

Antigone Book Notes

Antigone by Sophocles

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Author/Context

Greek drama has a long evolution, but the great tragic playwright Sophocles played a key role in this process by adding a third actor to the stage, and minimalizing the role of the Chorus that had always had a central role in the earlier plays of Aeschylus. Born around 495 B.C. in the very same Colonus region seen in *Oedipus at Colonus*, part of the ancient Greek city-state of Athens, Sophocles began writing early on in life. He continually entered the annual drama contest held in nearby Athens until he won first place in 468, shortly before he was thirty years old, taking popularity away from Aeschylus, the first great Greek tragedian who had until then reigned supreme.

Sophocles' work added to the technical elements of playwriting, but his thematic content is much more immediate to the opinions of Athenians as well. Rather than focusing on the archaic perspective that gods control all human events, Sophocles gives responsibility to humans and holds them accountable for their actions based upon the decisions they make. This theme is seen in *Antigone* because all of the characters suffer due to decisions they themselves have made: Antigone buries Polyneices, knowing that she will be put to death if she is caught, and Creon knows that his actions violate religious law but he does not care. Haemon dies because of his grief at Antigone's death, and Eurydice dies because of the deaths of her two sons. As a result, human events become a matter of cause and effect, rather than blaming everything on the cruelty of the gods. These characters control their own actions. In addition, previous traditions partly established by Aeschylus dictated that tragedies would be divided into a series of three plays, called a trilogy, which was usually followed by a fourth, lighthearted Satyr play. In contrast, Sophocles condensed the meaning of each play he wrote into a self-contained unit in and of itself, without any need to compare. His plays are thus each to be interpreted as independent from any other work.

After achieving his celebrity status in 468, success would follow Sophocles for the next twenty years until he would be beaten at the Athenian drama contest in 441 B.C. by the third and last great Athenian playwright, Euripides. Euripides would reign supreme until his death in 406, a year before that of Sophocles. When not busy writing and entering competitions, Sophocles himself was also a successful statesman, serving as treasurer of the Athenian democracy from 443-442 BC, and as a military general from 441-440 after gaining great popularity from *Antigone* which was written in 442. Much later, he also served as an Athenian magistrate in 413. This political experience certainly gives much of the inspiration for his themes, such as how to properly rule a city or the capacity for corruption that rulers of cities and those in power may face. Much of the conflict seen in *Antigone* is as a result of people fighting for control of Thebes as Eteocles and Polyneices both fought and died for the power to rule, and Creon suffered because of his arrogance after becoming the new Theban king. Sophocles and his plays form a keystone of Greek drama as there is a movement away from an archaic world of fear and powerlessness toward a growing sense of humanity and enlightenment. He lived through the Golden Age of Athenian democracy when such notable persons such as Pericles and Socrates walked the earth. He died in 405 BC, shortly before this period of greatness would be brought to a nightmarish end with the



defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian War, creating a great historical tragedy that Sophocles did not live long enough to write.

It also must be pointed out that although loosely connected to the same mythological tale, Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Antigone* do not form a cohesive trilogy at all; the plays were not even written in this chronological order. Instead, it was the famous *Antigone* that was written first, presumably around 442 BC when he was fifty-four years old. Following this was *Oedipus the King* fifteen years later in 426, and finally *Oedipus at Colonus*, written very close to when Sophocles' death in 405 and produced posthumously a year later. The first two plays deal very much with affairs of governing a city and the tendency towards corruption and ignorance that political power can bring, corresponding to the years when Sophocles was serving in public offices. However, this last play portrays a suffering, lonely old man who arrives at Colonus of all places -- Sophocles' birthplace -- in order to die.

Because it is the first of this series of plays, *Antigone* gives clues as to what Sophocles' original intent in writing about Oedipus' story may have been. The action of the story is set in Thebes and, as has been stated earlier, the theme of the story focuses on how a proper city should be ruled. In *Antigone*, there are many different issues that the new Theban king must face, and he fails miserably, learning wisdom only after great suffering. King Creon first creates a city law that violates a religious law, he is cold-hearted and causes Theban citizens to fear him rather than giving him respect, and he is cruel to his son, a young man whom he should be nourishing since he is his successor. Additionally, he openly mocks the power of women who are a very necessary element in urban society, nor does he listen to the wise advice of others who know better, such as the Chorus. When Creon realizes he has made a bad decision, he is paranoid and afraid that people will mock him. Only after he is punished for these many offenses does Creon find humility and wisdom. Sophocles thus uses *Antigone* to model everything that a city's ruler should not do. Overall, he teaches that a ruler must have wisdom, which is something that Creon is lacking throughout the play. The story of how a proper city should be ruled is the legacy that Sophocles has left for the people of Athens after writing *Antigone*. The production of this play led to immense popularity and universal confidence in Sophocles' ability to serve in an administrative office, and, soon after the play was produced, he was elected to the position of Athenian general from 441-440 BC.

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Plot Summary

After King Oedipus was exiled from the city of Thebes when he learned that he had committed incest and patricide, his younger son Eteocles claimed that the kingship belonged to him, exiling his older brother Polyneices. Polyneices then attacked Thebes with a massive army, but neither son won because they killed each other in battle. The new Theban king, Creon, declares that Eteocles will be buried and honored as a hero while Polyneices' body will rot away and be eaten by dogs in disgrace; the penalty for trying to bury the body is death. Hearing this news, an angry Antigone insists that her brother's body must be buried so that his spirit can rest in peace, in spite of the cautious advice of her younger sister, Ismene.

Antigone goes to the battlefield in front of Thebes, pouring sand over Polyneices' body and performing burial rites. She allows herself to be captured after coming out of hiding when some guards try to brush off the dust, and a defiant Antigone is brought to Creon. Stunned that a woman would dare to disobey his orders, he imprisons both Antigone and Ismene as an accomplice, declaring that they shall be executed. Soon after, Creon's son Haemon pleads for Antigone's release because he is engaged to marry her, although his arrogant father mocks him, ignoring his worries. An angry Haemon runs away, hurt that his father has treated him like this.

Then Creon changes his mind abruptly, deciding to execute only Antigone since Ismene's innocence is clear, and the older sister is thus sent outside of Thebes to starve to death in a cave. While Antigone is suffering this unfortunate fate, the blind prophet Teiresias warns Creon that the gods are very angry that he has refused burial for Polyneices, since the very same dogs and birds that eat his flesh are later used for sacrifices. As a result, Creon's son will die in punishment, he declares. Mocking Teiresias, Creon does not listen to this advice, saying that Teiresias just wants to scare him. However, he finally agrees to bury the slain man after the Chorus of Theban citizens reminds him that Teiresias has never been wrong about anything.

Now worried about his son, Creon washes Polyneices' body, performs burial rites, and cremates the body's remains. Then he goes to free Antigone from the cave where she is imprisoned, but it is too late to avoid tragedy: she has hung herself by a rope, and Haemon stands weeping beneath her. After trying to attack Creon, Haemon stabs himself and dies holding Antigone's body in his arms. A broken man, Creon returns to the palace only to learn that his wife Eurydice has also committed suicide after learning about her son's death. Creon is led away by his citizens, lamenting, wishing for the release from suffering that only death can give him. The story of *Antigone* focuses on the role of the ruler in a city, providing a model for all of the bad qualities that a king should not have, lest he be punished terribly as Creon was in the end. Moreover, the gods must always be respected by everyone.



Major Characters

Antigone: The oldest daughter of Oedipus. Her name in Greek means 'one who is of the opposite opinion' (anti = against, gnomi = opinion). After Antigone's brothers die in battle, Creon forbids burial for the elder Polyneices because he dared to attack Thebes. Pitying him, Antigone disregards the advice of her younger sister Ismene to obey Creon's decree and covers Polyneices' body in dust, declaring that religious laws of burial are more important than a city's law. As a result, Creon sentences Antigone to death by starvation in a cave in spite of his son Haemon's pleading, since he is engaged to marry her. Realizing that the Theban king has made a terrible mistake after speaking to Teiresias, Creon unseals the cave too late to save the girl. Antigone has already committed suicide by hanging herself from a rope.

Ismene: The youngest daughter of Oedipus. Her name in Greek means 'to linger towards' (eis = towards, mene = linger). She tells Antigone to obey Creon's decree, but her sister does not listen. After Antigone is captured and sentenced to die, Ismene insists that she helped commit the crime, because she wants to die with her. Antigone tells the truth that Ismene had no involvement in the burial at all, and Creon releases her from custody without punishment. Ismene is not heard from again. Throughout the play, she is the obedient, willing citizen easily dominated by tyrants such as Creon. She is a follower, unlike her bold sister.

Creon: Iocasta's brother and King of Thebes. After the deaths of both Theban princes, Polyneices and Eteocles, Creon claims the throne for himself because he is the former queen's brother. His first edict forbids burial to Polyneices or any of the other soldiers who attacked Thebes; after Antigone disobeys this law he sentences her to death and at first plans to kill Ismene as well, until the Chorus reminds him that she is innocent. Creon is selfish, erratic, and foolish. He is not a wise ruler and as a result, he suffers for his ignorance after realizing his mistakes too late. Antigone, his son Haemon, and his wife Eurydice all commit suicide. Creon is left humbled but heartbroken, incapable of even walking without someone to support him.

Minor Characters

Oedipus: The former king of Thebes and Antigone's father. His name in Greek means 'limping foot' (oido = to swell, pou = foot) because his father Laius sliced his ankles when he was a baby so that he would die in the wilderness, disabled. He wanted to avoid the prophesy that that his son Oedipus would one day kill him. After later discovering that he had indeed killed his father and married his mother, a grown Oedipus was exiled from Thebes and wandered for many years until he died an outcast. Then Oedipus' sons Polyneices and Eteocles battled for the Theban throne, killing each other; Creon forbids burial for Polyneices, but Oedipus' daughter Antigone performs burial rites on his body because she loves him. Arrested and sentenced to death, Antigone thus follows the same tragic footsteps of her father Oedipus, treated as a criminal by the city of Thebes.



Laius: Oedipus' father and former king of Thebes. To avoid being killed by his own son as was prophesized, Laius sent Oedipus to die in the wilderness as a baby, but the son survived. Oedipus later murders King Laius on the road to Thebes, just as the oracle had predicted he would.

Iocasta: The former queen of Thebes and Oedipus' mother. When she discovers that she has married her son, Oedipus, she commits suicide by hanging herself in the palace. Antigone comments that she had herself wrapped her mother in her funeral clothes.

Polyneices: The oldest son of Oedipus. After his younger brother Eteocles unjustly claims the Theban throne for himself, Polyneices assembles seven armies to attack the city and regain the kingship. He dies in battle, and Creon declares him to be a traitor, forbidding burial upon penalty of death. His body rots in front of the city until Antigone performs burial rites by sprinkling dust over it. Later, realizing that he is mistaken, Creon buries Polyneices in the ground, and his spirit is laid to rest at long last.

Eteocles: The youngest son of Oedipus. Although Polyneices is next in line to rule Thebes, Eteocles claims the throne for himself with the support of Creon and exiles his brother. Polyneices kills him in battle, and his body receives a full burial at the order of Creon. He declares that Eteocles is a hero because he died defending Thebes from enemies.

Chorus of Theban Elders: A group of Theban citizens. First arriving as obedient to King Creon, the Chorus gives opinions about events that occur in the story and recalls events that have occurred in the past. In addition, there is a gradual progression of the Chorus as it increasingly provides more advice in the story as it does for Creon when urging him to obey Teiresias' words and bury Polyneices. The Chorus leads a broken-hearted Creon away at the end, as he becomes no longer a vain selfish man, but instead is subject completely to the wishes of the people.

Sentry: A soldier who tells Creon about the illegal burial of Polyneices' body and later captures Antigone for committing this crime. He is afraid of Creon's anger when initially informing him that someone has violated his edict, but the Sentry is forgiven after bringing Antigone into custody.

Haemon: Creon's youngest son. When Antigone is sentenced to death, Haemon warns Creon that many Thebans believe that she should live. Antigone is also engaged to be Haemon's wife, and he does not want her to die. He becomes very upset when his father openly mocks him and later commits suicide after unsuccessfully trying to stab Creon with a sword. Haemon then stabs himself instead.

Teiresias: A blind old prophet. Many years earlier Teiresias had warned the Theban king Oedipus that he was guilty of incest and patricide, but Oedipus had heeded his warning too late. Now, the old blind prophet, guided by a young boy, warns King Creon that the gods are angry because Polyneices' body has not been buried, but Creon insists that he just wants to make some money by scaring him with lies. Just as Oedipus



had once not taken Teiresias seriously and suffered terribly for it, so too does Creon mock the old man and later suffer with the deaths of his niece, son, and wife. Teiresias also predicts future attacks for Thebes from the cities that surround it.

Messenger: A man who tells Eurydice about her son's suicide by stabbing himself with a sword. Although the wise Chorus is concerned about Eurydice as she runs away abruptly after hearing that her son is dead, the Messenger sees no danger and praises Creon's leadership as well. He is wrong on both accounts: Creon has made poor choices as a leader, and Eurydice stabs herself a short time later, blaming Creon for the deaths of her sons Megareus and Haemon.

Second Messenger: A man who tells Creon about Eurydice's suicide by stabbing herself with a knife. After hearing this news, Creon is a broken man with little will of his own. His harsh temper fades away into sadness, knowing at last that he has made a terrible mistake by denying burial to Polyneices.

Megareus (or Menoeceus): The youngest son of Eurydice and Creon. He had died fighting for Eteocles in the first attack on Thebes; after Creon warned him to stay away from the battle because he feared for his safety, Megareus, feeling overly confident, joined the battle because he didn't want to be thought of as a coward. Being an inexperienced soldier, he was killed at once. Eurydice blames Creon for Megareus' death as well as for that of the older Haemon. She commits suicide because the grief of losing two sons is too great to bear.



Objects/Places

Thebes: A city located northwest of Athens. Once ruled by Oedipus, his sons Polyneices and Eteocles staged a bloody battle to win the Theban throne. Both men die in battle and Creon is left as the sole king. Eteocles' body is given proper burial on Theban soil, yet Creon decrees that Polyneices must rot and be eaten by dogs because he is a traitor. Later, Teiresias prophesizes that other cities in Greece will attack Thebes, because Creon has denied burial for men from these cities as well.

Colonus: Location of Oedipus' death. A place in the Greek city-state of Athens, it is a quiet suburb of the main city. Antigone and Ismene return to Thebes after their father's death at Colonus, hoping in vain to stop the war between their brothers.

Body (of Polyneices): A corpse slain in battle outside of Thebes. A topic of great debate, King Creon refuses burial for this body of Polyneices, while Antigone insists that to deny burial violates the gods' laws. After performing burial rites she is sentenced to death; too late, Teiresias warns Creon to bury the body because the gods are, indeed, angry. Even though Creon follows these instructions, he is punished with the deaths of his niece, son, and wife.

Decree (of Creon): An order given by Creon that forbade burial for Polyneices' body upon penalty of death, for his body must rot on the field in front of Thebes. Ismene tells Antigone to obey the decree to avoid a death sentence, but the older sister doesn't listen. Later Teiresias tells Creon that his decree is wrong and has made the gods angry. For his poor decisions, Creon suffers very much with the deaths of his niece, son, and wife.

Zeus: King of all gods. He rules the Heavens. Although Creon is irreverent to Zeus by going so far as to say he didn't care if birds brought torn pieces of Polyneices' flesh directly to Zeus himself, the Chorus remains pious and loyal to this supreme god of all gods.

Danae: Mother of the Greek hero Perseus who experienced much suffering. The Chorus compares her fate to that of Antigone. Like Oedipus' father Laius, Perseus' grandfather received a prophesy from Delphi that his son would one day kill him, and he tried unsuccessfully to kill Perseus to avoid this fate. After living in exile for many years, Perseus returns home with Danae and accidentally kills his father with a discus, thus fulfilling the earlier prophesy, much as Oedipus would do by killing Laius.

Phineus: An ancient prophet whose wife blinded his two sons; he is punished by a jealous Zeus, angry that he has been given psychic powers by Apollo. After being tormented for many years by monsters called Harpies, Phineus is saved by the famous Jason and his Argonauts. The Chorus compares Antigone's suffering to that of Phineus.

Fate: An uncontrollable divine force that predetermines future events. Teiresias and the oracle of Apollo at Delphi can see into the future and know what is fated to happen. Fate



cannot be changed, and when men such as Laius or Creon try to avoid the fate that is destined for them, they always fail. Fate cannot be changed. Teiresias also declares that Thebes is fated to be attacked by the cities in Argos.

Seven armies: Seven different armies mustered together from Argos by Polyneices in order to attack Thebes. The armies are each led by a chieftain, but after the battle all chieftains are dead except for one, Adrastus, who flees and seeks help in nearby Athens. The dead chieftains are denied burial at Creon's order; only Polyneices is granted burial eventually, and Teiresias predicts that Argos will soon attack Thebes to avenge these deaths.

Bacchus: Greek god of wine and revelry. After an ancient king of Thebes named Pentheus mocked Bacchus, the god punished Pentheus with a painful death. His body is torn apart by his mother and the rest of his family as they are all driven into madness by a vengeful Bacchus. The Chorus compares Antigone's fate to that of Pentheus.

Argos: A plains region south of Thebes on the Peloponnesian Peninsula in lower Greece. Here such cities as Argos, Mycenae, and Corinth are located; Polyneices recruited chieftains and seven armies from Argos. They are all killed on the battlefield in front of Thebes and denied burial, except for one. Teiresias warns Creon that the cities in Argos will soon attack Thebes to get revenge for the deaths of their citizens.



Quotes

Quote 1: "And now what is the proclamation that they tell of/made lately by the commander, publicly,/to all people? Do you know it? Have you heard it?/Don't you notice when evils due to enemies/are headed towards those we love?" Line 8-12

Quote 2: "Consider, sister, how our father died,/hated and infamous; how he brought to light/his own offenses.../Then, mother...did shame/violently on her life, with twisted cords [because she hung herself]/Third, our two brothers, on a single day.../Each killed the other, hand against brother's hand." Line 59-65

Quote 3: "Now there are only two of us, left behind,/and see how miserable our end shall be/if in the teeth of law we shall transgress/against the sovereign [ruler]'s decree and power. You ought to realize we are only women,/not meant to fight against men,/and that we are ruled by those who are stronger,/to obedience in this and even more painful matters." Line 64-73

Quote 4: "It is impossible to know any man--/I mean his soul, intelligence, and judgement--/until he shows his skill in rule and law./I think that a man [who is] supreme ruler of a whole city,/if he does not reach for the best counsel for her.../him I judge the worst of any [man].../and anyone thinking/another man more a friend than his own country,/I rate him nowhere." Line 195-204

Quote 5: "[Polyneices] sought to taste the blood he shared with us,/and lead the rest of us to slavery--/You shall leave him without burial; you shall watch him/chewed up by birds and dogs and violated.../But he that is loyal to the state/in death, in life alike, shall have my honor." Line 220-229

Quote 6: "It were best that he were found, but whether/the criminal is taken or he isn't--/for that chance will decide--one thing is certain,/you'll never see me coming here again./I never hoped to escape, never thought I could./But now I have come off safe, I thank God heartily." Line 362-367

Quote 7: "If he [man] honors the laws of earth,/and the justice of the gods he has confirmed by oath,/high is his city; no city/has he with whom dwells dishonor/prompted by recklessness./He who is so, may he never/share my hearth!/may he never think my thoughts!" Line 404-411

Quote 8: "[Antigone] was crying out with the shrill cry/of an embittered bird/that sees its nest robbed of its nestlings/and the bed empty. So, too, when she saw/the body stripped of its cover, she burst out in groans.../and with her hands immediately/brought thirsty dust to the body; from a shapely brazen/urn, held high over it, poured a triple stream/of funeral offerings; and crowned the corpse." Line 466-475

Quote 9: "I did not believe/your proclamation had such power to enable/one who will someday die to override/God's ordinances, unwritten and secure./They are not of today



and yesterday;/they live forever; none knows when first they were./These are the laws whose penalties I would not/incur from the gods, through fear of any man's temper." Line 496-503

Quote 10: "Go then to the world below, yourself, if you/must love [your brothers]. Love them. When I am alive no woman shall rule." Line 577-578

Quote 11: "From this time forth,/these must be women, and not free to roam./For even the stout of heart shrink when they see/the approach of death close to their lives." Line 636-639

Quote 12: "With wisdom has someone declared/a word of distinction:/that evil seems good to one whose mind/the god leads to ruin,/and but for the briefest moment of time/is his life outside of calamity." Line 673-678

Quote 13: "Do not, my son, banish your good sense/through pleasure in a woman, since you know/that the embrace grows cold/when an evil woman shares your bed and home.../No. Spit on her, throw her out like an enemy,/this girl, to marry someone in Death's house./I caught her openly in disobedience/alone out of all in this city..." Line 702-710

Quote 14: "The man the city sets up in authority/must be obeyed in small things and in just.../There is nothing worse/than disobedience to authority./It destroys cities, it demolishes homes.../So we must stand by the side of what is orderly; we cannot give victory to a woman./If we accept defeat, let it be from a man;/we must not let people say that a woman beat us." Line 720-734

Quote 15: "[T]he city mourns for this girl; they think she is dying/most wrongly and undeservedly/of all womenkind, for the most glorious acts.../A man who thinks he alone is right.../when opened up, [is] seen/to be quite empty. For a man, though he be wise,/it is no shame to learn--learn many things,/and not maintain his views too rigidly." Line 747-767

Quote 16: "You see me, you people of my country/as I set out on my last road of all,/looking for the last time on this light of this sun.../though I have known nothing of marriage songs/nor chant that brings the bride to bed./My husband is to be the Lord of Death." Line 870-877

Quote 17: "My city! Rich citizens of my city.../I make my way to a prison sealed like a tomb./Pity me. Neither among the living not the dead/do I have a home in common--/neither with the living nor the dead." Line 900-907

Quote 18: "What law of God have I broken?/Why should I still look to the gods in my misery?/Whom should I summon as an ally? For indeed/because of piety I was called impious./If this proceeding is good in the gods' eyes/I shall know my sin, once I have suffered./But if Creon and his people are the wrongdoers/let their suffering be no worse than the injustice/ they are [giving] out to me." Line 978-986



Quote 19: "Yield to the dead man; do not stab him--/now he is gone--what bravery is this,/to inflict another death upon the dead?/I mean you well and speak well for your good./It is never sweeter to learn from a good counselor/than when he counsels to your benefit." Line 1086-1091

Quote 20: "[Y]ou [will] give in exchange/one of your own loins bred, a corpse for a corpse,/for you have thrust one that belongs above/below the earth, and bitterly dishonored/a living soul by lodging her in the grave;/while one that belonged to the underworld/gods you have kept on this earth without due share/of rites of burial." Line 1135-1141

Quote 21: "All the cities will stir in hatred/against you, because their sons in mangled shreds/received their burial rites from dogs, from wild beasts/or when some bird of the air brought a vile stink/to each city that contained the hearths of the dead." Line 1152-1156

Quote 22: "Once Creon was a man worthy of envy--/of my envy, at least. For he saved this city/of Thebes from her enemies, and attained/the throne of the land, with all a king's power./He guided it right. His race bloomed/with good children. But when a man forfeits joy/I do not count his life as life, but only/a life trapped within a corpse." Line 1233-1240

Quote 23: "There they lie,/the dead upon the dead. So he has won/the pitiful fulfillment of his marriage/within death's house. In this human world he has shown/how the wrong choice in plans is for a man/his greatest evil." Line 1316-1321

Quote 24: "The mistakes of a blinded man/are themselves rigid and laden with death./You look at us the killer and the killed/of the one blood./Oh the awful blindness/of those plans of mine./My son, you were so young,/so young to die. You were freed from the bonds of life/through no folly of your own--only through mine." Line 1340-1346

Quote 25: "O, let it come, let it come,/that best of fates that waits on my last day./Surely best fate of all. Let it come, let it come!/That I may never see one more day's light!" Line 1401-1404

Quote 26: "For what is destined/for us, men mortal, there is no escape." Line 1411-1412

Quote 27: "Wisdom is far the chief element in happiness/and, secondly, no irreverence towards the gods./But, great words of haughty men exact/in retribution blows as great/and in old age teach wisdom." Line 1420-1424



Topic Tracking: Death

Death 1: Antigone's family is filled with death. Her father Oedipus killed his father Laius, Oedipus died in exile after wandering for many years, her mother Iocasta committed suicide, and now her brothers Eteocles and Polyneices are died as well. Antigone wants Polyneices to have a peaceful death by giving his body a proper burial, so that his spirit is not unhappy.

Death 2: The punishment for burying Polyneices' body is death by public stoning. Ismene is afraid that her sister Antigone will die too if she buries Polyneices against the wishes of Creon. She does not want to be the only person in her entire family who is left alive, so she begs Antigone not to violate Creon's decree.

Death 3: Creon arrests Antigone because she tried to bury her brother Polyneices against his wishes. When the Sentry dusts off the dead body, Antigone becomes enraged and runs forward quickly to protect it from being disturbed by anyone. She acts as if she is a mother and the dead body of her brother is her child.

Death 4: Antigone declares that Creon can only make laws about the city he rules. Death is something that the gods are in charge of, and the laws about burial for people who have died are timeless because the gods are immortal. Creon does not have the power to make laws denying burial, because he is breaking the god's laws. A spirit cannot rest in peace until its body has been buried.

Death 5: Creon happily condemns Antigone to death because she dares to question his judgement. He says to her, "Go, then, to the world below and love your brothers," meaning that if she loves her brothers so much then she can go see them herself in the Underworld when she is executed.

Death 6: Ismene is afraid to live her life alone when Antigone dies. She claims that she helped her sister to bury Polyneices' body because she is a weak person and doesn't want to be lonely. If everyone else in her family is dead, then she would like to die as well, declaring, "What life can be mine without [Antigone]?"

Death 7: At first Creon plans to execute Ismene and Antigone both, although Ismene is clearly innocent of any crime. The Chorus reminds him of this and Creon quickly changes his mind, agreeing that Ismene can go free; Creon takes death very lightly as if it were not such a big deal. Earlier, he threatened to execute Antigone right in front of Haemon without any thought to how cruel that would be. Antigone's execution will be carried out by starvation in a closed cave rather than by stoning, to avoid polluting the city with death.

Death 8: Antigone feels as if she is not yet dead or not yet alive, because she has been sentenced to die and therefore can no longer think of living, but she is not actually dead yet. She is obsessed with her own death and somewhat looks forward to it, is all-too willing to receive her punishment. Knowing that she will not marry Haemon in life, she



notes that now she will marry the "Lord of Death," for Death will take her away when she dies.

Death 9: Looking forward to seeing other members of her family who have died once again such as her mother, father, and brothers, Antigone is eager for her own death. It was her love for her brother that caused her to bury his body, and now she will be allowed to see Polyneices again in the Underworld.

Death 10: Teiresias states that Creon has done the exact opposite of what he should have done: he kept a dead man, Polyneices, in the world of the living above the ground, and he has placed a living person, Antigone, beneath the ground where only those that are dead belong. This is a terrible mistake. Antigone's cave is called a "tomb," which is a special place where dead bodies are buried.

Death 11: When death did not involve him or his direct family, Creon was more than happy to execute people for crimes. Now, however, when it is his own son who has died, Creon is a broken man, just as Antigone had been after the deaths of her brothers. Death has finally affected Creon's life now as well.

Death 12: Stabbing himself with a sword, Haemon died while hugging the body of Antigone. They are called "the dead upon the dead," for it is Antigone's death caused Haemon to kill himself. Soon it shall be the dead upon the dead upon the dead, as Creon's wife Eurydice kills herself after hearing about her dead son Haemon.

Death 13: Like the family of Oedipus, Creon's family is now filled with death. Both of his sons are dead as well as his wife and niece Antigone. He feels the sadness that Antigone had once felt when she insisted on burying her dead brother's body; Creon could understand this anguish only by experiencing it for himself, since he showed no compassion when he initially condemned Antigone to die.

Death 14: As Antigone had once welcomed her own death because she was so upset after the deaths of her brothers, now Creon welcomes his own death and does not think at all of his responsibilities to rule Thebes. He calls death "that best of fates" because it is the only escape he can have for his guilt and suffering.



Topic Tracking: Pride

Pride 1: Oedipus' sons were too prideful because they did not agree about what was best for the city of Thebes; Eteocles wanted the power to rule and so did Polyneices. Instead, Polyneices and Eteocles fought over the kingship until they had both killed each other, leaving neither man to be the ruler. Creon then takes over, since he is their uncle.

Pride 2: Antigone is too prideful and does not obey the law that King Creon has made for Theban citizens: that no one can bury Polyneices' body. Instead of listening to her ruler, Antigone decides to bury her brother anyway simply because she loves him. It is because of this pride that she is later condemned to death.

Pride 3: Creon's pride prompts him to turn Polyneices into a villain, even though he is guilty of the same crime as Eteocles. Both men wanted to have the power of ruling Thebes for themselves alone, and both men lost this battle equally. King Creon is corrupted by the same power that drove these men into battle.

Pride 4: Even a lowly Sentry can see what Creon cannot. Denying burial to a man is a crime that violates religious laws that are established by the gods. The Sentry suggests that the gods buried Polyneices, but Creon says that the gods do not honor criminals. He is too prideful to realize that he himself is a criminal for making a city law that violates a religious law.

Pride 5: The Chorus of Theban citizens states that the laws of gods are greater than laws of a city. If a city wants to be prosperous, then the king must obey the laws of the gods while governing the city. King Creon fails to do this because he makes it illegal to bury Polyneices' body, which violates the religious law making burial required for the dead. Because of his pride, Creon shall later suffer as the gods punish him for his disrespect.

Pride 6: Creon's pride also fills him not as a king superior to the gods, but also as a man superior to women. Creon is insulted at the very thought that a mere woman dared to disobey him, stating that Antigone and Ismene shall be imprisoned until the execution takes place, "not free to roam" like all women should be. Creon is so prideful as a man that he does not have any respect for women.

Pride 7: Haemon gives good advice to Creon, that the Theban citizens are upset that he is going to execute Antigone. Creon doesn't care about what Thebans have to say because of his pride saying only, "Should the city tell me how I am to rule them?" and does not listen to this wise advice. Because of his pride, Creon only cares about himself rather than the opinions of the citizens he rules.

Pride 8: Later, Creon mocks Haemon by calling him a "woman's slave" and declares that he will kill Antigone right in front of his son. This pride alienates his son, who runs away screaming that his father will never see him again. Rather than thinking about



people in his family and helping them, Creon only cares about himself and does what he wants without listening to anyone's advice because he is too prideful.

Pride 9: The Chorus sings about other people who were too prideful in the past and suffered for it; one man tried to kill Danae's son and later was killed for it; one man mocked Bacchus and was torn apart by his own mother; another man crossed paths with Zeus when he could predict the future, and he was punished as well. The lesson remains that prideful people are always punished by the gods.

Pride 10: When Teiresias offers the wise advice to Creon that he must bury Polyneices' body because the gods are angry, Creon mocks him. The Theban king is too prideful to obey even the wisest of prophets, insisting that the old blind man just wants to make some money by scaring him with lies. He even insults Zeus himself by declaring that he doesn't care if the carrion birds carried pieces of flesh to Zeus' himself.

Pride 11: Creon finally puts his pride aside and listens to the Chorus' wise advice. It is difficult even then, and he obeys only because he fears the punishment that he might receive. "To yield is terrible," he says, meaning to swallow his pride and admit that he is wrong is a very difficult thing for him to do.

Pride 12: The Messenger suggests that Haemon committed suicide because his own pride stopped him from obeying the wishes of his father to execute Antigone. "The wrong choice of plans for a man/is his greatest evil," he says, meaning that Haemon should not have killed himself. The young man died because he refused to respect his Creon's authority as a his king and as his father.

Pride 13: Creon's pride is now gone, and he admits that he made a terrible mistake by not listening to anyone's advice. The only way that he has found this wisdom has been by suffering and feeling the punishment of the gods he had previously refused to respect.

Pride 14: Creon is further humbled after his wife Eurydice commits suicide as well. He accepts responsibility for what he has done and acknowledges that he has made some very bad decisions by violating religious law. Now he wants to die.

Pride 15: The Chorus mentions that "great words of haughty men" bring great punishments, as they have in the case of Creon. Too late, he learned that he was wrong, although his pride would not allow him to admit this earlier. Creon's pride is the key factor most responsible for his downfall and the suffering that will follow him for the rest of his life.



Topic Tracking: Women

Women 1: Antigone wants to bury Polyneices, but her sister begs her not to go because it is in violation of Creon's decree. Antigone's younger sister Ismene believes that women should always follow whatever men want to do because women are powerless to stop them. Men rule and women are ruled.

Women 2: Creon is totally shocked that a woman such as Antigone would dare to disobey his decree. She has been arrested by a Sentry who gives Antigone over into Creon's custody. The Theban king listens to the Sentry's story with awe and disbelief. That a woman would dare to defy a man is unthinkable.

Women 3: Appearing to be very angry that a woman dared to defy his wishes, Creon boldly declares that "When I am alive no woman shall rule." The issue of Antigone being condemned to die becomes more than just a person who disobeys Creon; instead, the punishment is given even more eagerly because it is a woman who disobeys a man. Creon does not respect her because she is a woman.

Women 4: Creon believes that women must be kept in a powerless state. After they are arrested, he says that, like all women, Antigone and Ismene will "not be free to roam," thus keeping them in a state that is inferior to men. Creon has no respect for women at all.

Women 5: At first Creon urges Haemon to spit on Antigone and make her suffer for disobeying a man, and he declares that he cannot set her free because he will not be laughed at by the Theban people. He will not let people say "that a woman beat us," because this is very hurtful to his power as a man. Women have no place in Theban society except to be commanded by men, according to Creon.

Women 6: After stating so surely that a men are intended to have all over the power in Theban society and to control the women, Creon says that Haemon is a "woman's slave" because he wants Antigone to be released. This is a terrible insult to Haemon as Creon says that he is more inferior than even a woman.

Women 7: The Chorus mentions some other women in history who were forced to suffer. Danae was a mother who lived her life in exile with her son Perseus because her father wanted her son to die. Pentheus' mother was driven into madness by Bacchus and tore her son apart with her bare hands. Phineus' wife blinded her own children with a sewing shuttle. As a result, Antigone is not the only woman to suffer because of a man.

Women 8: Later, the group of Theban citizens tells of how Bacchus' own mother was struck by one of Zeus' thunderbolts and died. Again, Antigone is hardly the only woman to ever suffer because of another man. Indeed, there are many other woman who have suffered in history as well.



Women 9: Although the father Creon shows no compassion or respect for Antigone, the son loves Antigone very much since he was engaged to marry her. Haemon's devotion to Antigone causes him to first try unsuccessfully to stab his father and then to secondly stab himself, committing suicide. He dies holding her dead body in his arms. Haemon killed himself because of a woman that he loved.

Women 10: Now, Creon is turned into very same the "woman's slave" that he had once mocked his own son for. Creon can no longer hardly walk because he is so upset about his wife's death. Just as Haemon had welcomed his own death after knowing Antigone was dead, Creon hopes to die as well, because he is so saddened by his Eurydice's death.



Line 1-489

The two daughters of Oedipus are standing together outside of the palace gates in the city of Thebes, discussing recent events in the city. Antigone complains to her sister Ismene that the gods have been very cruel to their entire family. The girls' father, Oedipus, died not long before at Colonus after a long life of suffering, since he discovered that he had murdered his own father, Laius. He also had sexual intercourse with his own mother Iocasta, who hung herself when she realized what had happened. Oedipus blinded himself as a result of his guilt and was exiled from Thebes until his eventual death. After he died, these two sisters returned to Thebes to stop the battle for the Theban kingship that was being waged between Oedipus' elder son, Polyneices and the younger Eteocles. The result of this war was that both brothers killed each other in battle and Iocasta's brother, Creon, now rules the city as its king. However, he will not allow Polyneices' body to be buried and hopes for it to remain exposed in disgrace and eaten by birds and animals. Creon had supported Eteocles during the war and regards Polyneices to be a traitor to Thebes.

Topic Tracking: Death 1

Topic Tracking: Pride 1

Antigone laments to Ismene that it is not fair for her brother to be denied a burial, "And now what is the proclamation that they tell of made lately by the commander, publicly,/to all people? Do you know it? Have you heard it?/Don't you notice when evils due to enemies/are headed towards those we love?" Line 8-12. She refers not only to the recent situation of their dead brother, but also to the evils that befell Oedipus their father, who had been exiled from Thebes by his own sons, never to return. Ismene tells Antigone that she has not heard this news and is surprised to hear that Polyneices will not be given a burial. Antigone asks if she will help her to secretly give him a proper burial so that his spirit can rest, but Ismene is fearful because it is forbidden. The punishment for anyone who disobeys is death. Ismene thus places the good of the city before the good of her family. Ismene explains her reasons to Antigone, "Consider, sister, how our father died,/hated and infamous; how he brought to light/his own offenses.../Then, mother...did shame/violently on her life, with twisted cords [because she hung herself]/Third, our two brothers, on a single day.../Each killed the other, hand against brother's hand" Line 59-65. She remembers that their family is filled with sadness, and she is afraid that they will join them in suffering if Antigone and Ismene break the law and bury Polyneices' body.

Topic Tracking: Death 2

Yet Ismene continues, explaining that there is little good that they can accomplish, "Now there are only two of us, left behind,/and see how miserable our end shall be/if in the teeth of law we shall transgress/against the sovereign [ruler]'s decree and power. You ought to realize we are only women,/not meant to fight against men,/and that we are ruled by those who are stronger,/to obedience in this and even more painful matters" Line 64-73. The two sisters disagree about what should be done. Antigone wants to



violate Creon's order, but Ismene thinks that their family is filled with enough tragedy already, that it is wiser to stay out of any more trouble. She also believes that women should stay in their place and simply let men make all of the decisions, because men are stronger than women anyway. Antigone insists that she will go to bury her brother alone. She believes that religious laws requiring burial are more important than laws of the city. However, she is not afraid to die but remains very determined. Ismene tries to dissuade her again by saying, "It is better not to hunt the impossible," because she believes that Antigone will not accomplish anything by her actions. To bury her brother is an impossible task in her opinion. The sisters then say good-bye to each other, and Antigone runs off to bury Polyneices anyway.

Topic Tracking: Pride 2

Topic Tracking: Women 1

The Chorus of Theban Elders speaks about the recent events in Thebes during the war between the seven armies brought to the city by Polyneices; how each army fought each at one of the seven gates of Thebes; and how the brothers Polyneices and Eteocles killed each other in battle. Remembering these occurrences, they welcome their king Creon as he arrives and speaks to them. He states that "It is impossible to know any man--/I mean his soul, intelligence, and judgement--/until he shows his skill in rule and law./I think that a man [who is] supreme ruler of a whole city,/if he does not reach for the best counsel for her.../him I judge the worst of any [man].../and anyone thinking/another man more a friend than his own country,/I rate him nowhere" Line 195-204. As ruler of Thebes, Creon feels that a person owes loyalty to their city more than anything else, no matter what the consequences may be. Thus, he has no tolerance for people who are disloyal to the greater good of the city.

He repeats his decree that no one may bury Polyneices' body because he is a traitor, who "sought to taste the blood he shared with us,/and lead the rest of us to slavery--/You shall leave him without burial; you shall watch him/chewed up by birds and dogs and violated.../But he that is loyal to the state/in death, in life alike, shall have my honor" Line 220-229. Polyneices attacked Thebes with seven armies because his younger brother Eteocles, with the support of Creon, refused to give him the kingship. Instead, Eteocles exiled his brother so that he would not threaten his power. As a result, an angry Polyneices attacked Thebes to reclaim what rightfully belonged to him, because he was the older brother and the true successor to the Theban kingship after his father, Oedipus, had been exiled. But Eteocles and Polyneices killed each other in battle. Creon still sees Polyneices as a traitor and because he dared to attack the precious city of Thebes. For this crime against the city, Creon will not allow his body to be buried. Creon's words of Polyneices wanting to "lead the rest of us to slavery" are not really true, because he only wanted to have the kingship. Creon tries to turn Polyneices into a villain and tells the Chorus that he was an enemy of the city. The Chorus readily says that they will respect Creon's decree about the burial, and they will not support anybody else who might disagree with this decision.

Topic Tracking: Pride 3



The conversation is interrupted by a Sentry who suddenly comes running in. He is out of breath because he is in such a rush to speak with Creon, declaring that he has very important news. Curious, Creon asks him to tell more, but the Sentry is very evasive and acts afraid, declaring that he and his fellow sentries chose who would go to see Creon by lottery, fearing his anger. This Sentry ended up winning the lottery and as a result, he had to go to Creon bearing his news. Finally he admits that someone has sprinkled dirt over Polyneices' corpse that is lying outside of the city's gates and performed a burial ritual upon his body. In effect, someone has violated Creon's solemn decree forbidding burial for traitors. There are no footprints on the ground around the body, and so they cannot find any sign of who did this. The Chorus suggests that perhaps it was God himself who committed the deed, but Creon becomes very, very angry, saying "Do you see the gods as honoring criminals?" and insists that it is someone in Thebes who has done this deed. Creon distrusts his own citizens.

Topic Tracking: Pride 4

Creon orders the Sentry to find and arrest whomever it was, otherwise he himself will be executed for not guarding Polyneices' body properly. The man simply replies, "it's a bad thing if one judges and judges wrongly," but Creon is confused by these mysterious words. He does not realize that the Sentry is calling him a poor judge of character for being so rash in his threats to execute him. The Sentry then shows fear towards Creon in a comment towards the audience, "It were best that he were found, but whether/the criminal is taken or he isn't--/for that chance will decide--one thing is certain,/you'll never see me coming here again./I never hoped to escape, never thought I could./But now I have come off safe, I thank God heartily" Line 362-367. He does not show respect towards Creon, but instead he shows only fear. Creon departs and returns to his palace.

The Chorus then speaks about the joys of men and what great things men have accomplished on earth such as learning to ride horses and use animals for plowing fields. The Chorus recognizes that men have many talents, and these talents are used for good sometimes, but sometimes they are used to commit evil and to make bad decisions. They end their song with "If he [man] honors the laws of earth,/and the justice of the gods he has confirmed by oath,/high is his city; no city/has he with whom dwells dishonor/prompted by recklessness./He who is so, may he never/share my hearth!/may he never think my thoughts!" Line 404-411. The Chorus hopes that they never make the mistake of disobeying the laws of the gods. They reveal that if a citizen and a king obey the rules of the gods, then the gods will bless their city with good fortune; however, if they do not obey the rules of the gods, then the city will no longer exist and will disappear. Perhaps this suggests the events that are occurring as Creon refuses to allow proper burial of a man, as is required by the gods. Instead, Creon places the importance of the city as being greater than that of the gods who rule the world.

Topic Tracking: Pride 5

The Sentry suddenly returns, bringing a very unhappy Antigone with him. He asks where Creon is, and the Theban king comes out of the palace at that moment, surprised to see that the Sentry has returned again. The Sentry is very happy that he has



captured this criminal who buried Polyneices, insisting that he is now free from any possible punishments. Creon is stunned to hear this news and asks how she was captured. The Sentry tells the story of how he had returned to the body with his fellow sentries and dusted it off so that it was no longer covered. However as soon as this was done, they saw Antigone coming towards them, stirring up a dust cloud around her, "She was crying out with the shrill cry/of an embittered bird/that sees its nest robbed of its nestlings/and the bed empty. So, too, when she saw/the body stripped of its cover, she burst out in groans.../and with her hands immediately/brought thirsty dust to the body; from a shapely brazen/urn, held high over it, poured a triple stream/of funeral offerings; and crowned the corpse" Line 466-475. Antigone was caught in the very act of breaking Creon's decree by burying Polyneices; as a result, she was arrested and brought to Creon. Creon asks Antigone if she is guilty of this crime, and she admits that it is true. The Theban king is pleased with the work of the Sentry and sends him on his way, forgiving his earlier negligence.

Topic Tracking: Death 3

Topic Tracking: Woman 2



Line 490-831

After Creon sends the Sentry away, he questions Antigone about why she decided to disobey his decree and bury the body of Polyneices. Antigone readily admits that she is responsible for committing this act, but she insists that the orders to deny burial come from Creon himself, but the religious law of giving a burial to all dead men is from the gods themselves. Creon puts his own laws for the city as being more important than the religious law, "I did not believe/your proclamation had such power to enable/one who will someday die to override/God's ordinances, unwritten and secure./They are not of today and yesterday;/they live forever; none knows when first they were./These are the laws whose penalties I would not/incur from the gods, through fear of any man's temper" Line 496-503. Antigone insists that she will not disrespect the laws of the gods.

Topic Tracking: Death 4

Creon declares that she will be put to death for defying his decree. He asks that Ismene, her sister, also be brought there, since he suspects that she is involved in the plot to bury Polyneices. While they are waiting, Antigone criticizes Creon by declaring he oversteps his boundaries as king, for he just does anything he wants without any regard for other laws or morals, such as those of the gods. She insists that she buried Polyneices because of her love for him, even though Creon insists that her brother was an enemy to Thebes. Only Eteocles is a hero, because he died trying to protect the city from Polyneices. Antigone says that neither man is an enemy or a hero; instead, they are merely two brothers who died in combat, both of whom she loved very dearly. They both deserve proper burial.

Once again, Antigone places the importance of her family as being greater than that of the city. Creon thinks that the city is more important than anything else. Antigone tries to tell him that, as he had suspected before, there are citizens in Thebes who question Creon's authority and who agree with what Antigone has done by disobeying him. Although Creon was suspicious of the Theban citizens before, now he insists that Antigone is alone and that the people of Thebes all support his decisions. Creon dismisses everything that she has said about him because she will die soon anyway, "Go then to the world below, yourself, if you/must love [your brothers]. Love them. When I am alive no woman shall rule" Line 577-578. Creon is not only upset that she disobeyed him, but also that it is a woman who dared to disobey the wishes of a man, questioning his authority.

Topic Tracking: Woman 3

Topic Tracking: Death 5

At that moment, the Chorus announces the arrival of Ismene. Creon asks her immediately if she assisted Antigone in performing burial rites to the body of Polyneices. Although Ismene really was not involved and actually tried to stop Antigone from going off to break Creon's decree, now Ismene declares that she helped Antigone, and that she must die with her sister. Surprised, Antigone insists that she acted alone, and telling



Ismene to stop lying for her sake. However, Ismene declares that she cannot live alone with everyone else in her family dead, including her only surviving sibling. In spite of Antigone's pleas, Ismene says that she helped to commit the crime of burying Polyneices and that they must thus die together saying, "What life can be mine without her?"

Topic Tracking: Death 6

Ismene then asks Creon if he will kill his own future daughter-in-law, for Antigone is engaged to marry Creon's son Haemon. Creon coldly replies that he does want his son to marry a bad choice of a woman, anyway. He asks that the two sisters be taken away and guarded until they are both executed, because "From this time forth,/these must be women, and not free to roam./For even the stout of heart shrink when they see/the approach of death close to their lives" Line 636-639. Creon is afraid that they will try to run away because they might be afraid of dying. He says that, like all women, these two are not allowed to go anywhere, "not free to roam." Creon thinks that women are not as worthy or as excellent as men are. The fact that women have disobeyed him increases his feelings of anger.

Topic Tracking: Women 4

Topic Tracking: Pride 6

After the girls are led away, the Chorus of Theban elders sings about how once a member of a family commits a crime against the gods, the punishments continue to affect many later generations in the family. They recall how Oedipus' family has been cursed for many generations, down to these children who were "the last light of hope" for Oedipus' family. The Chorus acknowledges that the king of the gods, Zeus, is all-powerful, and that his power lasts forever into the future, for he is immortal. The Chorus adds, "With wisdom has someone declared/a word of distinction:/that evil seems good to one whose mind/the god leads to ruin,/and but for the briefest moment of time/is his life outside of calamity" Line 673-678. These words refer to the disagreement about whether Polyneices' body should be buried. Antigone thinks that she has made the good decision by following the religious law of giving the dead a proper burial, while Creon thinks he has made the good decision by punishing what he sees as an enemy of the city by denying burial. Surely one of these two thinks that he is right when he is really following a path of evil as the Chorus predicts, although it is uncertain who this could be. It is suggested that Creon is the man making the mistake, because it is he violates the religious law that the Chorus is giving such importance to, because of his refusal to bury Polyneices.

The Chorus announces that Creon's son Haemon has arrived and wonders if he is planning to criticize his father for condemning his fiancée, Antigone to death. Haemon responds that he fully respects his father in whatever decision he makes, because of the "goodness of [his] leadership." Just as Creon had turned Polyneices into an enemy of the city, now he does the same thing with Antigone, explaining why he has sentenced her to death. He advises, "Do not, my son, banish your good sense/through pleasure in a woman, since you know/that the embrace grows cold/when an evil woman shares



your bed and home.../No. Spit on her, throw her out like an enemy,/this girl, to marry someone in Death's house./I caught her openly in disobedience/alone out of all in this city..." Line 702-710. Because Antigone had disobeyed Creon, she has suddenly become not only his enemy, but also an enemy of the city. Creon also says that he will not look like a fool by forgiving her, because all of the Theban citizens want her to die anyway.

He continues, "The man the city sets up in authority/must be obeyed in small things and in just.../There is nothing worse/than disobedience to authority./It destroys cities, it demolishes homes.../So we must stand by the side of what is orderly; we cannot give victory to a woman./If we accept defeat, let it be from a man;/we must not let people say that a woman beat us" Line 720-734. Creon states that he does what the citizens in Thebes wish to have done, for he is their representative. This disagrees with Antigone's earlier words that Theban citizens do not agree with Creon's decision to deny burial to Polyneices. In addition, an authority must be obeyed by all people no matter what because a city will be destroyed if no one obeys the authority, and more than anything women must obey the authority of men. If a man had committed this crime of disobedience, Creon suggests that he might not put him to death. However, he refuses to let any women such as Antigone and Ismene go unpunished for disobeying a man, because he does not want the citizens to know that a woman defied him. This is an embarrassing thought for him to imagine, for "we must not let people say a woman beat us."

Topic Tracking: Women 5

Creon's son Haemon acknowledges that his father's words are very wise, and he respects his decision to put Antigone to death. However, he offers some advice to his father because he is watching out for his reputation, and he warns him that the Theban citizens are not all in support of him as he thinks. In fact, "the city mourns for this girl; they think she is dying/most wrongly and undeservedly/of all womenkind, for the most glorious acts.../A man who thinks he alone is right.../when opened up, [is] seen/to be quite empty. For a man, though he be wise,/it is no shame to learn--learn many things,/and not maintain his views too rigidly" Line 747-767. Haemon advises his father not to be so closed-minded and to think about how his citizens feel, too, because many of the people in Thebes disagree with his decisions. Haemon says that Creon should learn from his mistakes by not being so rash in the future; there is nothing undignified in changing one's opinion because he has learned something new.

Hearing these words, Creon flies into a rage, mocking his son by asking how an old man like he can possibly learn wisdom from such a young man as is his son. Then he declares boldly that the opinions of the Theban citizens do not matter, "Should the city tell me how I am to rule them?" although this is the total opposite of what he said before. Creon previously claimed to represent the needs of the people, because they all support him and he is only doing what the citizens want him to do. Haemon becomes angry as well, criticizing Creon's ability as a ruler, saying that he should be the king of a desert where there are no people to argue with him. Haemon says that Creon is closed-minded because he will not listen or even consider what he has said, and he is following



religious law by defending Antigone, because she has not committed any sin against them gods. Instead, Creon is guilty of a religious sin by denying burial to a dead man's body.

Topic Tracking: Pride 7

In response, Creon simply calls his son "a woman's slave," disregarding his words, while Haemon says that if Creon was not his father then he would call him insane. Finally, showing no respect toward his son, Creon calls for Antigone to be brought out immediately so that she can be executed right there in front of Haemon, just to spite him. Haemon screams out that it is the last time that Creon will ever see him again, running away in a very emotional state of mind. Creon dismisses this behavior calmly and is unconcerned. He states again that Haemon's words have changed nothing, for Antigone and Ismene both shall die for violating his decree that made burial forbidden to Polyneices' body. Unlike Antigone, Creon has put the importance of the city as being greater than that of his own family. Instead of being a loving father towards his son, he is instead a cruel, emotionless king.

Topic Tracking: Pride 8

Topic Tracking: Women 6



Line 832-1163

As soon as Haemon leaves, Creon declares again that both girls will be put to death. The Chorus speaks up and asks if he plans to punish

Ismene as well as Antigone, even though it is obvious that Ismene was not involved at all in trying to bury the body of Polyneices. She only said that she helped because she wishes to die with her sister. Creon then changes his mind suddenly, saying that now only Antigone will die by being locked into a cave with only a little food, so that she will eventually starve to death. In this way, the city will "avoid pollution" that a public execution within the city's walls would bring. By having Antigone die outside of Thebes, Creon hopes to avoid any sort of harm that might come to the city if she were to die there. The Chorus responds with great words of sadness, saying that they are feeling "unlawful" because, contrary to Creon's wishes, they weep for Antigone as she arrives to hear her death sentence.

Topic Tracking: Death 7

Antigone is not afraid and remains strong in spite of her fate and addresses them: "You see me, you people of my country/as I set out on my last road of all,/looking for the last time on this light of this sun.../though I have known nothing of marriage songs/nor chant that brings the bride to bed./My husband is to be the Lord of Death" Line 870-877. The Chorus speaks to her that she has chosen to die because she chose to give burial rites to Polyneices even though she knew that the penalty was death. Antigone compares herself to a fallen goddess who, too, was unjustly punished, but the Chorus reminds her that she is not a goddess but is only a mortal woman. Antigone becomes angry at the Chorus and screams aloud, "My city! Rich citizens of my city.../I make my way to a prison sealed like a tomb./Pity me. Neither among the living nor the dead/do I have a home in common--/neither with the living nor the dead" Line 900-907. Antigone sees herself as an exile as her father Oedipus had been before he died after many years of wandering, and also as her brother Polyneices had been before he had died. She feels that, condemned to death, she is not living any longer because she knows she is sentenced to die, nor is she dead yet. Antigone is lost, without a home, because she chose to bury her brother. The Chorus repeats that she knew the consequences of her actions, thus there is no reason for anyone to have pity. She chose death.

Topic Tracking: Death 8

Antigone continues to complain and lament while Creon is not affected at all by her pleading, saying that it will not change anything. Antigone looks forward to seeing the other dead members of her family such as her mother Iocasta, her father Oedipus, and her brothers Eteocles and Polyneices. Now she will join them in death, although she appeals to the gods for guidance and help in her situation, "What law of God have I broken?/Why should I still look to the gods in my misery?/Whom should I summon as an ally? For indeed/because of piety I was called impious./If this proceeding is good in the gods' eyes/I shall know my sin, once I have suffered./But if Creon and his people are



the wrongdoers/let their suffering be no worse than the injustice/ they are [giving] out to me" Line 978-986. She wishes a curse upon Creon if she is innocent in the eyes of the gods. When she dies and the gods judge her, she will know if she died as an innocent woman or as a criminal. Antigone thinks that she is innocent, asking the gods what crime she has committed against them by merely burying a man. Creon is tired of hearing her words and tells the guards to hurry up and get her out of the city to be locked into her cave. There, she will starve to death. Antigone leaves at last, still crying aloud that she is innocent.

Topic Tracking: Death 9

The Chorus sings again about things that happened in history to other humans, how others suffered terribly in the past, just as Antigone does now. They recall the story of Danae, who was a woman living her life in suffering because she had to hide with her son to avoid being killed. Also there is the story of a king who mocked the god Bacchus and was punished by having his own mother driven to madness and ripping his body into pieces, and also Phineus was a man whose wife blinded his two sons. The Chorus points out that history is filled with stories of suffering; Antigone's situation is not anything new. These two women of the past, both Danae and Phineus were punished because of Fate, a powerful force that determines what events will happen in the future. If Fate predicts that something will happen, then there is no way to stop it from occurring. Many times before, the Chorus suggested that perhaps Antigone suffers because of her father Oedipus' sins; because of his crimes, perhaps the daughter is fated to suffer as well. She is also the person who made the decision to defy Creon, and so Antigone is arrogant to Creon by not respecting his authority as king.

Topic Tracking: Pride 9

Topic Tracking: Women 7

The Chorus is interrupted because the blind prophet Teiresias suddenly appears, guided by a young boy. He declares that he has important news for Creon, warning him that he is "on the razor edge of danger." Curious, Creon wonders what the prophet is talking about. Teiresias tells of how he was burning a bird, trying to tell prophecies by looking at the position of the cooked bird's entrails, as is the custom in Argos, yet the bird would not burn at all. Instead, the fat stayed uncooked and blood and fluids from the bird actually caused the fire to be extinguished. Teiresias warns that the gods are unhappy with Creon's refusal to bury Polyneices, because the flesh from this man's body is being devoured by the same dogs and birds that are sacrificed to the gods. The gods are angry because these animals are all polluted. It is the "city's sickness," he calls it. Teiresias advises Creon to bury Polyneices instead of letting his body rot away outside of Thebes, "Yield to the dead man; do not stab him--/now he is gone--what bravery is this,/to inflict another death upon the dead?/I mean you well and speak well for your good./It is never sweeter to learn from a good counselor/than when he counsels to your benefit" Line 1086-1091. Just as Haemon had offered wise advice to Creon, thinking of his best interests by warning him that Theban citizens were upset about refusing burial, now Teiresias does the same to him by warning about the gods' displeasure.



Yet as he had done to Haemon, now Creon grows very angry at Teiresias and remains arrogant, refusing to change his mind at all. Polyneices shall remain unburied, he declares boldly, even if birds of Zeus were snatching pieces of flesh away for Zeus himself. He insists that the gods cannot possibly be polluted by anything humans can do, and he insists that this old man, Teiresias, has come to him just to make some money. Earlier, he would not listen to Haemon because he was too young to give advice, but now when a very distinguished and famous man even older than he offers wise advice, Creon still refuses to listen and even insults Zeus. Teiresias responds by saying that Creon's "mind is sick," but Creon continues merely to dismiss the prophet as telling lies just to earn some money by supposedly "saving" the city from punishment from the gods. Creon is very arrogant and still refuses to listen to anyone. He doesn't take Teiresias' warning seriously at all.

Topic Tracking: Pride 10

Insulted to see Creon's ignorance, Teiresias speaks a very sad prophesy for the future of Thebes and for Creon, "you [will] give in exchange/one of your own loins bred, a corpse for a corpse,/for you have thrust one that belongs above/below the earth, and bitterly dishonored/a living soul by lodging her in the grave;/while one that belonged to the underworld/gods you have kept on this earth without due share/of rites of burial" Line 1135-1141. He warns that Creon will lose one of his own children because Creon has unjustly killed Antigone, a girl who was thrust into a tomb to be starved to death, while he left a man who should have been entombed out into the open air to decompose without any honor. Continuing, Teiresias prophesizes more for the future of Thebes because of Creon's leadership, blaming him for another war in the future, "All the cities will stir in hatred/against you, because their sons in mangled shreds/received their burial rites from dogs, from wild beasts/or when some bird of the air brought a vile stink/to each city that contained the hearths of the dead" Line 1152-1156.

Topic Tracking: Death 10

These words reveal that not only is Polyneices' body now unburied, but Creon has also not given burial to any of the other five chieftains from the seven armies who died fighting against Eteocles in battle. These other leaders were trying to help the elder Polyneices regain the kingship of Thebes. For this crime not only will the gods be angry, but also the nearby cities from which these dead men had come from will also be very upset, rising up against Thebes. Angry and insulted, Teiresias is led away by his boy, declaring that Creon should get angry at younger men than him. Apparently, the prophet is upset that Creon has been disrespectful to an elder and would not listen to his wisdom; however, this was the same thing that Creon told his own son Haemon before, that he is older and wiser than his son. Now, however, when a man older and wiser than him offers advice, Creon does not listen to that advice, either. Creon is a stubborn, prideful man who makes excuses to justify what he wants for himself, rather than acting for the good of the city he rules. Teiresias warns that he will be punished because of this.



Line 1164-1424

As soon as Teiresias departs, led by a young boy, the Chorus of Theban Elders reminds Creon that the old prophet has never been wrong in all of his predictions. Creon is very confused, because he knows that Teiresias is right, but he doesn't want to change his mind: "To yield is terrible," he says. The Chorus pressures him to release Antigone from the cave where she has been imprisoned. Finally, Creon listens to the advice of others and agrees to free Antigone, in order to avoid the terrible prophesy of Teiresias. Yet the events that will happen next have already been decided by Fate. Creon can do nothing to stop Fate, but he is hopeful that it is not too late to save Antigone; at the Chorus' advice he also agrees to go himself to free her rather than sending servants to do the job for him. This is a turning point for Creon, for he has not listened to anyone else's advice before, but Teiresias' grim predictions have changed his mind. Creon departs the city in order to free Antigone.

Topic Tracking: Pride 11

While waiting to see if Antigone is freed in time to save her life, the Chorus sings about how a god named Bacchus protects the city of Thebes from danger because it is his favorite city and it is where he was born. The Chorus also recalls how Bacchus' mother, a mortal woman, was killed after she was tragically struck by Zeus' thunderbolt. While they are praising the powers of this god, a Messenger arrives and speaks to these Theban elders. He brings very sad news and laments the fate of Creon, saying "Once Creon was a man worthy of envy--/of my envy, at least. For he saved this city/of Thebes from her enemies, and attained/the throne of the land, with all a king's power./He guided it right. His race bloomed/with good children. But when a man forfeits joy/I do not count his life as life, but only/a life trapped within a corpse" Line 1233-1240. The Messenger does not see any problems with Creon's leadership, although many citizens in Thebes were upset that he had condemned Antigone to death. The Messenger implies that Creon has no joy remaining within him. Surprised, the Chorus presses to know more, and the Messenger admits that Creon's son Haemon has committed suicide because he was angry at Creon's decision to kill his fiancée, Antigone.

Topic Tracking: Death 11

Topic Tracking: Women 8

In reply to this, the Chorus recalls Teiresias' prophesy that Creon will lose one of his own children, "a corpse for a corpse" because of his pride. At that moment Creon's wife Eurydice arrives, for she has overheard the Messenger's news that her son is dead. She demands to hear about the details of his death. The Messenger tells the story of how he went with Creon first to the battlefield in front of Thebes where the body of Polyneices was lying unburied and decomposing. There Creon and his servants washed him, performed the proper funeral rites, and burned the remains of his body. Then they continued on to the cave where Antigone was imprisoned as they heard a scream suddenly and, seeing that the rocks blocking the cave's entrance had been torn away and upon entering, they saw that Antigone had hung herself with rope. This



daughter of Oedipus chose a quick death by suicide, rather than the slow pain of starvation alone in the cave. Haemon was there hugging the dangling body of Antigone and weeping.

Creon called out to his son with gentle words, but the son was filled with anger and tried to attack his father with a sword. Creon fled from the cave however, and Haemon simply thrust the sword through his own ribs, tearing Antigone's body down, too, as he lay there dying. The man ends his story, "There they lie,/the dead upon the dead. So he has won/the pitiful fulfillment of his marriage/within death's house. In this human world he has shown/how the wrong choice in plans is for a man/his greatest evil" Line 1316-1321. The Messenger states that the two are now married together in death, because marriage in life had been denied because of Creon. He also criticizes Haemon's decision to commit suicide, saying that he has made the "wrong choice" and that it was a mistake, but there is nothing he can do to change what has happened; both Creon's niece and his son are now both dead. Hearing this, now Eurydice runs away quickly without saying a single word.

Topic Tracking: Death 12

Topic Tracking: Pride 12

Topic Tracking: Women 9

The Messenger insists that Eurydice will be fine, because she has good judgement, just as he had said that Creon had good leadership of Thebes. He does not seem to be a good judge of character, since it is clear that Creon certainly was not doing a good job of ruling Thebes, because of his pride. Yet the Chorus is worried about what Eurydice plans to do, because she isn't telling anyone how she feels and might do something violent such as harming herself or someone else. The messenger then says that he will follow Eurydice into the palace to make sure that she is all right and to comfort her. As the Messenger goes, Creon returns to speak with the Chorus. He is now a changed man, no longer prideful, because of the death of his son. Now Creon regrets his decision to be a king instead of a father, to choose the city over his own family, quite unlike Antigone who favored her family. Now it is his own family that is falling apart, just as Antigone's family had fallen apart after the deaths of her brother Polyneices and Eteocles, her mother Iocasta and her father Oedipus. Now he understands how Antigone felt about the loss of her brother, for it is his own son that has died.

Creon cries aloud "The mistakes of a blinded man/are themselves rigid and laden with death./You look at us the killer and the killed/of the one blood./Oh the awful blindness/of those plans of mine./My son, you were so young,/so young to die. You were freed from the bonds of life/through no folly of your own--only through mine" Line 1340-1346. Finally, Creon admits that he was wrong in not listening to anyone's advice about burying Polyneices' body and about condemning Antigone to death. Antigone had warned him about his folly, as did Haemon, but it was not until Teiresias arrived and the Chorus pressured him to change his mind that he agreed to forgive Antigone and bury Polyneices. Now he calls himself a "blinded man" because he was not wise and refused to listen to the wisdom of others. He declares that he, too, is killed because he is so upset about the death of his son that there is no joy left within him. The Theban king



continues to lament about his ignorance while the Chorus comforts him, saying that he has learned from his mistakes and he knows what decisions are just now.

Topic Tracking: Pride 13

A Second Messenger runs in to see Creon, saying that the queen Eurydice is dead because of suicide, stabbing herself with a knife in her stomach, just as Haemon her son had stabbed himself with a sword. She was too overcome with grief after hearing about the death of her son Haemon. The First Messenger was wrong to think that she would not harm herself, and the Chorus was wise to suspect what she was planning to do and to warn him about it. Creon is overcome with sadness as he goes to see the body of his wife in the palace, lamenting aloud "Poor mother and poor son." The Second Messenger says that Eurydice blamed Creon for killing both Haemon and another son named Megareus, who had died in the war between Thebes and other cities in Argos. Creon hears this and does not disagree. Instead, he blames himself for everything that has happened because of his poor judgement. He asks to be led away by his servants, just as the blind old Teiresias was led away by the young boy. Now Creon, too, needs others to show him the way.

Topic Tracking: Death 13

As he departs, Creon wishes only for death to stop his suffering, since he no longer thinks about Thebes at all, "O, let it come, let it come,/that best of fates that waits on my last day./Surely best fate of all. Let it come, let it come!/That I may never see one more day's light!" Line 1401-1404. He wishes for death to save him, the "best of fates." Only death can stop the suffering he feels now because of his poor leadership that has caused not only Thebes to suffer, but it has also caused the death of his son, wife, and his niece Antigone. The Chorus comforts him again, telling him not to worry about the future because "For what is destined/for us, men mortal, there is no escape" Line 1411-1412. No matter how much Creon tried to avoid the prophecy that Teiresias had told him by quickly changing his mind and giving a burial to Polyneices, it did nothing to stop what was already fated to happen. Men have no power to stop Fate, because it is a force that comes from the gods themselves. Once again, the Chorus offers respect and reverence towards the gods.

Topic Tracking: Pride 14

Topic Tracking: Death 14

Topic Tracking: Women 10

Creon is led away by his servants, crying aloud because of his mistakes. The Chorus of Theban elders speaks one last time about the lesson that Creon has learned and the lesson that all men should always remember, "Wisdom is far the chief element in happiness/and, secondly, no irreverence towards the gods./But, great words of haughty men exact/in retribution blows as great/and in old age teach wisdom" Line 1420-1424. Creon was not wise and as a result, he has lost all happiness in his life. He was disrespectful to the gods by placing the importance of laws for his city of Thebes as being greater than the religious laws of burial that come from the gods. Because he



disrespected the gods, he was punished for his ignorance and given "retribution." However, the final outcome of all of these events is that he has finally found wisdom, as the Chorus says that these punishments from the gods "in old age teach wisdom." Although Creon's suffering is so very great, the important thing is that he is a much wiser man now because of this suffering. Ignorance is the worst crime of all, especially when so many others whom he ruled were in fact wiser than he was. A man possesses wisdom when he can learn from the words of others, and Creon did not do this until it was already too late.

Topic Tracking: Pride 15