CREON
Am I to rule for others, or myself?

HAEMON
A State for one man is no State at all.

CREON
The State is his who rules it, so 'tis held.

HAEMON
As monarch of a desert thou wouldst shine.

CREON
This boy, methinks, maintains the woman's cause.

HAEMON
If thou be'st woman, yes. My thought's for thee.

CREON
O reprobate, would'st wrangle with thy sire?

HAEMON
Because I see thee wrongfully perverse.

CREON
And am I wrong, if I maintain my rights?

HAEMON

Talk not of rights; thou spurn'st the due of Heaven

CREON

O heart corrupt, a woman's minion thou!

HAEMON

Slave to dishonor thou wilt never find me.

CREON

Thy speech at least was all a plea for her.

HAEMON

And thee and me, and for the gods below.

CREON

Living the maid shall never be thy bride.

HAEMON

So she shall die, but one will die with her.

CREON

Hast come to such a pass as threaten me?

HAEMON

What threat is this, vain counsels to reprove?

CREON

Vain fool to instruct thy betters; thou shall rue it.

HAEMON

Wert not my father, I had said thou err'st.

CREON

Play not the spaniel, thou a woman's slave.

HAEMON

When thou dost speak, must no man make reply?

CREON

This passes bounds. By heaven, thou shalt not rate
And jeer and flout me with impunity.
Off with the hateful thing that she may die
At once, beside her bridegroom, in his sight.

HAEMON

Think not that in my sight the maid shall die,
Or by my side; never shalt thou again
Behold my face hereafter. Go, consort
With friends who like a madman for their mate.
[Exit HAEMON]

CHORUS

Thy son has gone, my liege, in angry haste.
Fell is the wrath of youth beneath a smart.

CREON

Let him go vent his fury like a fiend:
These sisters twain he shall not save from death.

CHORUS

Surely, thou meanest not to slay them both?

CREON

I stand corrected; only her who touched
The body.

CHORUS

And what death is she to die?

CREON

She shall be taken to some desert place
By man untrod, and in a rock-hewn cave,
With food no more than to avoid the taint
That homicide might bring on all the State,
Buried alive. There let her call in aid
The King of Death, the one god she reveres,
Or learn too late a lesson learnt at last:
'Tis labor lost, to reverence the dead.

CHORUS

(Str.)

Love resistless in fight, all yield at a glance of thine eye,
Love who pillowed all night on a maiden's cheek dost lie,
Over the upland holds. Shall mortals not yield to thee?

(Ant).

Mad are thy subjects all, and even the wisest heart
Straight to folly will fall, at a touch of thy poisoned dart.
Thou didst kindle the strife, this feud of kinsman with kin,
By the eyes of a winsome wife, and the yearning her heart to win.
For as her consort still, enthroned with Justice above,
Thou bendest man to thy will, O all invincible Love.

Lo I myself am borne aside,
From Justice, as I view this bride.
(O sight an eye in tears to drown)
Antigone, so young, so fair,
Thus hurried down
Death's bower with the dead to share.

ANTIGONE

(Str. 1)

Friends, countrymen, my last farewell I make;
My journey's done.
One last fond, lingering, longing look I take
At the bright sun.
For Death who puts to sleep both young and old
Hales my young life,
And beckons me to Acheron's dark fold,
An unwed wife.
No youths have sung the marriage song for me,

My bridal bed
No maids have strewn with flowers from the lea,
'Tis Death I wed.

CHORUS

But bethink thee, thou art sped,
Great and glorious, to the dead.
Thou the sword's edge hast not tasted,
No disease thy frame hath wasted.
Freely thou alone shalt go
Living to the dead below.

ANTIGONE

(Ant. 1)

Nay, but the piteous tale I've heard men tell
Of Tantalus' doomed child,
Chained upon Siphylus' high rocky fell,
That clung like ivy wild,
Drenched by the pelting rain and whirling snow,
Left there to pine,
While on her frozen breast the tears aye flow—
Her fate is mine.

CHORUS

She was sprung of gods, divine,
Mortals we of mortal line.
Like renown with gods to gain
Recompenses all thy pain.
Take this solace to thy tomb
Hers in life and death thy doom.

ANTIGONE

(Str. 2)

Alack, alack! Ye mock me. Is it meet
Thus to insult me living, to my face?
Cease, by our country's altars I entreat,
Ye lordly rulers of a lordly race.
O fount of Dirce, wood-embowered plain
Where Theban chariots to victory speed,
Mark ye the cruel laws that now have wrought my bane,
The friends who show no pity in my need!
Was ever fate like mine? O monstrous doom,
Within a rock-built prison sepulchered,
To fade and wither in a living tomb,

And alien midst the living and the dead.

CHORUS

(Str. 3)

In thy boldness over-rash
Madly thou thy foot didst dash
'Gainst high Justice' altar stair.
Thou a father's guild dost bear.

ANTIGONE

(Ant. 2)

At this thou touchest my most poignant pain,
My ill-starred father's piteous disgrace,
The taint of blood, the hereditary stain,
That clings to all of Labdacus' famed race.
Woe worth the monstrous marriage-bed where lay
A mother with the son her womb had borne,
Therein I was conceived, woe worth the day,
Fruit of incestuous sheets, a maid forlorn,
And now I pass, accursed and unwed,
To meet them as an alien there below;
And thee, O brother, in marriage ill-bested,
'Twas thy dead hand that dealt me this death-blow.

CHORUS

Religion has her chains, 'tis true,
Let rite be paid when rites are due.
Yet is it ill to disobey
The powers who hold by might the sway.
Thou hast withstood authority,
A self-willed rebel, thou must die.

ANTIGONE

Unwept, unwed, unfriended, hence I go,
No longer may I see the day's bright eye;
Not one friend left to share my bitter woe,
And o'er my ashes heave one passing sigh.

CREON

If wail and lamentation aught availed
To stave off death, I trow they'd never end.

Away with her, and having walled her up
In a rock-vaulted tomb, as I ordained,
Leave her alone at liberty to die,
Or, if she choose, to live in solitude,
The tomb her dwelling. We in either case
Are guiltless as concerns this maiden's blood,
Only on earth no lodging shall she find.

ANTIGONE

O grave, O bridal bower, O prison house
Hewn from the rock, my everlasting home,
Whither I go to join the mighty host
Of kinsfolk, Persephassa's guests long dead,
The last of all, of all more miserable,
I pass, my destined span of years cut short.
And yet good hope is mine that I shall find
A welcome from my sire, a welcome too,
From thee, my mother, and my brother dear;
From with these hands, I laved and decked your limbs
In death, and poured libations on your grave.
And last, my Polyneices, unto thee
I paid due rites, and this my recompense!
Yet am I justified in wisdom's eyes.
For even had it been some child of mine,
Or husband mouldering in death's decay,
I had not wrought this deed despite the State.
What is the law I call in aid? 'Tis thus
I argue. Had it been a husband dead
I might have wed another, and have borne
Another child, to take the dead child's place.
But, now my sire and mother both are dead,
No second brother can be born for me.
Thus by the law of conscience I was led
To honor thee, dear brother, and was judged
By Creon guilty of a heinous crime.
And now he drags me like a criminal,
A bride unwed, amerced of marriage-song
And marriage-bed and joys of motherhood,
By friends deserted to a living grave.
What ordinance of heaven have I transgressed?
Hereafter can I look to any god
For succor, call on any man for help?
Alas, my piety is impious deemed.
Well, if such justice is approved of heaven,
I shall be taught by suffering my sin;

But if the sin is theirs, O may they suffer
No worse ills than the wrongs they do to me.

CHORUS
The same ungovernable will
Drives like a gale the maiden still.

CREON
Therefore, my guards who let her stay
Shall smart full sore for their delay.

ANTIGONE
Ah, woe is me! This word I hear
Brings death most near.

CHORUS
I have no comfort. What he saith,
Portends no other thing than death.

ANTIGONE
My fatherland, city of Thebes divine,
Ye gods of Thebes whence sprang my line,
Look, puissant lords of Thebes, on me;
The last of all your royal house ye see.
Martyred by men of sin, undone.
Such meed my piety hath won.
[Exit ANTIGONE]

CHORUS
(Str. 1)
Like to thee that maiden bright,
Danae, in her brass-bound tower,
Once exchanged the glad sunlight
For a cell, her bridal bower.
And yet she sprang of royal line,
My child, like thine,
And nursed the seed
By her conceived
Of Zeus descending in a golden shower.
Strange are the ways of Fate, her power

Nor wealth, nor arms withstand, nor tower;
Nor brass-prowed ships, that breast the sea
From Fate can flee.

(Ant. 1)

Thus Dryas' child, the rash Edonian King,
For words of high disdain
Did Bacchus to a rocky dungeon bring,
To cool the madness of a fevered brain.
His frenzy passed,
He learnt at last
'Twas madness gibes against a god to fling.
For once he fain had quenched the Maenad's fire;
And of the tuneful Nine provoked the ire.

(Str. 2)

By the Iron Rocks that guard the double main,
On Bosphorus' lone strand,
Where stretcheth Salmydessus' plain
In the wild Thracian land,
There on his borders Ares witnessed
The vengeance by a jealous step-dame ta'en
The gore that trickled from a spindle red,
The sightless orbits of her step-sons twain.

(Ant. 2)

Wasting away they mourned their piteous doom,
The blasted issue of their mother's womb.
But she her lineage could trace
To great Erectheus' race;
Daughter of Boreas in her sire's vast caves
Reared, where the tempest raves,
Swift as his horses o'er the hills she sped;
A child of gods; yet she, my child, like thee,
By Destiny
That knows not death nor age—she too was vanquished.
[Enter TEIRESIAS and BOY]

TEIRESIAS

Princes of Thebes, two wayfarers as one,
Having betwixt us eyes for one, we are here.
The blind man cannot move without a guide.

CREON
Why tidings, old Teiresias?

TEIRESIAS
I will tell thee;
And when thou hearest thou must heed the seer.

CREON
Thus far I ne'er have disobeyed thy rede.

TEIRESIAS
So hast thou steered the ship of State aright.

CREON
I know it, and I gladly own my debt.

TEIRESIAS
Bethink thee that thou treadest once again
The razor edge of peril.

CREON
What is this?
Thy words inspire a dread presentiment.

TEIRESIAS
The divination of my arts shall tell.
Sitting upon my throne of augury,
As is my wont, where every fowl of heaven
Find harborage, upon mine ears was borne
A jargon strange of twitterings, hoots, and screams;
So knew I that each bird at the other tare
With bloody talons, for the whirr of wings
Could signify naught else. Perturbed in soul,
I straight essayed the sacrifice by fire
On blazing altars, but the God of Fire
Came not in flame, and from the thigh bones dripped
And sputtered in the ashes a foul ooze;

Gall-bladders cracked and spurted up: the fat
Melted and fell and left the thigh bones bare.
Such are the signs, taught by this lad, I read—
As I guide others, so the boy guides me—
The frustrate signs of oracles grown dumb.
O King, thy willful temper ails the State,
For all our shrines and altars are profaned
By what has filled the maw of dogs and crows,
The flesh of Oedipus' unburied son.
Therefore the angry gods abominate
Our litanies and our burnt offerings;
Therefore no birds trill out a happy note,
Gorged with the carnival of human gore.
O ponder this, my son. To err is common
To all men, but the man who having erred
Hugs not his errors, but repents and seeks
The cure, is not a wastrel nor unwise.
No fool, the saw goes, like the obstinate fool.
Let death disarm thy vengeance. O forbear
To vex the dead. What glory wilt thou win
By slaying twice the slain? I mean thee well;
Counsel's most welcome if I promise gain.

CREON

Old man, ye all let fly at me your shafts
Like anchors at a target; yea, ye set
Your soothsayer on me. Peddlers are ye all
And I the merchandise ye buy and sell.
Go to, and make your profit where ye will,
Silver of Sardis change for gold of Ind;
Ye will not purchase this man's burial,
Not though the winged ministers of Zeus
Should bear him in their talons to his throne;
Not e'en in awe of prodigy so dire
Would I permit his burial, for I know
No human soilure can assail the gods;
This too I know, Teiresias, dire's the fall
Of craft and cunning when it tries to gloss
Foul treachery with fair words for filthy gain.

TEIRESIAS

Alas! doth any know and lay to heart—

CREON
Is this the prelude to some hackneyed saw?

TEIRESIAS
How far good counsel is the best of goods?

CREON
True, as unwisdom is the worst of ills.

TEIRESIAS
Thou art infected with that ill thyself.

CREON
I will not bandy insults with thee, seer.

TEIRESIAS
And yet thou say'st my prophesies are frauds.

CREON
Prophets are all a money-getting tribe.

TEIRESIAS
And kings are all a lucre-loving race.

CREON
Dost know at whom thou glancest, me thy lord?

TEIRESIAS
Lord of the State and savior, thanks to me.

CREON
Skilled prophet art thou, but to wrong inclined.

TEIRESIAS
Take heed, thou wilt provoke me to reveal
The mystery deep hidden in my breast.

CREON

Say on, but see it be not said for gain.

TEIRESIAS

Such thou, methinks, till now hast judged my words.

CREON

Be sure thou wilt not traffic on my wits.

TEIRESIAS

Know then for sure, the coursers of the sun
Not many times shall run their race, before
Thou shalt have given the fruit of thine own loins
In quittance of thy murder, life for life;
For that thou hast entombed a living soul,
And sent below a denizen of earth,
And wronged the nether gods by leaving here
A corpse unlaved, unwept, unsepulchered.
Herein thou hast no part, nor e'en the gods
In heaven; and thou usurp'st a power not thine.
For this the avenging spirits of Heaven and Hell
Who dog the steps of sin are on thy trail:
What these have suffered thou shalt suffer too.
And now, consider whether bought by gold
I prophesy. For, yet a little while,
And sound of lamentation shall be heard,
Of men and women through thy desolate halls;
And all thy neighbor States are leagues to avenge
Their mangled warriors who have found a grave
I' the maw of wolf or hound, or winged bird
That flying homewards taints their city's air.
These are the shafts, that like a bowman I
Provoked to anger, loosen at thy breast,
Unerring, and their smart thou shalt not shun.
Boy, lead me home, that he may vent his spleen
On younger men, and learn to curb his tongue
With gentler manners than his present mood.
[Exit TEIRESIAS]

CHORUS

My liege, that man hath gone, foretelling woe.
And, O believe me, since these grizzled locks
Were like the raven, never have I known
The prophet's warning to the State to fail.

CREON

I know it too, and it perplexes me.
To yield is grievous, but the obstinate soul
That fights with Fate, is smitten grievously.

CHORUS

Son of Menoeceus, list to good advice.

CREON

What should I do. Advise me. I will heed.

CHORUS

Go, free the maiden from her rocky cell;
And for the unburied outlaw build a tomb.

CREON

Is that your counsel? You would have me yield?

CHORUS

Yea, king, this instant. Vengeance of the gods
Is swift to overtake the impenitent.

CREON

Ah! what a wrench it is to sacrifice
My heart's resolve; but Fate is ill to fight.

CHORUS

Go, trust not others. Do it quick thyself.

CREON

I go hot-foot. Bestir ye one and all,
My henchmen! Get ye axes! Speed away

To yonder eminence! I too will go,
For all my resolution this way sways.
'Twas I that bound, I too will set her free.
Almost I am persuaded it is best
To keep through life the law ordained of old.
[Exit CREON]

CHORUS

(Str. 1)

Thou by many names adored,
 Child of Zeus the God of thunder,
 Of a Theban bride the wonder,
Fair Italia's guardian lord;

In the deep-embosomed glades
 Of the Eleusinian Queen
Haunt of revelers, men and maids,
 Dionysus, thou art seen.

Where Ismenus rolls his waters,
 Where the Dragon's teeth were sown,
Where the Bacchanals thy daughters
 Round thee roam,
 There thy home;
Thebes, O Bacchus, is thine own.

(Ant. 1)

Thee on the two-crested rock
 Lurid-flaming torches see;
Where Corisian maidens flock,
 Thee the springs of Castaly.

By Nysa's bastion ivy-clad,
By shores with clustered vineyards glad,
There to thee the hymn rings out,
And through our streets we Thebans shout,
 All hail to thee
 Evoe, Evoe!

(Str. 2)

Oh, as thou lov'st this city best of all,
To thee, and to thy Mother levin-stricken,
In our dire need we call;
Thou see'st with what a plague our townfolk sicken.
 Thy ready help we crave,
Whether adown Parnassian heights descending,
Or o'er the roaring straits thy swift was wending,
 Save us, O save!

(Ant. 2)

Brightest of all the orbs that breathe forth light,
 Authentic son of Zeus, immortal king,
Leader of all the voices of the night,
 Come, and thy train of Thyiads with thee bring,
 Thy maddened rout
Who dance before thee all night long, and shout,
 Thy handmaids we,
 Evoe, Evoe!

[Enter MESSENGER]

MESSENGER

Attend all ye who dwell beside the halls
Of Cadmus and Amphion. No man's life
As of one tenor would I praise or blame,
For Fortune with a constant ebb and rise
Casts down and raises high and low alike,
And none can read a mortal's horoscope.
Take Creon; he, methought, if any man,
Was enviable. He had saved this land
Of Cadmus from our enemies and attained
A monarch's powers and ruled the state supreme,
While a right noble issue crowned his bliss.
Now all is gone and wasted, for a life
Without life's joys I count a living death.
You'll tell me he has ample store of wealth,
The pomp and circumstance of kings; but if
These give no pleasure, all the rest I count
The shadow of a shade, nor would I weigh
His wealth and power 'gainst a dram of joy.

CHORUS

What fresh woes bring'st thou to the royal house?

MESSENGER

Both dead, and they who live deserve to die.

CHORUS

Who is the slayer, who the victim? speak.

MESSENGER

Haemon; his blood shed by no stranger hand.

CHORUS

What mean ye? by his father's or his own?

MESSENGER

His own; in anger for his father's crime.

CHORUS

O prophet, what thou spakest comes to pass.

MESSENGER

So stands the case; now 'tis for you to act.

CHORUS

Lo! from the palace gates I see approaching
Creon's unhappy wife, Eurydice.
Comes she by chance or learning her son's fate?
[Enter EURYDICE]

EURYDICE

Ye men of Thebes, I overheard your talk.
As I passed out to offer up my prayer
To Pallas, and was drawing back the bar
To open wide the door, upon my ears
There broke a wail that told of household woe
Stricken with terror in my handmaids' arms
I fell and fainted. But repeat your tale

To one not unacquaint with misery.

MESSENGER

Dear mistress, I was there and will relate
The perfect truth, omitting not one word.
Why should we gloze and flatter, to be proved
Liars hereafter? Truth is ever best.
Well, in attendance on my liege, your lord,
I crossed the plain to its utmost margin, where
The corse of Polyneices, gnawn and mauled,
Was lying yet. We offered first a prayer
To Pluto and the goddess of cross-ways,
With contrite hearts, to deprecate their ire.
Then laved with lustral waves the mangled corse,
Laid it on fresh-lopped branches, lit a pyre,
And to his memory piled a mighty mound
Of mother earth. Then to the caverned rock,
The bridal chamber of the maid and Death,
We sped, about to enter. But a guard
Heard from that godless shrine a far shrill wail,
And ran back to our lord to tell the news.
But as he nearer drew a hollow sound
Of lamentation to the King was borne.
He groaned and uttered then this bitter plaint:
"Am I a prophet? miserable me!
Is this the saddest path I ever trod?
'Tis my son's voice that calls me. On press on,
My henchmen, haste with double speed to the tomb
Where rocks down-torn have made a gap, look in
And tell me if in truth I recognize
The voice of Haemon or am heaven-deceived."
So at the bidding of our distraught lord
We looked, and in the craven's vaulted gloom
I saw the maiden lying strangled there,
A noose of linen twined about her neck;
And hard beside her, clasping her cold form,
Her lover lay bewailing his dead bride
Death-wedded, and his father's cruelty.
When the King saw him, with a terrible groan
He moved towards him, crying, "O my son
What hast thou done? What ailed thee? What mischance
Has reft thee of thy reason? O come forth,
Come forth, my son; thy father supplicates."
But the son glared at him with tiger eyes,
Spat in his face, and then, without a word,

Drew his two-hilted sword and smote, but missed
His father flying backwards. Then the boy,
Wroth with himself, poor wretch, incontinent
Fell on his sword and drove it through his side
Home, but yet breathing clasped in his lax arms
The maid, her pallid cheek incarnadined
With his expiring gasps. So there they lay
Two corpses, one in death. His marriage rites
Are consummated in the halls of Death:
A witness that of ills whate'er befall
Mortals' un wisdom is the worst of all.
[Exit EURYDICE]

CHORUS

What makest thou of this? The Queen has gone
Without a word importing good or ill.

MESSENGER

I marvel too, but entertain good hope.
'Tis that she shrinks in public to lament
Her son's sad ending, and in privacy
Would with her maidens mourn a private loss.
Trust me, she is discreet and will not err.

CHORUS

I know not, but strained silence, so I deem,
Is no less ominous than excessive grief.

MESSENGER

Well, let us to the house and solve our doubts,
Whether the tumult of her heart conceals
Some fell design. It may be thou art right:
Unnatural silence signifies no good.

CHORUS

Lo! the King himself appears.
Evidence he with him bears
'Gainst himself (ah me! I quake
'Gainst a king such charge to make)
But all must own,
The guilt is his and his alone.

CREON

(Str. 1)

Woe for sin of minds perverse,
Deadly fraught with mortal curse.
Behold us slain and slayers, all akin.
Woe for my counsel dire, conceived in sin.
 Alas, my son,
 Life scarce begun,
 Thou wast undone.
The fault was mine, mine only, O my son!

CHORUS

Too late thou seemest to perceive the truth.

CREON

(Str. 2)

By sorrow schooled. Heavy the hand of God,
Thorny and rough the paths my feet have trod,
Humbled my pride, my pleasure turned to pain;
Poor mortals, how we labor all in vain!
[Enter SECOND MESSENGER]

SECOND MESSENGER

Sorrows are thine, my lord, and more to come,
One lying at thy feet, another yet
More grievous waits thee, when thou comest home.

CREON

What woe is lacking to my tale of woes?

SECOND MESSENGER

Thy wife, the mother of thy dead son here,
Lies stricken by a fresh inflicted blow.

CREON

(Ant. 1)

How bottomless the pit!
Does claim me too, O Death?

What is this word he saith,
This woeful messenger? Say, is it fit
To slay anew a man already slain?
Is Death at work again,
Stroke upon stroke, first son, then mother slain?

CHORUS

Look for thyself. She lies for all to view.

CREON

(Ant. 2)

Alas! another added woe I see.
What more remains to crown my agony?
A minute past I clasped a lifeless son,
And now another victim Death hath won.
Unhappy mother, most unhappy son!

SECOND MESSENGER

Beside the altar on a keen-edged sword
She fell and closed her eyes in night, but erst
She mourned for Megareus who nobly died
Long since, then for her son; with her last breath
She cursed thee, the slayer of her child.

CREON

(Str. 3)

I shudder with affright
O for a two-edged sword to slay outright
A wretch like me,
Made one with misery.

SECOND MESSENGER

'Tis true that thou wert charged by the dead Queen
As author of both deaths, hers and her son's.

CREON

In what wise was her self-destruction wrought?

SECOND MESSENGER

Hearing the loud lament above her son
With her own hand she stabbed herself to the heart.

CREON

(Str. 4)

I am the guilty cause. I did the deed,
Thy murderer. Yea, I guilty plead.
My henchmen, lead me hence, away, away,
A cipher, less than nothing; no delay!

CHORUS

Well said, if in disaster aught is well
His past endure demand the speediest cure.

CREON

(Ant. 3)

Come, Fate, a friend at need,
Come with all speed!
Come, my best friend,
And speed my end!
Away, away!

Let me not look upon another day!

CHORUS

This for the morrow; to us are present needs
That they whom it concerns must take in hand.

CREON

I join your prayer that echoes my desire.

CHORUS

O pray not, prayers are idle; from the doom
Of fate for mortals refuge is there none.

CREON

(Ant. 4)

Away with me, a worthless wretch who slew

Unwitting thee, my son, thy mother too.
Whither to turn I know now; every way
 Leads but astray,
And on my head I feel the heavy weight
 Of crushing Fate.

CHORUS

Of happiness the chiefest part
Is a wise heart:
And to defraud the gods in aught
 With peril's fraught.
Swelling words of high-flown might
Mightily the gods do smite.
Chastisement for errors past
Wisdom brings to age at last.



5.6 Reflection

Now that you have read *Antigone*, would you say Antigone was right to rebel against the authority and decree of her uncle Creon?

Unit 6

Structure of *Antigone*

6.1 Introduction

Now we shall see how *Antigone* is related to the structure of the Greek tragedy by relating it to what is discussed in module 1.



6.2 Objectives

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

1. Relate the general structure of the Greek tragic play as explained in module 1 and the structure of *Antigone*.
2. Explain the significance of the various parts of the structure of *Antigone*.



6.3 Reflection

Can you list the various parts of the structure of a Greek tragic play?

6.4 Structure of the Greek Tragedy

At this juncture we need to remind you of the parts of the structure of the Greek tragic play as explained in Unit 3 of module 1, that is, prologos, parados, episode, stasimon, and exodus. In reminding you of the parts of the structure, we advise you to once again read Unit 3 of module 1 to refresh your knowledge.

6.5 Structure of *Antigone*

6.5.1 Prologos

This starts when the two sisters Antigone and Ismene are introduced. A contrast is drawn between their characters: while Antigone is resolute, serious and determined to oppose Creon's decree and to justify her actions, Ismene is weak, scared and feminine.

Antigone rejects Ismene's attempts to dissuade her from rebelling against Creon's decree.

6.5.2 Parados

In this section of the play the Chorus describe the invasion of Thebes by Polyneices and the defence of the city by his brother Eteocles. It also describes the discomfiture of the Argive host and the victory over the enemies of the city-state of Thebes. There is emphasis on the guilt of Polyneices for attacking his birthplace in the quest for power.

6.5.3 Episodes and Stasimons

The play consists of a total of five episodes or main sections of action. There are also five stasimons or stasima – which are interludes between the episodes. The episodes and stasimons are outlined below.

First Episode

Creon, who takes over the kingship after the deaths of Oedipus and his sons, is introduced and makes his first speech, announcing that Eteocles, the defender of the city against Polyneices and his allies, will be honoured with full burial rites while Polyneices shall not for the reason that he laid siege to his homeland. Creon further decrees that no one would be allowed to bury Polyneices, and that a watch has been put in place to ensure that the decree is enforced. The punishment for violating the decree is the death penalty. However, even as he is speaking one of the men appointed as part of the watch enters and announces that an unknown person had secretly strewn dust over Polyneices' corpse, thus giving it the forbidden funeral rites. Enraged, Creon dismisses the man with threats of terrible death for himself and the other guards if the perpetrators of the act are not caught.

First Stasimon

The chorus celebrates the wit and works of human beings, their bravery and inventiveness. However, human beings can only obtain honour if they obey the law but

failure to obey the law can lead to destruction. The stasimon is a reference to Antigone's actions.

Second Episode

The sentinel re-enters with the culprit: it is Antigone, Creon's niece by virtue of the fact that she is the daughter of Jocasta his sister and wife of Oedipus. Perhaps out of disbelief, Creon asks Antigone whether it is true as alleged by the guard that she disobeyed the decree forbidding burial rites for her brother Polyneices, and she answers in the affirmative. He further asks if she knew of the edict banning citizens from burying Polyneices. In response she states that she was aware but chose to disobey the edict. She proceeds to give a noble speech justifying her act by explaining that she merely obeyed the unwritten divine law which is superior to laws issued by mortal men. Creon is incensed, not only because of the act of disobedience, but more because the defiance is perpetrated by a woman, and sentences her to death. Suspecting that Antigone could not have acted alone but with the collaboration of her sister Ismene, Creon summons Ismene who, despite earlier rejecting Antigone's plea to participate in the rebellious act of burying Polyneices, now pleads to share her sister's fate. However, Antigone, who had not forgiven her for refusing to assist her bury their brother because of timidity, rejects the offer. Thus spurned, Ismene appeals to Creon to spare the life of Antigone by reminding him that her condemned sister is betrothed to his son. Creon, however, remains unmoved and insists that Antigone shall die.

Second Stasimon

This stasimon lays emphasis on the power of destiny. The only remaining survivors of the house of Labdacus, the sisters Antigone and Ismene, are now expected to perish. The stasimon, however, not only refers to the fate of Antigone, but also that of Creon.

Third Episode

Haemon, the son of Creon and the engaged lover of Antigone, now enters, determined to save the life of Antigone. He tells his father, respectfully, that his decision to take the

life of Antigone is wrong and that even the people do not support it. He advises him to listen to the opinions of others for the sake of his own welfare and reputation, but the king, offended that his own son would be telling him what to do, stubbornly insists on pursuing his own path. While Haemon keeps his temper, Creon becomes more unreasonable and vicious. Realising the futility of his efforts, Haemon leaves his father's presence to die with Antigone. Thereupon Creon announces the form of punishment to be meted out on Antigone: she shall be buried alive. At the same time he declares that Ismene's life will be spared as he is satisfied of her innocence.

Third Stasimon

This is a celebration of the power of love.

Fourth Episode

The guards lead Antigone to the tomb where she will be buried alive. She mourns her fate, while the Chorus, moved to pity by her impending demise while at the same time disapproving of her act of disobedience, condole with her. Creon re-enters and rebukes the sentinels for delaying the execution of the order to have her buried alive. Antigone, for her part, takes her final leave of the world.

Fourth Stasimon

Our attention is drawn to the fate of three others who suffered punishment similar to Antigone's – Danae, Lycurgus, and Cleopatra.

Fifth Episode

The old blind prophet Teiresias enters and warns Creon against his course of action, informing him that the gods are angry with Thebes because of the failure to bury Polyneices whose body remains exposed on the plain. The city, he says, is polluted and the corpse must be buried at once. Creon, however, responds to the prophet as he had responded to Haemon – with stubborn arrogance. Refusing to reverse his decree, Creon angrily tells Teiresias that he is the corrupt mouthpiece of rebellious citizens. The

prophet responds by declaring that the gods will punish Creon for taking the life of Antigone and leaving the corpse of Polyneices exposed on the plain. The punishment will take the form of the death of his own son, Haemon. Upon hearing these words, Creon, aware of the fact that Teiresias is never known to predict falsity, is struck with fear and panic and yields. He reverses his edicts about Polyneices' burial and Antigone's punishment. As it turns out, however, his change of heart, albeit forced by circumstances, is too little too late.

Fifth Stasimon

Pleased with Creon's repentance and expecting things to get better, the Chorus sing and dance in honour of Dionysus.

6.5.4 Exodus

A messenger enters and announces the catastrophe. As he speaks Eurydice, the wife of Creon and Haemon's mother, enters. In his haste to reverse his wrongs, Creon had ensured that Polyneices was honourably buried but, upon rushing to the tomb to release Antigone, finds she has already hung herself. In addition, Haemon, hearbroken, clings to her dead body. Upon seeing his father, Haemon attempts to stab him but misses – but he stabs himself and falls dead on Antigone's corpse. Before Creon recovers from the shock of the double suicide, a messenger announces that Eurydice has stabbed herself upon hearing of the death of her son, which she blames on her stubborn husband. Distraught at the loss of niece, wife and son, Creon prays for death, and the comfort of the Chorus does not soothe him. Creon returns into the confines of the palace.

Unit 7

Elements of Tragedy and *Antigone*

7.1 Introduction

Having looked at the structure of *Antigone*, we now shift our focus to the relationship between *Antigone* and elements of Greek.



7.2 Objectives

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

1. Discuss the content of *Antigone* in relation to the elements of tragedy.
2. Explain the link between elements of tragedy and specific aspects of *Antigone*.

7.3 Reflection

Can you recall the key points you learnt regarding the link between elements of tragedy and *Antigone*?

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7.4 Elements of the Greek Tragedy

The elements of tragedy as explained in module 1 unit 3 are: tragic hero, *hamartia*, *peripeteia*, *anagnorisis*, *catharsis*, and the three unities. You need to refresh your knowledge on these elements as you relate them to *Antigone*.

7.5 Questions on the Elements of tragedy as they relate to *Antigone*.

7.5.1 Tragic Hero

From your understanding of the concept of tragic hero, who do you think should be considered the tragic hero of the play? Some scholars have argued that it should be *Antigone* whereas others have argued the case for *Creon*. As a student of literature you should be able to decide a position on the debate.

7.5.2 *Hamartia*

The *hamartia* is one of the elements on which the debate regarding the tragic hero rests. Not only are both Creon and Antigone of high social status, they are both stubborn. Do you think both are tragic heroes?

7.5.3 Peripeteia

What aspects of the play do you think constitute a peripeteia for Antigone? Similarly, what aspects of the play do you think would be considered a peripeteia for Creon?

7.5.4 Anagnorisis

How would you relate the anagnorisis to the lives of Creon and Antigone?

7.5.5 Catharsis

After reading the entire play, does it leave you with a feeling of catharsis? Which character do you have the strongest sympathy for – Creon, his wife, his son, or Antigone?

7.5.6 The Three Unities

- (i) Time: The action of the play all happens within a period of twenty-four hours.
- (ii) Place: Would you explain the concept of unity of place in relation to *Antigone*?
- (iii) Action: How would you explain the close-knit nature of the various episodes of *Antigone*?



7.6 Activity

List the main points of what you have learnt in this unit.

Unit 8

Characters and Themes of *Antigone*

8.1 Introduction

In this unit we focus on the main characters and themes of *Antigone* so that you get a deeper understanding of the contents of the play.



8.2 Objectives

By the end of the unit you should be able to:

1. Explain the key themes of the play.
2. Discuss the key characters of the play.
3. Explain the relationship between the themes and characters of the play..

8.3 Characters

8.3.1 Antigone

Antigone is the play's protagonist and tragic heroine. Her character is almost the opposite of that of her sister Ismene, who is docile and a coward. Antigone is combative, rebellious and stubborn – characteristics which set her on the path of conflict with her uncle Creon. In addition Antigone is not proud of her girlhood, which she sees as a sign of weakness. She has the distinction of having stuck with her father Oedipus after he was exiled, leading him around and taking care of him in his blindness and old age, till his death at Colonus. The caring and loving spirit that draws Antigone close to her father in his time of adversity is what causes her to stick to her brother Polyneices in his death. Thus, when Creon decrees that the corpse of Poluneices be denied burial rites, Antigone rebels, bringing her into direct conflict with the king. From her perspective, the law of the gods, which demands fairness to Polyneices, is above the law of man.

8.3.2 Ismene

Antigone's sister and daughter to Oedipus. She is everything Antigone is not: attractive, cowardly, weak-hearted. The contrast between the two comes out more clearly when they are faced with the challenging situation of Creon's decision to deny Polyneices his rightful burial rites. While Antigone is determined to rebel against the unjust decree, Ismene opts to obey; she is opposed to the idea of disobeying the king's decree, especially because she does not think it is good for a woman to stand up to a man's authority, especially so when the man is not only their uncle but also king of the land. Later, however, when Antigone is caught and sentenced to death, Ismene attempts to join forces with her – but Antigone refuses, preferring to fight alone.

8.3.3 Creon

Creon is the king of Thebes, having succeeded the throne after the downfall of his brother in law, Oedipus, who goes into exile for his twin crimes of marrying his own mother, Jocasta, and killing his own father, Laius. The natural heirs to the throne, Eteocles and Polyneices, engage in a fatal power struggle – ending in the death of both of them in battle. As the only surviving male relative, Creon ascends to the throne. The play starts at the point soon after the death of the young men and Creon's ascension to the throne. In his overzealousness to run matters of the state, Creon views Polyneices as the offender since he invades Thebes with foreign forces. On the other hand, Creon perceives Eteocles as worthy of honour for defending Thebes against his brother. However, when Antigone dares to defy him, Creon is too blinded by rage and his low opinion of women to see that even the gods are opposed to his decision to deny Polyneices burial rites. When his stubborn determination meets equally stubborn resistance from Antigone, Creon orders that she should be killed. All attempts by his son Haemon and wife Eurydice to dissuade him from punishing Antigone fall on deaf ears – and he only budes when the prophet Teiresias tells him his actions will lead to dire punishment from the gods: the death of his son. However, his attempt to make things right turns out to be too little too late as Haemon commits suicide; so does his mother. Creon then pays the price of being self-opinionated.

8.3.4 Haemon

He is the son of Creon and Eurydice and is betrothed to Antigone. He finds himself in a difficult situation when he is forced to choose between his father, to whom he has always been loyal, and his beloved Antigone. This is when Antigone decides to disobey his father's decree regarding the denial of burial rites to Polyneices' corpse. His attempts to change his father's decree fail to yield fruit. Unable to separate himself from either family or the love of his life, he commits suicide.

8.3.5 Eurydice

Wife to Creon the king. Like her son Haemon, she fails to convince Creon to reverse his decree about the treatment of Polyneices' body. When her son commits suicide, she too commits suicide, unable to bear the pain.

8.3.6 Teiresias

The blind, old prophet whose attempts to advise Creon fall on deaf ears – until he informs Creon of the divine punishment that will befall him if he does not release Antigone from her prison. Teiresias is the voice of the gods and the voice of wisdom.

8.3.7 The Chorus

The group of Elders who comment on the proceedings of the story as it unfolds. In Greek tragedy the Chorus consisted of a group of approximately ten people. Apart from commenting on the proceedings, the Chorus also play the role of messengers, singers and dancers, as the story proceeds. The Chorus deliver the prologue and epilogue.

8.4 Themes

8.4.1 Rebellion against male authority

The Greek society of Antigone's day was male-dominated – women were on the periphery of the decision-making process and had a lower status than men. It is obvious from the exchanges between Antigone and Creon that he has little regard for her and her opinion particularly because she is a woman. Creon therefore finds it hard to be challenged by a woman, let alone his own niece. In a society where women are

expected to be seen and not heard, where they are expected to obey whatever a man says, especially if that man is in authority, it is extraordinary for Antigone to rebel.



8.4.1.1 Activity

List the names of any number of women who in your opinion have rebelled against male authority. These women could be from history, religion, or the society in which you live. For example, would you say that Alice Lenshina, founder and leader of the Lumpa Church, rebelled against male authority?

8.4.2 The superiority of divine law

Creon is blinded by power and his rejection of Antigone's opinion. He is self-opinionated, convinced that only his opinion is right. He is there immune to advice from his own son and wife, and pays the price for his rigid self-opinionatedness. Unfortunately for him, divine opinion is on the side of Antigone: she advocates love and compassion for the dead, he advocates unreasonable punishment. He fails to see that his decree to deny Polyneices his rightful burial rites is at odds with divine law. In the end, however, it is divine law that triumphs over human law because the gods will always have their way in their struggles with humans, as is evidenced in the struggle between Oedipus' family and the gods.

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8.4.2.1 Activity

Would you agree that divine law is superior to human law? What reasons do you have for agreeing or disagreeing with this assertion?

8.4.3 Power's corruption ability

In *Oedipus the King* Creon is projected as a wise, humble man. However, once he obtains power, in *Antigone*, he becomes corrupted by it. He is transformed from a

humble, wise man into an arrogant, self-opinionated and misguided leader. Power blinds Creon to the extent that he cannot even distinguish wrong from right.



8.4.3.1 Activity

'Power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely.' What are your views about this famous quote by Lord Acton, especially in light of the events in *Antigone*.

8.4.4 The struggle between man and gods

The theme of the struggle between man and god is a motif running through most Greek tragic plays. In this play the struggle is between Creon and the gods, represented by Teiresias, the old, blind prophet. Creon, just like Oedipus before him, struggles against the gods out of ignorance, convinced that what he is doing is right. Like Oedipus before him, he also shows contempt for the messenger of the gods, Teiresias. Since it is impossible for a human being to overcome the gods, Creon is not spared from divine retribution.



8.4.4.1 Activity

Do you think Creon was right to deny Polyneices his burial rights and to decree punishment for Antigone for rebelling against the decree? Do you think he deliberately wanted to fight the gods? If it was not deliberate, was there justice in the punishment of the gods?

8.4.5 Commitment to family versus commitment to love

Haemon finds himself caught between loyalty to family and his love for Antigone. Should he stay loyal to his family and let Antigone be? Should he choose Antigone over family?



8.4.5.1 Activity

The conflict between commitment to family and commitment to love is a very common theme in literature. For example, in Shakespeare's play, *Romeo and Juliet*, the two young lovers are forced to choose between family and love, leading to tragic consequences. Are you aware of other such conflicts in literature or even in real life? Do you think Haemon should have remained loyal to his father?

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8.4.6 The nature of divine justice

This is another theme that permeates Greek tragic plays. In *Antigone*, questions arise as to what the most appropriate punishment for Creon should be. If he is to be punished for his own arrogance and rigidity, why should the punishment take the form of the death of his son and wife? Even when he realises his error and tries to make amends, he is still punished. Why should others suffer for the sins of one man?



8.4.6.1 Activity

Do you think divine justice is fair from your understanding of the story and the Bible? What do you think, for instance, of the Biblical teaching that all people have to suffer for the original sin committed by Adam and Eve?

Module Summary

In this module you have interacted with the texts of Sophocles' two famous plays *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone*. You have also been accorded the opportunity to relate the contents of the play to the contents of module 4 on the Greek tragic play. In addition you have been able to interact with the themes and characters of the plays and thereby get a better understanding of the texts. In the process you have also tackled questions on the texts. We hope you have also been able to draw comparisons between *Antigone* and *Oedipus the King* and that you are now able to see how they are linked thematically and in terms of the main characters.

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