

Antigone

By Sophocles

Written 442 B.C.E

Translated by R. C. Jebb

Dramatis Personae

daughters of Oedipus:

ANTIGONE

ISMENE

CREON, King of Thebes

EURYDICE, his wife

HAEMON, his son

TEIRESIAS, the blind prophet

GUARD, set to watch the corpse of Polyneices

FIRST MESSENGER

SECOND MESSENGER, from the house

CHORUS OF THEBAN ELDERS

Scene

The same as in Oedipus the King, an open space before the royal palace, once that of Oedipus, at Thebes. The backscene represents the front of the palace, with three doors, of which the central and largest is the principal entrance into the house. The time is at daybreak on the morning after the fall of the two brothers, Eteocles and Polyneices, and the flight of the defeated Argives. ANTIGONE calls ISMENE forth from the palace, in order to speak to her alone.

ANTIGONE

Ismene, sister, mine own dear sister, knowest thou what ill there is, of all bequeathed by Oedipus, that Zeus fulfils not for us twain while we live? Nothing painful is there, nothing fraught with ruin, no shame, no dishonour, that I have not seen in thy woes and mine.

And now what new edict is this of which they tell, that our Captain hath just published to all Thebes? Knowest thou aught? Hast thou heard? Or is it hidden from thee that our friends are threatened with the doom of our foes?

ISMENE

No word of friends, Antigone, gladsome or painful, hath come to me, since we two sisters were bereft of brothers twain, killed in one day by twofold blow; and since in this last night the Argive host hath fled, know no more, whether my fortune be brighter, or more grievous.

ANTIGONE

I knew it well, and therefore sought to bring thee beyond the gates of the court, that thou mightest hear alone.

ISMENE

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

ANTIGONE

What, hath not Creon destined our brothers, the one to honoured burial, the other to unburied shame? Eteocles, they say, with due observance of right and custom, he hath laid in the earth, for his honour among the dead below. But the hapless corpse of Polyneices-as rumour saith, it hath been published to the town that none shall entomb him or mourn, but leave unwept, unsepulchred, a welcome store for the birds, as they espy him, to feast on at will.

Such, 'tis said, is the edict that the good Creon hath set forth for thee and for me,-yes, for me,-and is coming hither to proclaim it clearly to those who know it not; nor counts the matter light, but, whoso disobeys in aught, his doom is death by stoning before all the folk. Thou knowest it now; and thou wilt soon show whether thou art nobly bred, or the base daughter of a noble line.

ISMENE

Poor sister,-and if things stand thus, what could I help to do or undo?

ANTIGONE

Consider if thou wilt share the toil and the deed.

ISMENE

In what venture? What can be thy meaning?

ANTIGONE

Wilt thou aid this hand to lift the dead?

ISMENE

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

ANTIGONE

I will do my part,-and thine, if thou wilt not,-to a brother. False to him will I never be found.

ISMENE

Ah, over-bold! when Creon hath forbidden?

ANTIGONE

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

ISMENE

Ah me! think, sister, how our father perished, amid hate and scorn, when sins bared by his own search had moved him to strike both eyes with self-blinding hand; then the mother wife, two names in one, with twisted noose did despite unto her life; and last, our two brothers in one day,-each shedding, hapless one,

a kinsman's blood,-wrought out with mutual hands their common doom. And now we in turn-we two left all alone think how we shall perish, more miserably than all the rest, if, in defiance of the law, we brave a king's decree or his powers. Nay, we must remember, first, that we were born women, as who should not strive with men; next, that we are ruled of the stronger, so that we must obey in these things, and in things yet sorer. I, therefore, asking the Spirits Infernal to pardon, seeing that force is put on me herein, will hearken to our rulers. for 'tis witless to be over busy.

ANTIGONE

I will not urge thee,-no nor, if thou yet shouldst have the mind, wouldst thou be welcome as a worker with me. Nay, be what thou wilt; but I will bury him: well for me to die in doing that. I shall rest, a loved one with him whom I have loved, sinless in my crime; for I owe a longer allegiance to the dead than to the living: in that world I shall abide for ever. But if thou wilt, be guilty of dishonouring laws which the gods have stablished in honour.

ISMENE

I do them no dishonour; but to defy the State,-I have no strength for that.

ANTIGONE

Such be thy plea:-I, then, will go to heap the earth above the brother whom I love.

ISMENE

Alas, unhappy one! How I fear for thee!

ANTIGONE

Fear not for me: guide thine own fate aright.

ISMENE:

At least, then, disclose this plan to none, but hide it closely,-and so, too, will I.

ANTIGONE

Oh, denounce it! Thou wilt be far more hateful for thy silence, if thou proclaim not these things to all.

ISMENE

Thou hast a hot heart for chilling deeds.

ANTIGONE

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

ISMENE

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

ANTIGONE

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

ISMENE

A hopeless quest should not be made at all.

ANTIGONE

If thus thou speakest, thou wilt have hatred from me, and will justly be subject to the lasting hatred of the dead. But leave me, and the folly that is mine alone, to suffer this dread thing; for I shall not suffer aught so dreadful as an ignoble death.

ISMENE

Go, then, if thou must; and of this be sure,-that though thine errand is foolish, to thy dear ones thou art truly dear.

Exit ANTIGONE on the spectators' left. ISMENE retires into the palace by one of the two side-doors. When they have departed, the CHORUS OF THEBAN ELDERS enters.

CHORUS *singing*

strophe 1

Beam of the sun, fairest light that ever dawned on Thebe of the seven gates, thou hast shone forth at last, eye of golden day, arisen above Dirce's streams! The warrior of the white shield, who came from Argos in his panoply, hath been stirred by thee to headlong flight, in swifter career;

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

systema 1

who set forth against our land by reason of the vexed claims of Polyneices; and, like shrill-screaming eagle, he flew over into our land, in snow-white pinion sheathed, with an armed throng, and with plumage of helms.

CHORUS

antistrophe 1

He paused above our dwellings; he ravened around our sevenfold portals with spears athirst for blood; but he went hence, or ever his jaws were glutted with our gore, or the Fire-god's pine-fed flame had seized our crown of towers. So fierce was the noise of battle raised behind him, a thing too hard for him to conquer, as he wrestled with his dragon foe.

LEADER

systema 2

For Zeus utterly abhors the boasts of a proud tongue; and when he beheld them coming on in a great stream, in the haughty pride of clanging gold, he smote with brandished fire one who was now hasting to shout victory at his goal upon our ramparts.

CHORUS

strophe 2

Swung down, he fell on the earth with a crash, torch in hand, he who so lately, in the frenzy of the mad onset, was raging against us with the blasts of his tempestuous hate. But those threats fared not as he hoped; and to other foes the mighty War-god dispensed their several dooms, dealing havoc around, a mighty helper at our need.

LEADER

systema 3

For seven captains at seven gates, matched against seven, left the tribute of their panoplies to Zeus who

turns the battle; save those two of cruel fate, who, born of one sire and one mother, set against each other their twain conquering spears, and are sharers in a common death.

CHORUS

antistrophe 2

But since Victory of glorious name hath come to us, with joy responsive to the joy of Thebe whose chariots are many, let us enjoy forgetfulness after the late wars, and visit all the temples of the gods with night-long dance and song; and may Bacchus be our leader, whose dancing shakes the land of Thebe.

LEADER

systema 4

But lo, the king of the land comes yonder, Creon, son of Menoeceus, our new ruler by the new fortunes that the gods have given; what counsel is he pondering, that he hath proposed this special conference of elders, summoned by his general mandate?

Enter CREON, from the central doors of the palace, in the garb of king, with two attendants.

CREON

Sirs, the vessel of our State, after being tossed on wild waves, hath once more been safely steadied by the gods: and ye, out of all the folk, have been called apart by my summons, because I knew, first of all, how true and constant was your reverence for the royal power of Laius; how, again, when Oedipus was ruler of our land, and when he had perished, your steadfast loyalty still upheld their children. Since, then, his sons have fallen in one day by a twofold doom,-each smitten by the other, each stained with a brother's blood,- I now possess the throne and all its powers, by nearness of kinship to the dead.

No man can be fully known, in soul and spirit and mind, until he hath been seen versed in rule and law-giving. For if any, being supreme guide of the State, cleaves not to the best counsels, but, through some fear, keeps his lips locked, I hold, and have ever held, him most base; and if any makes a friend of more account than his fatherland, that man hath no place in my regard. For I-be Zeus my witness, who sees all things always-would not be silent if I saw ruin, instead of safety, coming to the citizens; nor would I ever deem the country's foe a friend to myself; remembering this, that our country is the ship that bears us safe, and that only while she prospers in our voyage can we make true friends.

Such are the rules by which I guard this city's greatness. And in accord with them is the edict which I have now published to the folk touching the sons of Oedipus;-that Eteocles, who hath fallen fighting for our city, in all renown of arms, shall be entombed, and crowned with every rite that follows the noblest dead to their rest. But for his brother, Polyneices,-who came back from exile, and sought to consume utterly with fire the city of his fathers and the shrines of his fathers' gods,-sought to taste of kindred blood, and to lead the remnant into slavery;-touching this man, it hath been proclaimed to our people that none shall grace him with sepulture or lament, but leave him unburied, a corpse for birds and dogs to eat, a ghastly sight of shame.

Such the spirit of my dealing; and never, by deed of mine, shall the wicked stand in honour before the just; but whoso hath good will to Thebes, he shall be honoured of me, in his life and in his death.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Such is thy pleasure, Creon, son of Menoeceus, touching this city's foe, and its friend; and thou hast power, I ween, to take what order thou wilt, both for the dead, and for all us who live.

CREON

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

LEADER

Lay the burden of this task on some younger man.

CREON

Nay, watchers of the corpse have been found.

LEADER

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

CREON

That ye side not with the breakers of these commands.

LEADER

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

CREON

In sooth, that is the meed; yet lucre hath oft ruined men through their hopes.

A GUARD enters from the spectators' left.

GUARD

My liege, I will not say that I come breathless from speed, or that have plied a nimble foot; for often did my thoughts make me pause, and wheel round in my path, to return. My mind was holding large discourse with me; 'Fool, why goest thou to thy certain doom?' 'Wretch, tarrying again? And if Creon hears this from another, must not thou smart for it?' So debating, I went on my way with lagging steps, and thus a short road was made long. At last, however, it carried the day that I should come hither-to thee; and, though my tale be nought, yet will I tell it; for I come with a good grip on one hope,-that I can suffer nothing but what is my fate.

CREON

And what is it that disquiets thee thus?

GUARD

I wish to tell thee first about myself-I did not do the deed-I did not see the doer-it were not right that I should come to any harm.

CREON

Thou hast a shrewd eye for thy mark; well dost thou fence thyself round against the blame; clearly thou hast some strange thing to tell.

GUARD

Aye, truly; dread news makes one pause long.

CREON

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

GUARD

Well, this is it.-The corpse-some one hath just given it burial, and gone away,-after sprinkling thirsty dust on the flesh, with such other rites as piety enjoins.

CREON

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

GUARD

I know not; no stroke of pickaxe was seen there, no earth thrown up by mattock; the ground was hard and dry, unbroken, without track of wheels; the doer was one who had left no trace. And when the first day-watchman showed it to us, sore wonder fell on all. The dead man was veiled from us; not shut within a tomb, but lightly strewn with dust, as by the hand of one who shunned a curse. And no sign met the eye as though any beast of prey or any dog had come nigh to him, or torn him.

Then evil words flew fast and loud among us, guard accusing guard; und it would e'en have come to blows at last, nor was there any to hinder. Every man was the culprit, and no one was convicted, but all disclaimed knowledge of the deed. And we were ready to take red-hot iron in our hands;-to walk through fire;-to make oath by the gods that we had not done the deed,-that we were not privy to the planning or the doing.

At last, when all our searching was fruitless, one spake, who made us all bend our faces on the earth in fear; for we saw not how we could gainsay him, or escape mischance if we obeyed. His counsel was that this deed must be reported to thee, and not hidden. And this seemed best; and the lot doomed my hapless self to win this prize. So here I stand,-as unwelcome as unwilling, well I wot; for no man delights in the bearer of bad news.

LEADER

O king, my thoughts have long been whispering, can this deed, perchance, be e'en the work of gods?

CREON

Cease, ere thy words fill me utterly with wrath, lest thou be found at once an old man and foolish. For thou sayest what is not to be borne, in saying that the gods have care for this corpse. Was it for high reward of trusty service that they sought to hide his nakedness, who came to burn their pillared shrines and sacred treasures, to burn their land, and scatter its laws to the winds? Or dost thou behold the gods honouring the wicked? It cannot be. No! From the first there were certain in the town that muttered against me, chafing at this edict, wagging their heads in secret; and kept not their necks duly under the yoke, like men contented with my sway.

'Tis by them, well I know, that these have been beguiled and bribed to do this deed. Nothing so evil as money ever grew to be current among men. This lays cities low, this drives men from their homes, this trains and warps honest souls till they set themselves to works of shame; this still teaches folk to practise villainies, and to know every godless deed.

But all the men who wrought this thing for hire have made it sure that, soon or late, they shall pay the price. Now, as Zeus still hath my reverence, know this-I tell it thee on my oath:-If ye find not the very author of this burial, and produce him before mine eyes, death alone shall not be enough for you, till first, hung up alive, ye have revealed this outrage,-that henceforth ye may thief with better knowledge whence lucre should be won, and learn that it is not well to love gain from every source. For thou wilt find that ill-gotten pelf brings more men to ruin than to weal.

GUARD

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

CREON

Knowest thou not that even now thy voice offends?

GUARD

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

CREON

And why wouldst thou define the seat of my pain?

GUARD

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

CREON

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

GUARD

May be, but never the doer of this deed.

CREON

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

GUARD

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

CREON

Let thy fancy play with 'judgment' as it will;-but, if ye show me not the doers of these things, ye shall avow that dastardly gains work sorrows.

CREON goes into the palace.

GUARD

Well, may he be found! so 'twere best. But, be he caught or be he not-fortune must settle that-truly thou wilt not see me here again. Saved, even now, beyond hope and thought, I owe the gods great thanks.

The GUARD goes out on the spectators' left.

CHORUS *singing*

strophe 1

Wonders are many, and none is more wonderful than man; the power that crosses the white sea, driven by the stormy south-wind, making a path under surges that threaten to engulf him; and Earth, the eldest of the gods, the immortal, the unwearied, doth he wear, turning the soil with the offspring of horses, as the ploughs go to and fro from year to year.

antistrophe 1

And the light-hearted race of birds, and the tribes of savage beasts, and the sea-brood of the deep, he

snare in the meshes of his woven toils, he leads captive, man excellent in wit. And he masters by his arts the beast whose lair is in the wilds, who roams the hills; he tames the horse of shaggy mane, he puts the yoke upon its neck, he tames the tireless mountain bull.

strophe 2

And speech, and wind-swift thought, and all the moods that mould a state, hath he taught himself; and how to flee the arrows of the frost, when 'tis hard lodging under the clear sky, and the arrows of the rushing rain; yea, he hath resource for all; without resource he meets nothing that must come: only against Death shall he call for aid in vain; but from baffling maladies he hath devised escapes.

antistrophe 2

Cunning beyond fancy's dream is the fertile skill which brings him, now to evil, now to good. When he honours the laws of the land, and that justice which he hath sworn by the gods to uphold, proudly stands his city: no city hath he who, for his rashness, dwells with sin. Never may he share my hearth, never think my thoughts, who doth these things!

Enter the GUARD on the spectators' left, leading in ANTIGONE.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What portent from the gods is this?-my soul is amazed. I know her-how can I deny that yon maiden is Antigone?

O hapless, and child of hapless sire,-Of Oedipus! What means this? Thou brought a prisoner?-thou, disloyal to the king's laws, and taken in folly?

GUARD

Here she is, the doer of the deed:-caught this girl burying him:-but where is Creon?
CREON enters hurriedly from the palace.

LEADER

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

CREON

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

GUARD

O king, against nothing should men pledge their word; for the after-thought belies the first intent. I could have vowed that I should not soon be here again,-scared by thy threats, with which I had just been lashed: but,-since the joy that surprises and transcends our hopes is like in fulness to no other pleasure,-I have come, though 'tis in breach of my sworn oath, bringing this maid; who was taken showing grace to the dead. This time there was no casting of lots; no, this luck hath fallen to me, and to none else. And now, sire, take her thyself, question her, examine her, as thou wilt; but I have a right to free and final quittance of this trouble.

CREON

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

GUARD

She was burying the man; thou knowest all.

CREON

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

GUARD

I saw her burying the corpse that thou hadst forbidden to bury. Is that plain and clear?

CREON

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

GUARD

It befell on this wise. When we had come to the place,-with those dread menaces of thine upon us,-we swept away all the dust that covered the corpse, and bared the dank body well; and then sat us down on the brow of the hill, to windward, heedful that the smell from him should not strike us; every man was wide awake, and kept his neighbour alert with torrents of threats, if anyone should be careless of this task.

So went it, until the sun's bright orb stood in mid heaven, and the heat began to burn: and then suddenly a whirlwind lifted from the earth storm of dust, a trouble in the sky the plain, marring all the leafage of its woods; and the wide air was choked therewith: we closed our eyes, and bore the plague from the gods.

And when, after a long while, this storm had passed, the maid was seen; and she cried aloud with the sharp cry of a bird in its bitterness,-even as when, within the empty nest, it sees the bed stripped of its nestlings. So she also, when she saw the corpse bare, lifted up a voice of wailing, and called down curses on the doers of that deed. And straightway she brought thirsty dust in her hands; and from a shapely ewer of bronze, held high, with thrice-poured drink-offering she crowned the dead.

We rushed forward when we saw it, and at once doted upon our quarry, who was in no wise dismayed. Then we taxed her with her past and present doings; and she stood not on denial of aught,-at once to my joy and to my pain. To have escaped from ill one's self is a great joy; but 'tis painful to bring friends to ill. Howbeit, all such things are of less account to me than mine own safety.

CREON

Thou-thou whose face is bent to earth-dost thou avow, or disavow, this deed?

ANTIGONE

I avow it; I make no denial.

CREON to GUARD

Thou canst betake thee whither thou wilt, free and clear of a grave charge.

Exit GUARD

To ANTIGONE

Now, tell me thou-not in many words, but briefly-knewest thou that an edict had forbidden this?

ANTIGONE

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

CREON

And thou didst indeed dare to transgress that law?

ANTIGONE

Yes; for it was not Zeus that had published me that edict; not such are the laws set among men by the justice who dwells with the gods below; nor deemed I that thy decrees were of such force, that a mortal could override the unwritten and unfailing statutes of heaven. For their life is not of to-day or yesterday, but from all time, and no man knows when they were first put forth.

Not through dread of any human pride could I answer to the gods for breaking these. Die I must,-I knew that well (how should I not?)-even without thy edicts. But if I am to die before my time, I count that a gain: for when any one lives, as I do, compassed about with evils, can such an one find aught but gain in death?

So for me to meet this doom is trifling grief; but if I had suffered my mother's son to lie in death an unburied corpse, that would have grieved me; for this, I am not grieved. And if my present deeds are foolish in thy sight, it may be that a foolish judge arraigns my folly.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

The maid shows herself passionate child of passionate sire, and knows not how to bend before troubles.

CREON

Yet I would have thee know that o'er-stubborn spirits are most often humbled; 'tis the stiffest iron, baked to hardness in the fire, that thou shalt oftenest see snapped and shivered; and I have known horses that show temper brought to order by a little curb; there is no room for pride when thou art thy neighbour's slave.-This girl was already versed in insolence when she transgressed the laws that had been set forth; and, that done, lo, a second insult,-to vaunt of this, and exult in her deed.

Now verily I am no man, she is the man, if this victory shall rest with her, and bring no penalty. No! be she sister's child, or nearer to me in blood than any that worships Zeus at the altar of our house,-she and her kinsfolk shall not avoid a doom most dire; for indeed I charge that other with a like share in the plotting of this burial.

And summon her-for I saw her e'en now within,-raving, and not mistress of her wits. So oft, before the deed, the mind stands self-convicted in its treason, when folks are plotting mischief in the dark. But verily this, too, is hateful,-when one who hath been caught in wickedness then seeks to make the crime a glory.

ANTIGONE

Wouldst thou do more than take and slay me?

CREON

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

ANTIGONE

Why then dost thou delay? In thy discourse there is nought that pleases me,-never may there be!-and so my words must needs be displeasing to thee. And yet, for glory-whence could I have won a nobler, than by giving burial to mine own brother? All here would own that they thought it well, were not their lips sealed by fear. But royalty, blest in so much besides, hath the power to do and say what it will.

CREON

Thou differest from all these Thebans in that view.

ANTIGONE

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

CREON

And art thou not ashamed to act apart from them?

ANTIGONE

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

CREON

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

ANTIGONE

Brother by the same mother and the same sire.

CREON

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

ANTIGONE

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

CREON

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

ANTIGONE

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

CREON

Wasting this land; while he fell as its champion.

ANTIGONE

Nevertheless, Hades desires these rites.

CREON

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

ANTIGONE

Who knows but this seems blameless in the world below?

CREON

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

ANTIGONE

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

CREON

Pass, then, to the world of the dead, and, if thou must needs love, love them. While I live, no woman shall rule me.

Enter ISMENE from the house, led in by two attendants.

CHORUS *chanting*

Lo, yonder Ismene comes forth, shedding such tears as fond sisters weep; a cloud upon her brow casts its shadow over her darkly-flushing face, and breaks in rain on her fair cheek.

CREON

And thou, who, lurking like a viper in my house, wast secretly draining my life-blood, while I knew not that I was nurturing two pests, to rise against my throne-come, tell me now, wilt thou also confess thy part in this burial, or wilt thou forswear all knowledge of it?

ISMENE

I have done the deed,-if she allows my claim,-and share the burden of the charge.

ANTIGONE

Nay, justice will not suffer thee to do that: thou didst not consent to the deed, nor did I give thee part in it.

ISMENE

But, now that ills beset thee, I am not ashamed to sail the sea of trouble at thy side.

ANTIGONE

Whose was the deed, Hades and the dead are witnesses: a friend in words is not the friend that I love.

ISMENE

Nay, sister, reject me not, but let me die with thee, and duly honour the dead.

ANTIGONE

Share not thou my death, nor claim deeds to which thou hast not put thy hand: my death will suffice.

ISMENE

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

ANTIGONE

Ask Creon; all thy care is for him.

ISMENE

Why vex me thus, when it avails thee nought?

ANTIGONE

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

ISMENE

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

ANTIGONE

Save thyself: I grudge not thy escape.

ISMENE

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

ANTIGONE

Thy choice was to live; mine, to die.

ISMENE

At least thy choice was not made without my protest.

ANTIGONE

One world approved thy wisdom; another, mine.

ISMENE

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

ANTIGONE

Be of good cheer; thou livest; but my life hath long been given to death, that so I might serve the dead.

CREON

Lo, one of these maidens hath newly shown herself foolish, as the other hath been since her life began.

ISMENE

Yea, O king, such reason as nature may have given abides not with the unfortunate, but goes astray.

CREON

Thine did, when thou chocest vile deeds with the vile.

ISMENE

What life could I endure, without her presence?

CREON

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

ISMENE

But wilt thou slay the betrothed of thine own son?

CREON

Nay, there are other fields for him to plough.

ISMENE

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

CREON

I like not an evil wife for my son.

ANTIGONE

Haemon, beloved! How thy father wrongs thee!

CREON

Enough, enough of thee and of thy marriage!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Wilt thou indeed rob thy son of this maiden?

CREON

'Tis Death that shall stay these bridals for me.

LEADER

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

CREON

Determined, yes, for thee and for me.-

To the two attendants

No more delay-servants, take them within! Henceforth they must be women, and not range at large; for verily even the bold seek to fly, when they see Death now closing on their life.

Exeunt attendants, guarding ANTIGONE and ISMENE.-CREON remains.

CHORUS *singing*

strophe 1

Blest are they whose days have not tasted of evil. For when a house hath once been shaken from heaven, there the curse fails nevermore, passing from life to life of the race; even as, when the surge is driven over the darkness of the deep by the fierce breath of Thracian sea-winds, it rolls up the black sand from the depths, and there is sullen roar from wind-vexed headlands that front the blows of the storm.

antistrophe 1

I see that from olden time the sorrows in the house of the Labdacidae are heaped upon the sorrows of the dead; and generation is not freed by generation, but some god strikes them down, and the race hath no deliverance.

For now that hope of which the light had been spread above the last root of the house of Oedipus-that hope, in turn, is brought low--by the blood-stained dust due to the gods infernal, and by folly in speech, and frenzy at the heart.

strophe 2

Thy power, O Zeus, what human trespass can limit? That power which neither Sleep, the all-ensnaring, nor the untiring months of the gods can master; but thou, a ruler to whom time brings not old age, dwellest in the dazzling splendour of Olympus.

And through the future, near and far, as through the past, shall this law hold good: Nothing that is vast enters into the life of mortals without a curse.

antistrophe 2

For that hope whose wanderings are so wide is to many men a comfort, but to many a false lure of giddy desires; and the disappointment comes on one who knoweth nought till he burn his foot against the hot fire.

For with wisdom hath some one given forth the famous saying, that evil seems good, soon or late, to him whose mind the god draws to mischief; and but for the briefest space doth he fare free of woe.