

# **THE PHOENISSAE**

by Euripides



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# THE PHOENISSAE

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by Euripides

translated by E. P. Coleridge

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## CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

JOCASTA, wife of OEDIPUS  
OLD SERVANT, an attendant of ANTIGONE  
ANTIGONE, daughter Of OEDIPUS  
CHORUS OF PHOENICIAN MAIDENS  
POLYNEICES, exiled son of OEDIPUS  
ETEOCLES, now King of Thebes; son of OEDIPUS  
CREON, brother of JOCASTA  
TEIRESIAS, a blind prophet  
MENOECEUS, son of CREON  
FIRST MESSENGER  
SECOND MESSENGER  
OEDIPUS, formerly King of Thebes  
Daughter of TEIRESIAS, guards, attendants

(SCENE:—Before the royal palace of Thebes. JOCASTA enters from the palace alone.)

### JOCASTA

O SUN—GOD, who cleavest thy way along the starry sky, mounted on golden—studded car, rolling on thy path of flame behind fleet coursers, how curst the beam thou didst shed on Thebes, the day that Cadmus left Phoenicia's realm beside the sea and reached this land! He it was that in days long gone wedded Harmonia, the daughter of Cypris, and begat Polydorus from whom they say sprung Labdacus, and Laius from him. I am known as the daughter of Menoeceus, and Creon is my brother by the same mother. Men called me Jocasta, for so my father named me, and I am married to Laius. Now when he was still childless after being wedded to me a long time, he went and questioned Phoebus, craving moreover that our love might be crowned with sons born to his house. But the god said, "King of Thebes for horses famed! seek not to beget children against the will of heaven; for if thou beget a son, that child shall slay thee, and all thy house shall wade through blood." But he, yielding to his lust in a drunken fit, begat a son of me, and when his babe was born, conscious of his sin and of the god's warning, he gave the child to shepherds to expose in Hera's meadow on mount Cithaeron, after piercing his ankles with iron spikes; whence it was that Hellas named him Oedipus. But the keepers of the horses of Polybus finding him took him home and laid him in the arms of their mistress. So she suckled the child that I had borne and persuaded her husband she was its mother. Soon as my son was grown to man's estate, the tawny beard upon his cheek, either because he had guessed the fraud or learnt it from another, he set out for the shrine of Phoebus, eager to know for certain who his parents were; and likewise Laius, my husband, was on his way thither, anxious to find out if the child he had exposed was dead. And they twain met where the branching roads to Phocis unite; and the charioteer of Laius called to him, "Out of the way, stranger, room for my lord!" But he, with never a word, strode on in his pride; and the horses with their hoofs drew blood from the tendons of his feet. Then—but why need I tell aught beyond the sad issue?—son slew father, and taking his chariot gave it to Polybus his foster—father. Now when the Sphinx was grievously harrying our city after my husband's death, my brother Creon proclaimed that he would wed me to any who should guess the riddle of that crafty maiden. By some strange chance, my own son, Oedipus, guessed the Sphinx's riddle, and so he became king of this land and received its sceptre as his prize, and married his mother, all unwitting, luckless wretch! nor did I his mother know that I was wedded to my son; and I bore him two sons, Eteocles and the hero Polyneices, and two daughters as well; the one her father called Ismene, the other, which was the elder, I named Antigone. Now when Oedipus, that awful sufferer, learnt that I his wedded wife was

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his mother too, he inflicted a ghastly outrage upon his eyes, tearing the bleeding orbs with a golden brooch. But since my sons have grown to bearded men, they have confined their father closely, that his misfortune, needing as it did full many a shift to hide it, might be forgotten. He is still living in the palace, but his misfortunes have so unhinged him that he imprecates the most unholy curses on his sons, praying that they may have to draw the sword before they share this house between them. So they, fearful that heaven may accomplish his prayer if they dwell together, have made an agreement, arranging that Polyneices, the younger, should first leave the land in voluntary exile, while Eteocles should stay and hold the sceptre for a year and then change places. But as soon as Eteocles was seated high in power, he refused to give up the throne, and drove Polyneices into exile from the kingdom; so Polyneices went to Argos and married into the family of Adrastus, and having collected a numerous force of Argives is leading them hither; and he is come up against our seven-gated walls, demanding the sceptre of his father and his share in the kingdom. Wherefore I, to end their strife, have prevailed on one son to meet the other under truce, before appealing to arms; and the messenger I sent tells me that he will come. O Zeus, whose home is heaven's radiant vault, save us, and grant that my sons may be reconciled! For thou, if thou art really wise, must not suffer the same poor mortal to be for ever wretched.

(JOCASTA re-enters the palace, as the OLD SERVANT appears on the roof.)

### OLD SERVANT

Antigone, choice blossom in a father's house, although thy mother allowed thee at thy earnest treaty to leave thy maiden chamber for the topmost story of the house, thence to behold the Argive host, yet a stay moment that I may first reconnoitre the path, whether there be any of the citizens visible on the road, lest reproach, little as it matters to a slave like me, fasten on thee, my royal mistress; and when I am quite sure will tell thee everything that I saw and heard from the Argives, when carried the terms of the truce to and fro between this city and Polyneices. (After a slight pause) No, there is no citizen approaching the palace; so mount the ancient cedar steps, and view the plains that skirt Ismenus and the fount of Dirce to see the mighty host of foemen.

(ANTIGONE appears beside him. She chants her replies to him.)

### ANTIGONE

Stretch out thy hand to me from the stairs, the hand of age to youth, helping me to mount.

### OLD SERVANT

There! clasp it, my young mistress; thou art come at a lucky moment; for Pelasgia's host is just upon the move, and their several contingents are separating.

### ANTIGONE

O Hecate, dread child of Latona! the plain is one blaze of bronze.

### OLD SERVANT

Ah! this is no ordinary home-coming of Polyneices; with many a knight and clash of countless arms he comes.

### ANTIGONE

Are the gates fast barred, and the brazen bolts shot home into Amphion's walls of stone?

### OLD SERVANT

Never fear! all is safe within the town. But mark him who cometh first, if thou wouldst learn his name.

### ANTIGONE

Who is that with the white crest, who marches in the van, lightly bearing on his arm a buckler all of bronze?

### OLD SERVANT

A chieftain, lady—

### ANTIGONE

Who is he? whose son? his name? tell me, old man.

### OLD SERVANT

Mycenae claims him for her son; in Lerna's glens he dwells, the prince Hippomedon.

### ANTIGONE

Ah! how proud and terrible his mien! like to an earth-born giant he moves, with stars engraved upon his targe, resembling not a child of earth.

### OLD SERVANT

Dost see yon chieftain crossing Dirce's stream?

### ANTIGONE

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His harness is quite different. Who is that?

**OLD SERVANT**

Tydeus, the son of Oeneus; true Aetolian spirit fires his breast.

**ANTIGONE**

Is this he, old man, who wedded a sister of the wife of Polyneices? What a foreign look his armour has! a half-barbarian he!

**OLD SERVANT**

Yes, my child; all Aetolians carry shields, and are most unerring marksmen with their darts.

**ANTIGONE**

How art thou so sure of these descriptions, old man?

**OLD SERVANT**

I carefully noted the blazons on their shields before when I went with the terms of the truce to thy brother; so when I see them now I know who carry them.

**ANTIGONE**

Who is that youth passing close to the tomb of Zethus, with long flowing hair, but a look of fury in his eye? is he a captain? for crowds of warriors follow at his heels.

**OLD SERVANT**

That is Parthenopaeus, Atalanta's son.

**ANTIGONE**

May Artemis, who hies o'er the hills with his mother, lay him low with an arrow, for coming against my city to sack it!

**OLD SERVANT**

May it be so, my daughter; but with justice are they come hither, and my fear is that the gods will take the rightful view,

**ANTIGONE**

Where is he who was born of the same mother as I was by a cruel destiny? Oh! tell me, old friend, where Polyneices is.

**OLD SERVANT**

He is yonder, ranged next to Adrastus near the tomb of Niobe's seven unwed daughters. Dost see him?

**ANTIGONE**

I see him, yes! but not distinctly; 'tis but the outline of his form the semblance of his stalwart limbs I see. Would I could speed through the sky, swift as a cloud before the wind, towards my own dear brother, and throw my arms about my darling's neck, so long, poor boy! an exile. How bright his golden weapons flash like the sun-god's morning rays!

**OLD SERVANT**

He will soon be here, to fill thy heart with joy, according to the truce.

**ANTIGONE**

Who is that, old man, on yonder car driving snow-white steeds?

**OLD SERVANT**

That, lady, is the prophet Amphiarus; with him are the victims, whose streaming blood the thirsty earth will drink.

**ANTIGONE**

Daughter of Latona with the dazzling zone, O moon, thou orb of golden light! how quietly, with what restraint he drives, goading first one horse, then the other! But where is Capaneus who utters those dreadful threats against this city?

**OLD SERVANT**

Yonder he is, calculating how he may scale the towers, taking the measure of our walls from base to summit.

**ANTIGONE**

O Nemesis, with booming thunder-peals of Zeus and blazing levin-light, thine it is to silence such presumptuous boasting. Is this the man, who says he will give the maids of Thebes as captives of his spear to Mycenae's dames, to Lerna's Trident, and the waters of Amymone, dear to Poseidon, when he has thrown the toils of slavery round

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them? Never, never, Artemis, my queen revered, child of Zeus with locks of gold, may I endure the yoke of slavery!

### OLD SERVANT

My daughter, go within, and abide beneath the shelter of thy maiden chamber, now that thou hast had thy wish and seen all that thy heart desired; for I see a crowd of women moving toward the royal palace, confusion reigning in the city. Now the race of women by nature loves to find fault; and if they get some slight handle for their talk they exaggerate it, for they seem to take a pleasure in saying everything bad of one another.

(ANTIGONE and the OLD SERVANT descend into the palace, as the CHORUS of PHOENICIAN MAIDENS enters.)

### CHORUS (singing)

strophe 1

From the Tyrian main I come, an offering choice for Loxias from Phoenician isle, to minister to Phoebus in his halls, where his fane lies nestling 'neath the snow-swept peaks of Parnassus; over the Ionian sea I rowed my course, for above the plains unharvested, that fringe the coast of Sicily, the boisterous west-wind coursed, piping sweetest music in the sky.

antistrophe 1

Chosen from my city as beauty's gift for Loxias, to the land of Cadmus I came, sent thither to the towers of Laius, the home of my kin, the famous sons of Agenor; and there I became the handmaid of Phoebus, dedicated like his offerings of wrought gold. But as yet the water of Castaly is waiting for me to bedew the maiden glory of my tresses for the service of Phoebus.

epode

Hail! thou rock that kindest bright fire above the twin-peaked heights of Dionysus. Hail! thou vine, that, day by day, makest the lush bunches of thy grapes to drip. Hail! awful cavern of the serpent, and the god's outlook on the hills, and sacred mount by snow-storms lashed! would I were now circling in the dance of the deathless god, free from wild alarms, having left Dirce ere this for the vales of Phoebus at the centre of the world!

strophe 2

But now I find the impetuous god of war is come to battle before these walls, and hath kindled murder's torch in this city. God grant he fail! for a friend's sorrows are also mine; and if this land with its seven towers suffer any mischance, Phoenicia's realm must share it. Ah me! our stock is one; all children we of Io, that horned maid, whose sorrows I partake.

antistrophe 2

Around the city a dense array of serried shields is rousing the spectre of bloody strife, whose issue Ares shall soon learn to his cost, if he brings upon the sons of Oedipus the horrors of the curse. O Argos, city of Pelasgia! I dread thy prowess and the vengeance Heaven sends; for he who cometh against our home in full panoply is entering the lists with justice on his side.

(POLYNEICES enters alone.)

### POLYNEICES

Those who kept watch and ward at the gate admitted me so readily within the walls that my only fear is, that now they have caught me in their toils, they will not let me out unscathed; so I must turn my eye in every direction, hither and thither, to guard against all treachery. Armed with this sword, I shall inspire myself with the trust that is born of boldness. (Starting) What ho! who goes there? or is it an idle sound I fear? Everything seems a danger to venturous spirits, when their feet begin to tread an enemy's country. Still I trust my mother, and at the same time mistrust her for persuading me to come hither under truce. Well, there is help at hand, for the altar's hearth is close and there are people in the palace. Come, let me sheath my sword in its dark scabbard and ask these maidens standing near the house, who they are.

Ladies of another land, tell me from what country ye come to the halls of Hellas. LEADER OF THE CHORUS Phoenicia is my native land where I was born and bred; and Agenor's children's children sent me hither as a first-fruits of the spoils of war foy Phoebus; but when the noble son of Oedipus was about to escort me to the hallowed oracle and the altars of Loxias, came Argives meantime against his city. Now tell me in return who thou art that comes to this fortress of the Theban realm with its seven gates.

### POLYNEICES



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My father was Oedipus, the son of Laius; my mother Jocasta, daughter of Menoeceus; and I am called Polyneices by the folk of Thebes.

**CHORUS** (chanting)

O kinsman of Agenor's race, my royal masters who sent me hither at thy feet, prince, I throw myself, according to the custom of my home. At last art thou come to thy native land; at last! Hail to thee! all hail! Come forth, my honoured mistress, open wide the doors. Dost hear, O mother of this chief? Why art thou delaying to leave the sheltering roof to fold thy son in thy embrace?

(JOCASTA enters from the palace.)

**JOCASTA** (chanting)

Maidens, I hear you call in your Phoenician tongue, and my old feet drag their tottering steps to meet my son. O my son, my son, at last after many a long day I see thee face to face; throw thy arms about thy mother's bosom; reach hither thy cheek to me and thy dark locks of clustering hair, o'ershadowing my neck therewith. Hail to thee! all hail! scarce now restored to thy mother's arms, when hope and expectation both were dead. What can I say to thee? how recall in every way, by word, by deed, the bliss of days long past, expressing my joy in the mazy measures of the dance? Ah! my son, thou didst leave thy father's halls desolate, when thy brother's despite drove thee thence in exile. Truly thou wert missed alike by thy friends and Thebes. This was why I cut off my silvered locks and let them fall for grief with many a tear, not clad in robes of white, my son, but instead thereof taking for my wear these sorry sable tatters; while within the palace that aged one with sightless orbs, ever nursing the sorrow of a double regret for the pair of brethren estranged from their home, rushed to lay hands upon himself with the sword or by the noose suspended o'er his chamber-roof, moaning his curses on his sons; and now he buries himself in darkness, weeping ever and lamenting. And thou, my child,—I hear thou hast taken an alien to wife and art begetting children to thy joy in thy home; they tell me thou art courting a foreign alliance, a ceaseless woe to me thy mother and to Laius thy ancestor, to have this woeful marriage foisted on us. 'Twas no hand of mine that lit for thee the marriage-torch, as custom ordains and as a happy mother ought; no part had Ismenus at thy wedding in supplying the luxurious bath; and there was silence through the streets of Thebes, what time thy young bride entered her home. Curses on them! whether it be the sword or strife or thy sire that is to blame, or heaven's visitation that hath burst so riotously upon the house of Oedipus; for on me is come all the anguish of these troubles. **LEADER OF THE CHORUS**

Wondrous dear to woman is the child of her travail, and all her race hath some affection for its babes.

**POLYNEICES**

Mother, I have come amongst enemies wisely or foolishly; but all men needs must love their native land; whoso saith otherwise is pleased to say so but his thoughts are turned elsewhere. So fearful was I and in such terror, lest my brother might slay me by treachery that I made my way through the city sword in hand, casting my eyes all round me. My only hope is the truce and thy plighted word which induced me to enter my paternal walls; and many a tear I shed by the way, seeing after a weary while my home and the altars of the gods, the training ground, scene of my childhood, and Dirce's founts from which I was unjustly driven to sojourn in a strange city, with tears ever gushing from mine eyes. Yea, and to add to my grief I see thee with hair cut short and clad in sable robe; woe is me for my sorrows!

How terrible, dear mother, is hatred 'twixt those once near and dear; how hard it makes all reconciliation! What doth my aged sire within the house, his light all darkness now? what of my sisters twain? Ah! they, I know, bewail my bitter exile.

**JOCASTA**

Some god with fell intent is plaguing the race of Oedipus. Thus it all began; I broke God's law and bore a son, and in an evil hour married thy father and thou wert born. But why repeat these horrors? what Heaven sends we have to bear. I am afraid to ask thee what I fain would, for fear of wounding thy feelings; yet I long to.

**POLYNEICES**

Nay, question me, leave naught unsaid; for thy will, mother, is my pleasure too.

**JOCASTA**

Well then, first I ask thee what I long to have answered. What means exile from one's country? is it a great evil?

**POLYNEICES**

The greatest; harder to bear than tell.

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**JOCASTA**

What is it like? what is it galls the exile?

**POLYNEICES**

One thing most of all; he cannot speak his mind.

**JOCASTA**

This is a slave's lot thou describest, to refrain from uttering what one thinks.

**POLYNEICES**

The follies of his rulers must be bear.

**JOCASTA**

That too is bitter, to join in the folly of fools.

**POLYNEICES**

Yet to gain our ends we must submit against our nature.

**JOCASTA**

Hope, they say, is the exile's food.

**POLYNEICES**

Aye, hope that looks so fair; but she is ever in the future.

**JOCASTA**

But doth not time expose her futility?

**POLYNEICES**

She hath a certain winsome charm in misfortune.

**JOCASTA**

Whence hadst thou means to live, ere thy marriage found it for thee?

**POLYNEICES**

One while I had enough for the day, and then maybe I had it not.

**JOCASTA**

Did not thy father's friends and whilom guests assist thee?

**POLYNEICES**

Seek to be prosperous; once let fortune lour, and the aid supplied by friends is naught.

**JOCASTA**

Did not thy noble breeding exalt thy horn for thee?

**POLYNEICES**

Poverty is a curse; breeding would not find me food.

**JOCASTA**

Man's dearest treasure then, it seems, is his country.

**POLYNEICES**

No words of thine could tell how dear.

**JOCASTA**

How was it thou didst go to Argos? what was thy scheme?

**POLYNEICES**

I know not; the deity summoned me thither in accordance with my destiny.

**JOCASTA**

He doubtless had some wise design; but how didst thou win thy wife?

**POLYNEICES**

Loxias had given Adrastus an oracle.

**JOCASTA**

What was it? what meanest thou? I cannot guess.

**POLYNEICES**

That he should wed his daughters to a boar and a lion.

**JOCASTA**

What hadst thou, my son, to do with the name of beasts?

**POLYNEICES**

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It was night when I reached the porch of Adrastus.

**JOCASTA**

In search of a resting-place, or wandering thither in thy exile?

**POLYNEICES**

Yes, I wandered thither; and so did another like me.

**JOCASTA**

Who was he? he too it seems was in evil plight.

**POLYNEICES**

Tydeus, son of Oeneus, was his name.

**JOCASTA**

But why did Adrastus liken you to wild beasts?

**POLYNEICES**

Because we came to blows about our bed.

**JOCASTA**

Was it then that the son of Talaus understood the oracle?

**POLYNEICES**

Yes, and he gave to us his daughters twain.

**JOCASTA**

Art thou blest or curst in thy marriage?

**POLYNEICES**

As yet I have no fault to find with it.

**JOCASTA**

How didst thou persuade an army to follow thee hither?

**POLYNEICES**

To me and to Tydeus who is my kinsman by marriage, Adrastus sware an oath, even to the husbands of his daughters twain, that he would restore us both to our country, but me the first. So many a chief from Argos and Mycenae has joined me, doing me a bitter though needful service, for 'tis against my own city I am marching. Now I call heaven to witness, that it is not willingly I have raised my arm against parents whom I love full well. But to thee, mother, it belongs to dissolve this unhappy feud, and, by reconciling brothers in love, to end my troubles and thine and this whole city's. 'Tis an old-world maxim, but I will cite it for all that: "Men set most store by wealth, and of all things in this world it hath the greatest power." This am I come to secure at the head of my countless host; for good birth is naught if poverty go with it. LEADER

Lo! Eteocles comes hither to discuss the truce. Thine the task, mother Jocasta, to speak such words as may reconcile thy sons.

(ETEOCLES and his retinue enter.)

**ETEOCLES**

Mother, I am here; but it was only to pleasure thee I came. What am to do? Let some one begin the conference; for I stopped marshalling the citizens in double lines around the walls, that I might hear thy arbitration. between us; for it is under this truce that thou hast persuaded me to admit this fellow within the walls.

**JOCASTA**

Stay a moment; haste never carries justice with it; but slow deliberation oft attains a wise result. Restrain the fierceness of thy look, that panting rage; for this is not the Gorgon's severed head but thy own brother whom thou seest here. Thou too, Polyneices, turn and face thy brother; for if thou and he stand face to face, thou wilt adopt a kindlier tone and lend a readier ear to him. I fain would give you both one piece of wholesome counsel; when a man that is angered with his friend confronts him face to face, he ought only to keep in view the object of his coming, forgetting all previous quarrels. Polyneices my son, speak first, for thou art come at the head of a Danaid host, alleging wrongful treatment; and may some god judge betwixt us and reconcile the trouble.

**POLYNEICES**

The words of truth are simple, and justice needs no subtle interpretations, for it hath a fitness in itself; but the words of injustice, being rotten in themselves, require clever treatment. I provided for his interests and mine in our father's palace, being anxious to avoid the curse which Oedipus once uttered against us; of my own free-will I

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left the land, allowing him to rule our country for one full year, on condition that I should then take the sceptre in turn, instead of plunging into deadly enmity and thereby doing others hurt or suffering it myself, as is now the case. But he, after consenting to this and calling the gods to witness his oath, has performed none of his promises, but is still keeping the sovereignty in his own hands together with my share of our heritage. Even now am I ready to take my own and dismiss my army from this land, receiving my house in turn to dwell therein, and once more restore it to him for a like period instead of ravaging our country and planting scaling-ladders against the towers, as I shall attempt to do if I do not get my rights. Wherefore I call the gods to witness that spite of my just dealing in everything I am being unjustly robbed of my country by most godless fraud. Here, mother, have I stated the several points on their own merits, without collecting words to fence them in, but urging a fair case, I think, alike in the judgment of skilled or simple folk. LEADER

To me at least, albeit I was not born and bred in Hellas, thy words seem full of sense.

### ETEOCLES

If all were at one in their ideas of honour and wisdom, there would have been no strife to make men disagree; but, as it is, fairness and equality have no existence in this world beyond the name; there is really no such thing. For instance, mother, I will tell thee this without any concealment; I would ascend to the rising of the stars and the sun or dive beneath the earth, were I able so to do, to win a monarch's power, the chief of things divine. Therefore, mother, I will never yield this blessing to another, but keep it for myself; for it were a coward's act to lose the greater and to win the less. Besides, I blush to think that he should gain his object by coming with arms in his hand and ravaging the land; for this were foul disgrace to glorious Thebes, if I should yield my sceptre up to him for fear of Argive might. He ought not, mother, to have attempted reconciliation by armed force, for words compass everything that even the sword of an enemy might effect. Still, if on any other terms he cares to dwell here, he may; but the sceptre will I never willingly let go. Shall I become his slave, when I can be his master? Never! Wherefore come fire, come sword! harness your steeds, fill the plains with chariots, for I will not forego my throne for him. For if we must do wrong, to do so for a kingdom were the fairest cause, but in all else virtue should be our aim. LEADER

Fair words are only called for when the deeds they crown are fair; otherwise they lose their charm and offend justice.

### JOCASTA

Eteocles, my child, it is not all evil that attends old age; sometimes its experience can offer sager counsel than can youth. Oh why, my son, art thou so set upon Ambition, that worst of deities? Forbear; that goddess knows not justice; many are the homes and cities once prosperous that she hath entered and left after the ruin of her votaries; she it is thou madly followest. Better far, my son, prize Equality that ever linketh friend to friend, city to city, and allies to each other; for Equality is man's natural law; but the less is always in opposition to the greater, ushering in the dayspring of dislike. For it is Equality that hath set up for man measures and divisions of weights and hath distinguished numbers; night's sightless orb, and radiant sun proceed upon their yearly course on equal terms, and neither of them is envious when it has to yield. Though sun and gloom then both are servants in man's interests, wilt not thou be content with thy fair share of thy heritage and give the same to him? if not, why where is justice? Why prize beyond its worth the monarch's power, injustice in prosperity? why think so much of the admiring glances turned on rank? Nay, 'tis vanity. Or wouldst thou by heaping riches in thy halls, heap up toil therewith? what advantage is it? 'tis but a name; for the wise find that enough which suffices for their wants. Man indeed hath no possessions of his own; we do but hold a stewardship of the gods' property; and when they will, they take it back again. Riches make no settled home, but are as transient as the day. Come, suppose I put before thee two alternatives, whether thou wilt rule or save thy city? Wilt thou say "Rule"?

Again, if Polyneices win the day and his Argive warriors rout the ranks of Thebes, thou wilt see this city conquered and many a captive maid brutally dishonoured by the foe; so will that wealth thou art so bent on getting become a grievous bane to Thebes; but still ambition fills thee. This I say to thee; and this to thee, Polyneices; Adrastus hath conferred a foolish favour on thee; and thou too hast shown little sense in coming to lay thy city waste. Suppose thou conquer this land (which Heaven forefend!) tell me, I conjure thee, how wilt thou rear a trophy to Zeus? how wilt thou begin the sacrifice after thy country's conquest or inscribe the spoils at the streams of Inachus with "Polyneices gave Thebes to the flames and dedicated these shields to the gods"? Oh! never, my son, be it thine to win such fame from Hellas! If, on the other hand, thou art worsted and thy brother's

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cause prevail, how shalt thou return to Argos, leaving countless dead behind? Some one will be sure to say, "Out on thee! Adrastus, for the evil bridegroom thou hast brought unto thy house; thanks to one maid's marriage, ruin is come on us."

Towards two evils, my son, art thou hastening,—loss of influence there and ruin in the midst of thy efforts here. Oh! my children, lay aside your violence; two men's follies, once they meet, result in very deadly evil. LEADER  
O heaven, avert these troubles and reconcile the sons of Oedipus in some way!

**ETEOCLES**

Mother, the season for parley is past; the time we still delay is idle waste; thy good wishes are of no avail, for we shall never be reconciled except upon the terms already named, namely, that I should keep the sceptre and be king of this land: wherefore cease these tedious warnings and let me be. (Turning to POLYNEICES) And as for thee, outside the walls, or die!

**POLYNEICES**

Who will slay me? who is so invulnerable as to plunge his sword in my body without reaping the self-same fate?

**ETEOCLES**

Thou art near him, aye, very near; dost see my arm?

**POLYNEICES**

I see it; but wealth is cowardly, a craven too fond of life.

**ETEOCLES**

Was it then to meet a dastard thou camest with all that host to war?

**POLYNEICES**

In a general caution is better than foolhardiness.

**ETEOCLES**

Relying on the truce, which saves thy life, thou turnest boaster.

**POLYNEICES**

Once more I ask thee to restore my sceptre and share in the kingdom.

**ETEOCLES**

I have naught to restore; 'tis my own house, and I will dwell therein.

**POLYNEICES**

What! and keep more than thy share?

**ETEOCLES**

Yes, I will. Begone!

**POLYNEICES**

O altars of my fathers' gods!—

**ETEOCLES**

Which thou art here to raze.

**POLYNEICES**

Hear me.

**ETEOCLES**

Who would hear thee after thou hast marched against thy fatherland?

**POLYNEICES**

O temples of those gods that ride on snow—white steeds!

**ETEOCLES**

They hate thee.

**POLYNEICES**

I am being driven from my country.

**ETEOCLES**

Because thou camest to drive others thence.

**POLYNEICES**

Unjustly, O ye gods!

**ETEOCLES**

Call on the gods at Mycenae, not here.

THE PHOENISSAE

**POLYNEICES**

Thou hast outraged right—

**ETEOCLES**

But I have not like thee become my country's foe.

**POLYNEICES**

By driving me forth without my portion.

**ETEOCLES**

And further I will slay thee.

**POLYNEICES**

O father, dost thou hear what I am suffering?

**ETEOCLES**

Yea, and he hears what thou art doing.

**POLYNEICES**

Thou too, mother mine?

**ETEOCLES**

Thou hast no right to mention thy mother.

**POLYNEICES**

O my city!

**ETEOCLES**

Get thee to Argos, and invoke the waters of Lerna.

**POLYNEICES**

I will; trouble not thyself; all thanks to thee though, mother mine—

**ETEOCLES**

Forth from the land!

**POLYNEICES**

I go, yet grant me to behold my father.

**ETEOCLES**

Thou shalt not have thy wish.

**POLYNEICES**

At least then my tender sisters.

**ETEOCLES**

No! them too thou shalt never see.

**POLYNEICES**

Ah, sisters mine!

**ETEOCLES**

Why dost thou, their bitterest foe, call on them?

**POLYNEICES**

Mother dear, to thee at least farewell!

**JOCASTA**

A joyous faring mine in sooth, my son!

**POLYNEICES**

Thy son no more!

**JOCASTA**

Born to sorrow, endless sorrow, I!

**POLYNEICES**

'Tis because my brother treats me despitefully.

**ETEOCLES**

I am treated just the same.

**POLYNEICES**

Where wilt thou be stationed before the towers?

**ETEOCLES**

## THE PHOENISSAE

Why ask me this?

**POLYNEICES**

I will array myself against thee for thy death.

**ETEOCLES**

I too have the same desire.

**JOCASTA**

Woe is me! what will ye do, my sons?

**POLYNEICES**

The event will show.

**JOCASTA**

Oh, fly your father's curse!

(JOCASTA enters the palace.)

**ETEOCLES**

Destruction seize our whole house!

**POLYNEICES**

Soon shall my sword be busy, plunged in gore. But I call my native land and heaven too to witness, with what contumely and bitter treatment I am being driven forth, as though I were a slave, not a son of Oedipus as much as he. If aught happen to thee, my city, blame him, not me; for I came not willingly, and all unwillingly am I driven hence. Farewell, king Phoebus, lord of highways; farewell palace and comrades; farewell ye statues of the gods, at which men offer sheep; for I know not if shall ever again address you, though hope is still awake, which makes me confident that with heaven's help I shall slay this fellow and rule my native Thebes.

(POLYNEICES departs.)

**ETEOCLES**

Forth from the land! 'twas a true name our father gave thee, when, prompted by some god, he called thee Polyneices, a name denoting strife.

**CHORUS** (singing)

strophe

To this land came Cadmus of Tyre, at whose feet an unyoked heifer threw itself down, giving effect to an oracle on the spot where the god's response bade him take up his abode in Aonia's rich cornlands, where gushing Dirce's fair rivers of water pour o'er verdant fruitful fields; here was born the Bromian god by her whom Zeus made a mother, round whom the ivy twined its wreaths while he was yet a babe, swathing him amid the covert of its green foliage as child of happy destiny, to be a theme for Bacchic revelry among the maids and wives inspired in Thebes.

antistrophe

There lay Ares' murderous dragon, a savage warder, watching with roving eye the watered glens and quickening streams; him did Cadmus slay with a jagged stone, when he came thither to draw him lustral water, smiting that fell head with a blow of his death-dealing arm; but by the counsel of Pallas, motherless goddess, he cast the teeth upon the earth into deep furrows, whence sprang to sight mail-clad host above the surface of the soil; but grim slaughter once again united them to the earth they loved, bedewing with blood the ground that had disclosed them to the sunlit breath of heaven.

epode

Thee too, Epaphus, child of Zeus, sprung from Io our ancestress, call on in my foreign tongue; all hail to thee! hear my prayer uttered in accents strange, and visit this land; 'twas in thy honour thy descendants settled here, and those goddesses of twofold name, Persephone and kindly Demeter or Earth the queen of all, that feedeth every mouth, won it for themselves; send to the help of this land those torch-bearing queens; for to gods all things are easy.

**ETEOCLES** (to an attendant)

Go, fetch Creon son of Menoeceus, the brother of Jocasta my mother; tell him I fain would confer with him on matters affecting our public and private weal, before we set out to battle and the arraying of our host. But lo! he comes and saves thee the trouble of going; I see him on his way to my palace.

(CREON enters.)

## THE PHOENISSAE

**CREON**

To and fro have I been, king Eteocles, in my desire to see thee, and have gone all round the gates and sentinels of Thebes in quest of thee.

**ETEOCLES**

Why, and I was anxious to see thee, Creon; for I found the terms of peace far from satisfactory, when I came to confer with Polyneices.

**CREON**

I hear that he has wider aims than Thebes, relying on his alliance with the daughter of Adrastus and his army. Well, we must leave this dependent on the gods; meantime I am come to tell thee our chief obstacle.

**ETEOCLES**

What is that? I do not understand what thou sayest.

**CREON**

There is come one that was captured by the Argives.

**ETEOCLES**

What news does he bring from their camp?

**CREON**

He says the Argive army intend at once to draw a ring of troops round the city of Thebes, about its towers.

**ETEOCLES**

In that case the city of Cadmus must lead out its troops.

**CREON**

Whither? art thou so young that thine eyes see not what they should?

**ETEOCLES**

Across yon trenches for immediate action.

**CREON**

Our Theban forces are small, while theirs are numberless.

**ETEOCLES**

I well know they are reputed brave.

**CREON**

No mean repute have those Argives among Hellenes.

**ETEOCLES**

Never fear! I will soon fill the plain with their dead.

**CREON**

I could wish it so; but I see great difficulties in this.

**ETEOCLES**

Trust me, I will not keep my host within the walls.

**CREON**

Still victory is entirely a matter of good counsel.

**ETEOCLES**

Art anxious then that I should have recourse to any other scheme?

**CREON**

Aye to every scheme, before running the risk once for all.

**ETEOCLES**

Suppose we fall on them by night from ambuscade?

**CREON**

Good! provided in the event of defeat thou canst secure thy return hither.

**ETEOCLES**

Night equalizes risks, though it rather favours daring.

**CREON**

The darkness of night is a terrible time to suffer disaster.

**ETEOCLES**

Well, shall I fall upon them as they sit at meat?



## THE PHOENISSAE

**CREON**

That might cause them fright, but victory is what we want.

**ETEOCLES**

Dirce's ford is deep enough to prevent their retreat.

**CREON**

No plan so good as to keep well guarded.

**ETEOCLES**

What if our cavalry make a sortie against the host of Argos?

**CREON**

Their troops too are fenced all round with chariots.

**ETEOCLES**

What then can I do? am I to surrender the city to the foe?

**CREON**

Nay, nay! but of thy wisdom form some plan.

**ETEOCLES**

Pray, what scheme is wiser than mine?

**CREON**

They have seven chiefs, I hear.

**ETEOCLES**

What is their appointed task? their might can be but feeble.

**CREON**

To lead the several companies and storm our seven gates.

**ETEOCLES**

What are we to do? I will not wait till every chance is gone.

**CREON**

Choose seven chiefs thyself to set against them at the gates.

**ETEOCLES**

To lead our companies, or to fight single-handed?

**CREON**

Choose our very bravest men to lead the troops.

**ETEOCLES**

I understand; to repel attempts at scaling our walls.

**CREON**

With others to share the command, for one man sees not everything.

**ETEOCLES**

Selecting them for courage or thoughtful prudence?

**CREON**

For both; for one is naught without the other.

**ETEOCLES**

It shall be done; I will away to our seven towers and post captains at the gates, as thou advisest, pitting them man for man against the foe. To tell thee each one's name were grievous waste of time, when the foe is camped beneath our very walls. But I will go, that my hands may no longer hang idle. May I meet my brother face to face, and encounter him hand to hand, e'en to the death, for coming to waste my country! But if I suffer any mischance, thou must see to the marriage 'twixt Antigone my sister and Haemon, thy son; and now, as I go forth to battle, I ratify their previous espousal. Thou art my mother's brother, so why need I say more? take care of her, as she deserves, both for thy own sake and mine. As for my sire he hath been guilty of folly against himself in putting out his eyes; small praise have I for him; by his curses maybe he will slay us too. One thing only have we still to do, to ask Teiresias, the seer, if he has aught to tell of heaven's will. Thy son Menoeceus, who bears thy father's name, will I send to fetch Teiresias hither, Creon; for with the he will readily converse, though I have ere now so scorned his art prophetic to his face, that he has reasons to reproach me. This commandment, Creon, I lay upon the city and thee; should my cause prevail, never give Polyneices' corpse a grave in Theban soil, and if so be some

## THE PHOENISSAE

friend should bury him, let death reward the man. Thus far to thee; and to my servants thus, bring forth my arms and coat of mail, that I may start at once for the appointed combat, with right to lead to victory. To save our city we will pray to Caution, the best goddess to serve our end.

(ETEOCLES and his retinue go out.)

**CHORUS** (singing)

strophe

O Ares, god of toil and trouble! why, why art thou possessed by love of blood and death, out of harmony with the festivals of Bromius? 'Tis for no crowns of dancers fair that thou dost toss thy youthful curls to the breeze, singing the while to the lute's soft breath a strain to charm the dancers' feet; but with warriors clad in mail thou dost lead thy sombre revelry, breathing into Argive breasts lust for Theban blood; with no wild waving of the thyrsus, clad in fawnskin thou dancest, but with chariots and bitted steeds wheelest thy charger strong of hoof. O'er the waters of Ismenus in wild career thou art urging thy horses, inspiring Argive breasts with hate of the earth-born race, arraying in brazen harness against these stone-built walls a host of warriors armed with shields. Truly Strife is a goddess to fear, who devised these troubles for the princes of this land, for the much-enduring sons of Labdacus.

antistrophe

O Cithaeron, apple of the eye of Artemis, holy vale of leaves, amid whose snows full many a beast lies couched, would thou hadst never reared the child exposed to die, Oedipus the fruit of Jocasta's womb, when as a babe he was cast forth from his home, marked with golden brooch; and would the Sphinx, that winged maid, fell monster from the hills, had never come to curse our land with inharmonious strains; she that erst drew nigh our walls and snatched the sons of Cadmus away in her taloned feet to the pathless fields of light, a fiend sent by Hades from hell to plague the men of Thebes; once more unhappy strife is bursting out between the sons of Oedipus in city and home. For never can wrong be right, nor children of unnatural parentage come as a glory to the mother that bears them, but as a stain on the marriage of him who is father and brother at once.

epode

O earth, thou once didst bear,—so long ago I heard the story told by foreigners in my own home,—a race which sprang of the teeth of a snake with blood-red crest, that fed on beasts, to be the glory and reproach of Thebes. In days gone by the sons of heaven came to the wedding of Harmonia, and the walls of Thebes arose to the sound of the lyre and her towers stood up as Amphion played, in the midst between the double streams of Dirce, that watereth the green meadows fronting the Ismenus; and Io, our horned ancestress was mother of the kings of Thebes; thus our city through an endless succession of divers blessings has set herself upon the highest pinnacle of martial glory.

(TEIRESIAS enters, led by his daughter. They are accompanied by MENOECEUS.)

**TEIRESIAS**

Lead on, my daughter; for thou art as an eye to my blind feet, as certain as a star to mariners; lead my steps on to level ground; then go before, that we stumble not, for thy father has no strength; keep safe for me in thy maiden hand the auguries I took in the days I observed the flight and cries of birds seated in my holy prophet's chair. Tell me, young Menoeceus, son of Creon, how much further toward the city is it ere reach thy father? for my knees grow weary, and I can scarce keep up this hurried pace.

**CREON**

Take heart, Teiresias, for thou hast reached thy moorings and art near thy friends; take him by the hand, my child; for just as every carriage has to wait for outside help to steady it, so too hath the step of age.

**TEIRESIAS**

Enough; I have arrived; why, Creon, dost thou summon me so urgently?

**CREON**

I have not forgotten that; but first collect thyself and regain breath, shaking off the fatigue of thy journey.

**TEIRESIAS**

I am indeed worn out, having arrived here only yesterday from the court of the Erechtheidae; for they too were at war, fighting with Eumolpus, in which contest I insured the victory of Cecrops' sons; and I received the golden crown, which thou seest me wearing, as first-fruits of the enemy's spoil.

**CREON**

I take thy crown of victory as an omen. We, as thou knowest, are exposed to the billows of an Argive war, and

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great is the struggle for Thebes. Eteocles, our king, is already gone in full harness to meet Mycenae's champions, and hath bidden me inquire of thee our best course to save the city.

**TEIRESIAS**

For Eteocles I would have closed my lips and refrained from all response, but to thee I will speak, since 'tis thy wish to learn. This country, Creon, has been long afflicted, ever since Laius became a father in heaven's despite, begetting hapless Oedipus to be his own mother's husband. That bloody outrage on his eyes was planned by heaven as an ensample to Hellas; and the sons of Oedipus made a gross mistake in wishing to throw over it the veil of time, as if forsooth they could outrun the gods' decree; for by robbing their father of his due honour and allowing him no freedom, they enraged their luckless sire; so he, stung by suffering and disgrace as well, vented awful curses against them; and I, because I left nothing undone or unsaid to prevent this, incurred the hatred of the sons of Oedipus. But death inflicted by each other's hands awaits them, Creon; and the many heaps of slain, some from Argive, some from Theban missiles, shall cause bitter lamentation in the land of Thebes. Alas! for thee, poor city, thou art being involved in their ruin, unless I can persuade one man. The best course was to prevent any child of Oedipus becoming either citizen or king in this land, since they were under a ban and would overthrow the city. But as evil has the mastery of good, there is still one other way of safety; but this it were unsafe for me to tell, and painful too for those whose high fortune it is to supply their city with the saving cure. Farewell! I will away; amongst the rest must I endure my doom, if need be; for what will become of me?

**CREON**

Stay here, old man.

**TEIRESIAS**

Hold me not.

**CREON**

Abide, why dost thou seek to fly?

**TEIRESIAS**

'Tis thy fortune that flies thee, not I.

**CREON**

Tell me what can save Thebes and her citizens.

**TEIRESIAS**

Though this be now thy wish, it will soon cease to be.

**CREON**

Not wish to save my country? how can that be?

**TEIRESIAS**

Art thou still eager to be told?

**CREON**

Yea; for wherein should I show greater zeal?

**TEIRESIAS**

Then straightway shalt thou hear my words prophetic. But first would fain know for certain where Menoeceus is, who led me hither.

**CREON**

Here, not far away, but at thy side.

**TEIRESIAS**

Let him retire far from my prophetic voice.

**CREON**

He is my own son and will preserve due silence.

**TEIRESIAS**

Wilt thou then that I tell thee in his presence?

**CREON**

Yea, for he will rejoice to hear the means of safety.

**TEIRESIAS**

Then hear the purport of my oracle, the which if ye observe ye shall save the city of Cadmus. Thou must sacrifice Menoeceus thy son here for thy country, since thine own lips demand the voice of fate.

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**CREON**

What mean'st thou? what is this thou hast said, old man?

**TEIRESIAS**

To that which is to be thou also must conform.

**CREON**

O the eternity of woe thy minute's tale proclaims!

**TEIRESIAS**

Yes to thee, but to thy country great salvation.

**CREON**

I shut my ears; I never listened; to city now farewell!

**TEIRESIAS**

Ha! the man is changed; he is drawing back.

**CREON**

Go in peace; it is not thy prophecy I need.

**TEIRESIAS**

Is truth dead, because thou art curst with woe?

**CREON**

By thy knees and honoured locks I implore thee!

**TEIRESIAS**

Why implore me? thou art craving a calamity hard to guard against.

**CREON**

Keep silence; tell not the city thy news.

**TEIRESIAS**

Thou biddest me act unjustly; I will not hold my peace.

**CREON**

What wilt thou then do to me? slay my child?

**TEIRESIAS**

That is for others to decide; I have but to speak.

**CREON**

Whence came this curse on me and my son?

**TEIRESIAS**

Thou dost right to ask me and to test what I have said. In yonder lair, where the earth-born dragon kept watch and ward o'er Dirce's springs, must this youth be offered and shed his life-blood on the ground by reason of Ares' ancient grudge against Cadmus, who thus avenges the slaughter of his earth-born snake. If ye do this, ye shall win Ares as an ally; and if the earth receive crop for crop and human blood for blood, ye shall find her kind again, that erst to your sorrow reared from that dragon's seed a crop of warriors with golden casques; for needs must one sprung from the dragon's teeth be slain. Now thou art our only survivor of the seed of that sown race, whose lineage is pure alike on mother's and on father's side, thou and these thy sons. Haemon's marriage debars him from being the victim, for he is no longer single; for even if he have not consummated his marriage, yet is he betrothed; but this tender youth, consecrated to the city's service, might by dying rescue his country; and bitter will he make the return of Adrastus and his Argives, flinging o'er their eyes death's dark pall, and will glorify Thebes. Choose thee one of these alternatives; either save the city or thy son.

Now hast thou all I have to say. Daughter, lead me home. A fool, the man who practises the diviner's art; for if he should announce an adverse answer, he makes himself disliked by those who seek to him; while, if from pity he deceives those who are consulting him, he sins against Heaven. Phoebus should have been man's only prophet, for he fears no man.

(His daughter leads TEIRESIAS out.) LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Why so silent, Creon, why are thy lips hushed and dumb? I too am no less stricken with dismay.

**CREON**

Why, what could one say? 'Tis clear what my words must be. For will never plunge myself so deeply into misfortune as to devote my son to death for the city; for love of children binds all men to life, and none would

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resign his own son to die. Let no man praise me into slaying my children. I am ready to die myself—for I am ripe in years—to set my country free. But thou, my son, ere the whole city learn this, up and fly with all haste away from this land, regardless of these prophets' unbridled utterances; for he will go to the seven gates and the captains there and tell all this to our governors and leaders; now if we can forestall him, thou mayst be saved, but if thou art too late, we are undone and thou wilt die.

**MENOECEUS**

Whither can I fly? to what city? to which of our guest-friends?

**CREON**

Fly where thou wilt be furthest removed from this land.

**MENOECEUS**

'Tis for thee to name a place, for me to carry out thy bidding.

**CREON**

After passing Delphi—

**MENOECEUS**

Whither must I go, father?

**CREON**

To Aetolia.

**MENOECEUS**

Whither thence?

**CREON**

To the land of Thesprotia.

**MENOECEUS**

To Dodona's hallowed threshold?

**CREON**

Thou followest me.

**MENOECEUS**

What protection shall I find me there?

**CREON**

The god will send thee on thy way.

**MENOECEUS**

How shall I find the means?

**CREON**

I will supply thee with money.

**MENOECEUS**

A good plan of thine, father. So go; for I will to thy sister, Jocasta, at whose breast I was suckled as a babe when reft of my mother and left a lonely orphan, to give her kindly greeting and then will I seek my safety. Come, come! be going, that there be no hindrance on thy part.

(CREON departs.)

How cleverly, ladies, I banished my father's fears by crafty words to gain my end; for he is trying to convey me hence, depriving the city of its chance and surrendering me to New mail on node CUCSCA from IN% "linguist@tamsun.tamu.edu" "The Linguist List" o cowardice. Though an old man may be pardoned, yet in my case there is no excuse for betraying the country that gave me birth. So I will go and save the city, be assured thereof, and give my life up for this land. For this were shame, that they whom no oracles bind and who have not come under Fate's iron law, should stand there, shoulder to shoulder, with never a fear of death, and fight for their country before her towers, while I escape the kingdom like a coward, a traitor to my father and brother and city; and wheresoe'er I live, I shall appear a dastard. Nay, by Zeus and all his stars, by Ares, god of blood, who 'stablished the warrior-crop that sprung one day from earth as princes of this land, that shall not be! but go I will, and standing on the topmost battlements, will deal my own death—blow over the dragon's deep dark den, the spot the seer described, and will set my country free. I have spoken. Now I go to make the city a present of my life, no mean offering, to rid this kingdom of its affliction. For if each were to take and expend all the good within his power, contributing it to his country's weal, our states would experience fewer troubles and would for the future

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prosper.

(MENOECEUS goes out.)

**CHORUS** (singing)

strophe

Thou cam'st, O winged fiend, spawn of earth and hellish viper-brood, to prey upon the sons of Cadmus, rife with death and fraught with sorrow, half a monster, half a maid, a murderous prodigy, with roving wings and ravening claws, that in days gone by didst catch up youthful victims from the haunts of Dirce, with discordant note, bringing a deadly curse, a woe of bloodshed to our native land. A murderous god he was who brought all this to pass. In every house was heard a cry of mothers wailing and of wailing maids, lamentation and the voice of weeping, as each took up the chant of death from street to street in turn. Loud rang the mourners' wail, and one great cry went up, whene'er that winged maiden bore some victim out of sight from the city.

antistrophe

At last came Oedipus, the man of sorrow, on his mission from Delphi to this land of Thebes, a joy to them then but afterwards cause of grief; for, when he had read the riddle triumphantly, he formed with his mother an unhallowed union, woe to him! polluting the city; and by his curses, luckless wight, he plunged his sons into a guilty strife, causing them to wade through seas of blood. All reverence do we feel for him, who is gone to his death in his country's cause, bequeathing to Creon a legacy of tears, but destined to crown with victory our seven fenced towers. May our motherhood be blessed with such noble sons, O Pallas, kindly queen, who with well-aimed stone didst spill the serpent's blood, rousing Cadmus as thou didst to brood upon the task, whereof the issue was a demon's curse that swooped upon this land and harried it.

(The FIRST MESSENGER enters.)

**MESSENGER**

Ho there! who is at the palace-gates? Open the door, summon Jocasta forth. Ho there! once again I call; spite of this long delay come forth; hearken, noble wife of Oedipus; cease thy lamentation and thy tears of woe.

(JOCASTA enters from the palace in answer to his call.)

**JOCASTA**

Surely thou art not come, my friend, with the sad news of Eteocles' death, beside whose shield thou hast ever marched, warding from him the foeman's darts? What tidings art thou here to bring me? Is my son alive or dead? Declare that to me.

**MESSENGER**

To rid thee of thy fear at once, he lives; that terror banish.

**JOCASTA**

Next, how is it with the seven towers that wall us in?

**MESSENGER**

They stand unshattered still; the city is not yet a prey.

**JOCASTA**

Have they been in jeopardy of the Argive spear?

**MESSENGER**

Aye, on the very brink; but our Theban warriors proved too strong for Mycenae's might.

**JOCASTA**

One thing tell me, I implore; knowest thou aught of Polyneices, is he yet alive? for this too I long to learn.

**MESSENGER**

As yet thy sons are living, the pair of them.

**JOCASTA**

God bless thee! How did you succeed in beating off from our gates the Argive hosts, when thus beleaguered? Tell me, that I may go within and cheer the old blind man, since our city is still safe.

**MESSENGER**

After Creon's son, who gave up life for country, had taken his stand on the turret's top and plunged a sword dark-hilted through his throat to save this land, thy son told off seven companies with their captains to the seven gates to keep watch on the Argive warriors, and stationed cavalry to cover cavalry, and infantry to support infantry, that assistance might be close at hand for any weak point in the walls. Then from our lofty towers we

## THE PHOENISSAE

saw the Argive host with their white shields leaving Teumessus, and, when near the trench, they charged up to our Theban city at the double. In one loud burst from their ranks and from our battlements rang out the battle-cry and trumpet-call. First to the Neistian gate, Parthenopaeus, son of the huntress maid, led a company bristling with serried shields, himself with his own peculiar badge in the centre of his targe, Atalanta slaying the Aetolian boar with an arrow shot from far. To the gates of Proetus came the prophet Amphiaraus, bringing the victims on a chariot; no vaunting blazon he carried, but weapons chastely plain. Next, prince Hippomedon came marching to the Ogygian port with this device upon his boss, Argus the all-seeing with his spangled eyes upon the watch whereof some open with the rising stars, while others he closes when they set, as one could see after he was slain. At the Homoloian gates Tydeus was posting himself, a lion's skin with shaggy mane upon his buckler, while in his right hand he bore a torch, like Titan Prometheus, to fire the town. Thy own son Polyneices led the battle 'gainst the Fountain gate; upon his shield for blazon were the steeds of Potniae galloping at frantic speed, revolving by some clever contrivance on pivots inside the buckler close to the handle, so as to appear distraught. At Electra's gate famed Capaneus brought up his company, bold as Ares for the fray; this device his buckler bore upon its iron back, an earth-born giant carrying on his shoulders a whole city which he had wrenched from its base, hint to us of the fate in store for Thebes. Adrastus was stationed at the seventh gate; a hundred vipers filled his shield with graven work, as he bore on his left arm that proud Argive badge, the hydra, and serpents were carrying off in their jaws the sons of Thebes from within their very walls. Now I was enabled to see each of them, as I carried the watch-word along the line to the leaders of our companies. To begin with, we fought with bows and thonged javelins, with slings that shoot from far and showers of crashing stones; and as we were conquering, Tydeus and thy son on sudden cried aloud, "Ye sons of Argos, before being riddled by their fire, why delay to fall upon the gates with might and main, the whole of you, light-armed and horse and charioteers?" No loitering then, soon as they heard that call; and many a warrior fell with bloody crown, and not a few of us thou couldst have seen thrown to the earth like tumblers before the walls, after they had given up the ghost, bedewing the thirsty ground with streams of gore. Then Atalanta's son, who was not an Argive but an Arcadian, hurling himself like a hurricane at the gates, called for fire and picks to raze the town; but Periclymenus, son of the ocean-god, stayed his wild career, heaving on his head a waggon-load of stone, even the coping torn from the battlements; and it shattered his head with the hair and crashed through the sutures of the skull, dabbling with blood his cheek just showing manhood's flush; and never shall he go back alive to his fair archer-mother, the maid of Maenalus. Thy son then, seeing these gates secure, went on to the next, and I with him. There I saw Tydeus and his serried ranks of targeteers hurling their Aetolian spears into the opening at the top of the turrets, with such good aim that our men fled and left the beetling battlements: but thy son rallied them once more, as a huntsman cheers his hounds, and made them man the towers again. And then away we hastened to other gates, after stopping the panic there. As for the madness of Capaneus, how am I to describe it? There was he, carrying with him a long scaling-ladder and loudly boasting that even the awful lightning of Zeus would not stay him from giving the city to utter destruction; and even as he spoke, he crept up beneath the hail of stones, gathered under the shelter of his shield, mounting from rung to rung on the smooth ladder; but, just as he was scaling the parapet of the wall, Zeus smote him with a thunderbolt; loud the earth re-echoed, and fear seized every heart; for his limbs were hurled from the ladder far apart as from a sling, his head toward the sky, his blood toward earth, while his legs and arms went spinning round like Ixion's wheel, till his charred corpse fell to the ground. But when Adrastus saw that Zeus was leagued against his army, he drew the Argive troops outside the trench and halted them. Meantime our horse, marking the lucky omen of Zeus, began driving forth their chariots, and our men-at-arms charged into the thick of the Argives, and everything combined to their discomfiture; men were falling and hurled headlong from chariots, wheels flew off, axles crashed together, while ever higher grew the heaps of slain; so for to-day at least have we prevented the destruction of our country's bulwarks; but whether fortune will hereafter smile upon this land, that rests with Heaven; for, even as it is, it owes its safety to some deity.

Victory is fair; and if the gods are growing kinder, it would be well with me.

### JOCASTA

Heaven and fortune smile; for my sons are yet alive and my country hath escaped ruin. But Creon seems to have reaped the bitter fruit of my marriage with Oedipus, by losing his son to his sorrow, a piece of luck-for Thebes, but bitter grief to him. Prithee to thy tale again and say what my two sons next intend.

### MESSENGER

## THE PHOENISSAE

Forbear to question further; all is well with thee so far.

**JOCASTA**

Thy words but rouse my suspicions; I cannot leave it thus.

**MESSENGER**

Hast thou any further wish than thy sons' safety?

**JOCASTA**

Yea, I would learn whether in the sequel I am also blest.

**MESSENGER**

Let me go; thy son is left without his squire.

**JOCASTA**

There is some evil thou art hiding, veiling it in darkness.

**MESSENGER**

Maybe; I would not add ill news to the good thou hast heard.

**JOCASTA**

Thou must, unless thou take wings and fly away.

**MESSENGER**

Ah! why didst thou not let me go after announcing my good news, instead of forcing me to disclose evil? Those two sons of thine are resolved on deeds of shameful recklessness, a single combat apart from the host, addressing to Argives and Thebans alike words I would they had never uttered. Eteocles, taking his stand on a lofty tower, after ordering silence to be proclaimed to the army, began on this wise, "Ye captains of Hellas, chieftains of Argos here assembled, and ye folk of Cadmus, barter not your lives for Polyneices or for me! For I myself excuse you from this risk, and will engage my brother in single combat; and if I slay him, will possess my palace without rival, but if I am worsted I will bequeath the city to him. Ye men of Argos, give up the struggle and return to your land, nor lose your lives here; of the earth-sown folk as well there are dead enough in those already slain."

So he; then thy son Polyneices rushed from the array and assented to his proposal; and all the Argives and the people of Cadmus shouted their approval, as though they deemed it just. On these terms the armies made a truce, and in the space betwixt them took an oath of each other for their leaders to abide by. Forthwith in brazen mail those two sons of aged Oedipus were casing themselves; and lords of Thebes with friendly care equipped the captain of this land, while Argive chieftains armed the other. There they stood in dazzling sheen, neither blenching, all eagerness to hurl their lances each at the other. Then came their friends to their side, first one, then another, with words of encouragement, to wit:

"Polyneices, it rests with thee to set up an image of Zeus as a trophy, and crown Argos with fair renown."

Others hailed Eteocles: "Now art thou fighting for thy city; now, if victorious, thou hast the sceptre in thy power."

So spake they, cheering them to the fray.

Meantime the seers were sacrificing sheep and noting the tongues and forks of fire, the damp reek which is a bad omen, and the tapering flame, which gives decisions on two points, being both a sign of victory and defeat. But, if thou hast any power or subtle speech or charmed spell, go, stay thy children from this fell affray, for great is the risk they run. The issue thereof will be grievous sorrow for thee, if to-day thou art reft of both thy sons. (The MESSENGER departs in haste as ANTIGONE comes out of the palace.)

**JOCASTA**

Antigone, my daughter, come forth before the palace; this heaven-sent crisis is no time for thee to be dancing or amusing thyself with girlish pursuits. But thou and thy mother must prevent two gallant youths, thy own brothers, from plunging into death and falling by each other's hand.

**ANTIGONE**

Mother mine, what new terror art thou proclaiming to thy dear ones before the palace?

**JOCASTA**

Daughter, thy brothers are in danger of their life.

**ANTIGONE**

What mean'st thou?

**JOCASTA**

They have resolved on single combat.



## THE PHOENISSAE

**ANTIGONE**

O horror! what hast thou to tell, mother?

**JOCASTA**

No welcome news; follow me.

**ANTIGONE**

Whither away from my maiden-bower?

**JOCASTA**

To the army.

**ANTIGONE**

I cannot face the crowd.

**JOCASTA**

Modesty is not for thee now.

**ANTIGONE**

But what can I do?

**JOCASTA**

Thou shalt end thy brothers' strife.

**ANTIGONE**

By what means, mother mine?

**JOCASTA**

By falling at their knees with me.

**ANTIGONE**

Lead on till we are 'twixt the armies; no time for lingering now.

**JOCASTA**

Haste, my daughter, haste! For, if I can forestall the onset of my sons, may yet live; but if they be dead, I will lay me down and die with them.

(JOCASTA and ANTIGONE hurriedly depart.)

**CHORUS** (singing)

strophe

Ah me! my bosom thrills with terror; and through my flesh there passes a throb of pity for the hapless mother. Which of her two sons will send the other to a bloody grave? ah, woe is me! O Zeus, O earth, alas! brother severing brother's throat and robbing him of life, cleaving through his shield to spill his blood? Ah me! ah me! which of them will claim my dirge of death?

antistrophe

Woe unto thee, thou land of Thebes! two savage beasts, two murderous souls, with brandished spears will soon be draining each his fallen foeman's gore. Woe is them, that they ever thought of single combat! in foreign accent will I chant a dirge of tears and wailing in mourning for the dead. Close to murder stands their fortune; the coming day will decide it. Fatal, ah! fatal will this slaughter be, because of the avenging fiends.

But I see Creon on his way hither to the palace with brow o'ercast; I will check my present lamentations.

(CREON enters. He is followed by attendants carrying the body of MENOECEUS.)

**CREON**

Ah me! what shall I do? Am I to mourn with bitter tears myself or my city, round which is settling a swarm thick enough to send us to Acheron? My own son hath died for his country, bringing glory to his name but grievous woe to me. His body I rescued but now from the dragon's rocky lair and sadly carried the self-slain victim hither in my arms; and my house is fallen with weeping: but now I come to fetch my sister Jocasta, the living must reverence the nether god by paying honour to the dead. LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Thy sister, Creon, hath gone forth and her daughter Antigone went with her.

**CREON**

Whither went she? and wherefore? tell me. LEADER

She heard that her sons were about to engage in single combat for the royal house.

**CREON**

What is this? I was paying the last honours to my dead son, and so am late in learning this fresh sorrow. LEADER

## THE PHOENISSAE

'Tis some time, Creon, since thy sister's departure, and I expect the struggle for life and death is already decided by the sons of Oedipus.

**CREON**

Alas! I see an omen there, the gloomy look and clouded brow of yonder messenger coming to tell us the whole matter.

(The SECOND MESSENGER enters.)

**MESSENGER**

Ah, woe is me! what language can I find to tell my tale?

**CREON**

Our fate is sealed; thy opening words do naught to reassure us.

**MESSENGER**

Ah, woe is me! I do repeat; for beside the scenes of woe already enacted I bring tidings of new horror.

**CREON**

What is thy tale?

**MESSENGER**

Thy sister's sons are now no more, Creon.

**CREON**

Alas! thou hast a heavy tale of woe for me and Thebes LEADER

O house of Oedipus, hast thou heard these tidings?

**CREON**

Of sons slain by the self-same fate. LEADER

A tale to make it weep, were it endowed with sense.

**CREON**

Oh! most grievous stroke of fate! woe is me for my sorrows! woe!

**MESSENGER**

Woe indeed! didst thou but know the sorrows still to tell.

**CREON**

How can they be more hard to bear than these?

**MESSENGER**

With her two sons thy sister has sought her death.

**CHORUS** (chanting)

Loudly, loudly raise the wail, and with white hands smite upon your heads!

**CREON**

Ah! woe is thee, Jocasta! what an end to life and marriage hast thou found the riddling of the Sphinx! But tell me how her two sons wrought the bloody deed, the struggle caused by the curse of Oedipus.

**MESSENGER**

Of our successes before the towers thou knowest, for the walls are not so far away as to prevent thy learning each event as it occurred. Now when they, the sons of aged Oedipus, had donned their brazen mail, they went and took their stand betwixt the hosts, chieftains both and generals too, to decide the day by single combat. Then Polynices, turning his eyes towards Argos, lifted up a prayer; "O Hera, awful queens—for thy servant I am, since I have wedded the daughter of Adrastus and dwell in his land,—grant that I may slay my brother, and stain my lifted hand with the blood of my conquered foe. A shameful prize it is I ask, my own brother's blood." And to many an eye the tear would rise at their sad fate, and men looked at one another, casting their glances round. But Eteocles, looking towards the temple of Pallas with the golden shield, prayed thus, "Daughter of Zeus, grant that this right arm may launch the spear of victory against my brother's breast and slay him who hath come to sack my country." Soon as the Tuscan trumpet blew, the signal for the bloody fray, like the torch that falls, they darted wildly at one another and, like boars whetting their savage tusks, began the fray, their beards wet with foam; and they kept shooting out their spears, but each crouched beneath his shield to let the steel glance idly off; but if either saw the other's face above the rim, he would aim his lance thereat, eager to outwit him.

But both kept such careful outlook through the spy-holes in their shields, that their weapons found naught to do; while from the on-lookers far more than the combatants trickled the sweat caused by terror for their friends.

## THE PHOENISSAE

Suddenly Eteocles, in kicking aside a stone that rolled beneath his tread, exposed a limb outside his shield, and Polyneices seeing a chance of dealing him a blow, aimed a dart at it, and the Argive shaft went through his leg; whereat the Danai, one and all, cried out for joy. But the wounded man, seeing a shoulder unguarded in this effort, plunged his spear with all his might into the breast of Polyneices, restoring gladness to the citizens of Thebes, though he brake off the spear-head; and so, at a loss for a weapon, he retreated foot by foot, till catching up splintered rock he let it fly and shivered the other's spear; and now was the combat equal, for each had lost his lance. Then clutching their sword-hilts they closed, and round and round, with shields close-locked, they waged their wild warfare. Anon Eteocles introduced that crafty Thessalian trick, having some knowledge thereof from his intercourse with that country; disengaging himself from the immediate contest, he drew back his left foot but kept his eye closely on the pit of the other's stomach from a distance; then advancing his right foot he plunged his weapon through his navel and fixed it in his spine. Down falls Polyneices, blood-bespattered, ribs and belly contracting in his agony. But that other, thinking his victory now complete, threw down his sword and set to spoiling him, wholly intent thereon, without a thought for himself. And this indeed was his ruin; for Polyneices, who had fallen first, was still faintly breathing, and having in his grievous fall retained his sword, he made last effort and drove it through the heart of Eteocles. There they lie, fallen side by side, biting the dust with their teeth, without having decided the mastery. LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Ah, woe is thee! Oedipus, for thy sorrows! how I pity thee! Heaven, it seems, has fulfilled those curses of thine.

### MESSENGER

Now hear what further woes succeeded. Just as her two sons had fallen and lay dying, comes their wretched mother on the scene, her daughter with her, in hot haste; and when she saw their mortal wounds, "Too late," she moaned, "my sons, the help I bring"; and throwing herself on each in turn she wept and wailed, sorrowing o'er all her toil in suckling them; and so too their sister, who was with her, "Supporters of your mother's age I dear brothers, leaving me forlorn, unwed!" Then prince Eteocles with one deep dying gasp, hearing his mother's cry, laid on her his moist hand, and though he could not say a word, his tear-filled eyes were eloquent to prove his love. But Polyneices was still alive, and seeing his sister and his aged mother he said, "Mother mine, our end is come; I pity thee and my sister Antigone and my dead brother. For I loved him though he turned my foe, I loved him, yes! in spite of all. Bury me, mother mine, and thou, my sister dear, in my native soil; pacify the city's wrath that may get at least that much of my own fatherland, although I lost my home. With thy hand, mother, close mine eyes (therewith he himself places her fingers on the lids); and fare ye well; for already the darkness wraps me round."

So both at once breathed out their life of sorrow. But when their mother saw this sad mischance, in her o'ermastering grief she snatched from a corpse its sword and wrought an awful deed, driving the steel right through her throat; and there she lies, dead with the dead she loved so well, her arms thrown round them both. Thereon the host sprang to their feet and fell to wrangling, we maintaining that victory rested with my master, they with theirs; and amid our leaders the contention raged, some holding that Polyneices gave the first wound with his spear, others that, as both were dead, victory rested with neither. Meantime Antigone crept away from the host; and those others rushed to their weapons, but by some lucky forethought the folk of Cadmus had sat down under arms; and by a sudden attack we surprised the Argive host before it was fully equipped. Not one withstood our onset, and they filled the plain with fugitives, while blood was streaming from the countless dead our spears had slain. Soon as victory crowned our warfare, some began to rear an image to Zeus for the foe's defeat, others were stripping the Argive dead of their shields and sending their spoils inside the battlements; and others with Antigone are bringing her dead brothers hither for their friends to mourn. So the result of this struggle to our city hovers between the two extremes of good and evil fortune.

(The MESSENGER goes out.)

### CHORUS (chanting)

No longer do the misfortunes of this house extend to hearsay only; three corpses of the slain lie here at the palace for all to see, who by one common death have passed to their life of gloom.

(During the lament, ANTIGONE enters, followed by servants who bear the bodies Of JOCASTA, ETEOCLES, and POLYNEICES.)

### ANTIGONE (chanting)

No veil I draw o'er my tender cheek shaded with its clustering curls; no shame I feel from maiden modesty at the

## THE PHOENISSAE

hot blood mantling 'neath my eyes, the blush upon my face, as I hurry wildly on in death's train, casting from my hair its tirc and letting my delicate robe of saffron hue fly loose, a tearful escort to the dead. Ah me!

Woe to thee, Polyneices! rightly named, I trow; woe to thee, Thebes! no mere strife to end in strife was thine; but murder completed by murder hath brought the house of Oedipus to ruin with bloodshed dire and grim. O my home, my home! what minstrel can I summon from the dead to chant a fitting dirge o'er my tearful fate, as I bear these three corpses of my kin, my mother and her sons, welcome sight to the avenging fiend that destroyed the house of Oedipus, root and branch, in the hour that his shrewdness solved the Sphinx's riddling rhyme and slew that savage songstress. Woe is me! my father! what other Hellene or barbarian, what noble soul among the bygone tribes of man's poor mortal race ever endured the anguish of such visible afflictions?

Ah! poor maid, how piteous is thy plaint! What bird from its covert 'mid the leafy oak or soaring pine-tree's branch will come to mourn with me, the maid left motherless, with cries of woe, lamenting, ere it comes, the piteous lonely life, that henceforth must be always mine with tears that ever stream? On which of these corpses shall I throw my offerings first, plucking the hair from my head? on the breast of the mother that suckled me, or beside the ghastly death-wounds of my brothers' corpses? Woe to thee, Oedipus, my aged sire with sightless orbs, leave thy roof, disclose the misery of thy life, thou that draggest out a weary existence within the house, having cast a mist of darkness o'er thine eyes. Dost hear, thou whose aged step now gropes its way across the court, now seeks repose on wretched pallet couch?

(OEDIPUS enters from the palace. He chants the following lines responsively with ANTIGONE.)

### OEDIPUS

Why, daughter, hast thou dragged me to the light, supporting my blind footsteps from the gloom of my chamber, where I lie upon my bed and make piteous moan, a hoary sufferer, invisible as a phantom of the air, or as a spirit from the pit, or as a dream that flies?

### ANTIGONE

Father, there are tidings of sorrow for thee to bear; no more thy sons behold the light, or thy wife who ever would toil to tend thy blind footsteps as with a staff. Alas for thee, my sire!

### OEDIPUS

Ah me, the sorrows I endure! I may well say that. Tell me, child, what fate o'ertook those three, and how they left the light.

### ANTIGONE

Not to reproach or mock thee say I this, but in all sadness; 'tis thy own avenging curse, with all its load of slaughter, fire, and ruthless war, that is fallen on thy sons. Alas for thee, my sire!

### OEDIPUS

Ah me!

### ANTIGONE

Why dost thou groan?

### OEDIPUS

'Tis for my sons.

### ANTIGONE

Couldst thou have looked towards yon sun-god's four-horsed car and turned the light of thine eyes on these corpses, it would have been agony to thee.

### OEDIPUS

'Tis clear enough how their evil fate o'ertook my sons; but she, my poor wife tell me, daughter, how she came to die.

### ANTIGONE

All saw her weep and heard her moan, as she rushed forth to carry to her sons her last appeal, a mother's breast. But the mother found her sons at the Electran gate, in a meadow where the lotus blooms, fighting out their duel like lions in their lair, eager to wound each other with spears, their blood already congealed, a murderous libation to the Death-god poured out by Ares. Then, snatching from corpse a sword of hammered bronze, she plunged it in her flesh, and in sorrow for her sons fell with her arms around them. So to-day, father, the god, whose'er this issue is, has gathered to a head the sum of suffering for our house. LEADER OF THE CHORUS

To-day is the beginning of many troubles to the house of Oedipus; may he live to be more fortunate!

## THE PHOENISSAE

### CREON

Cease now your lamentations; 'tis time we bethought us of their burial. Hear what I have to say, Oedipus. Eteocles, thy son, left me to rule this land, by assigning it as a marriage portion to Haemon with the hand of thy daughter Antigone. Wherefore I will no longer permit thee to dwell therein, for Teiresias plainly declared that the city would never prosper so long as thou wert in the land. So begone! And this I say not to flout thee, nor because I bear thee any grudge, but from fear that some calamity will come upon the realm by reason of those fiends that dog thy steps.

### OEDIPUS

O destiny! to what a life of pain and sorrow didst thou bear me beyond all men that ever were, e'en from the very first; yea for when I was yet unborn, or ever I had left my mother's womb and seen the light, Apollo foretold to Laius that I should become my father's murderer; woe is me! So, as soon as I was born, my father tried to end again the hapless life he had given, deeming me his foe, for it was fated he should die at my hand; so he sent me still unweaned to make a pitiful meal for beasts, but I escaped from that. Ah! would that Cithaeron had sunk into hell's yawning abyss, in that it slew me not! Instead thereof Fate made me a slave in the service of Polybus; and I, poor wretch, after slaying my own father came to wed my mother to her sorrow, and begat sons that were my brothers, whom also I have destroyed, by bequeathing unto them the legacy of curses I received from Laius. For nature did not make me so void of understanding, that I should have devised these horrors against my own eyes and my children's life without the intervention of some god. Let that pass. What am I, poor wretch, to do? Who now will be my guide and tend the blind man's step? Shall she, that is dead? Were she alive, I know right well she would. My pair of gallant sons, then? But they are gone from me. Am I still so young myself that I can find a livelihood? Whence could I? O Creon, why seek thus to slay me utterly? For so thou wilt, if thou banish me from the land. Yet will I never twine my arms about thy knees and betray cowardice, for I will not belie my former gallant soul, no! not for all my evil case.

### CREON

Thy words are brave in refusing to touch my knees, and I am equally resolved not to let thee abide in the land. For these dead, bear one forth—with to the palace; but the other, who came with stranger folk to sack his native town, the dead Polyneices, cast forth unburied beyond our frontiers. To all the race of Cadmus shall this be proclaimed, that whosoe'er is caught decking his corpse with wreaths or giving it burial, shall be requited with death; unwept, unburied let him lie, a prey to birds. As for thee, Antigone, leave thy mourning for these lifeless three and betake thyself indoors to abide there in maiden state until to-morrow, when Haemon waits to wed thee.

### ANTIGONE

O father, in what cruel misery are we plunged! For thee I mourn more than for the dead; for in thy woes there is no opposite to trouble, but universal sorrow is thy lot. As for thee, thou new-made king, why, I ask, dost thou mock my father thus with banishment? Why start making laws over a helpless corpse?

### CREON

This was what Eteocles, not I, resolved.

### ANTIGONE

A foolish thought, and foolish art thou for entertaining it!

### CREON

What! ought I not to carry out his behests?

### ANTIGONE

No; not if they are wrong and ill-advised.

### CREON

Why, is it not just for that other to be given to the dogs?

### ANTIGONE

Nay, the vengeance ye are exacting is no lawful one.

### CREON

It is; for he was his country's foe, though not a foeman born.

### ANTIGONE

Well, to fate he rendered up his destinies.

### CREON

## THE PHOENISSAE

Let him now pay forfeit in his burial too.

**ANTIGONE**

What crime did he commit in coming to claim his heritage?

**CREON**

Be very sure of this, yon man shall have no burial.

**ANTIGONE**

I will bury him, although the state forbids.

**CREON**

Do so, and thou wilt be making thy own grave by his.

**ANTIGONE**

A noble end, for two so near and dear to be laid side by side!

**CREON** (to his servants)

Ho! seize and bear her within the palace.

**ANTIGONE**

Never! for I will not loose my hold upon this corpse.

**CREON**

Heaven's decrees, girl, fit not thy fancies.

**ANTIGONE**

Decrees! here is another, "No insult to the dead."

**CREON**

Be sure that none shall sprinkle over the corpse the moistened dust.

**ANTIGONE**

O Creon, by my mother's corpse, by Jocasta, I implore thee!

**CREON**

'Tis but lost labour; thou wilt not gain thy prayer.

**ANTIGONE**

Let me but bathe the dead body—

**CREON**

Nay, that would be part of what the city is forbidden.

**ANTIGONE**

At least let me bandage the gaping wounds.

**CREON**

No; thou shalt never pay honour to this corpse.

**ANTIGONE**

O my darling! one kiss at least will I print upon thy lips.

**CREON**

Do not let this mourning bring disaster on thy marriage.

**ANTIGONE**

Marriage! dost think I will live to wed thy son?

**CREON**

Most certainly thou must; how wilt thou escape his bed?

**ANTIGONE**

Then if I must, our wedding—night will find another Danaid bride in me.

**CREON** (turning to OEDIPUS)

Dost witness how boldly she reproached me?

**ANTIGONE**

Witness this steel, the sword by which I swear!

**CREON**

Why art so bent on being released from this marriage?

**ANTIGONE**

I mean to share my hapless father's exile.

THE PHOENISSAE

**CREON**

A noble spirit thine but somewhat touched with folly.

**ANTIGONE**

Likewise will I share his death, I tell thee further.

**CREON**

Go, leave the land; thou shalt not murder son of mine.

(CREON goes out, followed by his attendants who carry with them the body Of MENOECEUS.)

**OEDIPUS**

Daughter, for this loyal spirit I thank thee.

**ANTIGONE**

Were I to wed, then thou, my father, wouldst be alone in thy exile.

**OEDIPUS**

Abide here and be happy; I will bear my own load of sorrow.

**ANTIGONE**

And who shall tend thee in thy blindness, father?

**OEDIPUS**

Where fate appoints, there will I lay me down upon the ground.

**ANTIGONE**

Where is now the famous Oedipus, where that famous riddle?

**OEDIPUS**

Lost for ever! one day made, and one day marred my fortune.

**ANTIGONE**

May not I too share thy sorrows?

**OEDIPUS**

To wander with her blinded sire were shame unto his child.

**ANTIGONE**

Not so, father, but glory rather, if she be a maid discreet.

**OEDIPUS**

Lead me nigh that I may touch thy mother's corpse.

**ANTIGONE**

So! embrace the aged form so dear to thee.

**OEDIPUS**

Woe is thee, thy motherhood, thy marriage most unblest!

**ANTIGONE**

A piteous corpse, a prey to every ill at once!

**OEDIPUS**

Where lies the corpse of Eteocles, and of Polyneices, where?

**ANTIGONE**

Both lie stretched before thee, side by side.

**OEDIPUS**

Lay the blind man's hand upon his poor sons' brows.

**ANTIGONE**

There then! touch the dead, thy children.

**OEDIPUS**

Woe for you! dear fallen sons, sad offspring of a sire as sad!

**ANTIGONE**

O my brother Polyneices, name most dear to me!

**OEDIPUS**

Now is the oracle of Loxias being fulfilled, my child. **ANTIGONE**

What oracle was that? canst thou have further woes to tell?

**OEDIPUS**

## THE PHOENISSAE

That I should die in glorious Athens after a life of wandering.

**ANTIGONE**

Where? what fenced town in Attica will take thee in?

**OEDIPUS**

Hallowed Colonus, home of the god of steeds. Come then, attend on thy blind father, since thou art minded to share his exile.

(OEDIPUS and ANTIGONE chant their remaining lines as they slowly depart.)

**ANTIGONE**

To wretched exile go thy way; stretch forth thy hand, my aged sire, taking me to guide thee, like a breeze that speedeth barques.

**OEDIPUS**

See, daughter, I am advancing; be thou my guide, poor child.

**ANTIGONE**

Ah, poor indeed! the saddest maid of all in Thebes.

**OEDIPUS**

Where am I planting my aged step? Bring my staff, child.

**ANTIGONE**

This way, this way, father mine! plant thy footsteps here, like dream for all the strength thou hast.

**OEDIPUS**

Woe unto thee that art driving my aged limbs in grievous exile from their land! Ah me! the sorrows I endure!

**ANTIGONE**

"Endure"! why speak of enduring? Justice regardeth not the sinner and requiteth not men's follies.

**OEDIPUS**

I am he whose name passed into high songs of victory because I guessed the maiden's baffling riddle.

**ANTIGONE**

Thou art bringing up again the reproach of the Sphinx. Talk no more of past success. This misery was in store for thee all the while, to become an exile from thy country and die thou knowest not where; while I, bequeathing to my girlish friends tears of sad regret, must go forth from my native land, roaming as no maiden ought.

Ah! this dutiful resolve will crown me with glory in respect of my father's sufferings. Woe is me for the insults heaped on thee and on my brother whose dead body is cast forth from the palace unburied; poor boy! I will yet bury him secretly, though I have to die for it, father.

**OEDIPUS**

To thy companions show thyself.

**ANTIGONE**

My own laments suffice.

**OEDIPUS**

Go pray then at the altars.

**ANTIGONE**

They are weary of my piteous tale.

**OEDIPUS**

At least go seek the Bromian god in his hallowed haunt amongst the Maenads' hills.

**ANTIGONE**

Offering homage that is no homage in Heaven's eyes to him in whose honour I once fringed my dress with the Theban fawn-skin and led the dance upon the hills for the holy choir of Semele?

**OEDIPUS**

My noble fellow-countrymen, behold me; I am Oedipus, who solved the famous riddle, and once was first of men, I who alone cut short the murderous Sphinx's tyranny am now myself expelled the land in shame and misery. Go to; why make this moan and bootless lamentation? Weak mortal as I am, I must endure the fate that God decrees.

**CHORUS** (chanting)

Hail majestic Victory! keep thou my life nor ever cease to crown my song! –THE END–